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## Introductory analysis of the report of The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Norway

In June 2023 the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Norway submitted its report to the Norwegian parliament. Norway is the first Scandinavian country to appoint such a consultative body. The Commission had three objectives: to outline Norwegian assimilation policies, examine the present-day repercussions of the assimilation policy towards Sami and Kven/ Finnish people, and contribute to further reconciliation. The present paper presents an abridged analysis of the Commission's report set against historical and legislative backdrops. Such an approach broadens the interpretative perspective of the report and places the Commission's conclusions in the appropriate socio-cultural context.

**Keywords:** The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Norway, assimilation, Kven, Sami, ethnic minorities

*Generations have suffered losses,  
But the whole of Norway has also lost out.  
Dagfinn Høybråten*

### 1. Introduction

Following a proposal made by Storting (Norwegian Parliament) representatives – Kirsti Bergstø and Torgeir Knag Fylkesnes (both SV, Socialist Left Party) – about a truth commission for Norwegianization policies and injustices committed against the Sami and Kven people in Norway, the Norwegian Parliament decided to establish a commission on 20<sup>th</sup> June 2017. The presidency prepared further proposals for the commission's mandate, name, and composition, and the Storting sanctioned these on 14<sup>th</sup> June 2018. The commission received the name The Commission to Investigate Norwegianization Policy and Injustice towards the Sami, Kven,

and Norwegian Finns (the Truth and Reconciliation Commission) (Innstilling fra Stortingets presidentskap... 2017–2018), while it aimed to scrutinize Norwegianization policies and injustice towards Sami, Kven, and Norwegian Finns. The Commission was to survey the Norwegianization policy and its effects and propose measures that would contribute to reconciliation. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission presented its final report on 1 June 2023. In its report, the commission reviewed the rise of the Norwegisation ideology in Norwegian society, various decisions and measures taken by the Norwegian authorities with Norwegisation as a goal or effect, Sami and Kven resistance to Norwegisation, and the way forward towards dismantling the targeted Norwegisation policy. The report also presented people's experiences during the Norwegianization period and described the personal, social, and political consequences of Norwegianization.

The present paper aims to present the structure and findings of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's report as it has not yet been interpreted from a scientific viewpoint. The establishment of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission was a further phase of a longer process. Assimilation began in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and continued until the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. This was followed by a period of normalization in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and the reconciliation period at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

In connection with this process, a correct interpretation of the report is not possible without understanding the Norwegian history of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Tempestuous as it was, this period gave rise to a nation that became aware of itself, where the nation-building process as well as an unstable geo-political situation, led to the assimilation of ethnic minorities. Although the process concerned all non-dominant groups, the reasons for the Norwegisation were different. The Sami people, with their nomadic lifestyle, did not fit in with the patriotic values of the dominant society, while the Kven people were perceived as a menace to the young Norwegian state because of their Finnish roots and the growing preoccupation with nationalism in Finland in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. *The Fennoman Movement* or *Fennomani* was one of the nationalistic movements in Finland of that period. Its members wanted to revitalize the Finnish language and culture and "regain" territories inhabited by people with Finnish origins, e.g., the Kven people.<sup>1</sup> The Norwegian government feared that the Kven people would start collaborating with Finnish nationalists and join the northern part of the country to the Finish kingdom (Ryymin 2003: 205).

The period of Norwegisation lasted for over a century and was characterized by various intensities and phases. It is, therefore, essential to understand the dynamics of the process and define the areas where Norwegianization was most pervasive, especially since this assimilation policy is a key element in the report's analysis.

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<sup>1</sup> For a more detailed description of the geo-political situation in Norway in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, see Sylwia Hlebowicz (2021). *The Kven Awakening* (Pol. *Kweńskie Przebudzenie*).

Finally, it is crucial to outline the legal regulations concerning the Sami and the Kven people. These acts are the mainstay of minority groups' functioning in Norwegian society. Therefore, it is important to acknowledge that The Truth and Reconciliation Commission's report contains only suggestions for future bilateral (i.e. majority-minority group) cooperation. In contrast, the legal bills set the framework for practical actions aimed at preserving and protecting indigenous and minority groups.

## 2. The legal basis of ethnic minorities in Norway

Ethnic minorities are groups with a durable connection with the country's history. Norway is home to five ethnic minorities: Kvens/ Norwegian Finns (people of Finnish descent in Northern Norway), Jews, Forest Finns, Roma and Romani people/Tatars. In addition to these groups, there are also the Sami who are recognized as an indigenous people. Protection of minorities is an important part of human rights and is based on the principles of equal treatment and non-discrimination. The UN Convention on Political and Civil Rights highlights:

In those States in which ethnic, religious, or linguistic minorities exist, persons belonging to such minorities shall not be denied the right, in community with the other members of their group, to enjoy their own culture, to profess and practice their religion, or to use their language. (International Covenant on Civil... 1967)

The Human Rights Act of 1999 became a part of the Norwegian legislative system. This Act takes precedence over provisions in other national laws and legislation. Norway has also ratified two international agreements that are central to the rights of national minorities: The European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages (ECRML) and the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities.

The former emphasizes that minority languages help to maintain and develop Europe's traditions and cultural wealth. The ECRML obliges the states that sign up to it, to implement measures to protect, strengthen, and maintain minority languages, and to add conditions suitable for the teaching and learning of those languages. Norway ratified the agreement in 1993 and it entered into force in 1998. Sami, Kven, Romanés (languages of Rome), and Romani (the language of the Romani people/Tatars) are recognized as minority languages in Norway. They are protected by the provisions of the charter. The ECRML does not cover dialects of official languages in a particular state or of immigrant languages.

The Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities requires states to create the conditions for the national minorities to express, preserve, and develop their culture and identity:

1. The Parties undertake to promote the conditions necessary for persons belonging to national minorities to maintain and develop their culture, and to preserve the essential elements of their identity, namely their religion, language, traditions, and cultural heritage.
2. Without prejudice to measures taken in pursuance of their general integration policy, the Parties shall refrain from policies or practices aimed at the assimilation of persons belonging to national minorities against their will and shall protect these persons from any action aimed at such assimilation. (Framework Convention... 1995)

Norway ratified the agreement in 1999 and implemented a criterion whereby a national minority must be more than a hundred years old in connection to the country if it is to claim status as a national minority. Therefore, Jews, Kvens/ Norwegian Finns, Roma, Forest Finns, and Romani people/ Tatars all fulfill the same requirements to be considered a national minority. However, the Sami people are guaranteed stronger protection as indigenous people through ILO Convention No. 169, ratified in Norway by a decision of the Storting on June 7<sup>th</sup>, 1990. It entered into force on June 20<sup>th</sup>, 1991.<sup>2</sup> The first report, issued by the Norwegian Government on June 30<sup>th</sup>, 1992, highlights the importance of incorporating Sami rights in section 110 A of the Norwegian constitution, which reads:

It is the responsibility of the authorities of the State to create the conditions enabling the Sami people to preserve and develop their language, culture, and way of life. (First report for the period ending 30 June 1992... 1993)

Further to this, Art. 5 states that “the Norwegian constitution lays the basis for the protection of Sami culture, including the Sami people’s social, cultural, religious and spiritual values and practices” (First report for the period ending 30 June 1992... 1993).

These were legal milestones that enabled the indigenous people and non-dominant ethnic groups. They paved the way for legal protection of these groups and opened a possibility for genuine reconciliation. Despite this, it is crucial to acknowledge that the implementation of legal regulations was preceded by a long period of assimilation that lasted over a century.

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<sup>2</sup> Importantly, Norway was the first country to ratify this bill. In contrast, Finland has not yet reached any conclusions concerning this document due to dissensus between the Finnish and the Finnish Sami Parliament. The situation shows the complexity of social relations. For a more nuanced analysis see: Tanja Joona (2019).

### 3. Assimilation period

It is important to look to history to comprehend the modern course of socio-political actions. The complexity and tensions between the majority (i.e. Norwegians) and non-dominant groups (Sami, Kven, Forest Fins) lie deep in Norwegian history from the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. This was a period of intense change for the Norwegians which included nation-building.

The nation as a political community became prominent with the French Revolution. The state forms the framework for collective solidarity in a community of free citizens. This was a revolutionary concept of the nation, enacted by the third estate in opposition to estate privileges and princely sovereignty. The idea of popular sovereignty was also part of the political perception of the nation and as part of this a community of rights. The nation as a cultural community had its most important starting point in Germany, with language as a fundamental marker across the political borders that framed the princely states, and which divided the German nation into different geographical-political areas (Østerund 2015: 37–38). Fichte formulated this language-based conception of the nation in response to Napoleon's campaign through Europe (Fichte 1808).

The notion of a *nation* became a matter of geography; it applied to people born in the same area and who shared the same culture. Norway, united with Denmark since 1536, played only a minor role. Yet, ideals of patriotism spread among the intelligentsia in the 1770s, while The Norwegian Society (Norw. Det Norske Selskab) in Copenhagen and The Royal Norwegian Scientists Society (Norw. Det Kongelige Norske Videnskabers Selskab) in Trondheim, were concrete examples of nation-building practices. The central ideas revolved around unique features of 'national personality', formed by history and geographic circumstances (Østerund 2015: 40). From 1814 to 1905, political nationalism in Norway was turned against royal power and Swedish dominance in the union (Stråth 2005: 26–31).

In various respects, Norwegian nationalism and the demand for national independence became part of a wider modernization project spanning the 19<sup>th</sup> century. This coincided with changes in the farming sector towards a stronger market orientation with commercial agriculture and the creation of agricultural cooperatives. There were also industrial advances implemented until the dissolution of the union with Sweden, with the development of waterfall power, industrial tourism, and shipping (Nordby 1991: 119–146). The latter also included the growth of Norway's merchant fleet. Moreover, licensing legislation after 1905, which limited the right of foreigners to exploit waterfall power and other resources in Norway, was an economic continuation of the political and social-leftist movement.

The romantic view of the peasant was also no obstacle to modernization since left-wing nationalism raised the farmers' social and political positions in alliance with new social movements. Norwegian nationalism was a program for economic progress, social equalization, and national control over natural resources.

If nationalism in Sweden broke with its conservative mode thanks to economic growth, then Norwegian conservatism had a different dimension. In Sweden Nationalism had the aim of modernizing and democratizing the country, while Norwegian democracy and nation-building were part of a national program (Østerund 2015: 42).

The consolidation of the country as a national unit, and nation-building as a historical process, were defined as parts of the democratic process. The historian Ernst Sars emphasized the close connection between this principle and democratic development with broad popular movements and the implementation of expanded voting rights. The national movement was not only a struggle for greater independence from the outside, but it also had a social dimension (Fulsås 1999: 93–102). The nationality principle was based on the notion that different national characteristics had arisen in an interaction between natural and historical factors – geography, language, descent, common fate, and their importance in shaping the national mindset. The Norwegian fight for independence rested on cultural assertiveness, democratization, and dissolution of the union.

However, with independence in 1905, the young nation had to solve another challenge – ethnic minorities. Generally, non-dominant ethnic groups were treated as a menace to the social cohesion Norwegians strove to achieve. Therefore, it was decided to introduce *Norwegisation* (Norw. *fornorskning*) defined as “politics and processes where the language and culture of indigenous peoples and national minorities are opposed and replaced by the language and culture of the Norwegian majority” (Berg-Nordlie 2023). From the 1850s to the 1960s, Norway had a targeted Norwegianization policy directed at the indigenous Sami people and the national minority Kven/ Norwegian Finns. The Norwegian authorities also persecuted and opposed the culture of other national minorities.

The process of Norwegisation was divided into several phases and a detailed description goes far beyond the scope of the present paper. Nevertheless, it is essential to characterize briefly this long period.

Under the reign of Denmark, the Sami’s traditional religion was opposed, although there was no special policy against this group. The Norwegian-nationalist separationist movement emerged after entering the union with Sweden in 1814. Historians and intellectuals concluded that the Sami were inferior both in terms of culture and civilization, as well as being an inferior “race”. The idea that the Sami should be Norwegianized was also written about in the newspapers. In the milieu of the church, however, Norwegianization was not approved. For example, during this period the priest and linguist – Nils Vibe Stockfleth – was an important advocate for the Sami language in church life (Dahl 1957: 2).

After 1851, the state started systematically Norwegianizing Sami and Kven children at schools. The “Finn Fund” was established to educate more teachers who could conduct lessons in Norwegian, while The ethnic languages – Sami and Kven – were gradually replaced and finally forbidden. As for the Kven people,

they were perceived as a serious threat to Norway mainly because of their background. They settled in Norway in the 18<sup>th</sup> century in the strategic Finmark area but their homeland was Finland. As a result, Norwegians considered them a threat to national security both internally and externally (Eriksen and Niemi 1981: 252).

The assimilation process gained momentum at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The church minister, Vilhelm Andreas Wexelsen, introduced the so-called “Wexelsen poster” in 1898. Points 4 and 5 in the poster read:

Even if in a circle the majority of the children do not understand Norwegian, the teacher must always have the provisions given above in mind, and thus let it be up to the authority that the Sami or Kven language is not used to a further extent than the conditions make unavoidably necessary. [...] During the teacher's conversations with the children to bring them to understanding, the use of the Sami or Kven language should be avoided as much as possible. (Instructions regarding the use of Lappish... 1989)

The introduction of the instruction led to a sharp restriction on the use of Sami and Kven/Finnish in schools. Wexelsen also appointed a school director for Finnmark, Bernt Thomassen (1859–1929), who oversaw the implementation of Norwegianization. The Wexelsen poster stated that the language of instruction should be Norwegian and that Sami and Swedish/Finnish should only be used as “helpful languages” when necessary. Although the Wexelsen poster did not formally introduce a total ban on using Sami as a “helpful language”, the language was avoided. As part of this, it was suggested that teachers should preferably not explain to Sami-speaking pupils what Norwegian words meant by translating them into Sami but show the words' meanings with pictures, movements, and objects. In many places, the practice became very strict: schoolchildren were forbidden to use Sami between lessons, and they could be subjected to physical punishment if they did so (Brandal 2017: 59). Shortly after the introduction of the Wexelsen poster, boarding schools were established in Finnmark. Sami and Kven/ Norwegian-Finnish students who had to live there were isolated from their language and culture, and directly exposed to Norwegianization (Seppola 196: 165).

In addition to strict education laws, there were also administrative regulations. They came into force in 1902 and applied to the sale of land in Finnmark. Requisites for attaining a property in this region included a Norwegian name and command of the Norwegian language in terms of reading and writing. These conditions could never have been met given that the Sami were nomads, while the Kven people led lives which although unsophisticated, were not poor (Dahl 1950: 98).

Interestingly, the Sami made several attempts to resist Norwegianization. The beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century saw a wave of Sámi political activism. Important Sami leaders at this time included Daniel Mortenson (1860–1924), who was editor of the newspaper *Waren Sardne* and an important leader among the Southern Sami; Anders Larsen (1870–1949), who was editor of the newspaper *Sagai Muittalægje*

(1904–1911) and wrote the first Sami-language novel *Beaive-Álgu* (1912), which, among other subjects, deals with the pressure for Norwegianization; Isak Saba (1875–1921), who became the Sami's first parliamentary representative and wrote what later became the Sami national anthem; Elsa Laula Renberg (1877–1931), who was at the head of the first large Sámi meeting in 1917; and the politician Per Fokstad (1890–1973).

Towards the end of the Second World War, Finnmark and Nord-Troms were subjected to “scorched earth tactics” by the Nazi occupiers. Many cultural artifacts were burned down in those parts of Norway where Sami and Kven/ Norwegian-Finnish culture was strongest. The inhabitants, after forced evacuation, returned to their places of origin, nevertheless, the material heritage of these minorities lay in ashes, which caused great cultural loss (Brochmann, Kjelstadli 2014: 159).

After the Second World War, new Sami organizations were again founded, and many participated in Norwegian party politics. At the same time, more tolerant attitudes towards minorities were emerging. An opportunity appeared to put an end to the formal Norwegianization policy. In 1956, the Ministry of Church and Education set up the “Sami Committee” that investigated questions about cultural and economic measures for “the Sami-speaking population” in Norway. Three of the committee's nine members were Sami: Per Fokstad, Paul Danielsen, and Hans Opstad. The committee was led by Asbjørn Nesheim (1906–1989), who was not Sami, but had long-term experience with Sami issues, and had participated in founding and managing the Sami organization *Sámi Searvi* (1948). The committee's recommendation was submitted in 1959 and considered in the Storting in 1963. A central figure in this last phase of the process was Harald Samuelsberg (AP, Labor Party), the first Sami representative to the Storting since Isak Saba (1906–1912) (Andersen et al. 2021: 276).

The Sami Committee's work was an important settlement with the Norwegianization policy and set Norway on a new Sami political course. At the same time, the new School Act of 1959 came into being, which meant that the Wexelsen poster of 1898 was repealed, and Sami could again be used as a school language.

The status of the Sami language and Sami natural resources has been in dispute for many decades. Conflict and debate occurred between Sami organizations and the Norwegian state, and internally within Sami civil society. The Alta struggle (1968–1982) made the population of Norway generally aware of the Sami's situation. Finally, several laws and institutions were introduced which, among other things, strengthened the position of the Sami language: the Sami Act (1987), the “Sami Paragraph” in the Constitution (1988), and the Sami Parliament (1989). According to the “Sami Paragraph” (§ 108), Norway's Sami policy is now opposed to Norwegianization (The Constitution of the Kingdom of Norway...):

The state authorities shall create conditions enabling the Sami people, as an indigenous people, to preserve and develop their language, culture, and way of life.



After the Alta struggle the Kven people started to fight actively for their rights. However, it was not until 1992 that the Council of Europe adopted the European Charter on Regional and Minority Languages, ratified by Norway in 1992 with effect from 1998. Under the Minority Languages Charter, Sami was considered to be at the highest level (“Part III”), while Kven was less protected (“Part II”). In 2005, the Norwegian parliament recognized Kven as a minority language in Norway following an extended debate on whether Kven should be considered a dialect of Finnish or a separate language.

#### 4. The report

The crux of the report of The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Norway concerned the Norwegian authorities’ assimilation policy towards the Sami and Kvens/ Norwegian Finns, the consequences this policy has had for individuals and groups, and the relationship between the majority population and Kvens/ Norwegian Finns and Sami. The commission started primarily by mapping the consequences of the Norwegianization policy on the possibilities for Sami and Kven/ Norwegian Finns to practice their languages, their own cultures, and traditional ways of doing business. In connection with this, the commission also investigated the consequences of the Norwegianization policy on the majority population in the form of discrimination and the spread of prejudice directed against the Sami and Kven/ Norwegian Finns (Innstilling fra Stortingets presidentskap... 2017–2018).

The purpose of the review was to recognize the experiences of Sami and Kven/ Norwegian Finns in the face of the implementation of the policy of the Norwegian authorities, and the consequences these experiences had for them as groups and individuals, as well as to establish a common understanding of the treatment of all or parts of the Kven and Sami populations and their culture. Concerning this, the main objective of the commission was to foster reconciliation between the minority groups and the majority population (Sannhet og forsoning – grunnlag for et oppgjør... 2023). Following this, the commission’s task was threefold:

##### I. Historical mapping

The most important task of the commission was to investigate and describe local, regional, as well as national policies and activities of the Norwegian authorities towards minorities over a relatively long period – from around 1800 until the present day. Furthermore, the commission’s duty was to delineate the ideological basis for the assimilation process. In particular, the role of the school system was the object of assessment. Additionally, the activities of religious, academic, cultural, and social institutions were of interest.

The commission also researched how the Norwegianization policy affected the majority population's perceptions of minorities as well as the self-perception of members of non-dominant groups. Another objective was to assess the compatibility of the measures taken by the authorities concerning the needs of minorities. Importantly, the commission ensured that personal experiences and stories about injustices that occurred during the assimilation period and their consequences were made public.

## II. Investigate the effects of the Norwegianization policy in modern times

Apart from a historical overview of Norwegianization, the commission investigated the consequences of this process in modernity. Primarily, the panel of experts investigated how assimilation affected the language of the minorities in contemporary society, material culture, and mental and physical health. Furthermore, the commission investigated the effects of the Norwegianization policy on the public discourse in the form of hate speech and discrimination.

## III. Suggest measures for further reconciliation

Finally, the commission presented proposals for measures that would foster equalization of the majority and minority populations. Moreover, increasing general knowledge in society about the non-dominant groups was another objective. The commission also assessed the ongoing measures for reconciliation. In addition to submitting the final report, the commission recommended suitable ways to disseminate the knowledge that was acquired: through the use of digital media/internet and in collaboration with traditional mass media.

The commission consisted of the following members:

- Secretary General Dagfinn Høybråten, manager;
- Professor Ivar Bjørklund, Tromsø;
- Scholarship holder Håkon Hermanstrand, Kolvereid;
- Bishop emeritus Per Oskar Kjølaas, Tromsø;
- Professor Pia Lane, Oslo;
- Senior advisor Anne Kalstad Mikkelsen, Hamarøy;
- Museum manager Marit Myrvoll, Evenes;
- Professor emeritus Einar Niemi, Vadsø;
- Professor Anne Julie Semb, Oslo;
- University lecturer Liv Inger Somby, Kautokeino;
- Professor emeritus Aslak Syse, Oslo;
- Associate Professor Ketil Zachariassen, Tromsø (Innstilling fra Stortingets presidentskap... 2017–2018).

The report was submitted to the Norwegian Parliament on June 1<sup>st</sup>, 2023, and consisted of four parts:

- I. The basis of the commission's work;
- II. The historical mapping – from the Norwegianization policy to multiculturalism;
- III. In the shadow of the Norwegianization policy – the consequences of assimilation and injustice;
- IV. The reconciliation.

Interestingly, one of the commission members, Aslak Syse, submitted a dissenting statement, which can be found in the attachments to the final document. Syse writes that the commission had very little time to do the work it was set up to do. Moreover, he points out some methodological inconsistencies:

Even though it is made clear in the introductory chapters that there is a principal difference between the Norwegianization that had been planned and wanted by politicians on the one hand and Norwegianization as a result of other social processes on the other, the border between the two has, in my opinion, become fluid in parts of the presentation. Social processes, such as changes in industrial policy, urbanization, the burning down and evacuation of Finnmark and North Troms towards the end of the Second World War, and the rebuilding after the war, have had Norwegianizing effects. But these effects seem to result from a conscious Norwegianization policy. This shift in causal explanations appears to be unfortunate both academically and in a contemporary political context. Many of the consequences described in the report are more a consequence of changes in social structure and business policy than of a targeted indigenous and minority policy. (Sannhet og forsoning – grunnlag for et oppgjør... 2023: 663)

Additionally, Syse highlights that he disagrees with “a presentation where a one-sided victim role can seem to be the whole story”:

This one-sided role of victim is thus assigned to the Sami who have experienced no small amount of success politically and socially, especially in the last 30–40 years. The Fosen judgment and the Regional Court's decision that the local population in Karasjok is the rightful owner of the land in almost the entire municipality can be mentioned here. Although the report has many examples of Sami organization and results achieved through active ethnopolitics, this perspective is also under-communicated. (Sannhet og forsoning – grunnlag for et oppgjør... 2023: 663–664)

Indeed, the Sami community has managed to fight effectively for their rights. The analysis presented in the present paper confirms Syse's thesis. Sami people are acknowledged as the only indigenous people of the European Union (Joona 2019: 1).

The presentation of personal stories of the victims and/ or witnesses of the assimilation policy is a significant part of the report. The commission found out that the majority of respondents came from Finnmark (197), Norland (100) and Troms (82) (Sannhet og forsoning – grunnlag for et oppgjør... 2023: 323). This result is hardly surprising, given that Norwegianization took place predominantly in the northern part of the country. The thematic scope of the utterances is also informative. The graph below illustrates the main issues mentioned by the respondents.

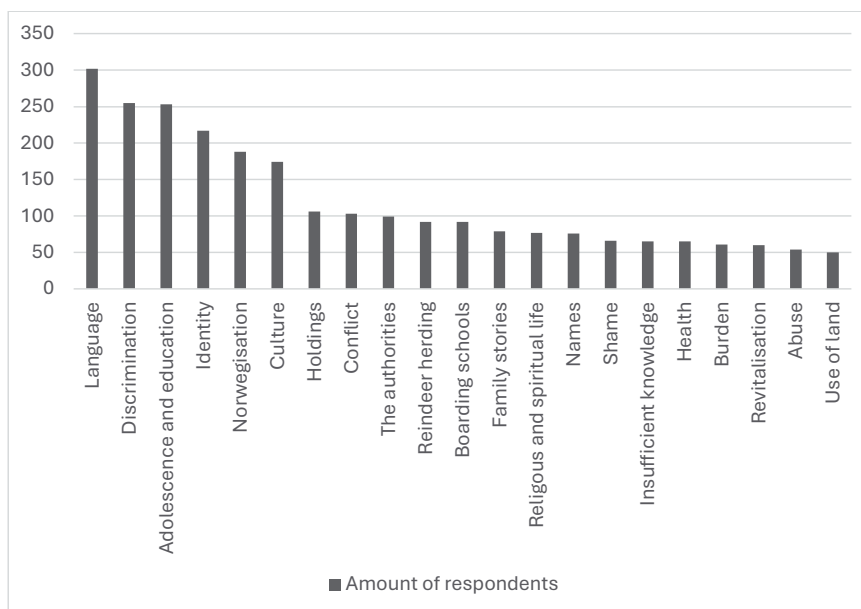


Figure 1. Prevailing themes of personal histories (Sannhet og forsoning – grunnlag for et oppgjør... 2023: 324). Graphics mine, SH

The themes reflect the main areas of the assimilation policy. It was mainly aimed at weakening minorities by eliminating the language from the public realm, especially the education system. Being devoid of the rudimentary tool of communication – the mother tongue, members of ethnic minorities felt discriminated against and devalued.

According to the report, the extensive language shift made Northern Sami an endangered language. Lule Sami, Southern Sami, and Kven are also severely endangered languages. The Ume, Pite, and Skolt Sami languages have few speakers left in Norway, so may soon be considered extinct languages if no revitalizing initiatives can help reverse the situation. The language shift has already been completed for the Forest Finns as there are no longer any Finnish-speaking Forest Finns alive who learned Finnish at home.

The commission emphasizes that one of the biggest obstacles to reconciliation after the Norwegianization policy is the so-called implementation gap – that is, many of the measures that the Norwegian authorities adopted to counteract the effects of the Norwegianization policy are not implemented in practice:

One of the biggest challenges the commission has observed is the lack of implementation of adopted policies. When laws, statutory rights, policy decisions, and measures have not been followed up by executive authorities towards all groups, the individual faces an implementation gap. (Sannhet og forsoning – grunnlag for et oppgjør... 2023: 634)

To bridge this gap the commission suggested activities aimed at reconciliation. In the report, they are called “pillars”, and apply to the following areas:

I. Knowledge and communication:

- The commission proposed a national competence center on Norwegianization policy and injustice, responsible for research, documentation, communication, and reconciliation work.
- The Commission proposed spreading knowledge about the Norwegianization policy and its consequences in primary and secondary education schools, colleges, and universities.
- The Commission urged the Norwegian authorities and relevant institutions to monitor processes and to develop measures in light of the findings of other commissions in the Nordic region that will be initiated in the years to come.

II. Language:

- The commission proposed national investment in comprehensive language training in the Swedish and Sami languages from kindergarten to adult education.
- The Commission proposed targeted investment in and increased visibility of the Kven and Sami languages in the public domain.
- The Commission proposed a Nordic initiative to strengthen cross-border cooperation on language, language education, the production of teaching materials, and language revitalization (NOU 2016: 16).
- The commission proposed that an action plan be developed for the Swedish language to increase the number of language users so that Swedish can eventually be lifted from Part II to Part III of the Minority Language Pact.
- The commission referred to NOU 2016: 18 *The Language of the Heart* and suggested an overall strategy for achieving linguistic equality in upbringing and education, health and care, and administration and justice, adapted to the Sami language.

III. Culture:

- The Commission proposed a comprehensive and long-term national investment in Sami, Kven/Norwegian-Finnish, and Finnish forest culture as part of the work of reconciliation.
- The Commission proposed strengthening the economic framework for Sami, Kven, and Forest Finnish cultural industries and institutions.
- The commission encouraged national institutions to establish closer cooperation with Sami, Kven, and Forest Finland institutions, and to contribute to the visibility, safeguarding, and dissemination of Sami, Kven/Norwegian Finnish, and Forest Finnish culture.
- The commission proposed cross-border cooperation on Sami, Swedish, and forest Finnish culture.

#### IV. Prevention of conflicts:

- The commission agreed with the Freedom of Expression Commission proposals (NOU 2022: 8) to counteract hatred and discrimination against indigenous peoples and minorities.
- A permanent advisory body should investigate issues concerning national minorities on behalf of the government, including forms of co-determination.
- The commission called for a survey of property and use rights outside Finnmark in line with international law. This must include the right to reindeer grazing outside today's reindeer herding district for national minorities' according to claim and age time use.
- The commission referred to NOU 2007: 13 The New Samiretten and NOU 2008: 5 The right to fish in the sea outside Finnmark and urges follow-up investigations.
- The commission proposed a review of the territorial situation for reindeer husbandry and its significance for the Sami culture (NOU 2007: 14).

#### V. Implementation of regulations:

- As part of the Storting's control of the administration, a review of the lack of implementation of decisions in the minority policy field should be initiated.
- The commission urged the authorities to strengthen training concerning Sami, Kven, and forest Finns and their rights as public servants.
- The commission encouraged the university and college sector to offer more students teaching about indigenous peoples and national minorities (Sannhet og forsoning – grunnlag for et oppgjør... 2023: 652–658).

## 5. Conclusions

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission's objective was threefold: to outline Norwegian assimilation policies, to examine the present-day repercussions of the assimilation policy towards Sami and Kven/ Finnish people, and to contribute to further reconciliation.

Undeniably, the Commission tried to perform its task as diligently as possible. The report was written in three languages (Norwegian, Sami, and Kven), while the Commission's name and the summary were written in seven languages (Kven, South Sami, Lule Sami, North Sami, Finnish, Norwegian, and English). In particular, the part presenting the personal experiences of victims and witnesses of the assimilation process is an invaluable source of information. However, the recommendations of the Commission leave much to be desired.

Norway has continued a consistent ethno-policy since the 1980s. The shift from politicizing ethnicity to ethnicizing politics is clear. Starting from the "Alta controversy", both politicians and the majority population acknowledge the importance of protecting ethnic minorities. The Norwegian authorities held regular meetings

in 1980–1981 with a Sami delegation appointed by the Norwegian Sami Association. In 1987, the Sami Act came into being. In 1988 there was an amendment to the Norwegian constitution and the adoption of the Finnmark Act in 2005. Moreover, the first session of the Sami Parliament was convened on October 9<sup>th</sup>, 1989, and opened by King Olav V, while in 1997, King Harald V delivered the following apology before the Norwegian Sami Assembly:

The Norwegian state is situated in the territories of two peoples – the Norwegians and the Sami. Sami history is closely interwoven with Norwegian history. Today, we must apologize for the injustice previously inflicted upon the Sami people by the Norwegian authorities as the result of a hard assimilation policy. The Norwegian State, therefore, has a particular responsibility for facilitating the Sami people's ability to build a strong and viable society. This is a historical right based on the Sami's presence in their cultural regions, which stretches far back in time. (H.M. Harald V 1997)

Norway has done a lot to live up to the King's words. As indicated in the article, Sami – as indigenous people, and Kven as a minority group, are protected by law at a national and international level. Furthermore, the pillars of reconciliation have been the mainstays of Norwegian ethnopolitics for several decades. The process of cultural and linguistic revitalization is a continuous process. It is, perhaps, enough to analyze the activities of the Kven people and Forest Fins to see that positive change is occurring. Additionally, Norwegians are becoming more aware of the cultural diversity of their own country.

It would be unrealistic to believe that the negative consequences of the Norwegianization process could be counteracted within only four decades as the assimilation period lasted for over a century. However, much has been done to bring the issue of ethnic and national minorities to the attention of society at large. Undoubtedly, there is still much to be done in terms of reconciliation, but it is essential to acknowledge that much has already been done.

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