



## **The Finns Party The Finnish Parliament Elections of 2015**

### **LANGUAGE POLICY**

*"Political conflicts are often language conflicts - and some conflicts are political because they are language-related conflicts."*

*"A diverse and strong foundation of language skills can be achieved with creative legislation and teaching that is adapted to societal and economic needs."*

*Juho Eerola, Chairman, Language Policy Work Group*

#### **A wide-ranging and healthy language foundation**

The Finns Party believes that the Finnish language supports, nurtures and unifies Finnish citizens and their society. Promotion of proficiency in the Finnish language and its protection and development should be incorporated into national legislation.

The Finnish language must be preserved as a functioning language for academic research - also the Nordic Council should include Finnish as a 'working language' just as it accepts Swedish, Norwegian and Danish. Continuation of residence permits beyond three years should require an applicant to exhibit a satisfactory level of competence in Finnish. Support for the minority languages related to Finnish ('Finnic/Finn-Ugric') should have directed budgetary funds and all national minority language communication channels should be concentrated into the Finnish Broadcasting System Channel 5 (YLE Fem) services (TV, radio, internet) - that should also include all material in the Swedish language.

The Finns Party believes Finland should move from a bilingual nation to a multilingual society. Such development can be furthered by government assistance going to supporting teaching in less-read (in Finland), but important, world languages rather than concentrating on English - in this way Finland's 'language reserves' can be enriched.

The teaching of the Swedish language should be made optional at all school grade levels.

The possible choices for optional 'second language' teaching in the third school year should be increased and English offered as an option in the first year. Official requirements with respect to Swedish should be available in the spirit of the law: these requirements should be seen to be met when there are a number of officials competent in Swedish. Moreover, translation and interpretation services should be organized when assistance is needed with regard to the other national language.

The Finns Party calls for rational thought on language policy - also with respect to the use of financial resources. Municipalities and communes should be allowed discretion and decision-making authority, as well as responsibility, for issues regarding bilingualism. Any reform legislation must take into account the citizens' opinions as well as equality and fairness.

### **Towards a more sensible language policy**

- The position of the Finnish language to be strengthened.
- The protection and development of the Finnish language should be supported with appropriate legislation.
- Finnish must be maintained as an academic research language - as well as accepted as a 'working language' in the Nordic Council - similarly to Swedish, Norwegian and Danish.
- Satisfaction competency in Finnish must be shown for extension of residency permission.
- Finnic languages to be supported and Finnish Broadcasting Channel 5 to be used for transmission needs (TV, radio, internet) of minority languages.

### Development from bilingualism to multilingualism

- Educational resources should be used for less-read, but important, world languages.
- Swedish language teaching should be optional at all grade levels.
- Second language teaching should have increased language options and English offered as a voluntary option in the first grade
- Options for offering translation and interpretation services for the requirements of providing assistance with the other national language should be examined
- Support for 'language nests' to assist with the preservation of endangered minority languages should be provided.

### Financial resources needed for a language policy

- Costs of a language policy must be properly assessed
- Municipal and commune decision-making authority and cost responsibility of bilingualism must be appropriately evaluated.

## **The status of the Finnish language to be strengthened**

The policy for the Finnish language should conform to, and be modelled after the language policies of the Nordic and Baltic states as well as keeping with the general pattern in other European nations. The Finnish language is a key factor in maintaining the cohesiveness and unity of the Finnish nation and should be supported as such. All applicants for Finnish citizenship must show a satisfactory degree of proficiency in Finnish. The Finnish language is to be a functional component of education and research. Trade, industrial and professional areas should be encouraged to use Finnish terminology so that understanding of research and development results in various areas can be used as widely as possible among the population. Skills in the Finnish language must be preserved and developed - and creative legislation used to further these goals.

Language legislation - from both fairness and appropriateness considerations - is to be evaluated in the light of availability of public services and economic efficiency. Finnish language policy must be consistent and compatible with Nordic values and procedures. The Swedish language act of 2009 offers an excellent reference for reform of Finnish language legislation. Societal welfare requires that the limited language-teaching resources be made available for more diverse and challenging areas than present - taking into account the real needs of the population, society and business for language skills.

## **The right to language and culture**

There must be respect for a citizen's own feelings of identity. The Finns Party does not accept outsiders setting up standards for how people judge themselves. We feel that Finnish-speaking Finns can be constructive members of Finnish society without any knowledge or concern for the Swedish language or culture. The great majority of the Finnish population considers themselves as Finnish-speaking citizens of Europe. There must be respect for what language skills a person thinks they need.

*Finns - a multilingual people in a multilingual world*

## **The Finnish language and its culture**

The nurturing and support of the Finnish language and the language-related parts of the Finnish culture and civilization relies on the Finnish-speaking majority. This realization must be the first priority of the Finnish government with respect to language policy - no one else in the world is going to take responsibility for the health of the Finnish language.

It should be noted that immigrants to Finland are speaking some 150 different languages. The Constitution requires that the public sector must serve the needs - both educational and other public service related - of both the Finnish- and Swedish-speaking populations. But we must realize that these days Finland must realize that there is a much wider range of language skills now in the country and we must offer communication possibilities to a lot more people – and we can also use this diversity as a resource.

Movement in the direction of developing a multilingual country also means lessening the significance of spending resources on simple bilingualism. For the Finnish-speaking majority, Swedish is a foreign language. Swedish-speaking Finns, however, learn Finnish

because it is the language of the large majority and a knowledge of Finnish can make a huge difference in their own welfare – economic and social. The Finnish government should take steps to address the needs of Finnish language skills for the entire population. This provides a still more versatile 'language reserve' for Finland and serves the requirements of the population, public sector and commerce.

## **Finnish public opinion**

*There should be a binding public referendum with regard to language policy.*

*From bilingualism to multilingualism*

*Competition determines needs*

The ability to compete in international commerce requires diverse language skills. Efforts must be invested in developing skills in the world's important languages and at early stages of life. 'Artificial' bilingualism uses up valuable resources which could be better used with training in world languages.

## **Free choice of language**

The possibility for Finns to choose 'world languages' of their choice means that Finland's 'language reserves' grow, and this growth increases international commercial competitiveness. At the same time we get more fluent Swedish speakers because motivation is the best support mechanism for learning languages. It's considered important that commerce can be transacted at least partially in the buyer's language. We're missing this skill, for the most part, due to the lack of freedom to choose the foreign languages we'd like to learn. In our neighbouring Sweden, the situation is quite something else.

## **The spirit of the Constitution and compulsory Swedish language teaching**

The promotion of even tighter requirements for teaching Swedish at all school levels is coming from those who invoke demands of the Finnish Constitution. The Constitution does not stipulate that the second national language should be a compulsory subject in the schools. The Finns Party believes that the 1968 legislation which made the teaching of Swedish to be mandatory should be revoked - as it is the single biggest reason for the present inflexibility of Finnish language studies.

## **Constitution contents**

*“Section 17 - Right to one's language and culture”*

*“The national languages of Finland are Finnish and Swedish. The right of everyone to use his or her own language, either Finnish or Swedish, before courts of law and other authorities, and to receive official documents in that language, shall be guaranteed. The public authorities shall provide for the cultural and societal needs of the Finnish-speaking and Swedish-speaking populations of the country on an equal basis.”*

*“The Sami, as an indigenous people, as well as the Roma and other groups, have the right to maintain and develop their own language and culture. Provisions on the right of the*

*Sami to use the Sami language before the authorities are laid down. The rights of persons using sign language and of persons in need of interpretation or translation aid owing to disability shall be guaranteed.”*

## **Nordic co-operation**

The Nordic Council should also include Finnish as a working language. The present situation of using only Norwegian, Swedish and Danish is not a respectful one for Finland where all members should have equal standing. We should suggest that the workings of the Council should use one of the world languages - and avoid the situation of giving a country the advantage of using their native language. The Nordic Youth Council, for example, uses English as their working language.

## **Language skills and the immigrant**

Language teaching for immigrants must get increased investment. Societal exclusion is a serious threat and lack of Finnish language skills increases the risk of immigrants being excluded from the larger community. Giving support to the development of Finnish language skills is an important step in furthering the integration of migrants. Notice should be made that emphasis should be on concentrating on practical communication possibilities - grammar can come along later.

The suburbs of urban centres are showing a rather rapid growth of children with native foreign languages. This phenomenon is a big challenge for school administration officials to keep these areas from separating from the larger community. It will be necessary to spend significant resources for language teaching in Finnish as well as English and other world languages.

Consequences of immigration and efforts for migrant integration make the bases for bilingual criteria with Finnish and Swedish irrelevant rather quickly. These criteria must be brought up-to-date: for example, Vantaa now has 2,6% Swedish-speaking population while the total of those speaking Russian, Estonian, Somali and other such languages is about 14%.

## **Translation and interpretation services**

Interpretation services must be guaranteed to all national minority languages no matter where the citizen wants to handle their affairs. This legislative requirement of a translation service applies to all official offices and organizations. Others may provide these services as well if they consider them feasible and necessary. Investigation should be done to determine if translation services should replace more costly methods of providing Swedish language skills in those municipalities where the primary language is Finnish with a minimum of Swedish speakers. This could amount to sizeable savings.

## **'Finnic and Finn-Ugric' languages**

For the Finns Party, the Finnish language is the basis of the Finnish identity. At the same time we recognize the Finnish geographical regions to be the home of linguistic diversity - a phenomenon we wish to cherish and protect. Finnish identity is very much tied to the heritage of Finn-Ugric languages and in particular the Finnish Kalevala-related heritage.

The preservation and revitalization of these languages is an important matter for Finns and for that reason the Finnish government should give strong support to further these language goals in co-operation with neighbouring countries.

The languages of the indigenous peoples on the present Finnish territory were the Northern-, Inari- and Skolt-Sami. In addition, on our territory there was the historical close relative to Finnish: Karelian. The Finns Party very much supports the preservation and revitalization of the Sami and Karelian languages. These languages seek official status in their home areas. The transition of these languages to the next generation can be promoted with education throughout the whole country.

### **Kalevala - basis for our identity**

The roots of Finnish identity are tied to the important language groups of the Kalevala - the Baltic Finn family of languages. These language groups are, even now, reasonably understandable. The Finns Party are in favor of the Kalevala being studied for a semester during students' primary and secondary education. A particular goal would be for students to familiarize themselves with some of the similarities and differences between the Finnish language and the Estonian and Karelian languages – and gaining some familiarity with some of the other languages related to Finnish.

Finland should be an active protector of the Karelian language - an historic sister language of Finnish. Karelian is presently spoken in the Republic of Karelia in the Russian Federation and some closely related dialects of it are spoken in eastern Finland. Finland is, as well, a signatory of the general European agreement on the protection of minority languages.

The Finns Party believes it should be Finland's goal to support other Finn-Ugric peoples in Norway, Sweden and Russia to preserve and develop their languages and Finland should work with the governments of these nations to promote those aims.

### **'Language nests' – a key to the regeneration of languages**

The Finns Party aim is to safeguard the Sami and Karelian languages in Finland with the aid of 'language nests' - a system where children in day care get training in the endangered languages through interaction and teaching with older generations. This is particularly effective when there are no longer such possibilities in the children's homes. One important feature of this method is that the experience is without translation and use of the majority language.

The transferring of a minority language cannot be counted on solely by use of these language nests - the Finns Party wants to assure the right to study the Sami and Karelian languages in their home areas but also to study their own languages in schools in other parts of Finland. Teaching staffs and school officials will need proper training for the language nest method and other educational means to succeed.

### **Language policy - looking to the costs**

The Finns Party wants the full costs of the language policy to be clarified. The Finnish Parliament must be given a full accounting of expected expenses so the taxpayer is aware

of the proposed budget. It would also be interesting to know what costs would be involved for language immersion-type teaching methodologies would cost.

At least the following costs should be determined:

- 1) The national language strategy and legislation costs
- 2) The cost of official bilingual services throughout the country
- 3) Municipal reform and delineation of bilingual areas
- 4) The use of language immersion methods throughout Finland
- 5) The direct and indirect costs of modernizing the teaching of Swedish

The responsible authority and institution officials must be familiar with the financial resources needed for implementing any policies before making decisions.