



Sami concerned about mining plans and new railways in reindeer grazing areas

The co-operation agency of the three Sami parliaments, SPR, is greatly concerned about a foreign exploration company carrying out a pre-study for an iron ore mine in Lannavaara in northern Sweden. Mining requires efficient transportation which means consequences for the Sami culture, biodiversity and reindeer husbandry in three countries.

The Australian exploration company Scandinavian Resources is now conducting a pre-study of the possibilities to mine iron ore in the Lannavaara area in northern Norrbotten County, Sweden. The area is not protected for nature conservation and the ore deposits are well-known. The question of transportation must be solved in order for the ore to be mined. Possible solutions that the company is investigating include building a railway between Lannavaara and Svappavaara, or a railway from Lannavaara to Karesuando and an extension of the railway network from Kolari in Finland all the way over to Skibotn, Norway.

This has sparked a reaction from the Sami Parliamentary Council. The Sami Parliamentary Council (*Samiskt Parlamentarisk Råd, SPR*) is the common parliamentary co-operation agency for the three Sami parliaments in Finland, Norway and Sweden. SPR is greatly concerned about the mining plans and the establishment of new transportation connections since these will have an impact on the Sami, the Sami culture, biodiversity and reindeer husbandry in three countries. What especially concerns SPR is that these plans move forward without first consulting the concerned Sami parliaments or the reindeer-herding Sami.

Sweden, Norway and Finland have ratified international conventions that concern these types of projects. This applies for example to the Espoo Convention, the UN Convention on Environmental Impact Assessment in a Transboundary Context. The parties that ratified the convention are committed to jointly or on their own carry out necessary and efficient measures to prevent, reduce and monitor environmental impacts if it is evident that planned activities result in an environmental impact in a cross-border context. The Lannavaara project may stretch over three countries – Norway, Sweden and Finland. Which is why, in accordance with the provisions of the Convention, those people living in the affected areas must also be

given the opportunity to equally participate in assessing the consequences the project can have on the environment.

SPR emphasizes that Finland, Sweden and Norway have unconditionally signed the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. In accordance with Article 29, the indigenous peoples have the right to the conservation and protection of the environment and the productive capacity of their lands or territories and resources. In accordance with Article 32, indigenous peoples have the right to determine and develop priorities and strategies for the development or use of their lands or territories and other resources. States shall consult and cooperate in good faith with the indigenous peoples concerned through their own representative institutions in order to obtain their free and informed consent prior to the approval of any project affecting their lands or territories and other resources, particularly in connection with the development, utilization or exploitation of mineral, water or other resources.

SPR also reminds of the EU European Convention on Human Rights that the accession treaties are a part of. In the Additional Protocol No 3 in Finland's and Sweden's accession treaty to the EU, Finland, Norway and Sweden recognize their obligations with regard to the Sami people under national and international law. In accordance with the protocol, Finland, Norway and Sweden are committed to preserving and developing the means of livelihood, language, culture and way of life of the Sami people and consider the dependence of traditional Sami culture and livelihood on primary economic activities, such as reindeer husbandry in the traditional areas of Sami settlement.

Therefore, through the Sami Parliamentary Council, the three Sami parliaments demand that:

- the conditions in the accession treaty to the EU be taken into consideration when planning the establishment of mines and transportation connections.
- the demands stipulated in the Espoo Convention and the European Convention on Human Rights are met in the planning of mining operations and transportation connections in Lannavaara. For mining operations and requirements of transportation connections, the Sami parliaments in Sweden, Norway and Finland, concerned Sami districts and concerned Sami shall have granted their free, prior and informed consent.
- in the planning of mining operations and transportation connections, presentations and plans are to be also drawn up in Sami, and that a Sami interpreter is arranged in connection with the processing of the case.
- SPR is invited to participate in the steering group for preparation and planning of railway operations and that it is taken into account in all planning phases.
- representatives of reindeer husbandry and fishing are taken into account in all planning phases.

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