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## New Government Programme supports Saami culture

The Government Programme of Prime Minister Katainen's first Government was published on Friday. It is a historical document for the Saami people. For the first time ever, the Government Programme specifically states the aim of developing the Saami culture and the rights of the Saami comprehensively.

Most of the key objectives of the Saami Parliament for this electoral period found their way into the Government Programme. "I am very happy with the central policies in the Government Programme. There is support for the Saami language, heritage and lore, the language revitalisation programme and the development of Saami cultural autonomy," says Klemetti Näkkäljärvi, President of the Saami Parliament and its representative in the government negotiations.

The Government Programme sets the ratification of the ILO 169 Convention as a goal. Although ratification of the ILO 169 Convention has been on the agenda in Finland for a long time, it has never been specifically mentioned in any Government Programme. "The Government Programme is favourable to further negotiations on the Nordic Saami Convention," President Näkkäljärvi says. The proposals submitted by the Saami Parliament concerning the reform of the land use steering system were also included in the Government Programme. The Government undertakes to develop land use by clarifying planning legislation and by participating in international cooperation on indigenous people to strengthen their protection. "This policy is also conducive to the implementation of Article 8(j) of the Convention on Biological Diversity. The final report of the Article 8(j) working group proposes the development of legislation governing land use," explains Näkkäljärvi.

The Government Programme undertakes to strengthen the development of reindeer husbandry and to make its damage compensation system more flexible. As regards fishing, the Government Programme undertakes to take action to protect migratory fish stocks.

A proposal for a Saami language revitalisation programme is under preparation in Finland at the initiative of the Saami Parliament. The proposal will be completed at the end of the current year. The Government Programme commits to the implementation of the Saami language revitalisation programme, to providing it with resources and to creating a permanent model for revitalising the Saami language. The Government Programme also makes broader pronouncements about the language rights of the Saami. The Government undertakes to secure the availability of social welfare and health care services in the Saami language and to draw up a national language strategy. The strategy process will focus particularly on the status of the Saami and Roma languages and sign language.

The Government Programme commits to a reform of the national biodiversity strategy and the sustainable development programme and to draw up an action plan for the protection of threatened habitats. The Saami cultural heritage and traditions regarding the use of the natural environment will be safeguarded in the implementation of the national biodiversity strategy. "These policies represent a comprehensive commitment to the needs of the Saami culture. There is a separate Saami sustainable development strategy embedded in the national sustainable development strategy. The national Article 8(j) working group made a broad-based proposal for action concerning the Saami culture in the new biodiversity strategy. The stated intent for the action plan for the protection of threatened habitats is to explore how the Reindeer Husbandry Act might be revised and implemented and how support for reindeer husbandry could be developed so as to help improve the

status of threatened and endangered habitats while fulfilling the obligations regarding the Convention on Biological Diversity (Articles 8(j) and 10(c)). This is very good for the Saami culture and reindeer husbandry. The Saami Parliament has put a lot of effort into preparing and implementing these strategies and programmes and continues to work hard to make them happen,” says Näkkäläjärvi.

The Government Programme incorporated the proposals submitted by the Saami Parliament for the development of Saami cultural autonomy and for providing the resources it requires. The Government Programme commits to developing Saami cultural autonomy and its operating potential. “This is a really important policy. The Government Programme will give the Saami Parliament more to work with, and putting these policies into practice requires strong input from the Saami Parliament,” says Näkkäläjärvi.

Saami matters will be considered more broadly in the implementation of the Government Programme. The Government will be drawing up a human rights policy action plan during the electoral period. This action plan will cover the rights of the Saami too. The Government Programme also touches on the status of the Act on Metsähallitus. Metsähallitus will be retained as a single entity. “The Government Programme also promises to maintain the lower-level road network so as to safeguard the operating environment of rural livelihoods and forestry. This is an important policy, as it favours the renovation of the Nellim road, which is important for the livelihood of the Skolt Saami,” says Näkkäläjärvi.

Government Programme online <http://www.valtioneuvosto.fi/tiedostot/julkinen/hallitusneuvottelut-2011/neuvottelutulos/fi.pdf> (in Finnish)

Final report of the Article 8(j) working group [www.samediggi.fi/art8j](http://www.samediggi.fi/art8j) (in Finnish)

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