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Summary

The indigenous Sámi people of Northern Europe has a long history of border-transcending pan-Sámi cooperation, particularly the Sámi communities living in the Nordic countries Finland, Norway and Sweden. The Russian Kola Sámi subgroup, however, had no opportunity to enter into international cooperation with other Sámi until the Perestroika. By then, a regional ethnic umbrella organization for the Sámi had already been created – in the West. Important subsequent changes in the international Sámi cooperation system were also to a large extent designed to fit the Nordic political landscape, not Russia. This article seeks to explore to what extent the Nordic integration process has taken precedence over the Sámi self-identification as a people that transcends the Nordic-Russian divide, resulting in indigenous political structures that are in fact more ‘Nordic’ than ‘pan-Sámi’; and if the Kola Sámi as a result of this have come to be inadequately represented in the pan-Sámi fora. We will here examine some key pan-Sámi structures, their relations to the Nordic states and Nordic cooperation, and the inclusion or exclusion of the Russian Sámi in them.

The Iron Curtain through Sápmi. Pan-Sámi politics, Nordic cooperation and the Russian Sámi

“The Sámi are one people, whose fellowship must not be divided by national boundaries.”

– *Sámi Political Program, Nordic Sámi Council (1980).*¹

While many ethno-political movements have focused on the goal of a sovereign nation-state, this has never been a widespread idea among the Sámi – who are few in numbers and scattered across a large area divided between four states. Instead, Sámi activists have as a rule opted to improve their people’s situation within the frameworks of these states. Battles for cultural revival and self-determination have been fought by demanding domestic change – to have Sámi rights introduced into national legislation, and Sámi institutions granted by the states. Even so, in the history of Sámi political activism, there is an easily identifiable undercurrent which we may refer to as ‘pan-Sámism’ – a desire to increase international Sámi cooperation, and to achieve a standardization of Sámi policy in the states that have divided Sápmi, the traditional Sámi homeland, between them.² Rather than forming the basis for any kind of separatist movement, pan-Sámi aspirations have been expressed through the establishment of networks and arrangements that transcend the state borders yet do not challenge said states’ sovereignty. This conglomerate of state- and civil society structures may be seen as a virtual ‘pan-Sámi polity’. It does not possess authority over any territory or population, but nevertheless constitutes an identifiable network of political institutions created with the intent to serve the symbolic and practical needs of a specific body politic. This virtual polity constitutes the political expression of the idea that the Sámi are not just a set of related indigenous minority communities in separate states, but a unitary, border-transcending people.

The pan-Sámi political network may be analytically split into a non-state and a state-based sector (cf. Fig 1). In the former we find a host of more and less formalized networks of people and NGOs. If this field of hectic and often *ad hoc* cultural-political activity can be said to have a centre, it is the Sámi Council (SC), established in 1956 as the ‘Nordic Sámi Council’, which unifies major Sámi NGOs. On the other hand, in the

sphere of pan-Sámi cooperation and project activity based around official structures, one might say that the ‘top level’ is constituted by the Sámi Parliamentary Council (SPC) launched in 2000 to unite the three Sámi Parliaments – official bodies of elected Sámi representatives in Finland, Norway and Sweden – and the ‘Nordic Sámi Cooperation’ (NSC) which coordinates the efforts of the Sámi Parliaments and relevant Ministries of the Nordic states. The most radical state-based pan-Sámi initiative so far is the proposed Nordic Sámi Convention, which aims to provide the Sámi communities of the signatory states (again Finland, Norway and Sweden) with a set of common legal rights – a virtual ‘constitution’ for a virtual polity.

The observant reader will have noticed who is missing in this picture. It appears that many of the pan-Sámi fora are defined not first and foremost by the concept of a ‘Sápmi’ that transcends the East-West division, but by ‘the Nordic countries’, a regional identity supposedly shared by all citizens of Western Europe’s northern states, Sámi or non-Sámi. As a consequence of this, it would appear that the Kola Sámi are not only a minority within the Sámi people³ but also the subgroup least politically integrated with the rest. Is, then, ‘pan-Sámism’ as expressed in the quote at the beginning of this article, just yet another case of political rhetoric clashing completely with practical politics?

In this article we will take a brief look at the extent to which the old Iron Curtain still divides Sápmi, by accounting for the Nordic character of the ‘virtual Sámi polity’ and the degree to which it causes the Kola Sámi to be excluded.

Part One: The Non-State Sector

The Sámi Council: from Nordic to pan-Sámi

Border-transcending Sámi political activity is nothing new, its first modern incarnation being the 1917 international Sámi congress where Norwegian and Swedish activists took part. However, it was not until the 1950s that the first border-transcending Sámi organization was founded. After WWII the political will for inter-Nordic cooperation grew stronger, and in 1952 the Nordic Council was established, an inter-parliamentary council gathering representatives of Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden and the autonomies Åland (Finland), Greenland and the Faeroe Isles (Denmark).⁴ The pan-Nordic spirit spilled over into Sámi politics, and at a 1952 conference on traditional Sámi handicrafts at Stockholm’s Nordic Museum, those present agreed that “Nordic collaboration in the Lapp⁵¹ question” should also be intensified. In 1953 the first Nordic Sámi Conference, financed by the Nordic states, convened.^{6,7}

The protocols make no mention of participants debating the Soviet Sámi issue. Instead, the Sámi were discussed as a people of “inter-Nordic” character, and the symbol later to become the Sámi Council’s logo was introduced here as a suggested “emblem for the Nordic conferences”: three rings representing Finland, Norway and Sweden, with a “smaller, unifying ring in the middle, the Sámi minority”.^{8, 9} The Conference charged a trilateral committee to create a proposal for a “Nordic Council for Sámi issues”, which was formally established at the next Nordic Sámi Conference (1956).¹⁰ Arguably, this first pan-Sámi political structure seems a product of ‘pan-Nordic’ ideology as much as ‘pan-Sámism’.

Still, the Nordic Sámi Council (SC) demonstrated a keen interest in transcending the Iron Curtain by several times requesting Soviet Sámi participation at the Nordic Sámi Conferences. Four Soviet researchers on Sámi issues did attend in 1968, but it would take fifteen years more before the first visit of an ethnic Sámi from the USSR – when in the wake of a meeting between SC secretary Leif Rantala and Soviet diplomat Yuriy Deryabin, the Kola Sámi Vasilij Selivanov was sent to the 1983 Nordic Sámi Conference.¹¹ In 1989, the Nordic Sámi Conference was once again visited by a Soviet Sámi representative, and the improved geopolitical situation was enthusiastically noted.¹² That year also saw the founding of the first Kola Sámi NGO, the Association of the Kola Sámi (AKS) which rapidly became the main connecting point between Nordic and Russian Sápmi. In 1991, AKS were observers at an SC meeting in Finland, and at the 1992 Nordic Sámi Conference they were accepted as full members. This gathering of Sámi from all four countries into one umbrella organization was a pan-Sámi breakthrough event.¹³ As a symbolic gesture, the word ‘Nordic’ was dropped: from now on, the organization would simply be called ‘the Sámi Council’ and the regular conferences, the next of which took place in Russia (Murmansk, 1996) were called ‘Sámi Conferences’.

Representation in the Sámi Council

In 1998 another Russian Sámi civil society formation was established: OOSMO, the Non-Governmental Organization of the Murmansk Region Sámi. This signaled the start of an increasing complexity in Russian Sámi politics which in itself constitutes a challenge for pan-Sámi cooperation – the group has no unitary structure to represent it abroad. AKS and OOSMO are the largest NGOs, and ever since OOSMO became a full SC member (2000) it has been common procedure to include both or none in pan-Sámi arrangements. Since the founding of OOSMO, many other Russian Sámi organizations have emerged which have not been

included in the SC – such as *obshchinas* (organizations aimed at reviving traditional forms of community and nature usage) and national cultural autonomies (urban cultural organizations). However, none of these organizations aim to represent *all* the Russian Sámi, but are instead more oriented towards the local level.

At the root level of the SC's internal democracy are the Sámi Conferences. If representation at these Conferences had been proportional, the Kola Sámi minority would have found themselves constantly outnumbered. Instead, each country sends the same number of voting delegates, elected by the SC member organizations. The Sámi Council itself consists of 15 individuals nominated by the NGOs and elected by the Conferences – and here, representation is roughly proportional, with 5 Norwegians, 4 Finns and Swedes, and 2 Russians.¹⁵ The SC statutes emphasize that the Council is to seek consensus in their decision-making rather than solve disagreements through voting, and judging from interviews internal opposition between Kola and Nordic Sámi does not seem to be a big problem. Furthermore, the reader should note that this structural inequality is rooted in the small numbers of the Kola Sámi rather than their not being citizens of Nordic countries.

Since the Kola Sámi entered the SC, the leadership position has been held by two Russians: Nina Afanas'yeva (1996, AKS), and Aleksandr Kobelev (2005-6, OOSMO). Kobelev has mentioned as a particular challenge that many documents were in languages he did not understand, necessitating the use of an interpreter.¹⁶ Other Nordic and Russian interviewees have confirmed that language poses a general challenge for Nordic-Russian cooperation – f. ex. the fact that the SC Secretariat has only ever employed one Kola Sámi is explained with lacking necessary language skills in Russia. Language problems are fated to be endemic to pan-Sámi politics, there being no common Sámi language and in any case many Sámi only speak their country's majority language. The Kola Sámi, though, are in a particularly difficult situation: The largest Sámi language, North Sámi, is not native to Russian Sápmi. Furthermore, while Norwegian and Swedish are mutually comprehensible and understood by many in Finland, the Russian border forms a distinct language barrier – on the other side of which, knowledge of English is also generally poorer. The usefulness of North Sámi in pan-Sámi affairs has led some to fear that it may displace the highly vulnerable/moribund local Sámi tongues on the Kola Peninsula.¹⁷

Role of the Sámi Council

While the SC structures have no decision-making power, being non-governmental, they are free to voice political opinions, make declarations and resolutions. Most declarations produced on the Sámi Conferences since the Kola Sámi joined have called attention to Kola Sámi grievances, including desires for a Russian Sámi Parliament, the future eastward expansion of rights guaranteed in the draft Nordic Sámi Convention, Russian ratification of ILO Convention 169 on the Rights of Tribal and Indigenous Peoples, and reservation of reindeer husbandry as an exclusive right for ethnic Sámi in their traditional territories.^{18, 19} The SC definitely serves as a ‘loudspeaker’ for the Kola Sámi minority, giving them a better opportunity to have their grievances heard than if they were to speak up only through their national NGOs.

The SC also participates in several other international fora, being on the ECOSOC roster, a permanent Arctic Council participant and an observer in the Barents Cooperation’s Working Group for Indigenous Peoples.²⁰ The Russian indigenous umbrella organization RAIPON is also involved in these, and since AKS holds membership in RAIPON too, the Kola Sámi are theoretically doubly represented. However, in the Russian context the Sámi are just one group in a great number of often larger indigenous peoples, making it highly unlikely that both RAIPON and the SC send a Kola Sámi representative to any forum. In fact, several interviewees state that due to language issues Kola Sámi individuals do not often represent the SC internationally either, the organization not having the money to send both a representative and an interpreter.

As for the economic worth of the SC to the Kola Sámi, it is substantial. Firstly, whereas the national subsections of the SC are to finance their own activities, one has made an exception for the Russian section, which is financed by the SC – this funding ultimately coming from the Nordic Council of Ministers.²¹ Also, the Kola Sámi, like all Sámi, may apply for financing from the SC Culture Committee. This committee’s members are chosen by the Council from a list of Sámi cultural organizations, Russian members of which include the handicraft association Chepes’ Sam’ and the youth organization Sam’ Nurash.²² Since 2004, □132,200 have been given in support for Russian Sámi cultural purposes (ca. 5,293,600 Russian Roubles in today’s rates) or about 17% of the total,²³ a substantial share considering the rather small part of the Sámi population this group makes up. One should keep in mind, though, that citizens of the Nordic states have rather more opportunities for getting cultural and political projects funded, than do citizens of Russia.

Part Two: The State-Based Sector

The Roots of the Sámi Parliamentary Council

In 1971 it was suggested in the SC to work for a non-governmental 'Nordic Sámi Union' centered on a 'Parliament' to which the Sámi NGOs would elect representatives, an executive 'Secretariat', and a 'Nordic Sámi Institute' to provide academic input.²⁴ The latter institution was indeed established two years later, with Nordic state funding, but the closest one came to a 'parliament' was a body of representatives elected by and among ethnic Sámi in Finland, the 'Sámi delegation' (established 1973). Activists in Sweden demanded the same kind of organ in 1981, and the same year – due to the Norwegian breakdown in minority-authority relations during the Alta River conflict²⁵ – the SC advised Norway to look to Finland. The national Sámi Rights Commissions created a joint Nordic committee to discuss the parliament issue, and in 1984 the Norwegian commission suggested that the Norwegian Sámi Council²⁶ should be replaced by a 'Sámi Parliament'. In 1989 such an organ was opened in Norway, Sweden followed suit in 1993 and the Finnish Sámi Delegation was reorganized into a Parliament in 1996.^{27, 28}

In 1994 the Sámi Parliaments requested of Norwegian Sámi legal expert John B. Henriksen to investigate possibilities for institutionalized cooperation between them. His draft for a Sámi Parliamentary Council was approved by a joint plenary meeting of the Sámi Parliaments in 1998.²⁹ The Sámi Parliamentary Council (SPC) was formally established in 2000, as an entity consisting of 7 representatives from each Sámi Parliament. Leadership and secretariat functions rotate between the Parliaments every 16th month.³⁰ In addition to annual SPC meetings, the Sámi Parliament Presidents also meet when this is deemed necessary.³¹ Starting in 2005, Sámi Parliamentary Conferences, plenaries of Sámi Parliamentarians from all states, are held every third year.³²

With the establishment of the SPC, the Sámi Parliaments had in a way come full circle to the vision of 1971 – although instead of a common Nordic elected organ, one had ended with a common forum for national Nordic elected organs.³³

Inclusion of the Russian Sámi into the SPC

The Soviet Union did not participate in the inter-Nordic process of deliberation and reform that resulted in the Sámi Parliaments, and the Soviet Sámi were in no position to lobby efficiently for such an institution. Hence, the type of institution in which the SPC is based is not found in Russia – the 'hub' of Russian indigenous political life instead being the umbrella organization RAIPON. Calls have been made to make RAIPON

an official, authorized representative of the Russian indigenous groups, citing the Sámi Parliaments as examples, but so far with little success.³⁴ Official indigenous representative structures have been established in some provinces, but the Kola Sámi have no such organ at any level of the state.³⁵ How then, might one include the Kola Sámi into a pan-Sámi structure predicated on the existence of precisely such organs?

During the drafting process, J. B. Henriksen brought this issue to the attention of his reference group – the Sámi Parliaments' Presidents – due to the notion that “when one is to have a common organ, one needs to somehow include the Russian Sámi also”. He suggested that the Kola Sámi be given the status of participating observers. However, the lack of an elected official Sámi body in Russia implied inviting in the NGO sector. Henriksen noted that “it is not customary to establish co-operation between three elected bodies and a voluntary organization”, and also that there would be practical challenges to including Russian actors in a Nordic cooperation, but emphasized that the SPC would not be able to speak on behalf of “the Saami as one people” if there is “not at least a minimal representation” from the Kola Sámi, and that “it is customary to give observer status to parties that for natural reasons are or can be affected by the co-operation and to those with genuine interest in participating...”. Henriksen's proposal became the model chosen for Russian representation.³⁶ At the time of drafting, AKS was the only Russian Sámi NGO, but by the time SPC came into existence this was no longer the situation. The SPC solved this by allowing OOSMO also to send observers, the expenses of both NGOs being paid by the Nordic side.

While this provides a voice for the Kola Sámi within the state-based pan-Sámi sector, they are not, as they are in the SC, formally equal to the Nordic Sámi – and they are not likely to become so until they get a representative organ recognized by Russian authorities. Like in the SC, however, this structural inequality is implied to be lessened by a culture of consensus-oriented deliberation. Norwegian Sámi Parliament President Egil Olli states that he cannot remember that any subject has ever been voted over at the SPC meetings, matters instead being discussed with compromise in mind, and that the Russian delegates always participate actively³⁷ – nor have any Russian interviewees indicated that Kola Sámi positions are ignored due to their observer status. Still, the fact remains that the Kola Sámi are formally just observers in this system, which at the very least is unfortunate at the symbolic level, from a pan-Sámi point of view. The desire for full SPC representation is one of many reasons that we have in latter years seen intensified activism for a Russian Sámi Parliament.

The closest one has come in Russian Sápmi to an organ fulfilling both the criterion of representativeness and of official endorsement, was the Coordination Council (2006-2008) which united representatives from 18 Kola Sámi civil society formations to advise the Centre for Indigenous Peoples – an agency established by Murmansk province to assist in the planning and execution of Sámi policy. This council was however, short-lived. Currently, Russia has a ‘Kola Sámi Assembly’ which was elected by a congress of Sámi individuals and refers to itself as the Russian Sámi Parliament but has no official recognition – *and* an officially endorsed Council of Indigenous Representatives which consists of *obshchina*-nominated individuals selected by the Governor.³⁸ AKS/OOSMO still represent the Kola Sámi in the SPC, although representatives of the would-be parliamentary structure has had some contact with the SPC also. As for the Council of Representatives, they have not been involved in any pan-Sámi cooperation. The Assembly aspires to eventually become a full SPC member,³⁹ but official Russian recognition does not seem likely in the near future – indeed, the provincial government’s creation of the Council of Representatives was more than partially a direct response to the perceived ‘challenge’ of a congress-elected Sámi Assembly.

The Role of the SPC

It should be understood that the SPC does not hold the central place in contemporary Sámi politics that one might assume: the state structures remain the primary points of orientation in political matters for the four countries’ Sámi communities, making the national Sámi institutions and organizations of prime importance. Still, there is a powerful symbolism in the fact that there now exists a pan-Sámi representative organ. In 2004 the SPC’s symbolic significance was strengthened, as the Sámi Conference transferred authority over the three Sámi ‘national symbols’ from the SC to a joint SC-SPC committee.⁴⁰ These symbols were created by the SC during the 1980s/early 1990s, and only partially with the participation of the Kola Sámi: the flag was agreed upon at the 1986 Nordic Sámi Conference, where the Soviet side of Sápmi was not represented, and only brought to Russia by a Sámi delegation three years later. This conference also chose the poem *Sámi Soga Lávlla* by Norwegian Sámi Isak Saba as the lyrics of the ‘national anthem’.⁴¹ The AKS delegation to the 1992 Nordic Sámi Conference participated in deciding on what melody was to be used, and in choosing February 6 as the international Day of the Sámi People – commemorating the 1917 international Sámi congress.⁴² This trinity of symbols (the day, the flag, the song) has been adopted eagerly by the Kola Sámi, particularly the flag being prominently

displayed in many political-cultural contexts. Although the Kola Sámi did not participate fully in the decision-making process, Russian involvement in the pan-Sámi structures has at least put the group on equal footing with the Nordic Sámi when it comes to formal ownership over its own ethnic symbols.

Furthermore, the SPC discusses border-transcending issues that concern the Sámi, incl. f. ex. education and research, media issues, the impact of climate change and the fate of the Sámi languages. Regarding the latter, it selects the members of the Sámi Language Commission, which has representatives from all the four countries.⁴³ The 2005 and 2009 Sámi Parliamentary Conferences also produced political declarations on pan-Sámi issues, including Russia as one of the four countries obliged to recognize and secure Sámi rights. The 2005 declaration specifically demanded the future expansion of Nordic Sámi Convention rights to Russia and Russian ratification of ILO 169.⁴⁴ The Sámi Parliamentary Council, like the SC, is also active in other international structures: It represents the Sámi in the Standing Committee of Parliamentarians of the Arctic Region, works with the EU regarding its 'Northern Dimension' and aims to be the common voice of the Sámi Parliaments in the UN system.⁴⁵ It is also represented in the Barents Cooperation's Working Group for Indigenous Peoples, sending one representative for each of the Sámi Parliaments – following the Parliaments' nomination of said representatives.⁴⁶ In this Working Group, though, Kola Sámi representatives are included directly through another mechanism.⁴⁷

The Sámi Parliaments, and hence also the SPC, have in general expressed support for the activities aimed towards the establishment of a Russian Sámi Parliament. This should not be all that surprising: in addition to Nordic Sámi concerns about the need for a Kola Sámi representative organ to voice the subgroup's demands *vis-à-vis* Russian authorities,⁴⁸ the creation of a Russian Sámi Parliament and subsequent inclusion of this into the SPC would also finally make the latter a genuinely pan-Sámi representative organ.

The Sámi Convention: from pan-Sámi to Nordic

The idea of common legal rights for the indigenous population across Sápmi was launched in the SC during the 1970s.⁴⁹ In 1985, the idea was voiced publicly on the Third Seminar on The Small Nations of the North in International and Constitutional Law – a forum for the Sámi and the three Nordic autonomies⁵⁰ – and work on the issue began in proper at the 1986 Nordic Sámi Conference, which envisioned international legal structures that would secure the indigenous rights of the Sámi and

address the problems caused by the national borders through Sápmi.⁵¹ In 1987 the SC created a legal committee that was to propose a pan-Sámi rights' convention. It included one person from each of the four countries, including the USSR even though the Soviet Sámi were not formally SC members at the time. The committee met several times in Russia, and Kola Sámi activists were actively involved in the process, although according to committee member John B. Henriksen "their demands were pretty limited when compared to the tendencies among many from the Nordic side".⁵² Upon completion, the legal committee sent its suggestion to the SC, which passed it on to the Sámi Parliaments. Following contacts between these and the Nordic states, Norway took the initiative for activity to start towards the development of a Nordic Sámi Convention.⁵³ It was at this point that the Convention idea moved decisively from the notion of a pan-Sámi rights convention to a *Nordic* Sámi convention – although one should note that this was not just the responsibility of Norway, or even the Nordic states: earlier also, the pan-Sámi convention had been discussed in terms of a treaty between the Nordic states and the Sámi people,⁵⁴ pragmatic concerns among the Nordic Sámi also served to 'push' the convention towards the Nordic arena – the Nordic states' political similarities and established tradition of cooperation on indigenous affairs made a Nordic Sámi Convention far more realistic than one also involving the Russian Federation;⁵⁵ and, finally, these states' growing acceptance for Sámi demands also made the Nordic path seem more beneficial from the perspective of wanting a more radical convention.

In 1995 the Nordic Council created a working group to analyze the need and legal basis for a Nordic Sámi Convention, in cooperation with the SC and the Sámi Parliaments. Norway again took the formal initiative. The group came to consist of delegations from Finland, Norway and Sweden, each involving three governmental representatives and one Sámi Parliament representative. In 1998 this group concluded by suggesting that a group of Nordic experts create a draft convention. They noted that due to "requests from the Sámi side" one should consider ways to involve Russia in the continued process, but that further work with the convention should not be dependent on Russia's participation.⁵⁶ The drafting expert group was established in 2001, and instructed to consider the Kola Sámi issue.⁵⁷ It consisted of two members from each country, one representing the government, one chosen by the SP. According to expert group participant John B. Henriksen they established communication with Kola Sámi representatives over the issue. These stated that optimally they would have wanted to be included, but "expressed understanding that

the mandate of the group was limited”. The pan-Sámi Convention had at this point been thoroughly locked into a Nordic framework. According to Henriksen, Sámi representatives in the process were more oriented towards including Russia, while Nordic state representatives were less so. However, Nordic Sámi involved had also realized that including Russia too much would reduce the Convention to a less ambitious standard – as stated by John B. Henriksen: “After all, if we had put the Russian legal situation as the baseline, we may have ended up with a document without much value for the Nordic side”.⁵⁸

The resulting final draft’s (2005) only inclusion of the Kola Sámi was a proposal that Russian citizens who are ethnically Sámi shall be subject to the Convention’s rights when residing in one of the signatory states. Apart from that, the strategy taken seems to have been establishing rights in Nordic Sápmi with the hopes of later expanding them to Russian Sápmi. Mathias Áhrén from the expert group has stated that they expect the Nordic countries, as soon as the Saami Convention has entered into force, to initiate discussions with the Russian Federation on how the spirit and the provisions of the Saami Convention can become reality also for the part of the Saami population residing within Russia.⁵⁹

At the time of writing, however, negotiations on the convention are still ongoing. Hence, the hypothetical discussions with Russia over the issue of implementing Nordic convention rights on Russian soil, will not manifest for a while yet.

The Nordic Sámi Cooperation

Finally, let us briefly look at one international Sámi coordination structure where the Kola Sámi are not included in any way, the Nordic Sámi Cooperation. The 1998 report on the need and basis for a Nordic Sámi Convention also addressed another issue long under debate: the relationship between the Sámi Parliaments and the Nordic cooperation structures. Sámi activists had long lobbied for their people’s full representation in the Nordic Council, but so far only been granted participating observer rights in the Nordic Cooperation and a consultation arrangement with the Nordic Council of Ministers (in 1994).⁶⁰ The report advocated annual joint meetings between the Sámi Parliament Presidents and the Nordic Ministers responsible for Sámi affairs; as well as regular meetings between civil servants in relevant ministries and the Sámi Parliament structures.⁶¹ In 2000 it was decided to establish such a “new Nordic cooperation on Sámi issues” with an “informal attachment to the Nordic Council of Ministers”. Ministers

and Presidents would meet annually, and the three states' delegations to the Nordic Cooperative Body on Sámi and Reindeer Herding Issues (established in 1964) were to serve as secretariats on a rotating basis. In 2001 this cooperative body was renamed the Nordic Civil Service Body for Sámi Issues, and Sámi Parliament representation there guaranteed.⁶²

Including Russian Sámi civil society actors in a forum this firmly anchored in Nordic inter-state cooperation seems highly challenging, but the fact remains that it constitutes a central arena for the discussion of border-transcending Sámi political arrangements also relevant to the Russian Sámi – f. ex. education and research, children's welfare, solutions for usage of the Sámi languages in ICT, financing of the SPC and the future of the Nordic Sámi Convention.⁶³ In 2004 the meeting of Ministers and Presidents instructed the Civil Service Body to find solutions for establishing “contact with Russian authorities and Sámi for mutual dialogue and information.” It was suggested to use the Barents Cooperation for this purpose, and a four-party junior minister meeting was held in 2005. At this meeting Russia pointed to the existing inclusion of indigenous issues in the Barents Cooperation and the Arctic Council, and stated that they did not envision the establishment of new forms of international cooperation in the indigenous sector. In 2006 the annual meeting of Ministers and Presidents declared its satisfaction with the focus of the Barents Cooperation, the Arctic Council and the Nordic Council of Ministers' on Russian indigenous issues – and tasked the Civil Service Body to keep themselves updated on the “need for further contact and dialogue with Russian authorities and Sámi in particular cases of significance”.⁶⁴

Part Three: Conclusions

The Nordic nature of pan-Sámi politics

In the beginning of this article, we asked if the international Sámi political cooperation is actually more Nordic than it is genuinely pan-Sámi. It seems one would have to concede that the ‘virtual polity’ of Sápmi is at least *firmly embedded within* the Nordic political space. The pan-Sámi parliament (SPC) is based on Nordic institutions, the institutionalized contact point between the ‘stateless nation’ and the states they are part of (NSC) is Nordic-exclusive, and the proposed international Sámi convention will only be valid on the Nordic side of the border.

However, what has caused pan-Sámi initiatives to be organized within the Nordic framework is neither state pressure against the Nordic Sámi, nor any identity-based preference for Nordic rather than truly pan-Sámi

cooperation among the Nordic Sámi. Instead, this is mainly a case of structures capturing actors – or rather, actors having to make do with the structures they are stuck in. Through none of the Sámi communities' fault, the historical window of opportunity to embark on border-transcending Sámi institution-building opened during the Cold War. Hence, true 'pan-Sámism' was objectively impossible, the best realistic scenario at the time being policy harmonization and pan-Sámi networking involving three out of four states. Thus, the SC was founded under Nordic patronage, and for the next decades the Nordic political space became the arena for practically all pan-Sámi activities. This deeply affected both the Sámi of the three countries, and the states themselves: a Nordic Sámi political community was shaped, and the states also began to identify the Sámi issue as having a strong inter-Nordic aspect. Still, the non-state nature of the SC meant that when opportunity came, incorporating the Kola Sámi was less problematic than it could have been – structurally, it was 'just' a case of an international NGO network including members from a new country. However, in this precise period the Nordic countries began to organize new Sámi institutions: the Sámi Parliaments, which would serve as the main basis for all subsequent pan-Sámi initiatives. Russia, not ever having been a part of the Nordic indigenous policy community, did not create such a structure – and although Kola Sámi activists have tried to create a similar institution, domestic authorities have not been positive to these attempts. The idea of a pan-Sámi convention was also firmly locked into the Nordic political space, as the Nordic states were the ones that were ready to consider such an initiative, and the Nordic cooperation could provide an arena on which to run such a process.

Seen in this light, the way in which pan-Sámi politics turned Nordic can be compared to a builder embarking on the construction of a house with the means available to her then and there, in the hope that she eventually will get the means necessary to expand it into the residence she ideally wants. Of course, this too constitutes a choice of sorts: the Nordic Sámi activists have chosen to utilize the golden opportunity presented by the Nordic cooperation to unite the great majority of the Sámi – even though this simultaneously reaffirms the 'rift' through Sápmi that was supposed to have vanished with the fall of the Iron Curtain. In the case of the Nordic Sámi Convention, one also finds that a desire to maximize gains contributed to the choice – worries that including Russia would water down the convention or at least make the process more difficult, made it more attractive to go for the Nordic option. Of course, 'maximize' is a very relative term here – it is also challenging to work with the Nordic states on indigenous issues: six years after the presentation of the draft,

the states have still not agreed on what to do with it.⁶⁵ Hence, for the Nordic Sámi activists, choosing the Nordic path over the truly pan-Sámi path may not be perceived as ‘taking the easy road’ as much as ‘taking a road that might actually lead somewhere’.

Finally, we must note that although pan-Sámi politics have developed as a basically Nordic phenomenon – partially steered by the course of history, partially led there by actors – there has always been a strong ideological commitment to include the Kola Sámi in some way, and to make sure that they benefit from the deal at some level.

Inclusion of the Russian Sámi in pan-Sámi structures

Our review of representation mechanisms for the Kola Sámi in pan-Sámi structures has revealed that the group is not as excluded as one may at first believe, when looking at the pan-Sámi arrangements’ history and their deep attachment to Nordic states and Nordic cooperation. However, the degree to which the Russians are represented varies greatly between the pan-Sámi entities (cf. Fig. 2). The NSC and the process surrounding the Nordic Sámi convention have been the least inclusive. The latter initially included Soviet Sámi activists (even prior to the Kola Sámi entering the SC) but as one decided to realize the project on the Nordic arena, the Kola Sámi were excluded. As for the NSC, it is obvious that such a structure can only with great difficulty include Russian NGOs – and highly interesting that even so, the NSC at one point did see the need for some form of contact with the Russian side.

It is the non-governmental part of the pan-Sámi sector that most thoroughly includes the Kola Sámi, as they are equal to their Nordic kin within the SC – formal representation only being somewhat lesser due to their small numbers. The crucial issue, though, is if the inclusion of AKS/OOSMO is enough that one may consider the Kola Sámi fully represented – there is a big number of Russian Sámi civil society formations that are not full members. However, not all Nordic Sámi organizations are SC members either – most notably the party lists that run for Sámi Parliament elections are absent.⁶⁶ In a strange way, the Kola Sámi are thus better represented than the Nordic Sámi within the SC: whereas the organizations that the Nordic Sámi elect to represent them do not participate in the SC, the Russians’ two main political organizations are represented. However, the elected representatives of the Nordic Sámi are instead active at the pan-Sámi level through the SPC.

As for the latter, what bars the Kola Sámi from full representation in the SPC is at first glance not the Nordic nature of this entity: if the Russian subgroup was to get some form of recognized, representative structure,

full representation would ostensibly be granted – so nothing more is demanded of them, than of the other Sámi communities. However, upon closer consideration, this demand is in itself a product of the ‘Nordicness’ of the pan-Sámi structures: essentially, full inclusion necessitates the emulation of Nordic Sámi policy through the establishment of a Sámi Parliament-like organ in Russia. Local attempts to organize such an assembly and have it recognized have not been very successful - so it does not seem like the Kola Sámi will get full SPC representation anytime soon. The Coordination Council could ostensibly have played this role, but was discontinued, giving way to a situation which confounds any outreach to Russian Sápmi: the official Council of Representatives is only connected to one sector of civil society (the *obshchinas*) and its members selected from above; but nor is the Kola Sámi Assembly an unproblematic envoy of the subgroup. It is one thing that those *obshchinas* who have established a relation to the government-organized Council of Representatives may have developed a vested interest in that ‘opposing’ structure, but also, recently, the new AKS leader Yelena Yakovleva expressed doubts on the representativeness of the 2010 congress that elected the Assembly, and commented that “there already is a council promoting Sámi interests in Murmansk province.” The issue of representativeness aside, when the leader of one of the two big NGOs distances herself from the Assembly, that in itself makes it problematic to focus only on this actor as a partner in Nordic-Russian Sámi cooperation. In addition, grass-roots recognition of the Assembly as a legitimate voice of the Kola Sámi is far from universal.⁶⁷ In sum, relying too much on the Assembly would be seen by some as taking sides in an internal conflict – but so would ignoring them to the benefit of any other Kola Sámi political formation. Also, the Assembly is still arguably the most representative Kola Sámi structure existing at the moment – it unites activists of different organizational backgrounds⁶⁸ and was elected by a larger gathering of Sámi individuals, representative or not. In sum there does not seem to be any ‘right’ choice short of inviting all these structures to represent the Kola Sámi, which is unfeasible.

In any case, AKS/OOSMO still is the Russian partner of choice in pan-Sámi cooperation, this having become an established pattern. The fact that the official Council of Representatives has been largely ignored is notable, but should come as no surprise: firstly, the Nordic Sámi, accustomed to democratically elected representatives, would not easily accept what they would view as ‘hand-picked Sámi’ to represent the Russians; secondly, representation of the Kola Sámi in the West is mainly facilitated by AKS/OOSMO, both organizations that (until recently)

expressed nothing but support for the Assembly, and are excluded from the Council of Representatives; thirdly, before 2011 Nordic Sámi media largely neglected to report on controversy among the Russian Sámi regarding the attempts to create a Russian Sámi Parliament ;⁶⁹ and finally, this is also a matter of who takes the initiative from the Russian side – AKS/OOSMO and the Assembly have eagerly sought out western contacts, whereas the Council of Representatives has not.

Final notes

In sum, the marriage of Nordic cooperation and pan-Sámi politics has led to a more politically united Sápmi than would otherwise have existed, but also to a structural reaffirming of the old East-West divide. The resulting ‘virtual polity’ is more *Nordic Sámi* than pan-Sámi, although Nordic Sámi actors have generally attempted to include Kola Sámi representatives in some way, allowing the Kola Sámi NGO sector to participate. The old Nordic Sámi Council was eagerly refitted into a truly pan-Sámi Council by including Russian NGOs on an equal basis, a move made possible by the Council’s non-governmental status. Today, it is the only pan-Sámi formation in which the Kola Sámi are fully integrated. That is not to say that there have never been communication problems, conflicts and unfortunately managed situations within the SC – it will never be easy to run a cooperation involving four different states that straddles the old Cold War divide and includes people speaking a host of different languages – but on the whole, the SC must be considered a success story of East-West Sámi integration.

The state-based structures have had more structural challenges, as they are created around a type of Sámi organ not found in Russia. The SPC has attempted to solve the problem by including AKS/OOSMO, but this does not solve the actual problem of there not being any recognized Kola Sámi representative organ. In the final analysis, this is a problem that can only be solved on the Russian side – one must adapt to the models developed for Nordic conditions, or the Kola Sámi will remain inadequately represented in the pan-Sámi structures. In short: unless the SPC suddenly decides that it will make an exception for the Russian Sámi and give full inclusion to a Kola Sámi political formation that does not fulfill both the criteria of representativeness and formal recognition; it is the Russian authorities that must in the end resolve the situation. Only they can grant the Kola Sámi an official and elected organ. So far, the authorities do not seem eager to mimic the Nordic model.

Even if a Russian Sámi Parliament was established, however, some pan-Sámi arrangements would still have a difficult job fully including

the Kola Sámi: the NSC would have to be completely redesigned if it were to include Russia as an equal member; and as for the Nordic Sámi Convention, it will – if ratified – thoroughly reaffirm the East-West divide through Sápmi. Hence, it seems that the Iron Curtain through Sápmi will never actually go entirely away. Groups may try their best to reshape the world to correspond with their ideas and identities, but history will take its due, locking us all into structures that are never ours to alter fully.

Figures

Fig 1. Pan-Sámi political structures .

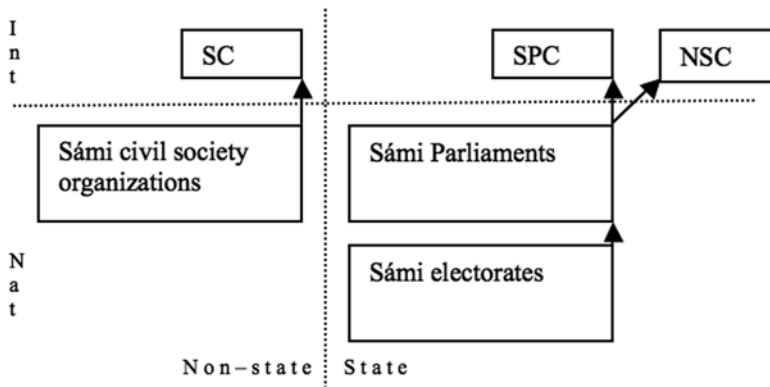
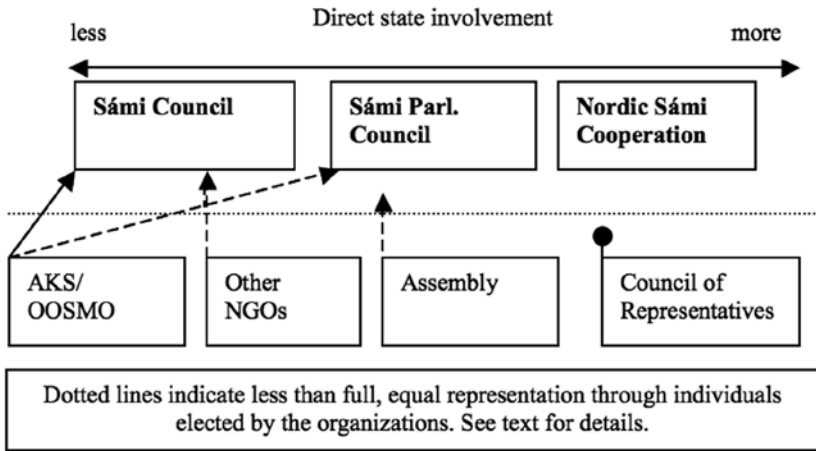


Fig 2. Kola Sámi representation in pan-Sámi structures.



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NSC: Nordic Sámi cooperation

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NSC 2010: *Protokoll fra nordiske fellesmøter 22.11.10*

SC: Sámi Council

SC 1980: *Samepolitisk program*. Political program from Sámi Conference.

SC 1984: *Samernas XII Konferens, Utsjoki 11-14. 1983. Skandinavisk upplaga*.

SC 1987: *Samernas XIII konferens. Åre 13.-15.8.1986. Skandinavisk upplaga*.

SC 1991: *Samernas 14. konferens, Lakselv 4-6.8.1989*.

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SPC: Sámi Parliamentary Council

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Notes

¹ SC 1980: 2

² Cf. Berg-Nordlie 2011a

³ In the 2002 Census only 1.991 Russians considered themselves Sámi. Even the numbers of registered voters for the Sámi Parliament elections exceed this: 13.890 in Norway, 7.812 in Sweden and 5.317 in Finland. Note, though, that Russian citizens responding to the census had to choose between 'ethnic Russian' (russkiy) and other ethnicities such as 'Sámi'. Sources (no websites listed in this article were last accessed earlier than 25.03.11): Samediggi.no: Sámedikki jienastuslohku – loahpalaš listu at [⁴ Norden.org: Countries and Territories and The history of the Nordic Council at \[www.norden.org/en/about-nordic-co-operation/countries-and-territories\]\(http://www.norden.org/en/about-nordic-co-operation/countries-and-territories\); and \[www.norden.org/en/nordic-council/the-nordic-council/the-history-of-the-nordic-council\]\(http://www.norden.org/en/nordic-council/the-nordic-council/the-history-of-the-nordic-council\).](http://samediggi.no/Artikkel.aspx?AId=2962&back=1&MIId1=1&MIId2=1707&MIId3=2945&Sametinget.se: Statistik samröstlängden at www.sametinget.se/6434; Samediggi.fi: Saamelaisten lukumäärä vuoden 2007 saamelaiskäräjävaaleissa! at www.samediggi.fi/index.php?option=com_docman&task=cat_view&gid=114&Itemid=10; Perepis2002.ru: Natsional'niy sostav naseleniya at www.perepis2002.ru/index.html?id=17.</p></div><div data-bbox=)

⁵ 'Lapp' is an outdated word for the Sámi, now mostly considered derogatory. 'Sámi' may also be written in English as 'Sami' or 'Saami'.

⁶ Only a quarter of the participants here were actually Sámi. According to Rantala (2004, p. 4) the last Nordic Sámi Conference with a non-Sámi majority was held in 1968.

⁷ Hill 1960, pp. 19, 21; Wigdehl 1972, pp. 21, 24.

⁸ This symbol, designed by Kristian Nissen at the Polhøgda research center (today the Frithjof Nansen Institute) has later been widely read as instead representing union between the Sámi of the three countries Finland, Norway and Sweden (cf. Rantala 2004, p. 2).

⁹ Nickul et. al. 1957, pp. 17-22, 342.

¹⁰ Nickul et. al. 1957, p. 338; Hill 1960: 19, 97

¹¹ SC 1984, pp. 45-6; Rantala 2004, pp. 4, 8; Rantala 2009.

¹² SC 1991, pp. 95-7, 100

¹³ Notably, though, the womens' organization Sáhráhká 'beat' the SC to the goal by including Kola Sámi activists the year before. Hætta 2003 p. 49; Zaborščikova 2010, pp. 76-7.

¹⁴ Berg-Nordlie 2011a.

¹⁵ Saamicouncil.net: Samerådets vedtekter at www.saamicouncil.net/?deptid=1327&print=1.

¹⁶ A. Kobelev in interview, 26.04.10 Lovozero.

¹⁷ Scheller 2011 pp. 88-9.

¹⁸ The demand on ILO 169 also applies to Finland and Sweden, and the demand on reindeer herding also concerns Finland. Note that if reindeer husbandry in Russian Sápmi was reserved for people of Sámi heritage, it would come at the cost of Komi and Nenets individuals – whose peoples have been involved in reindeer herding on the Kola Peninsula since the 1800s (cf. Overland 1999, pp. 23-4, 56-8).

¹⁹ SC 1996 p. 2; SC 2004 pp. 3, 6, 8; SC 2008 pp. 4, 8; SC 2009a p. 11; SC 2009b p. 7.

²⁰ Saamicouncil.net: Ulike statuser og representasjon at www.saamicouncil.net/?deptid=1332; Barentsindigenous.org: Working Group of Indigenous Peoples in BEAR at www.barentsindigenous.org/information-and-members.130878.en.html.

²¹ Inter-governmental Nordic cooperation structure established in 1971. Norden.org: Countries and Territories; History of the Nordic Council of Ministers at www.norden.org/en/nordic-council-of-ministers/the-nordic-council-of-ministers/history-of-the-nordic-council-of-ministers.

²² Saamicouncil.net: Kultursearvvit at www.saamicouncil.net/?deptid=1296.

²³ Saamicouncil.net: Sámiráđi kulturdoarjagat at www.saamicouncil.net/?deptid=3160. Data for 2008 and 2011 kindly supplied by SC Secretariat on request.

²⁴ Wigdehl 1972, p. 134-39

²⁵ Minde 2005, pp. 75-79, 87-101

²⁶ A committee of selected Sámi individuals, originally established in 1964 to be the basis for the Norwegian delegation to the SC.

²⁷ The Delegation's function as the Finnish representative to the SC was taken over by a Sámi NGO created the same year.

²⁸ Josefsen 2007 pp. 19-20; NOU 1984: 18, pp. 40-41, 200-28, 239, 384-5, 482-83, 488, 493-509.

²⁹ Interview with J. B. Henriksen, 24.10.11 Tromsø.

³⁰ SPC 2006 p. 2

⁴³¹ Samediggi.no: Samisk Parlamentarisk Råd at www.samediggi.no/artikkel.aspx?AId=262&back=1&Mid1=209&sprak=Norsk.

³² SPC 2005, pp. 5-6

³³ According to J. B. Henriksen, a system of pan-Sámi elections for a common parliament was considered at one point but deemed unrealistic. The economy and organizational capacity needed would necessitate state involvement, and it was assumed that the states did not desire a directly elected pan-Sámi structure (Interview, Tromsø 24.10.11).

³⁴ Sleptsov 2005, pp. 66-67; Murashko 2010, p. 43

³⁵ Berg-Nordlie 2011a.

³⁶ Henriksen 1999 p. 73-79, 97; interview with J. B. Henriksen, 24.10.10.

³⁷ Interview with E. Olli, 25.10.10, Tromsø, Norway.

³⁸ More on this subject in Berg-Nordlie 2011a.

³⁹ Interview with Assembly leader Valentina Sovkina, Lovozero 26.04.10, through e-mail 26.03.11.

⁴⁰ Saamicouncil.net: The Saami Symbols at www.saamicouncil.net/?deptid=2199.

⁴¹ SC 1987 pp. pp. 99-100, 133-40; Kalstad 1999, p. 52; Rantala 2004 pp. 8-9

⁴² SC 1994, pp. 85-94 Rantala 2004, pp. 10-11.

⁴³ SPC 2006, p. 4-6; SPC 2008a, p. 2-5; SPC 2010; Giella.org: Samisk språknemnds medlemmer at www.giella.org/Artikkel.aspx?AId=2377&back=1&Mid1=1126&Mid2=1127&Mid3=&

⁴⁴ SPC 2005; SPC 200b

⁴⁵ SPC 2006, pp. 8, 9.

⁴⁶ Barentsindigenous.org: Working group of indigenous peoples in the BEAR at www.barentsindigenous.org/information-and-members.130878.en.html.

⁴⁷ Earlier, the Coordination Council sent representatives to WGIP, but today this function is taken care of by the Kola Sámi Assembly. (Interviews with Christina Henriksen, Norwegian Barents Secretariat Advisor on Indigenous Peoples, through e-mail, March 2011).

⁴⁸ Berg-Nordlie 2011b

⁴⁹ Interview, J. B. Henriksen, 24.10.10.

⁵⁰ Grahl-Madsen 1988.

⁵¹ Dikkanen 1998, p. 89; Åhrén 2007, p. 10

⁵² Interview, J. B. Henriksen, 24.10.10.

⁵³ GRTS 1996-1997, Ch. 5.

⁵⁴ Grahl-Madsen 1988.

⁵⁵ Åhrén 2007, p. 13

⁵⁶ Aarseth 2006, pp. 462 – 463; NCon 1998, Ch. 1, 10 ; GRTS 1996-1997, Ch. 5; GRTS 2000-2001, p. 148.

⁵⁷ NCon 2001/2002.

⁵⁸ Interview, J. B. Henriksen, 24.10.10.

⁵⁹ Åhrén 2007, p. 13

⁶⁰ GRTS 1996-1997, Ch. 5

⁶¹ NCon 1998, Ch. 8, 10

⁶² Regjeringen.no: Om nordisk samisk samarbeid at www.regjeringen.no/nb/dep/fad/tema/samepolitikk/nordisk_samisk_samarbeid/om-nordisk-samisk-samarbeid.html?id=87011; NSC 2000a, 2000b; NSC 2001b.

⁶³ NSC 2000, 2001a, 2002, 2003, 2004, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2008 and 2010; cf. also NCon 2001/2002; SPC 2005 (§25); SPC 2006, p. 2, 4.

⁶⁴ In addition to the mentioned fora, the Nordic countries also individually discuss indigenous matters with Russia. NSC 2004, 2005, 2006; Interview with Bjørn Olav Megard, Director of Dept. on Sámi and Minorities within the Norwegian Ministry on Innovation, Administration and Church Affairs, through email, 30.03.11.

⁶⁵ NRK.no: – Uakseptabelt av Norge at www.nrk.no/nyheter/1.7140188; Samediggi.no: Forhandlingene om nordisk samekonvensjon er i gang at www.samediggi.no/artikkel.aspx?MIId1=3296&MIId2=3296&MIId3=3296&AIId=3987&Back=1

⁶⁶ A notable exception is one of the most important party lists in Norway, the Norwegian Sámi Association, which was an SC member before the Sámi Parliaments were established, and stayed in the SC after it began to run for elections. The Norwegian SC member organization Sámi People's Association has also run for elections, but currently has no representation.

⁶⁷ Berg-Nordlie 2011a. Nr.no: *Sterke kvinner uenige om sameting* and – *Hva skal vi med et Sameting?* at www.nrk.no/kanal/nrk_sapmi/1.7563483 and http://nrk.no/kanal/nrk_sapmi/1.7565691.

⁶⁸ Assembly members are elected by the Congress on an individual basis. Current members are associated with AKS/OOSMO, the Monchegorsk National Cultural Autonomy, the Russian branch of the Sámi Womens' Forum, the youth organization Sam' Nurash, the Lovozero-based reindeer herding company 'Tundra,' and the obshchina 'Yona' (Berg-Nordlie 2011a).

⁶⁹ Berg-Nordlie 2011b