

WHY THE CULTURAL IDENTITIES OF THE INDIGENOUS PEOPLES OF THE ARCTIC ARE MORE ENDANGERED THAN THEY SEEM

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Global warming is a fact. The reason for this can only be a guess. There are hypotheses claiming that the climate changes are consequences of human activities. Other hypotheses say that such occurrences appear regularly every few thousand years. As early as the beginning of the twentieth century some scientists noticed indicators of the growth of the global average temperature. Regardless of the reason global warming is observable mostly in polar areas. Nowadays about four million people live in the Arctic including native inhabitants. Global warming impacts on all of these including indigenous peoples of the Arctic whose cultural identities have always been related to nature. They have always lived in harmony together with nature, they have been a part of it and have never tried to fight against it. A changing climate can make them give up the way their ancestors used to live. Afterwards it can cause the disappearance of their languages and cultures that languages are parts of. Besides for many decades all indigenous people had been thought to be at a lower development level than new arrivals so today almost all languages spoken by indigenous peoples of the Arctic are endangered. All indigenous peoples of the Arctic have common points in their histories like deprivation of lands and suppression of languages and traditions. Most of their ancient customs and religions

are forgotten but there are many material marks that are important for future generations. It is very important to preserve the marks and the knowledge of their languages because the value of them is priceless. Today native inhabitants of the Arctic live in countries with various law regulations so their situation is different in each country. Some of them have some autonomy, but others still seek it.

In Europe the only indigenous people are the Saami. Today they live in tundra, taiga and coastal zones in the far north of Europe. The Saami are the inhabitants of four countries: Norway, Sweden, Finland and the Russian Federation (The Kola Peninsula). Nowadays preserving each cultural identity and language of the Saami is a part of the policy of the European Union and the Kingdom of Norway. The first time the significance of preserving the Saami cultural identity for the European Union was revealed in article 1 of protocol no 3 of the Saami people to "ACT concerning the conditions of accession of the Kingdom of Norway, the Republic of Austria, the Republic of Finland and the Kingdom of Sweden and the adjustments to the Treaties on which the European Union is founded" in the wording: "Notwithstanding the provisions of the EC Treaty, exclusive rights to reindeer husbandry within traditional Saami areas may be granted to the Saami people". This regulation can be noticed to be in contradiction to principles of a free market. However one should consider that without any legal help the Saami as an ethnic identity could soon disappear. That would be a heavy loss for all of Europe. Because the Saami inhabit sparsely populated areas there are more European regulations stipulating additional compensation for people living there. One of the main ones is article 174 of the Consolidated versions of the Treaty on the European Union and the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union: "In order to promote its overall harmonious development, the Union shall develop and pursue its actions leading to the strengthening of its economic, social and territorial cohesion. In particular, the Union shall aim at reducing disparities between the levels of development of the various regions and the backwardness of the least favoured regions. Among the regions concerned, particular attention shall be paid to rural areas, areas affected by industrial transition, and regions which suffer from severe and permanent natural or demographic handicaps such as

the northernmost regions with a very low population density and island, cross-border and mountain regions.”

In December 2007 European Union Commission approved to allocate funds from European Regional Development Fund to preserve the Saami cultural identity. The Amount was 33 million Euro allocated for reviving the endangered Saami languages and their area development to decrease Saami migration to other parts of Scandinavia.

The situation of the Saami people in the Russian Federation is different than those living in Nordic countries. First of all they are the only indigenous people in the European Union and Norway. In Russia there are many small ethnic groups that are endangered. They are found to be unable to act for themselves. It takes place especially when external companies are interested in exploitation of natural resources in the Kola Peninsula.

Native inhabitants residing in Arctic areas of the Russian Federation are under special protection of law regulations. Point 1, article 9 of the Constitution of the Russian Federation says: “Land and other natural resources shall be utilized and protected in the Russian Federation as the basis of life and activity of the people living in corresponding territories.” The population of the Saami in Russia is below 2000. Before the collapse of the Soviet Union at the end of 1991 they had been separated from the Saami living in Nordic countries. Most of them were forced to give up the way their forefathers used to live and to migrate. Russian law regulations give the Saami rights, but in practise these people do not impact changes of the area they live in. Their economic condition may make one suppose that in the future Saami cultural identity will disappear from the Kola Peninsula.

The Russian far north is inhabited by many small native peoples. Their situation is similar to the Saami in the Kola Peninsula.

Indigenous peoples of the Arctic live in countries surrounding the North Pole are different in social, political, economic and social conditions. They are at different development levels. However besides similarities in history there will probably be a common future for their cultural identities. Endangered languages and cultures will probably become extinct despite making efforts to preserve them. One of the reasons for that is the process

of globalization making the world unified. The next one is global warming depriving Arctic people of their traditional livelihood.

Although there is one more issue arising. The modern world's economy is based on energy and the global demand for energy is growing. Today natural gas is becoming one of the main sources of energy so all countries that have access to this fuel will be able to control the global economy. The Arctic is supposed to contain approximately 13 percent of the world's undiscovered oil and 30 percent of natural gas resources. On the other hand access to these resources is easier than it used to be a few decades ago. For the last forty years the ice cap in the Arctic sea has been reduced by 50 %. It is also plausible that by 2040 the Arctic sea will be ice-free. Apart from oil and natural gas there are other mineral resources in the Arctic like: lead, zinc, iron, etc.

The above mentioned will bring new possibilities for oil and gas mining companies and would cause a cash flow. But on the other hand it will destroy the Arctic ecosystems that will change climate conditions all over the world. One may assume that the changes will have a negative effect on all of humankind. There are also hypotheses wording that global warming is an effect of intentional activity just to facilitate an approach to the resources covered by the Arctic ice. The hypotheses does not seem to be impossible.

While meeting in Ottawa on the 19th of September 1996 countries bordering the Arctic established The Arctic Council. Today this intergovernmental forum has eight members: Canada, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, the Russian Federation, Sweden, and the United States of America. Six other countries are admitted to be observers: France, Germany, The Netherlands, Poland, Spain and the United Kingdom. The People's Republic of China, the Italian Republic, the State of Japan, the Republic of Korea, the Republic of Singapore, the Republic of India and the European Union are applying for observer status. At present the assumption of the existing Arctic Council is preservation of the natural environment and indigenous communities and the development of the Arctic region. One may arrive at the conclusion that it is rather hard to believe that the candidate states are interested in preserving the indigenous inhabitants of the Arctic. It is nearly certain that the only aim is to impact

the exploitation of the natural resources of the Arctic. Even the Arctic states claim for northernmost areas that have been unspecified by international law status. Each claim is contested by other countries. Anyway there is an international crisis pertaining strictly to natural resources in the Arctic.

In July and August 1999 the first Chinese icebreaker Xue Long (Snow Dragon) with fifty experts on board was on a scientific expedition to the North Pole. In the opinion of the authorities of China this state ought to have a significant share in the Arctic because of its large population. Anyway China will exploit the gas and oil resources in the Arctic. In fact the opinion of small Arctic Countries does not matter. To tell the truth only The USA, Russia, China and Canada are leading players in the race for the Arctic natural resources.

Resuming: the indigenous peoples of the Arctic have a slim chance to retain their cultural identity. The ruthless economy does not care about them other than for economic reasons. Maximization of profit is the only object being considered.