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The legal position of the Sami in the exploitation of mineral resources in Finland, Norway and Sweden

Student: Giuseppe Amatulli

Supervisors: Prof. Markku Suksi
Dr. Mariya Riekkinen
Abstract

The situation of the indigenous peoples in the world is difficult. They have to struggle against the States in order to see their rights recognised. The right to land takes a special place among these. This is one of the most important rights for the indigenous peoples, due to the fact that one of the features that differentiate the indigenous peoples from other groups or minorities is their relationship with ancestral lands. Moreover, if we consider the amount of natural resources that can be found in indigenous areas, it is easy to understand how complex the situation of the indigenous peoples is.

The focus of this work is on the situation of the indigenous people (the Sami) of the three Nordic countries (Finland, Norway and Sweden) and how they face the exploitation of natural resources in their areas. Northern Europe is in fact, rich in natural and subsoil resources and it is not easy for the governments to reach a balance between the rights of the Sami and the rights of the other citizens of the State. By means of analysing the Mining Acts of the three above mentioned States, we will point out whether the national law safeguards the Sami rights in a satisfactory way. In order to see if there is compliance between the provisions established in national law and in international law, a comparison between the Mining Acts and ILO Convention No. 169 will be made.

This comparison is important, given the fact that one of the aims of this thesis is to point out the actions taken from the State in order to protect indigenous rights and if States are respecting the international provisions established for the protection of indigenous rights in the national legislation, also without ratification of the international instruments. The other aims of this work are to analyse: if the obligations enshrined in the Mining Acts are sufficient to guarantee a good protection of Sami rights in case of mining activities, if the Sami are involved during the decision making process as well as if there are mechanisms of participation and legal remedies for the Sami.
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Amatulli, Giuseppe

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