

# Mines and the rights of the Sámi Indigenous People

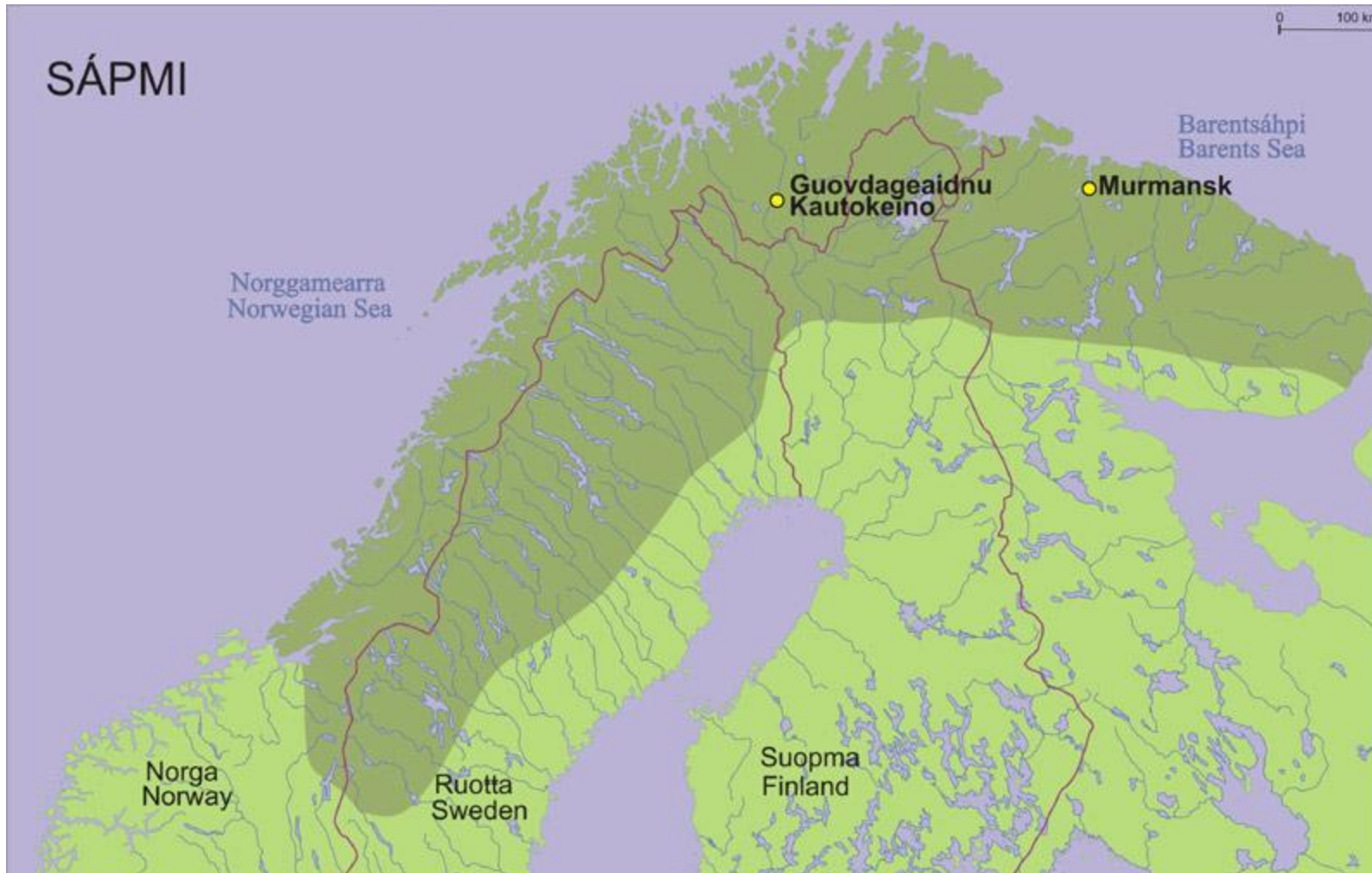
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# Sámi Truth and Reconciliation Process of Finland

- In 2021, the Finnish Government set up the *Sámi Truth and Reconciliation Commission* together with the Sámi Parliament and the Skolt Sámi Village Assembly.
- Objective: to identify and look at historical and current discrimination—assimilation policy and violations—and how they still affect people today.
- Approximately 400 people took part in hearings arranged by the Commission.
- The final report was handed to the Government, the Sámi Parliament and the Skolt Sámi Village Assembly on 4.12.2025.



**Today, the Sámi live across four nations**

**In Finland, there are about 12 000 Sámi people. Across northern Scandinavia, Finland, and Russia, there are 75 000 – 100 000.**

# The Sami`s cultural self-autonomy

- Since 1973
- The sami elect members to Sami Parliament
- The Sami homeland is defined in Sami Parliament act
- The new Sami Parliament act 2025

# The constitution protects Sámi rights

- The Constitution protects Sámi culture, including traditional livelihoods such as reindeer herding, fishing and hunting.
- But in practice, those rights are not always implemented.
- Land and waters – still open question
- The new Sami Parliament ( 2025) act strenghtens the voice of the Sami.

# About history

- Historical research has revealed that the Sámi historically administrated extensive land areas in northern Scandinavia and Finland, which were necessary needed for reindeer herding, hunting and fishing.
- They have also paid tax on these lands, meaning that their rights were comparable to ownership.
- However, these rights were replaced by state systems a couple of centuries ago, and
- The state now owns most of the land and water areas in Sami Homeland.
- Politicians have not been able to solve the land issue. However, a prohibition on weakening Sámi culture and traditional Sámi livelihoods has been added to our legislation (water, environmental protection, mining acts)

# Selected proposals from the Commission

- Finland should ratify ILO Convention 169.
- Any laws, rules, or decisions that affect the Sámi must follow the principle of free, prior and informed consent, as recognized in international indigenous declarations (FPIC)
- Traditional rights to land and water should clearly be identified and acknowledged.

# What about mining in Finland?

- 60 exploration projects are underway (100 million euros invested)
- 44 companies (Finnish and foreign) are active in mining activities
- Finland is the EU's biggest producer of gold, platinum and palladium
- Gold, iron, nickel, copper, phosphate, cobalt and rare earth metals have been found in Finland
- Most mining projects are in northern Finland

# Future?

The European Union has adopted a law on critical raw materials (CRMA) and wants to speed up the opening of new mines and the recycling of metals in the EU.

So far, there are no mines in the Sámi Homeland

# About the mining act and the Sámi

- In Finland, you can't open a mine without permits and approvals from several authorities
- The process starts with an environmental impact assessment.
- A prospecting or mining permit must not be granted if it, alone or in combination with other similar permits or other land use in the area, would substantially weaken the conditions for practicing traditional Sámi livelihoods or for maintaining and developing Sámi culture in the Sámi Homeland. However, this prohibition is not absolute: a mining permit can still be granted if the obstacle can be removed through permit conditions.
- The Mining Act also requires a cooperation and negotiation process with Sámi communities when prospecting or mining permits are applied for.

# The Commission`s proposal

- The Truth and Reconciliation Commission suggests strengthening the duty to cooperate and consult by adding the FPIC principle to the Mining Act. That would make it clear: opening a mine requires the Sámi community's approval.

# What happens next?

This debate about Sámi issues in Finland isn't going away. This government, and the new government formed after the parliamentary elections next year, will need to decide how to strengthen the Sámi's legal status.

Next autumn, the parliamentary working group will give Prime Minister Petteri Orpo its conclusions on the Commission's proposals. The parliamentary group's position paper and the Commission's 68 proposals will guide what happens next.