

Summary of Government Bill

(2008/09:153)

Language for All

The Government has submitted a Bill to the Riksdag (the Swedish Parliament) proposing a Language Act. The Language Act confirms Swedish as the main language in Sweden. There are currently no provisions in Swedish legislation that govern the status of the Swedish language. The Language Act is therefore a new law with new provisions. It is proposed that the Act enter into force on 1 July 2009.

The main provisions contained in the Act are as follows:

- Swedish is the main language in Sweden, i.e. the common language in society that everyone has to have access to and that can be used in all sectors of society.
- Everyone living in Sweden has to be given the opportunity to learn, develop and use Swedish.
- The language of the public services is Swedish.
- Public institutions have particular responsibility for ensuring that Swedish is used and developed and that Swedish terminology is available in different specialist areas.
- The language of public services is to be cultivated, simple and comprehensible.
- Swedish is the official language of Sweden in international contexts. The status of Swedish as an official EU language is to be safeguarded.
- Public institutions have particular responsibility for protecting and promoting Swedish sign language. Every person who is deaf, hearing-impaired or needs sign language for any other reason has to be given the opportunity to learn, develop and use sign language.
- The national minority languages in Sweden are Finnish, Yiddish, Meänkieli (Tornedal Finnish), Romany Chib and Sami; these languages have to be protected and promoted. Everyone belonging to a national minority has to be given the opportunity to learn, develop and use their minority language.
- Everyone who has a mother tongue other than Swedish, sign language or a national minority language has to be given the opportunity to develop and use their mother tongue.

The Language Act is based on current language policy, which includes objectives such as that Swedish is to be the main language in Sweden and that everyone has the right to language. The Act sends a clear signal regarding the importance of the Swedish language in our society. Swedish is to be safeguarded so that it can continue to be our main language in the future. Linguistic diversity in Sweden and individuals' access to language are also to be safeguarded.

It is very much a matter of democracy that everyone has the right to language and that society has a common language that everyone can understand and use. The Language Act contributes to increased awareness



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Ministry of Culture, Sweden

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The Bill is available on the Government website www.regeringen.se or can be ordered from the Riksdag Sales and Distribution Office, tel: +46 8 786 58 10, fax: +46 8 786 61 76.

of the importance of safeguarding the country's main language as a complete language, serving and uniting society.

The Government decided in February 2007 to appoint an inquiry to draft a proposal for a language act to govern the status of the Swedish language. The inquiry submitted the report Safeguarding Languages (SOU 2008:26) to the Minister for Culture in March 2008. The legislative proposal is based on this report.

Interest in language policy issues has also grown in the EU in recent years. There has been a focus on the need for initiatives to preserve linguistic diversity and promote multilingualism. The proposal for a new Swedish Language Act is in line with common EU objectives.



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