

# **THE KARELIAN ISSUE – KARELIA ACTION PROGRAMM**

**The Finnish Karelian League 2005**

## THE KARELIAN ISSUE - KARELIA - ACTION PROGRAMME

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## **FOREWORD**

### **The Finnish Karelian League**

#### **A Non-Governmental Organisation for Karelian Culture**

The Finnish Karelian League was established after the Winter War between Finland and the Soviet Union ended on 20 April 1940. As a result of the peace treaty (Moscow, 12 Mar 1940), Finland lost roughly 20% of its territory to the Soviet Union—most of the ceded territory comprised the Province of Vyborg, which in Finland is called the 'lost Karelia.' The population of Karelia as well as the areas of Petsamo and the eastern parts of Salla, which were also ceded, was evacuated almost 100% to the area inside the new Finnish frontiers. The peace treaty of the Continuation War (Moscow 19 Sep 1940 and Paris 1947), which was the second war fought between Finland and the Soviet Union, confirmed these territorial losses.

The original founders of the Finnish Karelian League were the municipalities, parishes and provincial organisations of the ceded territory. The most important mission of the League was to attend to the interests of the Karelian evacuees in matters concerning resettlement and compensation. After the central government took over the resettlement and social issues dealing with Karelian and other evacuees, the Finnish Karelian League began to concentrate on upholding the Karelian cultural heritage.

Today, the Finnish Karelian League has fifteen district offices all around Finland and nearly five hundred member societies, with representation in nearly all municipalities of Finland. Some of the Karelian societies operate outside the Finnish borders. The majority of our membership, roughly 50,000 private persons, are Karelian evacuees or their offspring. These days, the Karelian identity and culture also interest more and more Finns who have no roots in Karelia. Karelian activities and the Finnish Karelian League have become an NGO for all who are interested in Karelian heritage. The league has a few thousand young members with Karelian roots who established the Karelian Youth Association in 1980.

#### **Cooperation with Neighbouring Areas and the Karelian Issue**

The changes in the societal conditions of Russia have made cooperation across borders possible. The Finnish Karelian League has made contacts in, for example, the Russian Republic of Karelia, the Karelian Isthmus and with the Karelians living in the area of Tver. Contacts have also been formed with immigrant organisations in the West.

As a member of the European Union, Finland has the natural role of an expert in the cross-border policy with Russia. The Finnish Karelian League hopes that the emphasis of such policy be directed more and more to the ceded areas of Karelia. This is also a key issue for the stability and favourable development of the relations between our two countries. The League has worked to solve the Karelian issue throughout the post-war era—however, the League is not a direct actor in this issue, but rather a non-

governmental organisation which is in constant dialogue with our foreign policymakers over the matter.

### **The Vyborg Centre**

The Finnish Karelian League has encouraged Finnish foreign policymakers to create possibilities for a remunerative cooperation which is in accordance with the Karelia Issue Action Programme in a selected area of the ceded Karelia. This cooperation was launched in June 2001 when the Finnish Karelian League, together with a few of its member societies, established a culture, information and civic activity centre in Vyborg, the Viipuri Centre (Viipuri-keskus).

The Viipuri Centre acts as a liaison between the Finns and Russians who work and live in or visit the area of Vyborg. The centre gathers information from and makes connections between the actors and non-governmental organisations of various fields in Vyborg and the surrounding areas. The objective is to establish good and active relations with the media as well as the cultural and non-governmental organisations of Vyborg. The mission is to pursue a deeper understanding of the culture and mentality of our neighbours on both sides of the border by means of practical cooperation.

### **A Living Karelian Culture**

The Finnish Karelian League is an umbrella organisation which encourages and specialises in promoting the joyful Karelian culture, which boasts a thousand years of history. Karelians have always lived on the frontier, and have managed to maintain a sound faith in life and strong bond with their culture that was born in the heart of age-old forests, hills and great waters. This Karelian culture is not a relic but a vibrant, evolving attitude towards life on both sides of the border.

The Finnish Karelian League assembly approved the Karelian Issue Action Programme on 23 April 2005.

The Finnish Karelian League

## **I The Karelian issue - action programme**

### **1. The Karelian issue in the operating environment of northern Europe**

Within the last two decades, large and unforeseen changes have occurred in the state of world politics, such as the reunification of Germany, the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the independence of the Baltic countries and their joining the EU and NATO, the end of the cold war, the expansion of the European Union and the rise in importance of the Baltic Sea area. Especially the CIS countries and the states constituted of the non-Russian peoples of the former Soviet Union have distanced themselves from Moscow and look for political, military and economic support from the West and the EU. These changes have had an effect on Finland's central operating environment.

On the other hand, the state of Russia's domestic politics and the new rise of different ideas of nationalism in Russia and its neighbouring areas has made the attitudes in Moscow stricter and diminished the potential for all new attempts to even discuss the bringing up the Karelian issue. For Russia, no Karelian issue exists, but Russia has offered a discussion of "the Karelian opportunity" as a basis for discourse, meaning the creation of a functional model of regional co-operation in different fields between Finland, Russia and the EU.

The security-policy stability of Europe and the favourable economic and political development of Russia and its stabilisation might, however, create possibilities in the future to re-evaluate post-World War II border issues concerning Finland, too.

Finland should be active in building the EU's Northern Dimension policy as a part of the Union's politics, as well as in developing the bilateral relationship between Finland and Russia.

Karelia, as a part of the neighbouring areas, forms a natural object of activity for both the Northern Dimension policy and Finland's policy concerning its neighbouring areas.

### **2. CSCE and changing the borders**

It is possible to resolve the Karelian issue through negotiations according to the political principles and regulations of international justice agreed upon in the Charter of the UN and the Final Act of CSCE in 1975. This position is also included in the agreement on the relations of Finland and Russia of 1992.

According to the Final Act of CSCE, the borders may be changed according to the international justice by peaceful means and through agreements. The Finnish Karelian League is of the opinion that negotiations on the areas ceded to the Soviet Union or their use could be conducted on a new basis, if Russia has an interest in this. There has been no change in the willingness of Russia to discuss changing the borders defined by the peace treaty.

The Finnish Karelian League acts in a manner proper to a non-governmental organisation in the matter, in which the central issues are resolving and investigating the Karelian issue, influencing the political leadership and the general opinion of Finland and preparing material concerning the issue as well as producing correct information and circulating it both domestically and abroad. The League acts together with and through Finland's foreign policy leadership in the issue of returning Karelia.

### **3. Opening a discussion with Russia**

In accordance with its previous comments, the Finnish Karelian League proposes that the political leadership of Finland would open negotiations with Russia to return the ceded Karelia as soon as there is a realistic possibility to conduct such negotiations and both parties are willing. In any case, it should be established those issues concerning Karelia that Russia is at the moment willing to discuss.

### **4. The European Parliament and the Council of Europe**

The Finnish Karelian League supports and carries out research and publishing activities regarding Karelia. The League has also delivered and will deliver materials concerning the Karelian issue to the members of the European Union and the Parliament of the Council of Europe.

The Finnish Karelian League supports the Northern Dimension programme of the European Union and the neighbouring area programmes with special attention to the concern that cultural and productive financial investments in the area of the ceded Karelia should be clearly visible. The Finnish Karelian League considers it advisable that a discussion should be conducted in Europe as well on the effects of the territorial expansion of the Soviet Union after World War II on our continent.

### **5. Co-operation with the neighbouring areas in the ceded Karelia**

The co-operation with the neighbouring areas is one part of the Karelian issue, and Karelia is one of the areas mentioned in the co-operation with the neighbouring areas of Finland and Russia. The co-operation with the neighbouring areas has been realised as a part of European Union's programmes Interreg, Tacis and the new programme Neighbourhood.

Finland has mainly supported environmental projects in the neighbouring areas, such as reducing the factories' emissions and cleaning the waste water, which is in Finland's national interests considering that the pollution harms both sides of the border. Improving the general stability, security and welfare of the target countries, increasing their national security, decreasing the environmental hazards and promoting investments and the prerequisites for economic co-operation are the main goals of co-operation with the neighbouring areas.

The ceded Karelia has a special position among the neighbouring areas for the Finns, because its geographical location not only facilitates traffic and trade connections among other things, but also offers Finland a significant position as an intermediary for the streams of goods transported to Asia through Europe and Russia. Narrowing the gap between the living standards of Finland and Russia and facilitating the movement across the border is in the interests of both Russia and Finland. Co-operation with the neighbouring areas should be conducted from a stable basis and with long-term plans, and the co-operation should be extended to supporting the development of Russia's civic society.

## **6. The role of a non-governmental organisation in co-operation with the neighbouring areas**

The Finnish Karelian League participates in the co-operation with neighbouring areas as a non-governmental organisation in projects supported by different ministries. The Finnish Karelian League tries to reach a closer co-operation with the present administration and inhabitants of the area in order to preserve the cultural objects and the historical monuments of the area's "Finnish age," supporting the area's cultural work in this way.

## **7. The Viipuri Centre becomes a cultural institute**

From the Finnish Karelian League's initiative, the Association called Viipuri-keskus ry - Viborgs-centret rf was founded in the beginning of the year 2001. Its mission is to preserve the traditional Karelian culture and create connections in the neighbouring areas, as well as making both Finnish and Karelian culture, history and traditions known on both sides of the border.

In the years 2002 - 2004, the activities of Viipuri Centre were financed with the funds of EU's Interreg IIIA project. The activities of Viipuri Centre have supported the Finnish people's interest in Karelian culture and co-operation with the neighbouring areas, which has recently shown a clear increase. The Centre has organised annually numerous bilingual events in Finland, Vyborg and the Karelian Isthmus promoting mutual cultural knowledge. Traditional Finnish and Karelian culture, art and music and Vyborg as a multi-lingual and -cultural city, among other things, have been discussed in the bilingual seminars and several talks organised by the Viipuri Centre. The Centre's activities have significantly promoted the Finnish interest in Vyborg, both in its history and present. At the same time, the interest of the inhabitants of Vyborg in the area's Finnish history and culture has seen a new kind of increase.

Moreover, the importance of respecting one's own identity and roots has been shown to the local population of Vyborg through the Centre's activities.

The goal of the Finnish Karelian League is to gain the status of a Finnish cultural institute abroad for the Viipuri Centre, such as the cultural institutes in St. Petersburg and Athens. In that case the Centre would be partially funded by the EU and the state of Finland.

## **8. The Karelian culture and the language of Karelia**

The Finnish Karelian League supports the preservation of the Karelian identity, the Karelian culture and the language in Russia according to the agreement between Finland and Russia.

The importance of this principle and its practical realisation has also been noted by the United Nations. Supporting the language of Karelia and the Karelian culture together with economic co-operation can be seen as an important and effective connecting factor.

The Finnish Karelian League concurs with the objective of the society for the Karelian language (Karjalan kielen seura) to legalise the status of the Karelian language by changing the law on languages, or by enacting a law on minority languages other than those mentioned in the constitution. An intermediary objective is to define the status of

the Karelian language as one of the minority languages, so that it is considered as belonging to the group 'others' named in the constitution.

### **9. Vyborg into an international co-operation area**

The Vyborg region should be developed as a special international co-operation area; as such, it would be suited as a part of the Northern Dimension policy of the European Union. Law and order should prevail reliably in the co-operation area. This might offer tax relief and other benefits of a special economic zone for international business activities.

### **10. Developing tourism in the neighbouring areas**

The Finnish Karelian League suggests actions to accelerate the surveillance and customs arrangements at the border, to remove all restrictions over movement on the ceded area and to improve security.

Mutual tourism in the neighbouring areas can be promoted by granting a right to an exemption from visa for trips lasting one day.

The Finnish Karelian League encourages actions and negotiations for tourism on the outer islands in the Gulf of Finland. The League hopes that the lease of the Saimaa Canal will be renewed and that the traffic in the Canal will be developed to promote tourism.

Tourism would increase, if the consulate in Vyborg would be made to function more effectively and if a consulate would be founded in Lappeenranta.

The Finnish Karelian League considers it important to improve the central international traffic routes, such as the railway and road connections between Helsinki and St. Petersburg and the roads leading to frontier crossing points.

### **11. Appointing an investigator and drawing up a Karelia programme**

Because Russia does not acknowledge the existence of a Karelian issue, no progress has been made in the issue on the political level. The Finnish Karelian League proposes to the government of Finland that it would invite an internationally recognised investigator to explore whether there are possibilities and realistic preconditions for opening the discussions indicated in section three and to draw up a separate Karelia programme, in which the goals concerning the ceded Karelia would be defined.

## **II The Karelian issue - background for the action programme of the Finnish Karelian League**

### **1. The Karelian issue as a part of the League's rules**

Rules, section 2 (24 April 1999):

Purpose of the League

The League's purpose is to function as a cultural and interest group of the Karelians and the people interested in Karelia, and to act in order to resolve the issue of the ceded Karelia.

The Karelian issue is included in all of the League's activities. The starting point of the Finnish Karelian League is a Karelia-centred point of view, which means cultivating and developing the Karelian identity and the Karelian culture irrespective of borders. The League commits itself to its cultural task and through it, and keeps the Karelian issue before the governmental decision-makers on both sides of the border.

The Finnish Karelian League acts to resolve the Karelian issue, to preserve, develop and make known the Karelian culture and in a wider context the Karelian way of life both domestically and abroad. It advocates the cause of the Karelians and is a common bond for them. The focuses of action may change according to the needs and resources available at the time.

### **2. What is the Karelian issue - from the viewpoint of history and principle**

During the whole of its inhabited history, Karelia has been a region of encounter of the Slavs and the Baltic-Finnish peoples. The portion of Finnish Karelia that was a part of the independent Finland and ceded to the Soviet Union in the Peace Treaty of Moscow in 1940 and in the Peace Treaty of Paris in 1947, had been until that time a region inhabited through the centuries by Karelians and, since the 14<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup> centuries, by Finns. Even though the region has been alternately in the possession of Sweden and Russia (Novgorod), the Baltic-Finnish tribes have constituted an overwhelming majority of its population throughout the historical period.

When the borders of independent Finland were ratified by the Peace Treaty of Tartu in 1920, a small Russian minority in the Finnish Karelia remained inside those borders. Inside the borders determined by the Peace Treaty of Tartu remained two significant monasteries, Valamo and Konevitsa, over 90 % of whose brotherhood consisted of Russians until World War II, and whose cultural influence on the Orthodox population of Karelia was still significant.

However, the Russian minority was culturally significant and reflects the historical traditions of Karelia. Until the Peace of Stolbova (1617), the region was mainly Orthodox Christian in religion, which connected Karelia with its Russian neighbours. It was only during the 17<sup>th</sup> century when Lutheran population moved into the Ladoga Karelia and to the eastern part of the Karelian Isthmus, when the majority of the region's original

population had to escape to Russia, mainly to the regions of Tver and Tihvinä, because of the Swedish religious policy and army levies. In the Peace of Tartu, a Karelian-Finnish population numbered in thousands remained in Eastern Karelia, Viena and Ingria outside Finnish borders.

Historically speaking, the people of Karelia has populated a geographically extensive and vulnerable area, situated in the northern part of the Middle Europe, a zone reaching through Europe from the Balkans to the Arctic Ocean. The Middle Europe is an area of cultural encounter within Europe, and there are still many unresolved border disputes there, characteristic of a zone of encounter. They have come into being during centuries, when ethnically and culturally different nationalities live in the same areas due to continual border transfers. The Karelians have been a people of the border throughout history; a border of two states has crossed the area populated by it ever since the Peace of Nöteborg in 1323.

The ceded Karelia has been a part of the Finnish history and common phases from the 17<sup>th</sup> century at the latest. Even though the population living there had left their homes during the Winter War and again in 1944 before the coming of the invader or due to the terms of the peace treaty, it happened because of an external threat and out of reluctance to submit under a foreign occupier, as the case had been in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. The Karelian evacuee population still feels strongly that due to justice, the work of their ancestors and their love for their home, the ceded Karelia should belong to Finland and the Karelians. The ceded Karelia was an important part of Finland, especially from the time Finland was a Grand Duchy of Russia and after Finland gained its independence, and Finland has in its way a legitimate interest to follow the events in the region.

In its entirety, the Karelian issue means the work done for preserving and developing the status of Karelia, its different cultural areas, traditions, languages and religions. For the Finnish Karelian League, the Karelian issue is limited to the ceded Karelia, and the areas of focus connected to its history and culture.

Above all, historical and cultural bonds with other areas and Finnic peoples, such as with Viena, Olovets, Tver and the other Karelias are cultivated to preserve the originality of the Finnish and Finnic peoples and nationalities. This because the ceded Karelia and its cultural heritage cannot be considered as an enclave separate from the other Karelian region; the ceded Karelia was not a culturally homogenous whole, but the Karelian sub-cultures in the region were connected as a part of the cultural whole of Viena and Olovets, among others. The area of Vyborg and the parts of the western Isthmus have been more multi-cultural; that region has received more cultural and social influences from the West than the rest of Karelia.

Considering the Karelian issue state-centrally is a part of the area of interest and viewpoint of the Finnish Karelian League. The Karelian issue is handled as a national or political issue, that is, an answer is sought to the question that to whom Karelia or a part of it belongs. According to this viewpoint, the Finnish party seeks the answer in a Finnish-centred manner. As a non-governmental organisation, the Finnish Karelian League seeks solutions to the Karelian issue primarily from the Karelia-centred viewpoint defined in the previous section (1).

The Finnish Karelian League does not act on any political mandate and it has no role as an actor in foreign policy with regard to the Karelian issue as a part of foreign policy, conducting which is the duty of the President of the Republic and the government of the country. On the other hand, the Finnish Karelian League participates in the discussion on the return of Karelia from the state-centric viewpoint according to the methods and objectives stated in the Karelia action programme.

The objective of the Finnish Karelian League has been since the year 1940 to join the ceded Karelia as a part of the state of Finland. As today's challenge, the Finnish Karelian League sees the Karelian issue as a part of a wider development of northern Europe. It is affected by the development of the EU's Northern Dimension policy, the contents of the neighbouring area agreement and co-operation between Finland and Russia and the security-policy changes in the regional operating environment, such as the expansion of EU and NATO into the Baltic countries.

### **3. What is the Karelian issue - from the viewpoint of action**

The Finnish Karelian League receives governmental support for its activities, but it does not participate in party politics. The League pursues co-operation with such Karelian organisations and other Associations, whose objectives and methods support the League's Karelia programme.

The majority of Karelians live in Finland, and therefore Finland has a special responsibility to preserve the Karelian culture. The Finnish Karelian League continues and develops its own activities in the neighbouring areas in co-operation with the present population, administration, churches and non-governmental organisations of the area of the ceded Karelia. This is the only way to guarantee keeping the avenues for discussion open and that to act for a solution in the Karelian issue.

In 1992, the Agreement on the Foundations of Relations between the Republic of Finland and the Russian Federation (Finnish Treaty Series 63/1992) for 10 years was made, replacing the treaty of friendship, co-operation and mutual assistance; the agreement has been continued after its first phase ended. According to Article 10 of the agreement, the parties to the agreement shall give their support to the preservation of the identity of the Finns and Finno-Ugric peoples and nationalities in Russia and, correspondingly in Finland, the identity of persons originating in Russia. They shall protect each other's languages, cultures and historical monuments.

In the 1990's, the presence and activities of Karelians and other Finns in the ceded Karelia increased substantially. Trips to the lost home district and the restoration of former monuments and erecting new ones, and the retrieval of the corpses of those fallen in the wars from the ground and their burial in Finland, which often occurred in these contexts, as well as many other hobby and support activities, have had a chance to develop in peace, and increasingly many connections with the local population have been made. When entering the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the connections with the local administration of different parts of the area in particular have become functional and mutually beneficent. Besides the Finnish Karelian League's own active influence, the bilateral relationships of many parish societies with the present administration and inhabitants of their old

parishes have worked in favour of this situation. The participation of the Finnish Karelian League in these kinds of activities offers a natural opportunity to be present in the ceded Karelia.

The League supports the preservation of the Karelian language and culture in the Republic of Karelia. In the League's future activities, especially the development and support of the status and teaching of the Karelian language and the literature in the Karelian language in all ways are central goals. According to the theme of the year 2005-2007 "Karelianism, the Karelian identity, Finland," the League endeavours in its activities to develop connections with the different Karelias, to support their cultural resources and to develop the social and minority rights. The Karelian identity is seen as a valuable northern European resource.

The Finnish Karelian League acts strongly to give the Karelian language and the culture based on it a more visible and vivid significance, one which it is due as building a block of, for example, the Finnish identity. The League supports and makes initiatives itself to strengthen the position of the Karelian language. This objective is to be one of the central fields of the planned Ladoga Centre; activities in the Karelian language will be concentrated into the Centre, literature and educational material in the Karelian language will be collected and courses in the Karelian language held there. The emphatic presence of the Karelian language's status in the League's activities is also visible in developing contacts in the Viena and Olovets Karelia, in Tver Karelia and the Tihvinä region. These connections are purely cultural.

The Finnish Karelian League sees developing the Karelian identity and the status of the Karelian language as one of its most central goals in the thematic entity of the Karelian issue; a strong Karelia and Karelian identity is a strong asset in the resolution of the Karelian issue.

#### **4. How to discuss the Karelian issue?**

The Karelian issue immediately concerns two parties, Finland and Russia, from a national viewpoint. On the other hand, the issue is connected to a wider international perspective, such as border and peace treaties, the European Union and its adjacency and neighbouring area policy and the Northern Dimension of the EU. Discussing and particularly resolving the Karelian issue requires negotiations between several parties, essentially Finland and Russia.

The Karelian issue in its entirety reaches from a wide historical and cultural awareness of tradition and work done for it to the issue of returning the ceded Karelia. The Russian party, on the other hand, has emphasised in many different contexts that no Karelian issue exists for them, and that there is no intention to start any discussions concerning the return of ceded Karelia.

Solving this deadlocked situation requires diplomacy and, from the perspective of a non-governmental organisation, a strategic plan that is moderate and recognises the realities.

The Russian administration refers to the Peace Treaty of Paris in its official comments. Even though the Russian party is reluctant to discuss the Karelian issue, the term 'the Karelian opportunity' has been suggested by the Russian party as a basis for discussion

(see the article by Andrei Feodorov in section 4 of this publication). Within this definition of terms, discussion on Karelia as a whole and the ceded area linked to it in particular becomes possible. Progress can be made through this discussion in developing the co-operation with neighbouring areas, modernising border and customs regulations and all the cultural and economic co-operation occurring in Karelia between Finland and Russia.

The Finnish Karelian League considers keeping this avenue for discussion open to be crucially important. The Finnish Karelian League does not try to hinder a discourse seeking mutual understanding with preconceived attitudes. Fostering mutual understanding and trust is the key for discussing the Karelian issue with the Russian party. The Finnish Karelian League respects the treaties made by Finland and wishes to influence the political decision-making with its activities through the parliamentary system and in co-operation with the country's foreign policy leadership. In no section of the Karelian issue should it be acted in a way harmful to the relations between Finland and Russia.

The Karelian issue is an issue for the entire Finland. The Finnish Karelian League has proposed to the government in its Karelia programme that it would draw up a separate action programme concerning Karelia, in which it would comprehensively define its objectives with regard to the ceded area.

## **5. The role of the Finnish Karelian League in the Karelian issue**

The hope of returning to the ceded Karelia has inspired the representatives of the evacuees since the year 1945. The Karelian Members of Parliament especially have turned to the Finland's foreign policy leadership with their hopes of return.

The representatives of the Finnish Karelian League's leadership at the time have met the President of the Republic regarding the Karelian issue several times after the World War II was over, until the year 1967. After this, the following meeting was not arranged until the year 1992 with President Mauno Koivisto. The representatives of the League have also met President Martti Ahtisaari and President Tarja Halonen several times about the issue.

During the term of office of President Kekkonen, certain groups within the Finnish Karelian League were of the opinion that the League had completely forgotten to demand the return of the home region.

On the other hand, in the 1960's the President warned the Finnish Karelian League to refrain from expressions of opinion, and noted that the cause could not be advocated in public.

During the term of President Kekkonen, the issue was presented in the meetings of the heads of state up to the term of Brezhnev.

It was only after the Soviet Union was dissolved and the Baltic countries regained their independence that discussions about the return of ceded Karelia began in public and within the non-governmental organisations. In the spring of 1990, discussion about Karelia arose in the Finnish Karelian League. Five organisations from Vyborg proposed at

the meeting of the League that the League would actively research options based on which it would be possible to start negotiations on the return of the ceded Karelia. The majority in the meeting of the League thought that the issue should be pursued by the state; the meeting sent a proposal to its representatives.

After this the Finnish Karelian League has left a petition to both President Koivisto and President Ahtisaari, hoping that the return of ceded Karelia could be explored between Finland and Russia according to the Final Act of CSCE.

Since the late 1990's, the leadership of the Finnish Karelian League has met several times Finland's foreign policy leadership, Prime and Foreign Ministers, representatives of the Foreign Ministries and high-level representatives of Russia. The issue has been kept current by the Finnish Karelian League in the Finnish Parliament as well as the European Parliament and the Council of Europe.

The Karelian issue has been featured prominently in the events organised by the Finnish Karelian League, in the meetings of the League and in seminars. In statements approved by these, it has been proposed to the foreign policy leadership that it would start negotiations on developing the ceded Karelia and returning it, when that is considered possible. The Finnish Karelian League has also appointed a working group, whose first report was published in 1995 and the second in 1997.

An abridged version of the first report has been published in English, Russian and German. In the spring of 2004, the Finnish Karelian League organised a seminar on the Karelian issue, in which the Karelian issue was discussed from a wider perspective than before. In the seminar, the Karelian issue as a whole was approached both from the Russian and the Finnish point of view. Summaries of the essential talks in the seminar are appended to this publication.

## **6. The Finnish government and the Karelian issue**

President J.K. Paasikivi attempted to keep the possibility of rectification of the frontier present when the borders between Finland and the Soviet Union were discussed, but the opportunities for it were few and far between. Urho Kekkonen, who had already been a central participant in the Karelia plans of the summer of 1955, fostered the thought of rectifications of Finland's eastern frontier during his presidency, with the return of the whole ceded Karelia or parts of it as the goal. For this purpose, he made several suggestions in unofficial talks with the Soviet leadership.

President Koivisto noted in 1991 that Finland did not lose Karelia on any secret paragraph, but that it lost Karelia in a war. He thought that the future developments would depend largely on how the relationship between our countries would grow. In March 2005, Mauno Koivisto returned to the discussion on Karelia. The impulse came from the demonstrations organised by the Liberal Democratic Party of Russia in front of the Finnish embassy in Moscow because of the demands made by Finnish non-governmental organisations with regard to Karelia. According to the information in newspapers, Koivisto sees no reasonable grounds for the return of Karelia and stated as his opinion that Finland does not need more land.

President Ahtisaari stated in a state visit to Moscow in 1994 that Finland and Russia follow the principles of the Charter of the UN and the Final Act of CSCE in their mutual relations. During the visit, President Boris Yeltsin answered to a question by a television reporter that the seizure of Karelia by Russia was an example of Stalin's totalitarian and aggressive politics, which were not acceptable for him or the President of Finland. On commenting this statement by President Yeltsin, Ahtisaari added the willingness of Finns to the requirements of a demand on the return of Karelia, if the situation should change in such a way that there is an interest in the part of Russia to begin discussions on the Karelian issue. At that time, in 1994, President Ahtisaari was of the opinion that the worst thing possible for Finland would be that Finland would be numbered in Russia among the countries with territorial demands.

To a question posed in the Parliament concerning the return of Karelia on 20<sup>th</sup> of June 1994, Foreign Minister Heikki Haavisto answered that the government starts from the assumption that the borders with the Soviet Union and later with Russia have been defined in international treaties. In the Agreement of 1992 on the relations of Finland and Russia, it has been agreed to preserve the common border as a border of good neighbourliness and co-operation according to the Final Act of CSCE, respecting its inviolability and each other's territorial integrity. According to the Final Act of CSCE, the borders may be changed according to the international justice by peaceful means and through agreements. Finland has no territorial demands towards Russia. In principle, however, there is no reason to eliminate the possibility that negotiations on the areas ceded to the Soviet Union or their use could be conducted on a new basis, if Russia is willing to do this.

The representative of the Finnish Karelian League, Member of Parliament Risto Kuisma posed a written question to the government of Finland in December 2004 on the return of the ceded areas. In his answer, Foreign Minister Erkki Tuomioja referred to the Peace Treaty of Paris and the Final Act of CSCE and repeated that the government's position on the matter is unchanged and Finland has no territorial demands of any country. Therefore, the government does not intend to bring up the return of areas ceded to the Soviet Union in the peace treaty, and neither does the government have any plans with regard to the return of these areas. The best point of departure for the development of the ceded areas benefiting both countries is from the co-operation with the neighbouring areas realised by the government. In addition, Tuomioja emphasised that in principle the possibility cannot be eliminated that negotiations on the areas ceded to the Soviet Union or their use could be conducted on a new basis, if Russia is interested. There has been no change after the year 1999 in the willingness of Russia to discuss changing its borders determined in the peace treaty.

Therefore, Russia is not at the moment willing to discuss changes to its borders. President Yeltsin has already expressed this clearly after a short "period of thawing" and President Putin has rejected the discussion on the return of Karelia even more emphatically during his term in the office.

Because of the unsympathetic attitudes of Russia's leadership, the official Finland has not had many opportunities in the issue of the return of the ceded Karelia. However, our country has undertaken the co-operation with the neighbouring areas in a geographically

much wider extent. The agreement on the relations between Finland and Russia and co-operation in the Murmansk area, the Republic of Karelia, St. Petersburg and the Leningrad area entered into force in 1992. The agreement covers different fields from promoting trade and economic development to sports and youth connections and humanitarian aid.

The purpose of the projects in the co-operation with the neighbouring areas is to narrow the gap between the living standards, facilitate Russia's transfer into democracy and market economy, improve the possibilities of Europeanisation for the people of the ceded Karelia, help it to understand the Finnish viewpoints and increase the presence of Finns in the ceded Karelia.

## **7. The rise of Karelian feeling in the 21<sup>st</sup> century Finland**

When the Karelian issue is considered in its entirety, the interest in Karelia and the Karelian identity newly arisen within the last two or three years could even be seen as a form of neo-Karelianism.

In part, this has naturally been affected by the increase and change in the tourism to Karelia and to the home region, so that also those Finns with no Karelian roots have become more and more interested in Karelia. The phenomenon can also be seen as a continuation of the interest in Orthodox Christianity, going on for over three decades.

The media is increasingly interested in Karelia. For example, TV 1 broadcasted over twenty programs about Karelia and the Karelian identity on its channels in the autumn of 2004. When the programmes and documents about Karelia, the Continuation War that ended 60 years ago and the second evacuation of Karelia on the other radio and television channels are added to this, there are altogether dozens of radio and television programmes about Karelia. The same clearly increased interest in Karelia is also visible in the press, the film production, on the publishers' booklists, in the talks and seminars offered by open colleges and workers' institutes as well as the academic Karelian studies. Karelia has returned to the Finnish cultural and social life.

The Finnish Karelian League, which has kept the cause of Karelians in view for over 60 years, has been a part of the positive discussion on Karelia and the visibility of the Karelians.

Majority of the abovementioned Karelian programmes in the media have been created either with the assistance of the Finnish Karelian League and in co-operation with the League, or the League has had an otherwise significant role in the creation of the programmes and articles in the press. This shows that the League is both trusted and seen as having extensive expert knowledge concerning Karelia and the Karelian identity.

## **8. The Viipuri Centre and co-operation with neighbouring areas**

The Finnish Karelian League and some of its member organisations founded together the Viipuri Centre in Vyborg in 2001 as the Finnish Karelian League's own project within the

scope of co-operation with the neighbouring areas, through which the League has built contacts within the ceded Karelia.

Connections to the present leadership of the city, the non-governmental organisations, churches, cultural institutions and inhabitants, among others, are maintained through the Viipuri Centre. The most important task of the Viipuri Centre is to distribute information on the history and culture of Karelia and the Finnish and Karelian past and to make connections between Finns and the present inhabitants.

The Centre provides tourism and business information and interpretation services, and it also organises trips, seminars and tailored programme services, in all of which the importance of Vyborg and the Isthmus to the Karelian and Finnish culture is taken into account.

The activities of Viipuri Centre have been for a large part funded through the EU funding programmes. Until the end of the year 2004, the funding has mainly come through the Tacis and Interreg programmes of EU. The Finnish Karelian League and Viipuri Centre have used all the EU funding they have received for the abovementioned purposes with regard to Viipuri Centre's activities, and it is controlled by a supervisor appointed by the Regional Council of South Karelia together with Viipuri Centre's steering group.

The Finnish Karelian League's co-operation with the neighbouring areas as a whole endeavours to promote home area tourism and the Finnish public image produced by it on the former Finnish areas it with its connections to the ceded Karelia. It is to the benefit of Finland, if the other side of the border is inhabited by a self-supporting and self-confident people. The co-operation with neighbouring areas and the support activities of EU as well as many other organisations also increases the possibilities of Finns and Karelians to work and act in the ceded Karelia. Besides the intrinsic value of the support programmes, this fact gives the Finnish Karelian League the cause and the opportunity to join in the domestic and international neighbouring area policy, make its own suggestions if needed and participate in the programmes as far as possible.

The Finnish Karelian League tries to influence the neighbouring area policy in such a way that the focus would not be solely on economic issues, but that the support would also be directed to cultural and language issues. It is to the interest of both parties that the neighbouring area policy can contribute to keeping the Karelian nature as pure and viable. The last-mentioned issue will be taken specifically into account in developing the activities of the Ladoga Centre.