

NETHERLANDS

Frisians

Activity: 1962-2020

General notes

NA

Movement start and end dates

- Frisian demands for cultural and linguistic autonomy first surfaced in the 1880s. In the post World War II era, the Frisian National Party (Fryske Nasjonale Partij, FNP) was founded in 1962 to seek autonomy for northern province of Friesland within a federal Europe. We therefore peg the start date of the movement in 1962.
- The party has been consistently active in Dutch politics since then, demanding increased autonomy for the province (FNP 2019). In the 2019 Dutch provincial elections, the party obtained 7.9% of the votes and it retained four seats in the Frisian provincial legislature (NOS 2019).
- Given the party's core values and its participation in Dutch politics, we code the movement as ongoing (FNP Friesland; Frisian Alliance; Hewitt & Cheetham 2000; Kingdom of Frisia; Minahan 1996, 2002, 2016; Roth 2015). [start date: 1962; end date: ongoing]

Dominant claim

- All sources (Minority Rights Group International; Hewitt & Cheetham 2000) agree that the dominant claim of the Frisian movement has been and still is autonomy and the promotion of the Frisian language and culture. This is also confirmed by an article in the Irish Times (2014), which states that the Frisian nationalists have always been "uneasy about the idea of outright independence". Roth (2015: 51) similarly suggests that there is no movement demanding full independence. The organization representing the Frisian claim for self-determination, the Frisian National Party (Fryske Nasjonale Partij – FNP), names federalism and the devolution of additional power to the provincial governments as one of their seven core values. [1962-2020: autonomy claim]

Independence claims

- Hannan (2017) mentions the presence of elements supporting Frisian independence in Netherlands but does not offer sufficient corroborating evidence. We generally find no evidence of concrete independence claims prior to 2003, when the 'Groep fan Auwerk' organization was established, which made claims for an independent Frisian state called Frisia (see GfA 2009). While we could not find good concrete evidence regarding the group's popularity, outright secessionists are generally described as marginal at best (see above). Groep fan Auwerk's website was last operational in January 2022, and as of late 2022 was not accessible. [no independence claims]

Irredentist claims

NA

Claimed territory

- The territory claimed by the Frisian National Party consists of Friesland, a province in northern Netherlands, which also includes the West Frisian Islands (Minahan 2002: 612). While Minahan (2016: 148) suggests that the Frisian homeland includes parts of the neighboring province Groningen, the FNP's claims are limited to the province of Friesland (Roth 2015). We therefore code this particular territory based on the Global Administrative Areas database (GADM 2019).

Sovereignty declarations

NA

Separatist armed conflict

- We found no reports of separatist violence, hence a NVIOLSD classification. [NVIOLSD]

Historical context

- The Frisian Kingdom, established around 600 AD, was conquered by the Frankish Empire after the Battle of the Boarn in 734. The Frisians, however, kept their distinct identity and some degree of independence. By the twelfth century, the Frank's Germanic language had replaced Frisian as the dominant language (Minahan 2002; Minority Rights Group International).
- Friesland became a self-governing and relatively democratic entity after the demise of the Franks and the inclusion of Friesland first in the middle kingdom and then in the eastern kingdom of Louis the German, eventually becoming a fief of Holland. In the twelfth century, four free cities in Friesland became part of the Hanseatic League (Minahan 2002; Minority Rights Group International).
- When the independent Dutch kingdom (officially the Republic of the Seven United Netherlands) was formed in 1581, the Frisians, as a part of the Dutch kingdom, obtained considerable autonomy and a separate Frisian stadholder appointed by the Frisian people. In the Peace of Westphalia the United Republic of the Netherlands was granted self-determination, which further hastened the decline of the Frisian language, which had already come under pressure from German and Dutch (Minahan 2002; Minority Rights Group International).
- When Napoleon, who had occupied Holland and the Frisian territory, was defeated in 1815, the Frisian department became part of the United Kingdom of the Netherlands as the province of Friesland.
- During the Second World War Friesland was overrun by Nazi Germany, who promised the Frisians self-rule. But loyalty of the Frisians to the exiled House of Orange remained very strong. After the war, there were several linguistic concessions: From 1948 onwards, Frisian could be taught in secondary school and in 1955 it was recognized as a language of instruction at primary level. [1955: cultural rights concession]
- Finally, in 1956, legislation was passed that allowed the use of Frisian in courts and declared Frisian an official regional language in the Netherlands (Gorter et al. 2001; Hewitt & Cheetham 2000; Minahan 2002; Minority Rights Group International). [1956: cultural rights concession]

Concessions and restrictions

- The role of Frisian in education was part of several legislative acts throughout the 1970s until the 1990s. Most of these acts are not relevant enough to be coded as a cultural rights concession though. We code the following concessions:

- In 1974, the Primary Education Act of 1920 was modified. Frisian became a compulsory school subject in all primary schools in Friesland as of 1980 (Minahan 2002; Minority Rights Group International). [1974: cultural rights concession]
- In 1993, the modification of the Law on Secondary Education made Frisian compulsory in lower secondary education in the province (Mercator 2007; Minority Rights Group International). [1993: cultural rights concession]
- In 1989, there was a formal agreement between the national and the provincial government that expressed “the common interest and responsibility of the central and regional authorities towards the protection, preservation and promotion of the Frisian language and culture” (Riemersma 2001). This Covenant on Frisian Language and Culture included provisions for the use of Frisian in media, education, culture, research, public administration and courts. Gorter (2001: 218) calls it a “weak form of legal protection” with has limited duration that needs to be renegotiated again and again. The Covenant was renewed in 1993, in 2001, and then again in 2013, however, since there was no increase in the level of cultural autonomy that came with these renewals, we only code the 1989 act. [1989: cultural rights concession]
- The Dutch government signed the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages (ECRML) in 1992 and ratified it in 1996 with respect to Frisian. The ratification resulted in forty-eight concrete measures from part III of the ECRML. According to Gorter (2001), the specific provisions of the charter had already been implemented and hence the signing of the Charter had only a symbolic effect. This event is thus not coded.
- In 2013, the Dutch parliament adopted the 2013 Law on Frisian Language and Use. The law reaffirmed the language as second official language of the Netherlands, and it provided a legal basis for the Covenant on the Frisian Language and Culture. However, in effect the law did not provide new rights but only merged existing provisions together into one act. Therefore, we do not code a concession.

Regional autonomy

- The province of Fryslân has a democratically elected regional parliament (Provincial Council) with 43 council members. However, the council’s tasks include managing nature areas, building and maintaining cycle paths, overseeing provincial public transport, and providing services in the areas of young people, the arts and culture (Government of the Netherlands). Hence, given the marginal tasks and the unitary character of the Dutch state, we do not code regional autonomy.

De facto independence

NA

Major territorial changes

NA

EPR2SDM

<i>Movement</i>	Frisians
<i>Scenario</i>	No match
<i>EPR group(s)</i>	-
<i>Gwgroupid(s)</i>	-

Power access

- Since 1966 the Frisian National Party is represented in the Provincial Council. Since 1999 the FNP has one member in the national senate (FNP; Minority Rights Group International) through Independent Politics Netherlands (Onafhankelijke Politiek Nederland, OPNL), a political party that represents several provincial parties. However, we found no evidence of inclusion in the center's executive. [1962-2020: powerless]

Group size

- According to the World Directory of Minority and Indigenous Peoples, there were 700,000 Frisians in the Netherlands as of 2018. According to the World Bank, the Netherlands' population was 17.23 million in 2018. [0.040]
 - o Minahan (2002: 613) suggests a similar population size: 710,000 in 2002.

Regional concentration

- According to Minahan (2002: 612), the Frisians make up a majority in the Province of Friesland (approx. 89%). According to the World Directory of Minority and Indigenous Peoples, this amounts to almost 400,000 people in 2018, which is more than 50 per cent of all Frisians (700,000) in the whole country in the same year. [concentrated]

Kin

- According to Minahan (2002: 612), there are around 150,000 Frisians in neighboring Germany. [kin in neighboring country]

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