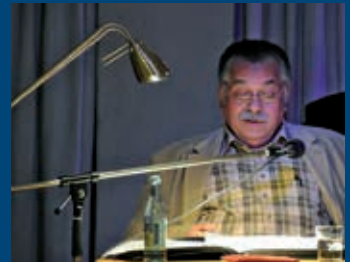




Bundesministerium
des Innern

National minorities, minority and regional languages in Germany



National minorities,
minority and regional languages
in Germany

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Near the Reichstag building, along the Spree promenade in Berlin, Dani Karavan's installation "Basic Law 49" shows the articles of Germany's 1949 constitution on 19 glass panes.

Photo: © Jens Kalaene/dpa



"No person shall be favoured or disfavoured because of sex, parentage, race, language, homeland and origin, faith, or religious or political opinions."

Basic Law for the
Federal Republic of Germany,
Art. 3 (3), first sentence.

Foreword



Dr Thomas de Maizière, Member of the German Bundestag
Federal Minister of the Interior

Photo: © Press and Information Office of the Federal Government

Four officially recognized national minorities live in Germany: the Danish minority, the Frisian ethnic group, the German Sinti and Roma, and the Sorbian people. The members of national minorities are German nationals and therefore part of the German legal order. They enjoy all rights and freedoms granted under the Basic Law without any restrictions.

This brochure describes the history, the settlement areas and the organizations of the national minorities in Germany and explores how they see themselves and how they live while trying to preserve their cultural roots. Each of the four minorities identifies itself in particular through its own language. As language is an important part of their identity, it deserves particular protection. Low German, too, is subject to special protection. It is spoken in eight federal states.

The special legal status of the minorities and their languages as well as of the regional language Low German is based on two Council of Europe agreements that are binding in Germany: the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities and the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages. The protection enshrined in these agreements is specified and implemented in laws, ordinances, statutes and administrative action at federal and state level. Federal, state and local authorities support the members of national minorities and the speakers of regional and minority languages in preserving their cultural identity.

In this context, the Federal Government Commissioner for Matters Related to Ethnic German Resettlers and National Minorities plays a special role. He represents the Federal Government in various contact groups, puts forward the interests and matters of national minorities and the regional language Low German at federal level and promotes acceptance and recognition among the general public.

I would like to thank him and the members of the national minorities – many of whom are volunteers – for their commitment in preserving their culture, which also helps preserve some of Germany’s cultural wealth and strengthens cultural diversity in Europe.



Dr Thomas de Maizière, Member of the German Bundestag
Federal Minister of the Interior

Welcome



Hartmut Koschyk, Member of the German Bundestag
Federal Government Commissioner for Matters Related to Ethnic German Resettlers and National Minorities

Photo: © Press and Information Office of the Federal Government

In January 2014 I was appointed Federal Government Commissioner for Matters Related to Ethnic German Resettlers and National Minorities.

Since then I have talked to many representatives and associations and learned a lot about national minorities in Germany. It is therefore my great pleasure to present you this brochure that vividly describes the life, the culture and the languages of Germany's national minorities.

The Danish minority, the Frisian ethnic group, the German Sinti and Roma and the Sorbian people are national minorities enjoying special protection, including the cultivation of minority languages and the regional language Low German.

The minority members preserve century-old customs and traditions as well as their languages that are expressions of their cultural identity. To address their concerns, they need the support of the majority culture and policy-makers in Germany.

A look into the history books shows that countless conflicts, crises and wars start with the oppression and persecution of minorities. Protecting the historical minorities, their languages and the regional language Low German helps maintain and develop the cultural wealth in Germany. Cultural diversity, in turn, promotes tolerance, which is crucial for a living pluralist democracy. Hence, protecting minorities and regional and minority languages also helps maintain peace in the country.

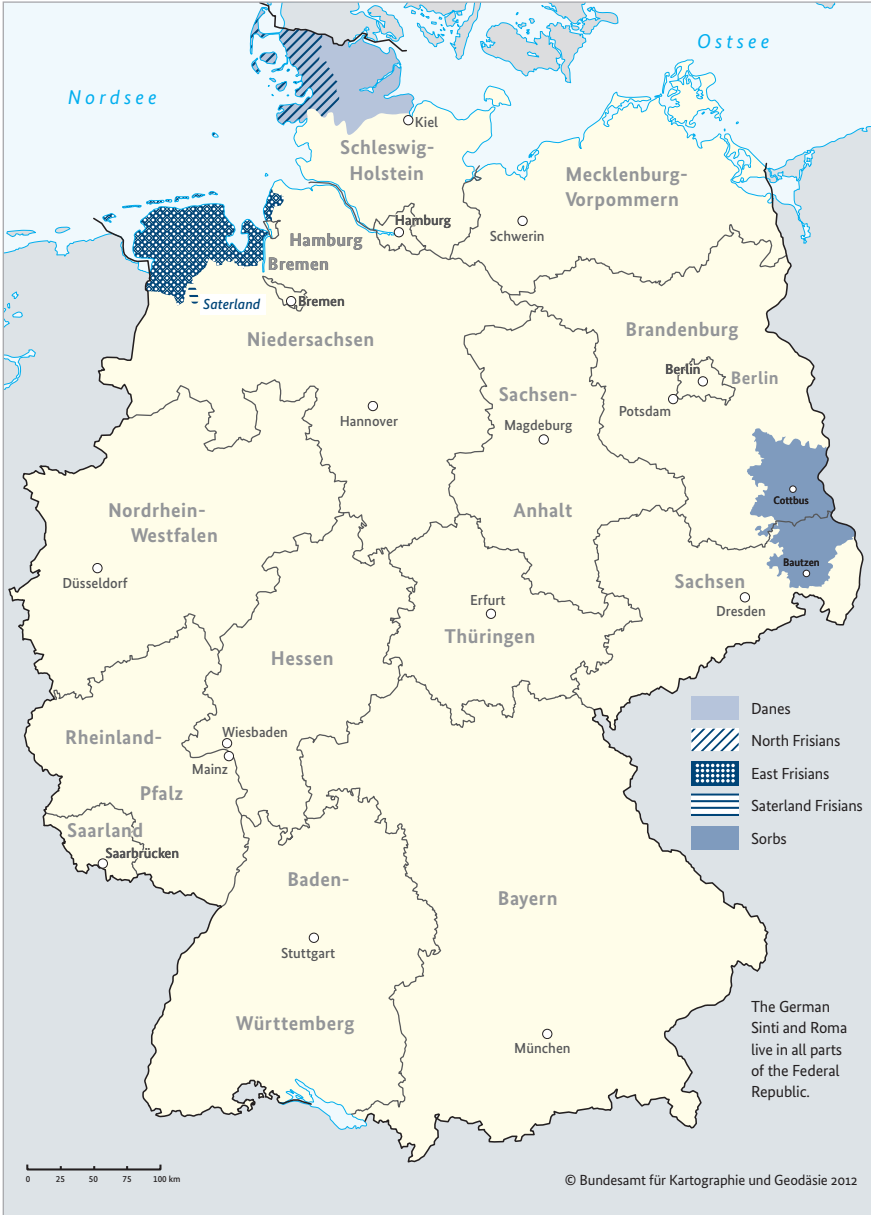
Good intergovernmental relations also rely on the protection and support of minorities and their languages. Many national minorities in Europe live on either side of national borders. Discrimination against a minority in one country can often irritate the neighbouring country, also affecting the minority living in that country. A good example for successful, cross-border peace policy is the relationship between the German and Danish minorities in North and South Schleswig. Although it is now nearly forgotten, the “Schleswig-Holstein Question” was one of the thorniest political issues in 19th-century Europe.

I hope this brochure helps increase understanding of the special situation of national minorities and of regional and minority languages in Germany and has sparked your interest. If you are more aware of this important part of our society after reading it, this brochure has achieved its goal.

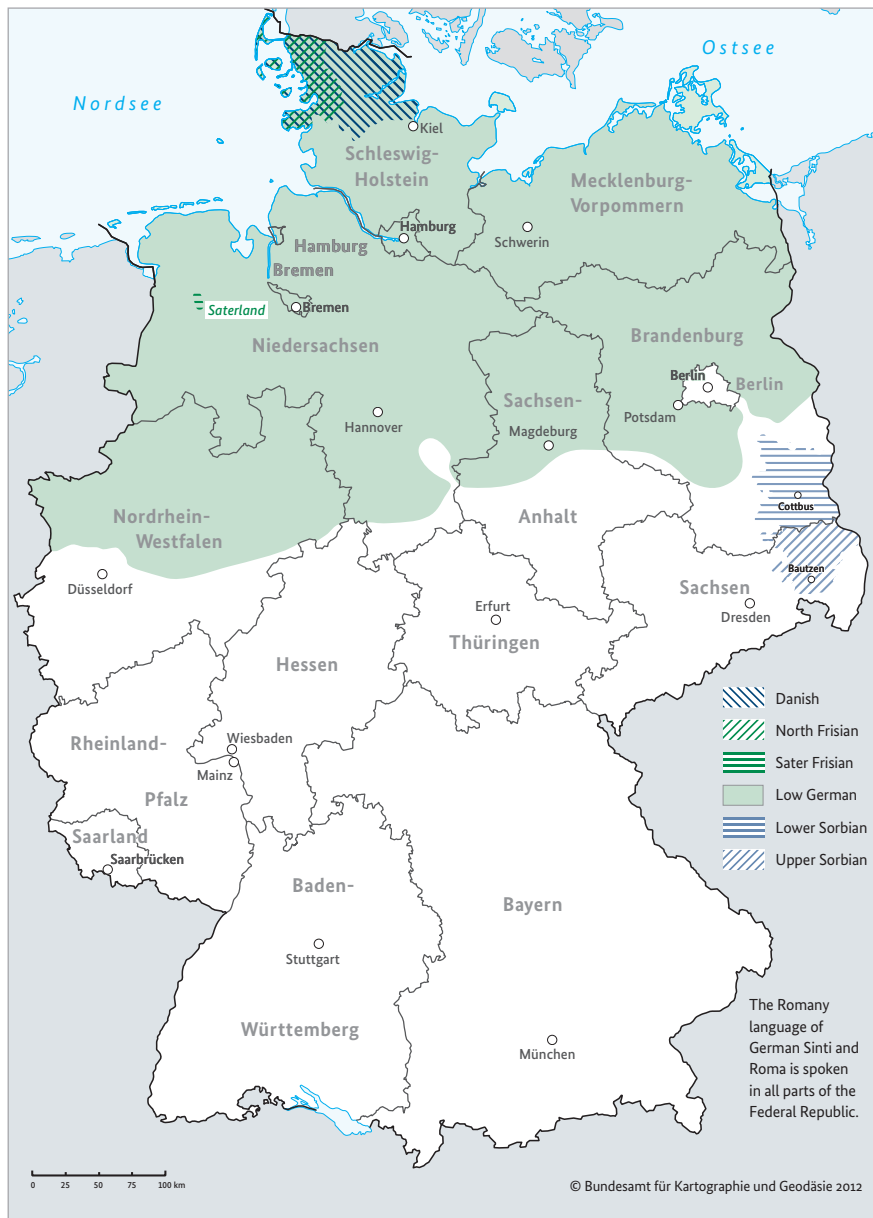


Hartmut Koschyk, Member of the German Bundestag
Federal Government Commissioner for Matters Related to Ethnic
German Resettlers and National Minorities

SETTLEMENT AREAS OF NATIONAL MINORITIES IN GERMANY



AREAS OF REGIONAL AND MINORITY LANGUAGES IN GERMANY



Introduction

Four officially recognized national minorities live in Germany: the Danes, the Frisians, the German Sinti and Roma, and the Sorbs. They receive special protection and specific funding from the federal and state governments.

The Federal Government regards as national minorities those population groups who meet the following five criteria:

- their members are German nationals;
- they differ from the majority population in having their own language, culture and history and thus their own distinct identity;
- they wish to maintain this identity;
- they have traditionally been resident in Germany (usually for centuries);
- they live in Germany within traditional settlement areas.

For historical reasons, the German Sinti and Roma are exempt from the last criterion. They are recognized as a national minority although they live mostly as small groups in almost all parts of Germany and do not have their own specific settlement areas. The aspect of tradition distinguishes the national minorities from immigrants, who have not traditionally resided in Germany. Unlike Jewish groups in some other countries, Germany's Jewish community does not consider itself a national minority, but a religious community.

Protecting the languages

Protecting and promoting national minorities also includes the minority languages spoken in addition to German, namely Danish, North and Sater Frisian, Upper and Lower Sorbian as well as the Romany language spoken by Sinti and Roma. Also the regional language Low German is protected in Germany. This language, which is distinct from standard German, has been used by many people in northern Germany alongside standard German for many centuries. Speakers of Low German do not belong to a national minority, except East Frisians. Therefore, Low German is not a minority language. For people speaking a regional or minority language, this language is part of their identity. Losing their language means losing their identity.

Affiliation with a minority is a free choice

The size of the national minority groups in Germany is only an estimate: No population or socio-economic statistics on the basis of ethnicity have been gathered in the Federal Republic of Germany since the end of World War II. One reason for this is the persecution of ethnic minorities under the Nazi regime; another reason is considerations of international law. According to the Council of Europe Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, membership of a minority is an individual personal decision and is neither registered nor reviewed nor contested by the government authorities. Last but not least, the national minorities in Germany themselves have concerns about maintaining statistics based on ethnicity.

The annual Årsmøde meeting is the largest festival of the Danish minority.
Photo: © Strandperle

The members of the Danish minority live in Schleswig-Holstein, Germany's northernmost federal state. They are well organized and act as a bridge between Germany and Denmark.





THE *Danish* MINORITY

They live mainly in the border town of Flensburg, in the districts of Nordfriesland and Schleswig-Flensburg, and in the northern part of the district of Rendsburg-Eckernförde. The Danish minority's settlement area is South Schleswig, which extends from the river Eider and the Kiel Canal in the south to the German-Danish border in the north, and from the North Sea coast in the west to the Baltic Sea coast in the east. Conversely, a German minority lives in North Schleswig in the Kingdom of Denmark.

HISTORY

When the nation states of Germany and Denmark were founded, the affiliation of the former Duchy of Schleswig was long the subject of heated debate. After the First World War, the inhabitants of South Schleswig decided in favour of Germany, while the people living in North Schleswig opted for Denmark.

Northern Schleswig-Holstein used to belong to the Duchy of Schleswig, which for centuries was governed by the King of Denmark, who was at the same time Duke of Schleswig-Holstein. In 1773, the King of Denmark assumed exclusive power, also over the Duchy of Holstein.

Only the rising nationalist movement in the 19th century and Copenhagen's efforts to incorporate the Duchy of Schleswig into the Kingdom of Denmark ruined the good relations between Germany and Denmark. Between 1848 and 1851, this led to armed conflicts in which Denmark had the upper hand. In 1864, war broke out between the kingdoms of



The Danish minority in Germany is well organized and acts as a bridge between Germany and Denmark.

Photo: © Strandperle

Austria and Prussia on the one hand and the Kingdom of Denmark on the other. It was one of the three wars that led to the founding of a German nation-state. As a result of the war, the duchies of Schleswig and Holstein became a province of the Kingdom of Prussia, which was later incorporated into the German Empire, the first German nation-state.

After the defeat of the German Empire in the First World War, the Treaty of Versailles mandated a plebiscite to determine the border between Germany and Denmark. In 1920, North Schleswig voted to join Denmark, while the majority in South Schleswig decided in favour of Germany.

After the Second World War, the Kiel Declaration adopted by the Schleswig-Holstein state parliament in 1949 and the Bonn-Copenhagen Declarations of 1955 laid the groundwork for continuous improvement of the relationship between Germany and Denmark.

These declarations guarantee that anyone may choose to identify him- or herself as having Danish ethnicity, and that the authorities are not allowed to question such self-identification. The same applies to the German minority in Denmark. In its Article 5, the state constitution of Schleswig-Holstein emphasizes that the state recognizes and promotes the Danish minority.

DANISH LIFE IN GERMANY

Thanks to a large number of strong and independent organizations, the Danish minority is able to embrace and uphold its values and traditions. Having its own political party, the South Schleswig Voters' Association (Südschleswigscher Wählerverband, SSW), the minority is represented in the Schleswig-Holstein state parliament. Following the 2012 Schleswig-Holstein parliamentary elections, an SSW politician was appointed minister of justice, cultural and European affairs.

Wearing their traditional caps, graduates of a Danish private school roam the streets of Flensburg.

Photo: © Südschleswigscher Pressedienst



“European policy is minority policy”

The Danish minority believes it is important that every individual should be able to freely choose their nationality and culture. This choice should be respected as a basic democratic principle, as stipulated in the Council of Europe’s Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities and the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages. For example, the Danish minority argues that European policy should be minority policy, and minority policy should be European policy.

With about 13,500 members, the South Schleswig Association (Sydslesvigsk Forening e. V.) is the largest association and point of contact. It uses its information office in Copenhagen to make its views known to the Danish parliament, its administration and the Danish media. The association organizes the minority’s annual meeting, Arsmøde, which takes place during the last weekend in May or the first weekend in June and comprises more than 40 events. Political leaders and other prominent figures from Denmark are regularly invited to these events intended to underline the strong cultural ties between the ethnic minority and its mother country.

The Danish minority has its own political party, the SSW, with about 3,000 members. According to the Schleswig-Holstein Electoral Act, the party is exempt from the five-percent threshold. Currently, the SSW is represented on municipal and district councils and has three seats in the Schleswig-Holstein state parliament. Since 2012, the SSW has had governmental responsibility for the first time.

Danish private-school system

In Germany, Danish culture is promoted by the Danish daily newspaper *Flensborg Avis*, its own library system (Dansk Centralbibliothek) and the Danish minority’s extensive private-school system comprising primary and comprehensive schools, one boarding school and two grammar schools. About 5,700 pupils attend schools run by the Danish Schools Association (Dansk Skoleforening for Sydslesvig), while approximately 1,900 children go to one of its kindergartens. The Danish Schools Association is also responsible for adult education.

The schools teach more than just language skills; they focus specifically on the needs of the Danish minority and seek to instil a sense of group identity. The evangelical Lutheran Danish Church (Dansk Kirke) is a Free Church with 35 parishes and provides the minority with church activities.

The Danish Health Care Service (Dansk Sundhedstjeneste for Sydslesvig) runs welfare centres, retirement homes and homes for children and young people, while the Danish Youth Association (Sydslesvigs danske Ungdomsforeninger) organizes community activities for children and adolescents. In addition, members of the Danish minority have established a large number of other associations. They all work together in the Joint Council for the Danish Minority (Det Sydslesvigske samråd).

Vestermølle Danske Skole, probably the southernmost Danish school, is located in Elsdorf-Westermühlen. It is attended by four primary school classes.

Photo: © SPT





The Danevirke fortification system of the Vikings and the former trading settlement of Hedeby near Busdorf have been nominated as possible UNESCO world heritage sites. A Viking museum and events attract numerous visitors.

Photo: © Michael Staudt

LANGUAGE

Along with Norwegian and Swedish, Danish is one of the three major Scandinavian languages.

It descended from North Germanic and is one of the Indo-European languages. Its roots as a separate language date back about a thousand years. It was largely influenced by the Viking age. At the end of the Viking era, the Nordic languages began to develop independently of each other.

Danish alphabet

The Danish alphabet consists of the 26 letters of the Latin alphabet plus the letters Æ æ, Ø ø and Å å, of which Æ and Ø strongly resemble the German letters Ä and Ö. The spoken language differs significantly from the written language.

Influence of the Vikings and the Hanseatic League

Danish was also strongly influenced by the German language during the age of the Hanseatic League, a confederation of Low-German merchants and their market towns that existed between the 11th and 17th centuries. Words from the fields of trade and crafts were incorporated into the basic vocabulary of the language. Examples include *magt* – *Macht* (power) and *straks* – *stracks* (straight). Furthermore, Danish has borrowed vocabulary from the language of the French nobility (17th/18th century) and from English (20th century).

THE *Frisian* ETHNIC GROUP





The Frisian ethnic group in Germany lives on the western coast of Schleswig-Holstein, in north-western Lower Saxony and in the Cloppenburg district.

Every year on 21 February, more than 60 *Bilken* (beacons) burn along the coast and on the islands and *Halligen* of North Friesland.

Photo: © Michael Staudt



Frisia extends along the coast and numerous islands, which has a strong impact on life in this region.

Photo: © dpa/Gerhard Launer

Depending on where they live, they are called North, East or Saterland Frisians. The West Frisians live in the Netherlands. The North Frisians are at home in the North Friesland district and on the island of Heligoland. The East Frisians live in the rural districts of Aurich, Leer, Friesland and Wittmund, the urban districts of Emden and Wilhelmshaven as well as in parts of the rural districts of Cuxhaven and Wesermarsch. The Saterland Frisians are found in the north-western part of the Cloppenburg district and in the independent Saterland municipality (the villages of Strücklingen, Ramsloh, Scharrel and Sedelsburg). The group of Frisians also includes the West Frisians who are a recognized national minority in the Netherlands.

HISTORY

The history of the Frisians reaches back to ancient times. Already in the Middle Ages, their “Frisian Liberty”, even including some hints at democracy, was a counter-model to the predominant aristocracy.

Frisians populated West and East Frisia already very early. Presumably, they settled on the North Frisian islands such as Sylt, Amrum, Föhr and the small islands called *Halligen* as early as in the 7th and 8th centuries. In the 11th century, Frisians began settling the marshlands, the fertile alluvial land along the North Sea coast. The Saterland Frisians descended from East Frisians who left the North Sea coast between 1100 and 1400, after that region was utterly devastated by storm tides, to move further south to the Saterland region, which had already been settled by Westphalians.

Frisian Liberty

An important part of Frisian lore is “Frisian Liberty”. In medieval times, the regional councils known as *Landschaften* in the Frisian settlement areas of today’s Netherlands and Lower Saxony were largely autonomous in regulating their own affairs. With this legal position came the Frisians’ responsibility for the dykes. This image still resonates in the tradition of North Frisia. Ultimately, the Frisians were not able to uphold their liberties against the newer princely states, although they invoked a forged privilege allegedly granted by Charlemagne. Nevertheless, the connection between responsibility on the one hand and freedom on the other, so significant for modern civil society, may be considered part of Frisian heritage.

The Upstalsboom memorial and Frisian Liberty also attract tourists.

Photo: © Sabine Gronewold
Ostfriesische Landschaft





The Upstalsboom in Rahe near Aurich was a medieval meeting place. Since 1833 a stone pyramid has been standing at this place.

Photo: © Sabine Gronewold
Ostfriesische Landschaft.

Equality – in fighting the sea

The eastern Frisian settlement areas extended between the Ems and the Lower Weser rivers. The entire free Frisia was a loose network of the individual Frisian lands, also known as *Sieben Seelande* (Seven Sea Lands; a symbolic number), whose representatives assembled at the Upstalsboom (literally: erected tree; a ritual place near Aurich) to settle legal cases and make political decisions.

By the end of the Middle Ages, Frisian Liberty no longer existed. After centuries of changing dynasties and political affiliations, East Frisia became part of the Kingdom of Prussia in 1866. In 1867, North Frisia – previously part of the Danish Duchy of Schleswig – was incorporated into the new Prussian province of Schleswig-Holstein.

After the foundation of the German Empire in 1871, East and North Frisia became part of the new German national state.

FRISIAN LIFE IN GERMANY

The organizations of the North, East and Saterland Frisians try to preserve their languages, promote their use in public and teach their culture at schools.

North Frisia

In North Frisia, Frisian associations provide important support for the Frisian movement. The Frisian Council (Frasche Rädj, Sektion Nord e.V.) serves as an umbrella organization representing the common interests of North Frisians. Two associations work for all of North Frisia:

- the *North Frisian Association* founded in 1902 is committed to preserving culture and language as well as the nature and landscape of North Frisia;
- The *Friisk Foriining*, founded in 1923 as the Frisian-Schleswig Association, focuses on Frisian language and identity and works with the Danish minority. It is represented politically by the South Schleswig Voters' Association.

In 1988, a body was established at the Schleswig-Holstein state parliament to deal with matters concerning the Frisian population group and ensure awareness among policy-makers.

The story goes that *Boßeln*, the Frisian “national sport”, developed from villagers trying to defend themselves by throwing stones and clay balls at pirates and intruders.

Photo: © Michael Staudt



Biikebrennen

It is the most important festival of North Frisians: Every year on 21 February, more than 60 Biiken (beacons) burn along the coast and on the islands and Halligen. Biike means “fire signal” and originates in a Shrove Tuesday custom to ward off evil spirits and protect the new crop. Since the 19th century, the Biikebrennen has taken place on the eve of St. Peter’s day (22 February), which used to be a day of tribunal. Since the 1970s, the Biikebrennen has become much more popular also on the mainland due to a stronger sense of regional identity.

As a central scholarly institution, the Nordfriisk Instituut (North Frisian Institute) in Bredstedt has been of great importance to the cultivation of the Frisian language, culture and history since 1965. The institute is supported by the association Verein Nordfriesisches Institut, founded in 1948. In addition, the North Frisian Dictionary Institute has existed at the University of Kiel since 1950 and has produced a number of lexical reference works. The director of the Institute is the holder of the university chair in Frisian, founded in 1978. Frisian is also taught at public schools in Schleswig-Holstein and at a number of schools of the Danish minority. There is no independent Frisian school system. Since 1988 the private Ferring Foundation in Alkersum on the island of Föhr has been promoting Frisian language and culture.



Today’s design of Föhr’s traditional costume originates in the mid-19th century and has changed little since then.

Photo: © Michael Staudt



The Frisian “everyday radio” FriiskFunk broadcasts for one hour every morning.

Photo: © FriiskFunk

Frisian radio

Frisian has only a small media presence. But the Frisian storytelling competition “Ferteel iinjens!” sponsored by the broadcaster NDR, the North Frisian Institute and the local savings and loans is very popular. In addition, the Frisian radio

station FriiskFunk was established on the island of Föhr in late September 2010 by the Offener Kanal Schleswig-Holstein, initially for a period of five years. About once a month, the regional sections of the newspaper *Schleswig-Holsteinische Zeitung* run a page with Frisian- and Low German-language content, and some magazines are partly or entirely in Frisian..

East Frisia

Ostfriesische Landschaft, an association of local authorities and successor of the East Frisian *Landstände* (estates), represents the interests of the people, in particular in the fields of culture, research and education. It promotes the use of the regional language Low German in East Frisia and – as guardian of the Frisian heritage – preserves the historical and cultural memory of the Frisian coast region and fosters relationships between all Frisians inside and outside Europe.



Today, the old train station in Scharrel (Saterland) is the Saterland Frisian cultural centre of the Seelter Buund.

Photo: © Seelter Buund

Frisian cooperation

The Seelter Buund works with the North Frisians in the Inter-Frisian Council and the German committee of the European Bureau for Lesser Used Languages.

The association has a cultural centre with room for a radio station, archive, courses and meetings.

Saterland

The Saterland Frisian association Seelter Buund is dedicated to preserving and promoting the Sater Frisian language. The Seelter Buund initiated bilingual town signs and instruction in Sater Frisian at kindergartens and schools. In the meantime, all Saterland public schools offer activity groups or optional courses in Sater Frisian taught by qualified instructors. So more and more people are now reading and writing Sater Frisian. But the language is still threatened.

The University of Oldenburg offers seminars and carries out research on Sater Frisian. The Seelter Buund, the University of Oldenburg and the Oldenburgische Landschaft cooperate in a project on Saterland as a model region for early multi-lingualism.

LANGUAGE

Bilingual signs

In recent years, North Frisian has been gaining attention in the public sphere: Since Schleswig-Holstein adopted special rules in 1997, many communities have put up bilingual town signs in German and Frisian. Most railway stations in the Frisian language area now have bilingual station signs. In 2004, the parliament of the state of Schleswig-Holstein adopted the Act to Promote Frisian in the Public Sphere. Among other things, the act provides for Frisian signs in public buildings. For example, the regional tax office is called Stüürämt Nordfriislon in Frisian. Church services are occasionally held in Frisian; in 2000, an extensive hymnal was published.

While North Frisian is still widely used, East Frisian lives on only in the language of the Saterland Frisians. Nowadays, people in East Frisia speak Low German. West Frisian is spoken in the Dutch province of Friesland.

Like English, Dutch and German, Frisian is a West Germanic language. Together with English, Frisian makes up the North Sea Germanic (Invaeonic) language grouping.

North Frisian

North Frisian is made up of two dialect groups: Island and Mainland North Frisian. The mainland community Risum-Lindholm and the western side of the island of Föhr are strongholds of the North Frisian language. Starting in the early 19th century, North Frisian was increasingly used as a written language, and dictionaries, grammar books and many literary works have been published in the major dialects.

James Krüss (1926–1997), a widely-known author of books for children and young people, also wrote in his local Heligoland vernacular, Halunder, which is a variant of North Frisian. On the occasion of his 80th birthday, the North Frisian Institute published the author's radio play *Claus Reimers*, in which Krüss speaks the introduction and epilogue, on CD.



Westerland on the island of Sylt welcomes visitors in two languages.

Photo: © Nordfriisk Instituut

East Frisian and Sater Frisian

East Frisian is now extinct in the region where it originated but has been preserved in the Saterland region. Old Frisian was even the written language of government from the 13th to the 16th century, and many, mostly legal, texts exist from this period. But when the Hanseatic merchants, who spoke Low German, took over the North Sea trade from the Frisians, the Frisian language lost influence. Today, Low German is the language spoken by East Frisians.

East Frisian lives on in the Sater Frisian language, Seeltersk. Saterland Frisians are one of the smallest language groups in Europe. They use 16 different diphthongs, or gliding vowels, with two different vowel sounds within the same syllable, e.g. *ffauer* (four), *bloud* (blood) or *skeeuw* (askew). There are strong similarities with the English language.

“Pronunciation sometimes difficult”

“The Frisian language varies greatly by region. In general, the language is so similar and so closely related to the English language that it is no closer to any other language of other peoples, not even neighbouring peoples... It often combines vowel sounds and has a wide variety of diphthongs, so that pronunciation is sometimes difficult and writing even more so. That is why this language is so rarely preserved in books,” said the legal scholar Ubbo Emmius (1547–1625) about East Frisian.



Der Knüppelkrieg, play by the theatre group *Das letzte Kleinod* with residents of the Frisian island of Spiekeroog.

Photo: © Jens-Erwin Siemssen / *Das letzte Kleinod*

English and Danish influence

English and Frisian still have many similar words today: on the island of Sylt, for example, *hiir* (hear), *let* (let) and *winjsdai* (Wednesday). Danish and Jutlandic dialects had an influence on North Frisian, also in terms of vocabulary: For example, the word for boy is *dreng* in Danish and *dring* on the island of Föhr and in the region of Bökingharde. The Danish word for fire is *ild*; on Föhr it is *ial* and in Bökingharde it is *iijl*.

THE GERMAN *Sinti and Roma*

German Sinti and Roma have lived in Germany since the 14th century.





“Paramissa” café:
German Sinto
Reinhold Lagrene
reading traditional
stories of the German
Sinti and Roma.

Photo: © Central Council of
German Sinti and Roma

Genocide

“The genocide of the Sinti and Roma was carried out for the same motive of fanatic racism, with the same conscious desire for systematic and complete annihilation as the genocide of the Jews. Everywhere the Nazis were in control, [Sinti and Roma] were systematically murdered, entire families from babies to the elderly.”

Federal President Roman Herzog giving a speech at the opening of the Documentation and Cultural Centre of German Sinti and Roma.

As a national minority that has lived in Germany for centuries, the German Sinti and Roma are now afforded special protection. It is necessary to distinguish between them and Roma with foreign citizenship.

The German Sinti and Roma live in all parts of the Federal Republic.

HISTORY

The Sinti have lived in German-speaking lands since the 14th century. In the second half of the 19th century, the Roma started to make Germany their home.

Roughly a thousand years ago, the Sinti and Roma left their homeland in what is now north-west India and neighbouring Pakistan. They settled in the Balkan region, in the Middle East and Eastern Europe. In the 14th century, the Sinti settled in what is now Germany. Roma from South-East Europe followed in the second half of the 19th century.

Under the National-Socialist (Nazi) regime, the Sinti and Roma were subject to persecution and genocide in Germany, the areas occupied by Germany and the countries of Hitler’s allies. About 500,000 Sinti and Roma fell victim to the racist ideology of the Nazi regime and the genocide it had systematically planned. Most of their cultural heritage was destroyed.



The Memorial to the Sinti and Roma of Europe Murdered under the National-Socialist Regime was opened in Berlin on 24 October 2012. It consists of a circular pool of water surrounded by granite slabs featuring the names of the concentration camps. Day after day, a stone topped with a fresh flower rises from the middle of the pool.

Photo: © John MacDougall/
AFP/Getty Images

SINTI UND ROMA IN GERMANY TODAY

To represent their interests and strengthen their culture, the German Sinti and Roma have formed various associations.

Central Council of German Sinti and Roma

The Central Council of German Sinti and Roma was founded in February 1982 and is the independent umbrella organization of 17 state-level associations. Based in Heidelberg, it represents the civil and political interests of the German Sinti and Roma. The Council advocates equal participation of Sinti and Roma in politics and society, and their protection and support as a national minority. Within the framework of its civil-rights activities, it implements the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities at national level. To this end, the Council is engaged in an ongoing dialogue with federal and state governments.

Thanks to the Council's efforts, the German Sinti and Roma were legally recognized as a national minority and German Romany was recognized as a minority language under the Council of Europe Charter in May 1995. Furthermore, the Council promotes encounters with survivors of the Holocaust, supports the protection of graves of Sinti and Roma persecuted by the Nazis, and regularly organizes visits to historical memorial sites in Germany and abroad.

At international level, the Central Council regularly represents the interests of Sinti and Roma at conferences hosted by the EU, the Council of Europe and the OSCE. It is a member in numerous national and international minority organizations.

Documentation and Cultural Centre

The Documentation and Cultural Centre of German Sinti and Roma in Heidelberg is an important specialized institution. It was opened on 16 March 1997 by Federal President Roman Herzog. Its tasks include documentation and research on the history, culture and current issues of the Sinti and Roma; cultural activities; education and further training; advising on equal treatment; and public information. The Centre has the first permanent exhibition in the world focusing on the genocide of the Sinti and Roma. Furthermore, it is committed to protecting and promoting German Romany in accordance with the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages.



Three young Sinti trainees in front of the Documentation and Cultural Centre of German Sinti and Roma in Heidelberg.

Photo: © Central Council of German Sinti and Roma

In 2011, Hungarian-born Ferenc Snétberger, a Roma guitarist and composer, performed at the German Bundestag on the occasion of the national Holocaust memorial day.

Photo: © Getty Images



Sinti Alliance Germany

Based in Göttingen, the Sinti Alliance of Germany (Sinti Allianz Deutschland e.V.) is an association of German Sinti. It was founded in 1999/2000 by 20 family representatives whose members live in all the western federal states. It represents the interests of those German Sinti who feel committed to their traditional way of life with its historical precepts and prohibitions, cultural and social taboos, and who wish to preserve this system. The majority of Sinti represented by the Alliance regard themselves not only as members of a minority, but also as members of the Sinti ethnic group which is part of German society and maintains its Sinti language and culture alongside its German language and culture.

The Alliance also seeks to strengthen and preserve Sinti culture through cultural projects. Sinti elders teach Sinti children and young people about their history, culture, customs and traditions, and organize workshops with Sinti musicians, singers and dancers. They provide social counselling for precarious Sinti families and assistance, counselling and representation for the elderly and especially for victims of the Nazi regime.

Musical ambassadors

Many people are familiar with the music of the Sinti and Roma which ranges from Sinti jazz, Balkan pop and Flamenco to folk music and the music of Hungarian Roma.

LANGUAGE

When communicating with each other, the German Sinti and Roma speak both German and Romany as their mother tongue. Their children grow up bilingual.

Indian roots

Romany is roughly 2,000 years old. It is a separate language that is derived from ancient Sanskrit, and it is one of the Indo-European languages.

Every year on the first Sunday in July, numerous religious Sinti and Roma from Germany and abroad go on an international pilgrimage to Germershausen in the district of Göttingen.

Photo: © Swen Pförtner



Over the course of the centuries, the Sinti and Roma belonged to different cultures in Europe. As a result, different versions of Romany developed over time. There are various Romany dialects in Germany which developed in parallel with German dialects. For example, one can distinguish between Prussian, Bavarian, Württemberg, Palatinate and Saxon Romany dialects. However, all members of the German Sinti and Roma use the term “Romany” to refer to their language. Unlike many other languages, Romany was never standardized. More comprehensive works on the language did not appear until the late 18th century.

Romany as a private language

The genocide committed by the Nazis resulted not only in a massive loss of Sinti and Roma culture. Another consequence was that many Sinti and Roma masked their identity after 1945. This also had effects

on the way Romany was passed on. The resulting loss is still apparent today. Many German Sinti and Roma take the view that, also out of regard for the experience undergone by Holocaust survivors, Romany should not be taught to non-Sinti/non-Roma within the public educational system. The public school system does not provide for the teaching of Romany.

THE *Sorbian People*

The Sorbian people lives only in Germany, in a region called Upper Lusatia in the Free State of Saxony and Lower Lusatia in the federal state of Brandenburg.





Many Sorbs/Wends, such as this ship master near Lübbenau, live in the Spreewald in Brandenburg.

Photo: © Sean Gallup/Getty Images



In Lower Lusatia, such as in the city of Cottbus, people celebrate *Zapust*, the Lower Sorbian pre-Lenten festival.

Photo: © Thomas Kläber

In Brandenburg, the Sorbs are often also called Wends, which is the older term. It goes back to Roman historians who called the unfamiliar eastern tribes *Veneti* which in the German language changed to *Wenden*.

HISTORY

The Sorbian people, originally Slavic tribes from the region northeast of the Carpathian Mountains, first settled in the region between the Baltic Sea and the Erzgebirge mountains some 1500 years ago. In Upper and Lower Lusatia, the Sorbs have been able to preserve and develop their culture over centuries, except during the time of the National Socialist regime in the Third Reich.

In the first half of the sixth century, during the mass migrations, Slavic tribes left their traditional settlement areas northeast of the Carpathian Mountains heading west to an unpopulated area of some 40,000 square kilometers between the Baltic Sea and the Erzgebirge mountains. Since that time, the Sorbs (or *Serbja* in Upper Sorbian and *Sorby* in Lower Sorbian) have lived in the area between the rivers Saale and Neisse. In the Middle Ages, these territories fell under German rule, and the Christianization of the Sorbs began. The 11th century saw a far-reaching assimilation of the Sorbs. Only in Upper and Lower Lusatia were they able to preserve and develop their unique culture.

The Reformation with its centre in Wittenberg, not far from Lusatia, played an important role in reinforcing Sorbian identity, because it gave priority to sermons and hymns in the vernacular. As a result, the Sorbs developed a written language. Sorbian pastors and teachers laid the foundations for a Sorbian national identity and created a body of literature in the Sorbian language.



The legendary figure Krabat in a painting by Měrćin Nowak-Njechorński. The Sorbian author Jurij Brězan wrote three novels based on this legend.

Photo: © Domowina Verlag

Krabat

The most famous legendary figure of the Sorbian culture is Krabat. The legend dates back to the 17th century and tells the story of a young Sorbian beggar living in Lusatia who learns the art of magic and later uses it to help the Sorbs, especially by making the earth fertile and draining the swamps. For his deeds, he is honoured as the patron of the rural Sorbian population still today. In the second half of the 20th century, the Sorbian author Jurij Brězan wrote three novels based on this legend.



The Sorbian National Ensemble and lay artists performing on the occasion of the 100th anniversary of Domowina.

Photo: © Jurij Helgest / Domowina Verlag

Sorbian culture under pressure from industrialization

In the early 19th century, Sorbian scholars, together with associations, schooling and church services in the Sorbian language as well as books and magazines ensured the survival of the language and cultural identity of the Sorbs. But this cultural identity was threatened. The Sorbs mainly lived in villages and remained largely untouched by industrialization. Many Sorbs moved to industrial regions and urban areas, which often resulted in a loss of their Sorbian identity. During the Nazi regime this trend was reinforced by a conscious policy to wipe out the Sorbian identity. Pastors and teachers, Sorbian associations and the Sorbian press in particular were targets of repression by the Nazis.

The German Democratic Republic promoted the autonomy of the Sorbs in the area of culture, school education and science, for example by compulsory measures to preserve the Sorbian identity and putting in place bilingual road signs. Intensive industrialization of Upper and Lower Lusatia attracted a wave of new German-speaking settlers as the Sorbs were increasingly outnumbered in their old homeland.

Since German reunification in 1990 the Sorbian people have enjoyed special protection. This is laid down in the protocol note to the Unification Treaty and in the Brandenburg Sorbs/Wends Act of 1994, last updated in 2014, and the Act on the Sorbs' Rights in the Free State of Saxony of 1999.



On the occasion of the 100th anniversary of Domowina a commemorative stamp was issued in 2012, depicting the Sorbian festival of *Vogel-hochzeit* (birds' wedding).

Photo: © Kitty Kahane

100th anniversary of Domowina

Domowina was founded in Hoyerswerda a hundred years ago, on 13 October 1912, as the umbrella organization of the Sorbs. As good as banned in 1937, the organization reconstituted itself on 10 May 1945 in Crostwitz. After German reunification, a process of renewal launched in 1991 led to the umbrella organization as it exists today.

SORBIAN LIFE

The political and cultural umbrella organization of the Sorbs, Domowina, looks back to a hundred-year tradition. A growing number of schools offers bilingual classes. Since 2008, when Stanislaw Tillich was appointed as Minister-President, the government of the Free State of Saxony has been headed by a Sorb for the first time in history.

Domowina – Bund Lausitzer Sorben e.V., with headquarters in Bautzen, is the politically autonomous umbrella organization of Sorbian associations. It comprises five regional associations and numerous expert groups with a focus on culture, language, professions or religion. Its goals are to work on behalf of preserving and developing the language, culture and traditions of the Sorbian people. It represents the interests of the Sorbian people in the political and public sphere. Domowina also seeks to initiate and maintain international contacts with Slav neighbours and other ethnic groups and national minorities in Europe. The Federation, the Free State of Saxony and the federal state of Brandenburg provide funding for Domowina via the Foundation for the Sorbian People.

Foundation for the Sorbian People

The Foundation for the Sorbian People was established to enable the Sorbian people to organize their interests and concerns with a large degree of self-determination and with financial support from the federal government and the state governments of Brandenburg and Saxony. The foundation has its headquarters in the city of Bautzen, a branch office in Cottbus and regional offices.

The foundation's purpose is to preserve and promote the Sorbian language and culture as an expression of the Sorbian people's identity. Support is provided to

- the Sorbian National Ensemble (Sorbisches National-Ensemble GmbH) established in 1952;
- the German-Sorbian Folk Theatre (Deutsch-Sorbisches Volkstheater);
- the Sorbian Museum in Bautzen;
- the Sorbian/Wendish Museum in Cottbus;
- the Domowina publishing house, which publishes Sorbian books, newspapers and magazines, including the Upper Sorbian daily newspaper *Serbske Nowiny* and the Lower Sorbian weekly paper *Nowy casnik*;
- the Sorbian Institute in Bautzen, which conducts research on the Sorbian language, history and culture.

Bilingual school education

In the Sorbian settlement areas in Saxony and Brandenburg there are schools offering bilingual teaching of regular subjects (in Sorbian and German) and courses of Sorbian as a foreign language. In both federal states, there are several Sorbian kindergartens for younger children. The pan-state Sorbian Schools Association (Sorbischer Schulverein e.V.) has launched the WITAJ project (*witaj* means welcome in Sorbian) to promote the bilingual care and education of children in kindergartens and schools. The idea is that children growing up in a Sorbian environment should learn the Sorbian language not as a foreign language but like a second native language.



The “Easter riders” have preserved another Sorbian tradition.

Photo: © Thomas Kläber

The public service media also contribute to keeping the Sorbian culture alive. With more than 30 staff members, the broadcasting house Mitteldeutscher Rundfunk (MDR) produces a radio and TV programme in the Upper Sorbian language that is broadcast from the MDR studio in Bautzen. Radio Berlin-Brandenburg (RBB) broadcasts 11.5 hours of weekly radio programming in the Lower Sorbian language from the RBB studio in Cottbus.

LANGUAGE

Nearly 30,000 people speak Sorbian. There are two Sorbian languages, Lower Sorbian and Upper Sorbian. Lower Sorbian is in great danger of becoming extinct.

Today, the Lower Sorbian language is spoken in four rural districts in south-eastern Brandenburg. The Upper Sorbian language is spoken in four rural districts in north-eastern Saxony.

The written language is also divided in two: Upper Sorbian is based on the Bautzen dialect. It shares more similarities with the Czech and Slovak languages and is actively used by a greater number of speakers than the Lower Sorbian language. Lower Sorbian is based on the Cottbus dialect and has similarities with the Polish language. There are concerns that the number of active speakers of Lower Sorbian is not sufficient to keep the language permanently alive.

Sorbian belongs to the West Slavic family of languages. Both Upper and Lower Sorbian display the characteristics of this language group. However, there are some differences relative to the other West Slavic languages: For example, Sorbian retains a special grammatical form to refer to two items, in addition to the singular and plural (Upper Sorbian *dwaj hólcaj spěwataj* and Lower Sorbian *dwa gólca spiwatej*, “two boys are singing”, compared to Upper Sorbian *tři hólcy spěwaja* and Lower Sorbian *tři gólcy spiwaju*, “three boys are sing-

The Sorbian language daily newspaper *Serbske Nowiny* is published by the Domowina publishing house in Bautzen.

Photo: © Domowina Verlag



ing”). Sorbian vernacular has numerous dialects and local accents which differ at all levels of the language system.

First written records

Sorbian was first used as a written language during the Reformation; prior to that, very few written documents exist (the 12th-century Magdeburg Glossen and the Bautzen Bürgereid from around 1500). The first longer written documents in Sorbian were translations of religious texts. One of the oldest is the translation of the New Testament in the 16th century by Mikławš Jakubica, a manuscript with hymns (Gregorius 1593) and a translation of Luther’s Small Catechism (Warichius 1595). The first printed book in Sorbian was the Wendish Hymnal with a catechism by Albin Moller, dating from 1574.

Both federal states, Brandenburg and Saxony, are strongly committed to protecting and promoting the Sorbian language, not only in school education, cultural institutions and cultural events, but also in contacts with public authorities and courts as well as in the public sphere in general.

THE *Low German* REGIONAL LANGUAGE

*Low German (also known
as Platt or Plattdeutsch)
is spoken in northern Germany in
addition to High German,
mostly in the private sphere.*





Children at the Low German reading competition. Photo: © Michael Staudt

In Germany, Low German is recognized as a regional language as referred to in the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages. It differs from minority languages in that its speakers are not members of a national minority. Low German is at home in Bremen, Hamburg, Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania, Lower Saxony, Schleswig-Holstein and in northern Brandenburg, North Rhine-Westphalia and Saxony-Anhalt.

In 2007, the Institute for Low German conducted a representative survey which found that about 12 per cent of the population actively use Low German throughout the Low German language area. According to the survey, 2.6 million people considered themselves fluent or very fluent in Low German. While

As in many other public administrations, Low German is also spoken at the Higher Regional Court in Schleswig.

Photo: © Ulrich Perrey/dpa





Low German is alive, and also young musicians and their audience like it.

Photo: © Ostfriesische Landschaft/
Tüdelband

about 75 per cent of the population in northern Germany understand Low German, not all of them are able to speak the language.

High German is used as the first language in almost all areas of life. However, in many places – in rural areas more than in cities – Low German has survived as the second language. Low German is spoken by persons from all segments of the population, though much more by elderly than by young people, which means that the number of Low German speakers is decreasing. Today, Low German is used in particular among family and friends.

ORIGIN AND DEVELOPMENT

Low German developed from Old Saxon. During the age of the Hanseatic League it was an important language of trade. However, it has lost influence since then.

Plautdietsch

Low German has a special variant called Plautdietsch. The West Prussian vernacular emerged in the 16th and 17th century. Today, it is used all over the world – in Germany, Russia, Canada, the USA, and even in Latin America and the Caribbean. In Germany, most speakers of Plautdietsch are ethnic Germans who came from Russia in the 1990s.

Like Frisian and English, Low German is a North Sea Germanic language. The original Old Saxon was spoken in the tribal area of the Saxons, including parts of today's Lower Saxony and northern North Rhine-Westphalia.

Language of trade of the Hanseatic League

During the age of the Hanseatic League, from about 1230 to 1600, Low German was the common language in northern Germany and all along the North Sea and Baltic Sea coasts. From London to Bergen and Novgorod, merchants negotiated with their Russian and English counterparts in Low German. They not



The Holsten Gate in Lübeck was the Hanseatic League's symbol of power, and Low German was the language of trade from London to Novgorod.

Photo: © Getty Images

only spoke but also wrote in Low German, be it in courts, public administration or business. However, there is little literature in Low German from that time. With the decline of the Hanseatic League, from 1500 to 1630 High German displaced Low German as a written language in a wave moving from the south-east to the north-west. From then on, Low German was long limited to oral use and experienced a significant drop in its social prestige.

It was not until the mid-19th century that efforts began to reverse the decline of Low German and its negative image. Low German literature began to emerge and has continued to develop into the present day. The language once again lost ground in the decades following World War II, when many parents gave up speaking Low German with their children, even in rural areas. They thought that children speaking Low German would not sufficiently learn High German and therefore be disadvantaged at school and work. The last two decades have seen many efforts to increase the presence of the regional language in education. Several

hundred day-care centres teach Low German by singing, playing and using it in everyday activities. Some federal states have already made Low German an integral part of their syllabi and curricula.

SPECIAL CHARACTERISTICS

Low German is spoken in numerous dialects. They may differ so much that speakers cannot even understand one another.

There is no more a single Low German language than there is a single High German. The situation with Low German is so complex in particular because it does not have a standard written language. There are numerous dialects – with major differences in pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar and sentence structure – some of which are not even mutually intelligible.

Low German language confusion

A good illustration of the different Low German dialects is the translation of the sentence “The girls are talking.” In northern Lower Saxony, the Low German heartland, it is translated as *De Deerns snackt*; in East Frisia and Emsland it is *De Wichter praten*; in parts of Westphalia it is *De Luitens küert*; and in Western Pomerania it is *De Mäken spräken*. Roughly speaking, Low German can be divided into two larger branches, with the east-west dividing line starting in Lübeck and running to Magdeburg. The plural verb form in the present tense serves as the distinguishing feature: -(e)t west of the dividing line and -(e)n in the east. West Low German: *wi/ji/se loopt*; East Low German: *we/ji/se lopen*; High German: *wir laufen/ihr lauft/sie laufen* [we walk/you walk/they walk].

The association Ostfriesische Landschaft advertises Low German. Let's go: Man to!

Photo: © Cornelia Nath
Ostfriesische Landschaft



But it is the similarities which make Low German an autonomous language different from High German. The major difference is that unlike High German which emerged further south, Low German did not undergo what is known as the second sound shift in the 7th and 8th century. The dividing line of this sound shift runs from west to east, at approximately the latitude of Düsseldorf-Benrath, which is why it is called the Benrath line.

From Appel to Apfel

With the change of consonants, called sound shift, the southern West Germanic dialects became the Old High German language. The shift primarily affected the consonants p, t and k: Appel – Apfel (apple); eten – essen (eat); Eek – Eiche (oak). The sound shift also created differences in combinations of an s with l, m, n, p, t and w, as in the following verb pairs: slapen – schlafen (sleep); smieten – schmeißen (throw); snorken – schnarchen (snore); spelen – spielen (play); steken – stechen (stab) and swümmen – schwimmen (swim). Many languages underwent sound shifts over time. Researchers still argue about the actual causes.

While High and Low German share many common words, there are also quite a few unique Low German words such as *lütt* – small; *Deern* – girl; *Büx* – trousers. As regards Low German sentence structure, there is a clear tendency towards using High German patterns.

ORGANIZATIONS

The interests of Low German speakers in terms of language policy have been represented at federal level by the Bundesrat für Nedderdüütsch (Federal Council for Low German) since 2002.

The eight federal states concerned and, since 2008, the group of *Plautdietsch* speakers each have two delegates in the Council. The representatives are assigned through the regional units of the Bund Heimat und Umwelt in Deutschland and the Plautdietsch-Frind association. The Council has three expert groups: education and social affairs; culture and media; and justice and public administration. It is managed by the



In autumn 2012, the Ohnsorg Theater in Hamburg staged Anton Chekhov's play "Uncle Vanya" in Low German.

Photo: © Jutta Schwöbel

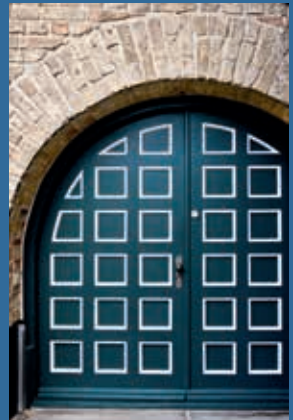
Institut für niederdeutsche Sprache (INS – Institute for the Low German Language). The INS is responsible for cultivating and promoting the Low German language, literature and culture. Its work focuses on documentation and information as well as on creating and maintaining a network and preserving and teaching Low German.

Annex



The European Centre for Minority Issues is housed in a historical building in the city centre of Flensburg.

Photo: © Christoph Oliver Schellhaus/European Centre for Minority Issues (ECMI)



I. INSTITUTIONS AND BODIES

1 Federal Government Commissioner for Matters Related to Ethnic German Resettlers and National Minorities Since November 2002 the Federal Government Commissioner for Matters Related to Ethnic German Resettlers has also been responsible for matters related to national minorities in Germany; his title has been modified accordingly. This step underscores the high priority the Federal Government gives to the protection of national minorities.

2 Consultative committees The consultative committees established at the Federal Ministry of the Interior on issues concerning the Danish minority, the Sorbian people, the Frisian ethnic group, the German Sinti and Roma and the Low German language group help the minorities maintain communication with the Federal Government and the German Bundestag. All five committees are chaired by the Federal Government Commissioner for Matters Related to Ethnic German Resettlers and National Minorities. According to their statutes, the committees are composed as follows:

Consultative Committee for Issues of the Danish Minority Additional members are the Federal Minister of the Interior and a State Secretary of the ministry, two members from each of the parliamentary groups of the German Bundestag, three members of the Danish minority in Germany, and one representative from the state of Schleswig-Holstein. Since 2014 the Secretariat for Minorities has been represented as a permanent guest.

- Consultative Committee for Issues of the Frisian Ethnic Group** Additional members are a representative from the Federal Ministry of the Interior; one member each from the following: Fräsche Rädj/Friesenrat Sektion Nord e.V., the Friisk Foriining, the Nordfriesischer Verein and the Seelter Bund; the director of the Nordfriisk Instituut; and one representative each from the states of Lower Saxony and Schleswig-Holstein. Members of the German Bundestag and representatives of other federal ministries are invited to attend the meetings. Since 2014 the Secretariat for Minorities has been represented as a permanent guest.
- Consultative Committee for Issues of the German Sinti and Roma** Additional members are one representative from the Federal Ministry of the Interior, one representative from the office of the Federal Government Commissioner for Culture and the Media, one representative from each of the parliamentary groups of the German Bundestag, one representative from each of the federal states, two representatives from the Central Council of German Sinti and Roma, two representatives from the Sinti Allianz Deutschland e.V., and one representative from the Secretariat for Minorities.
- Consultative Committee for Issues of the Sorbian People** Additional members are one representative from the Federal Ministry of the Interior, three members of the Sorbian people appointed by the Domowina umbrella organization, one representative from the Foundation for the Sorbian People, and one representative each from the governments of the state of Brandenburg and the Free State of Saxony. Members of the German Bundestag and representatives from other federal ministries are invited to attend the meetings. Since 2014 the Secretariat for Minorities has been represented as a permanent guest.

- Consultative Committee for Issues of the Low German Language Group** Additional members are one representative from the Federal Ministry of the Interior, four representatives from the Bundesrat für Niederdeutsch (Bundesrat für Nedderdüütsch) and one representative each from the states of Bremen, Brandenburg, Hamburg, Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania, Lower Saxony, North Rhine-Westphalia, Saxony-Anhalt and Schleswig-Holstein. Members of the German Bundestag and representatives from other federal ministries are invited to attend the meetings. Since 2014 the Secretariat for Minorities has been represented as a permanent guest.
- 3 Conferences of the Federal Government and the states with the minorities on the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities and on the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages (Implementing Conferences)** The conferences address the implementation of the Council of Europe Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities of 1 February 1995 and the Council of Europe European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages of 5 November 1992. Participants are the federal ministries dealing with the protection of national minorities as well as minority and regional languages, the responsible state authorities, representatives of the umbrella organizations of the minorities and language groups protected by the Convention and Charter and of their research institutions.
- 4 Meeting of federal and state officials on Low German** Since 2007 the representatives from the states of Bremen, Brandenburg, Hamburg, Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania, Lower Saxony, North Rhine-Westphalia, Saxony-Anhalt, Schleswig-Holstein and the Federal Government, and the Bundesrat für Niederdeutsch/Bundesrat für Nedderdüütsch have met annually to discuss different issues related to the dissemination and preservation of the Low German language.
- 5 Round Table on National Minorities at the German Bundestag** With the support of the chairperson of the Committee on Internal Affairs, this round table brings together Members of Parliament and representatives of the umbrella organizations of the national minorities for discussions several times a year.

6 Secretariat for Minorities In 2005, the Secretariat for Minorities, which is supported by the Federal Ministry of the Interior, was founded in Berlin as a secretariat for the associations of national minorities in Germany. Its mission is to facilitate the information exchange with the German Bundestag and the Federal Government. At the same time, the Secretariat for Minorities informs the minority associations about any relevant developments at federal level and does public relations work. The Secretariat also serves as a clearing house for the minorities and coordinates their papers.

7 European Centre for Minority Issues (ECMI) ECMI does practical research on potential ethnic conflicts and provides advice on minority issues in Europe. The foundation was established in 1996 by the governments of Denmark, Germany and Schleswig-Holstein and aims to help resolve ethnic tensions in Europe. This non-partisan and interdisciplinary institution has its headquarters in Flensburg and field offices in Kosovo and Georgia. The Centre cooperates with various governments, international organizations and other groups in Europe and supports the research community, the media and the public by providing information and analyses. Other focal activities of ECMI include the evaluation and development of legal standards, the representation of minorities in public and social offices and cultural problems of minorities. While the three governments cover the operating costs, the Centre seeks additional project funding. ECMI is managed by an Executive Board which consists of nine members from Denmark, Germany, the OSCE, the Council of Europe and the European Union.

8 Federal Union of European Nationalities (FUEN)

The Federal Union of European Nationalities (FUEN) founded in Versailles, France, in November 1949 is the largest umbrella organization of autochthonous, national minorities/ethnic groups in Europe. The organization currently represents 94 members from 32 European countries, including the national minorities in Germany and the German minorities in other European countries. The FUEN sees itself as the key civil society representative of these autochthonous, national minorities in Europe, and it represents the interests of this large group of citizens, mainly at European level, but also at national and regional level.

The FUEN has participatory status at the Council of Europe and consultative status at the United Nations as a recognized non-governmental organization (NGO). It finances its activities through contributions from its member organizations and state institutions and receives institutional support from Schleswig-Holstein and the Free State of Saxony, as well as from South Tyrol and the Danish state. The Federal Ministry of the Interior, the European Commission and other governmental and private funding agencies contribute project funding. The FUEN elects a president from its members. A secretary-general working in Flensburg assists the executive board.

Examples of FUEN's work include the website www.agdm.fuen.org about German minorities in Europe developed by the Working Group of German Minorities (AGDM); dialogue with members of the European Parliament; the project "Minorities Helping Minorities – Solidarity with the Roma" carried out together with Hungary and funded by the Robert Bosch Foundation and the Hermann Niermann Foundation; the project "RML2future" to promote multilingualism; and a football championship of minorities in Europe held every four years.

II. LEGAL BASIS

In Germany, the protection of minorities and languages is based on ample legal provisions.

General provisions European, German and international law includes provisions that protect all national minorities living in Germany and their languages as well as the regional language Low German. These general provisions do not distinguish between the individual groups.

1 European Union The Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union (EU), Article 21 (1), prohibits any discrimination based on language or membership of a national minority. In addition, in Article 22 the Union undertakes to respect cultural, religious and linguistic diversity.

Moreover, the Committee of the Regions reflects the importance that the EU and its member states attach to the individual regions. The Committee of the Regions is an EU institution providing advice to the Commission, the Council and the European Parliament. It gives regions and cities in the member states a voice in the EU's decision-making process. Although the Committee of the Regions is not specifically intended for minorities, they can bring their interests to bear in the Committee through their activities in their settlement areas.

In addition, the Council of the European Union has adopted several anti-discrimination directives, for example Directive 2000/43/EC on implementing the principle of equal treatment between persons irrespective of racial or ethnic origin. However, none of these directives expressly addresses discrimination based on language or membership of a national minority.

2 Basic Law The German constitution prohibits any form of discrimination because of language, homeland or origin (Article 3 (3), first sentence). Law-makers, courts and all levels of public administration must respect this rule.

3 Other federal laws The Federal Electoral Act and the Political Parties Act also include provisions to protect and promote national minorities.

3.1 Federal Electoral Act Parties of the national minorities are exempt from the five-percent threshold, according to which parties need to receive more than five per cent of the second votes or win a direct mandate in at least three constituencies in order to enter parliament (Section 6 (6), second sentence). The Federal Electoral Act also includes special provisions for the nomination of district candidates and state party lists (Section 20 (2), third sentence; Section 27 (1), fourth sentence).

3.2 Political Parties Act The federal Political Parties Act grants political parties of national minorities privileges in terms of government funding and collecting donations from abroad (Section 18 (3) and (4); Section 25 (2), first sentence, no. 1b).

4 International law At international level, the Council of Europe and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) are particularly active in addressing the concerns of national minorities in Europe.

4.1 Council of Europe To this end, the Council of Europe member states developed the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities and the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages.

4.1.1 Council of Europe Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities The Council of Europe member states started to draft the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities in 1993 and opened it for signature on 1 February 1995. The Convention, which entered into force in Germany in 1998, prohibits forced assimilation and all discrimination against persons due to their membership of a national minority. It also requires the member states to protect civil liberties and to take comprehensive measures to promote national minorities. In Germany, the Framework Convention has the status of federal law and therefore takes precedence over state legislation, for example. Out of the current 47 Council of Europe member states, 39 have ratified the Framework Convention and another four states have signed it (as of 14 August 2015).

Germany took an active role in drafting the Convention, in particular in working to make the implementation as efficient as possible, because making sure that mechanisms designed to ensure compliance with international law are effective is at least as important as entering into such obligations.

Within one year of the Convention's entry into force, the contracting states must provide the Council of Europe with comprehensive information about the measures taken to implement the Convention.

An Advisory Committee made up of independent experts assists the Council of Europe in its monitoring tasks. To this end it conducts site visits in the contracting states and prepares monitoring reports including recommendations for improvement.

4.1.2 The European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages

To protect European regional and minority languages, the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages was developed. It takes as its starting point the inalienable right to use one's regional or minority language in private and public life.

The Charter aims at protecting and promoting regional and minority languages traditionally spoken in a contracting state as an endangered part of the European cultural heritage. The measures required focus on education, particularly instruction in and with the language, and on the use of the regional or minority languages in the courts, government authorities, in broadcast and print media, at cultural events and institutions, and in economic and social life.

However, the Language Charter allows participating countries to select from alternative obligations in the above-mentioned areas of life, but each contracting state must apply at least 35 paragraphs or sections from a catalogue of measures including a certain number of compulsory measures to be chosen from a core area.

In a federal country, the state governments have the main responsibility for implementing the Language Charter. Before the Federal Republic of Germany signed the Charter, the federal states were informed about their possibility to commit themselves to implementing individual measures that take the different living conditions of the individual minorities and language groups into account. The obligations of the federal states vary depending on the minority and language group.

The Charter was opened for signature in Strasbourg on 5 November 1992, but did not enter into force until 1 May 1998 after achieving the five ratifications needed. The Federal Republic of Germany was one of the first signatories to the Charter on 5 November 1992. By an Act of 9 July 1998, the German Bundesrat, with the approval of the Bundesrat, ratified the Charter. It entered into force in Germany on 1 January 1999. Just like the Framework Convention, the Language Charter in Germany has the status of federal law taking precedence over subordinate law, including state legislation, and is to be applied as the more specific law overriding other federal laws. Out of the current 47 member states of the Council of Europe, 25 have ratified the Charter and another eight states have signed it (as of 14 August 2015).

The implementation of the Charter is monitored. As part of monitoring the implementation, within one year of its entry into force, the contracting states must provide the Secretary-General of the Council of Europe with full and detailed information on the measures taken to implement the Charter. Every three years thereafter, reports must be submitted to the Council of Europe.

A Council of Europe committee of independent experts conducts site visits in the contracting states to gain information and prepares monitoring reports that may contain recommendations for improvement.

4.2 Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe

In 1992 the OSCE established the post of High Commissioner for National Minorities. The task of the High Commissioner is to identify latent ethnic conflicts at an early stage and to take conflict prevention measures. The OSCE has not adopted any legally binding documents on the protection of minorities yet. However, in 1996 the member states agreed on a series of recommendations to protect and promote national minorities.

5 Minority-specific rules and measures

German and European legislation also provide for minority-specific rules and measures.

5.1 Danes The Schleswig-Holstein State Constitution recognizes that individuals have the right to identify themselves as members of a national minority (Article 5). It also puts the cultural autonomy and political participation of national minorities and ethnic groups under the protection of the federal state, the municipalities and associations of local authorities. Furthermore, Schleswig-Holstein commits itself to protecting and promoting the Danish minority, the Frisian ethnic group and the German Sinti and Roma. Article 8 of the constitution leaves it to the parents/guardians to decide whether their children should attend a school of a national minority.

Moreover, the Danish minority is afforded specific protection under the Bonn-Copenhagen Declarations. In 1955 Germany and Denmark made policy statements, in which Germany recognized the Danish minority living in Germany, and Denmark recognized the German minority living in North Schleswig on Danish territory. Both countries acknowledged the freedom of individuals to identify themselves as members of a national minority and reaffirmed the equality of all citizens. In another statement, Germany and Denmark agreed to financially support the respective minority in the German-Danish border area.

The Schleswig-Holstein electoral act grants the parties of the Danish minority the same rights as the federal law governing Bundestag elections. This means that parties of the Danish minority in Schleswig-Holstein are exempt from the five-per cent threshold, according to which parties need to receive more than five per cent of the second votes or win a direct mandate in at least three constituencies in order to enter parliament.

5.2 Frisians Frisians enjoy explicit protection under the Schleswig-Holstein State Constitution. In 2004, the Schleswig-Holstein state parliament adopted the Frisian Act to promote and protect the Frisian language. This Act recognizes the Frisian language and its free use, and guarantees the individual rights of the Frisians, such as bilingual signposting and the right to address administrative authorities in Frisian.

5.3 Sinti and Roma Thanks to the amendment of the Schleswig-Holstein State Constitution in November 2012, the German Sinti and Roma are also afforded explicit protection. Other federal states, such as Rhineland-Palatinate and Bremen, concluded framework agreements, while Baden-Württemberg concluded a state treaty.

5.4 Sorbs The Sorbian minority enjoys explicit protection under a protocol note on the Unification Treaty and under laws adopted by Brandenburg and Saxony, the federal states where this minority lives.

5.4.1 Protocol note on the Unification Treaty On the path to German unity, the Federal Republic of Germany and the German Democratic Republic concluded the Unification Treaty on 31 August 1990 which entered into force on 29 September 1990. A protocol note explicitly referred to the special rights of the Sorbian people. Both contracting parties recognized the right of individuals to identify themselves as members of a national minority and promised to preserve and develop the Sorbian culture and traditions and to preserve and cultivate the Sorbian language in public life (note (no. 14) on Article 35 of the Unification Treaty).

5.4.2 Brandenburg Article 25 of the Brandenburg State Constitution guarantees Sorbs/Wends the right to protect, preserve and cultivate their national identity, their traditional settlement area, their cultural autonomy and their right to effective political participation. Furthermore, Brandenburg commits itself to protecting and promoting the Sorbian/Wendish language and culture.

In 2014, Brandenburg revised the Act on the Specification of the Rights of the Sorbs/Wends of the state of Brandenburg adopted in 1994. The act grants the freedom to declare oneself a member of the national minority, recognition of the Sorbs/Wends as part of the state's population having equal rights and protection of their settlement area. Based on the act, the Council for Sorbian/Wendish Affairs directly elected by the Sorbs/Wends, the Commissioner of the State Government for Sorbian/Wendish Affairs and the local Commissioners for the Sorbian/Wendish Affairs in the minority's settlement area have been established in Brandenburg. Ultimately, the act protects and promotes the Sorbian/Wendish language and culture.

The Brandenburg electoral act grants the parties of the national minorities the same rights as the federal law governing Bundestag elections. This means that parties of the national minority of Sorbs/Wends are exempt from the five-per cent threshold, according to which parties need to receive more than five per cent of the second votes or win a direct mandate in at least three constituencies in order to enter parliament.

5.4.3 Saxony Sorbs are granted rights also in Saxony's constitution. For example, they are allowed to use Sorbian colours and coats of arms in addition to the state's colours and coats of arms (Article 2). In Article 5 of its constitution, Saxony recognizes the right to live in one's traditional homeland and undertakes to guarantee and protect the right of national and ethnic minorities of German nationality to preserve their identity and cultivate their language, religion, culture and tradition. The Sorbian settlement area is protected and Sorbs are recognized as part of the nation's population (Article 6).

The Act on the Sorbs' Rights in the Free State of Saxony passed by the Saxon parliament in 1999 governs the rights of the Sorbs in a similar way to the act in Brandenburg. The Saxon act also prescribes a Council for Sorbian Affairs and allows Sorbs to have their interests represented at all levels of government by an umbrella organization of Sorbian associations. Furthermore, the Saxon state government is required to submit a report on the situation of the Sorbian people in Saxony to the Saxon state parliament at least once per legislative period.

III. ADDRESSES

Associations and interest groups

Danes Südschleswigscher Verein –
Sydslesvigsk Forening – SSF
(South Schleswig Association)
Norderstraße 76
24939 Flensburg
<http://syfo.de>

Südschleswigscher Wählerverband (SSW) –
Sydslesvigsk Vælgerforening
(South Schleswig Voters' Association)
Schiffbrücke 42
24939 Flensburg
www.ssw.de

Frisians – North Frisians Friesenrat Sektion Nord e. V. – Frasche Rädj
(Frisian Council, Section North)
Friisk Hüs
Süderstraße 6
25821 Bredstedt
www.friesenrat.de

Nordfriesischer Verein (North Frisian Association)
Friisk Hüs
Süderstraße 6
25821 Bredstedt
www.nf-verein.de

- Frisians – North Frisians** Friesischer Verein – Friisk Foriining
(Frisian Association)
Friisk Hüs
Süderstraße 6
25821 Bredstedt
www.friiske.de
- Nordfriesisches Institut – Nordfriisk Instituut
(North Frisian Institute)
Süderstraße 30
25821 Bredstedt
www.nordfriiskinstituut.de
- Frisians – East Frisians** Ostfriesische Landschaft
– Körperschaft des öffentlichen Rechts –
Georgswall 1 – 5
26603 Aurich
www.ostfriesischelandschaft.de
- Frisians – Saterland
Frisians** Heimatverein Saterland – Seelter Buund
Scharreler Damm 3
26169 Friesoythe

Sinti and Roma Zentralrat Deutscher Sinti und Roma e. V.
(Central Council of German Sinti and Roma)
Bremeneckgasse 2
69117 Heidelberg
www.sintiundroma.de

Dokumentations- und Kulturzentrum
Deutscher Sinti und Roma
(Documentation and Cultural Centre of
German Sinti and Roma)
Bremeneckgasse 2
69117 Heidelberg
www.sintiundroma.de

Sinti Allianz Deutschland e. V.
(Sinti Alliance Germany)
Hagenweg 2
Haus der Kulturen
37081 Göttingen
www.sintiallianz.de

Sorbs Domowina – Bund Lausitzer Sorben e. V.
(Federation of Lusatian Sorbs)
Postplatz 2
02625 Bautzen
www.domowina.sorben.com

Sorbisches Institut – Serbski Institut
(Sorbian Institute)
Bahnhofstraße 6
02625 Bautzen
www.serbski-institut.de

Stiftung für das sorbische Volk
(Foundation for the Sorbian People)
Postplatz 2
02625 Bautzen
www.stiftung.sorben.com

Low German Bundesrat für Niederdeutsch –
Bundesraat för Nedderdüütsch
(Federal Council for Low German)
Institut für niederdeutsche Sprache
(Institute for the Low German Language)
Schnoor 41 – 43
28195 Bremen
www.bundesraat-nd.de

INS – Institut für niederdeutsche Sprache
(Institute for the Low German Language)
Schnoor 41 – 43
28195 Bremen
www.ins-bremen.de

Other institutions Minderheitensekretariat der
vier autochthonen Minderheiten Deutschlands
(Minority Council of the four autochthonous
minorities in Germany)
Bundeshaus
Bundesallee 216 – 218
10719 Berlin
www.minderheitensekretariat.de

European Centre for Minority Issues – ECMI
Schiffbrücke 12
24939 Flensburg
www.ecmi.de

Europäisches Büro für Sprachminderheiten
Deutschland
(European Bureau for Lesser Used Languages, EBLUL)
Committee for regional and minority languages
Scharreler Damm 11
26683 Saterland

Föderalistische Union
Europäischer Volksgruppen – FUEV
(Federal Union of European Nationalities – FUEN)
Schiffbrücke 41
24939 Flensburg
www.fuen.org

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