



The German Minority in Denmark

North of the Danish-German Border in North Schleswig live 15.000 people who belong to the German minority. The German minority in North Schleswig maintains its own schools and a wide spectrum of social and cultural institutions and serves as a vital bridge between the German and Danish cultures.

Both Germans and Danes lived in harmony until the rise of nationalism in the middle of the 19th century. Two wars - the one of 1848-1850, which Denmark won, and that of 1864, which Denmark lost to Prussia and Austria - did not solve the national conflicts but resulted in Schleswig becoming a Prussian province.

The outcome of the World War I opened up the prospect of a solution to of the

Schleswig question: Under the terms of the *Treaty of Versailles*, and applying the right of national self-determination, two plebiscites were held in Schleswig in 1920. In the southern part the vote in each community was counted separately, while in the northern part, all votes were counted together – en-bloc.

The result in the northern zone was 75 % for Denmark, 25 % for Germany, and south of the border, the result was 75 % for Germany and 25 % for Denmark, but with no Danish majority in any community.

As a result the border between the two zones became the national border between Denmark and Germany.

Another consequence was the creation of the German minority in Denmark and the Danish minority in Germany. But the

border was not yet a peaceful one: the Germans felt that the en-bloc voting procedure had been unfair and demanded a re-drawing of the border.

When Hitler came into power the German minority hoped for a revision of the border, but in the end got disappointed. The occupation of Denmark by German troops on April 9th, 1940 further poisoned relations between Germans and Danes in the border region.

World War II was a disaster for the German minority: 752 volunteers died in the war, all buildings - schools and kindergartens etc. – were confiscated and some 3.000 German minority men were jailed for cooperating with the German occupation.

But 1945 also marked a new, democratic beginning for the German minority with the *Declaration of Loyalty*. In it the German minority officially declared their loyalty toward the Danish constitution and acknowledged the border of 1920. By the Declaration of Loyalty the German minority became an accepted part of Danish society.

The Bonn-Copenhagen Declarations of 1955 were a further step towards normality. The declarations assured the rights of the minorities north and south of the border and stated the freedom to choose their nationality.

Highlights of recent history have been the visits of Her Majesty Queen Margrethe II in 1986 and of German president Richard von Weizsäcker in 1989, as well

as the joint visits to the German minority in North Schleswig of Danish queen Margrethe II and German president Roman Herzog in 1998.

All of these visits were important steps toward complete equality and demonstrated the good relations in the Danish-German border region.

Organisation(s)

Minority members regard themselves as Danish citizens with a German identity and strong ties to the region of North Schleswig. At the same time, the minority sees itself as a bridge between Danes and Germans.

The Bund Deutscher Nordschleswiger is the German minority's umbrella organisation. Its aim is to represent the interests of the minority and promote German language and culture in Nordschleswig. The head office of the BDN is the general secretariat in Aabenraa/Apenrade.

The minority is in close contact with the Danish parliament and government through its secretariat in Copenhagen.



The German minority's symbol shows the two Schleswig lions in the traditional blue and yellow colours and a bridge as a sign of the minority's function as a bridge between the German and Danish cultures and languages.

Kindergartens and schools

Kindergartens and schools are central institutions of the German minority. 23 pre-schools, 16 schools and 1 grammar school play an important role in teaching German language and culture, but also Danish is part of the curriculum so that the children may feel at home on both sides of the border. The final exams may

be used to study in both Germany and Denmark.



The Central Library at Aabenraa/Apenrade, one branch each at *Haderslev/Hadersleben*, *Sønderborg/Sonderburg*, *Tønder/Tondern* and *Tinglev/Tingleff*, two mobile libraries, and 15 school libraries - 23 German libraries - provide 230.000 media units, including books, magazines, games, recordings, and DVDs for 8.000 users.

Volunteer work

Volunteer work is essential for the German minority. Sports and leisure activities are offered by a wide range of groups that are part of the youth association *Jugendverband*. The *Jugendverband* is responsible for the yearly *Knivsbergfest*, the traditional summer gathering of the German minority.

The Knivsberg, highest point in Nordschleswig, also the location of the *Jugendhof*, the conference centre of the German minority, which especially provides youth activities, such as dance, sports and music.

Rowing is a popular sport among the German minority, and the six local rowing club houses also function as their local meeting places.

Religion

Members of the German minority can attend church services in German. Five German ministries in the rural parishes and four in the cities are responsible for the German Lutherans. The ministers share the church buildings with the Danish population.

Political representation

The German minority's political party is the *Schleswigsche Partei*, which also functions as an independent, regional party.

At the local elections in 2005 five representatives of the *Schleswigsche Partei* were voted in: two in Aabenraa/Apenrade, and one each in *Sønderborg/Sonderburg* and *Tønder/Tondern*, and a mandate without the right to vote in *Haderslev/Hadersleben*.

The latter resulted from a special rule that gives the party a voice but not a vote in the local council, if the *Schleswigsche Partei* achieves at least 25 % of the votes of a normal mandate. *Junge SPitzen* is the political youth organization of the German minority.

History & museums

History looms large wherever you are in Nordschleswig, in the German minority as well.

The *Archive/Institute for Historical Research* manages the archives of the German minority and performs related historical research.

The *Heimatkundliche Arbeitsgemeinschaft* is an association committed to the study of local and regional history through excursions, lectures and publications.

In *Sønderborg/Sonderburg* you may visit the German museum with its collection on German history in Nordschleswig and in *Aabenraa/Apenrade*, the German school museum.

Contacts in Denmark and Germany

Germany the federal state of Schleswig-Holstein lend moral and financial support to the German minority.

All parties represented in the national and regional parliaments are members of a committee responsible for the border region and the German minority.

The Danish parliament has a similar committee chaired by the minister of the interior, where matters concerning the German minority are discussed. Cross border cooperation between Denmark and Germany has always been very important for the German minority and has therefore been promoted.

International cooperation

The cooperation with the other minorities of the region has in recent years become an important task. The German minority supports the process of European integration and believes in a Europe united in diversity.

Minority issues have regained prominence particularly since the democratic revolutions in Europe following 1989. The German minority feels an obligation to help solve or prevent conflicts wherever possible and does this through the *Federal Union of European Nationalities (FUEN)*, *YEN (Youth of European Nationalities)* and the *European Bureau for Lesser-Used Languages (EBLUL)*.



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More information: www.nordschleswig.dk