



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 first from 1848 - 1850, which Denmark won, the second in 1864, which Denmark lost to Prussia and Austria - did not solve the national conflicts but resulted in Schleswig becoming a Prussian province and the creation of a small

Danish nation state.

The outcome of World War I opened 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, **plebiscites** were held in Schleswig in 1920.

In the northern zone 75 % voted for Denmark, 25 % for Germany, and south of the border, the result was 80 % for Germany and 20 % for Denmark. As a result, the border between the two zones became the national border between Denmark and Germany. Another result was the creation of the German minority in Denmark and the Danish minority in Germany.

However, the border was not yet a peaceful one: the Germans felt that the en-bloc voting procedure had been unfair and demanded a redrawing of the border. When Hitler came into power, the German minority hoped for a revision of the border. The occupation of Denmark by German troops from 1940 - 1945 further poisoned relations between Germans and Danes.

The year 1945 marked a turning point and 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 acknowledged 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 freedom to choose their nationality and were important steps toward complete equality.

The Declarations created the foundation for the **minority model** of the border region. It created a framework in which the intangible cultural heritage of minorities and majorities could flourish and contribute to the cultural diversity of the region.



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

Organization(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 considers itself as a bridge between Danes and Germans.

The **Bund Deutscher Nordschleswiger** is the German minority's umbrella organization. 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 Co-

penhagen.

Activities

Kindergartens and schools are central institutions of the German minority. 15 kindergartens, 12 schools and 1 grammar school with 1.800 students play an important role in teaching German language and culture. Danish is part of the curriculum, and the students can use the final exams to study in both Germany and Denmark.

The central library at Aabenraa/Apenrade and branches in *Haderslev/Hadersleben*, *Sønderborg/Sonderburg*, *Tønder/Tondern* and *Tinglev/Tingleff* and two mobile libraries provide 230.000 media units, including books, magazines,

games, recordings for 8.000 users.

Der Nordschleswiger is the daily of and for the German minority All articles are free available on nordschleswiger.dk.

Volunteer work is essential for the German minority, and a wide range of organization offer Sports and leisure activities.

The *Knivsberg* is not only the highest point in Nordschleswig but also the location of the *Jugendhof*, the conference center of the German minority, which especially provides youth activities, such dance, sports and music. The area is the setting for the yearly *Knivsbergfest*, the traditional summer gathering of the German minority.

Rowing is a popular sport among the German minority, and the six

local rowing clubhouses function as their local meeting places.

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 elections in 2021, a total

ten representatives of the *Schleswigsche Partei* were elected for the four local councils and in Tønder/Tondern the mayor is part of the German minority.



Royal visit in July of 2008 His Royal Highness the Crown Prince and Her Royal Highness Crown Princess Mary Elizabeth with the chairman of the German minority, Hinrich Jürgensen.



History & museum

History looms large wherever you are in Nordschleswig, in the German minority as well. In *Sønderborg/Sonderburg* you may visit the German museum which was reopened after an extensive renovation in August 2020.



Denmark and Germany

Germany, the federal state of Schleswig-Holstein and Denmark support the German minority financially.

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 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

On an international level, the German-Danish **minority model** is recognized as such throughout Europe today. Therefore, it is no coincidence that Flensburg is the seat of several international minority institutions, including the *FUEN* (the European minority organization) and the *European Centre for Minority Issues (ECMI)*.

The German minority was a founding member of the *Federal Union of European Nationalities (FUEN)* in 1949. With more than 100 member organizations in 35 European countries, FUEN is the largest umbrella organization of the autochthonous, national minorities / ethnic groups in Europe. Working within the FUEN is crucial for both minorities.

Every year groups – e.g. from the Ukraine, the Baltic countries, the Western Balkans and Israel - visit the German-Danish border region to exchange good practice examples and ideas on minority work in border regions.

Young people work together in the Youth of European Ethnic Groups (YEN) and the young people from the minorities of the borderland have taken on responsible positions there over the years and play important role in their minority organizations.

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