

**Twenty-third Session  
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**Item 16 of the Provisional Agenda :  
Activities relating to the Working Group on the  
Promotion of Indigenous and Minority Group Names**

**Status Report on the Promotion of Minority and Indigenous Geographical Names  
in the Federal Republic of Germany**

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## **Status Report on the Promotion of Minority and Indigenous Geographical Names in the Federal Republic of Germany**

The Federal Republic of Germany has signed two Conventions of the European Council on the Protection of Minorities (see Working Paper 42, Twenty-Second Session, New York, 20-29 April 2004):

- Framework Convention of the European Council for the Protection of National Minorities  
(in Germany in force since 01 February 1998)
- European Charter for Regional and Minority Languages  
(in Germany in force since 17 January 1998)

In the sense of the European Charter of regional or minority languages the following minority languages must be enumerated as protected and promoted languages within the territory of the Federal Republic of Germany:

- Danish in the Danish language area in the Land (state) Schleswig-Holstein,
- Upper Sorbian in the upper Sorbian language area in the Freistaat Sachsen,
- Lower Sorbian in the lower Sorbian language area in the Land Brandenburg,
- North Frisian in the north Frisian language area in the Land Schleswig-Holstein,
- Saterfrisian in the Saterfrisian language area in the Land Niedersachsen,
- Romany, the language of the Sinti and Roma, who are mostly living in the conurbations.

Against the background of general usage of geographical names in Germany the federal structure of this country must be taken into account, which means that any rule or provision on the use of standardized geographical names in minority and regional languages are within the competence of the Länder (states) of the Federal Republic of Germany.

In the Land Brandenburg the usage of the lower Sorbian language is regulated by the Sorben-Gesetz dated 1994. By this law the Sorbian language and culture are protected and promoted and in the lower Sorbian language area the public buildings, streets and places have to be named in a bilingual way. Official maps of the area are showing increasingly bilingual names.

In the Freistaat Sachsen the usage of the upper Sorbian language – inclusive its geographical names – is regulated by the Sächsisches Sorben-Gesetz dated 1999. Beside the protection and promotion of the upper Sorbian language and culture in the upper Sorbian language area the bilingual naming of features like public buildings, streets, places etc. is regulated. The text of this law also involves a list of bilingual place names in the upper Sorbian area. Official maps of the area are showing increasingly bilingual names.

In the Land Schleswig-Holstein the usage of the north Frisian language is regulated by the Friesisch-Gesetz dated 2004. Communes are now authorized to add the Frisian place name to the

German one on the road signs. In official registers or gazetteers, however, the Frisian place names are not yet considered. On the other hand several publishing houses are practising to add Frisian place names to the German names in their cartographic products and dictionaries.

Usage of geographical names in minority languages in schoolbooks and atlases:

In Germany the education system is within the competence of the Länder (states). The amalgamation of the ministries responsible for education and cultural affairs in the Länder is the Ständige Konferenz der Kultusminister der Länder in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland (KMK, Standing conference of the ministers of education and cultural affairs of the Länder in the Federal Republic of Germany). This body deals with educational and cultural affairs which are all-embracing over the Länder. For usage of geographical names in minority languages in schoolbooks and atlases the KMK has passed two resolutions:

- Bilingual geographical names in atlases and cartographical materials in the area of the Sorbs (2000),
- Bilingual geographical names in atlases and cartographical materials in the area of the Frisians (2004).

These resolutions lay down that in the above mentioned areas an existing geographical name in the minority language has to be added to the German name in atlases and cartographical materials for schools (if there is enough space).