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**IMPLEMENTATION OF RESOLUTIONS AND THE AIM AND
FUNCTIONS OF THE GROUP OF EXPERTS**

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

With reference to Resolution No.1 (“Promotion of minority and indigenous geographical names”) of the Eighth United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names held in Berlin in August 2002, an interim report on existing recommendations and guidelines for the handling of such names is here submitted by the Ständiger Ausschuss für geographische Namen (StAGN).

1. In the fourth edition of the “Toponymic guidelines for map and other editors Federal Republic of Germany” reference was made to the previous regulations on the protection and observance of the geographical names in multilingual areas as well as on dialects, which essentially applied to the minority languages Sorbian and Danish. This document was submitted to the Eighth United Conference of the United Nations on the Standardisation of Geographical Names. Moreover, on the occasion of this Conference participants were offered the opportunity of getting more information on practical use of Sorbian names in everyday life through a technical excursion to the areas of settlement of the Sorbs in the Land (state) Brandenburg, and also in the Freistaat Sachsen (Free State of Saxony).

2. The Federal Republic of Germany has signed two Conventions of the European Council on the Protection of Minorities:

2.1 Framework Convention of the European Council on the Protection of National Minorities

The European Council’s Framework Convention on the protection of national minorities was ratified by the Federal Republic on 10 September 1997 and entered into force on 01 February 1998.

The European Council’s Framework Convention for the protection of national minorities includes basic principles and provisions of protection of national minorities, which are binding under international law. It is the first convention that obliges the states involved to take appropriate measures of protection and promotion in the field of national minorities, thus constituting an important contribution to the preservation of peace, stability and democratic security.

A first report by the Federal Republic of Germany was presented on 24 February 2000 to the Advisory Committee for the Framework Convention on the protection of national minorities (ACFC) of the European Council.

2.2 European Charter of the Regional and Minority Languages

On 9 July 1998 the “Law on the European Charter of the Regional or Minority Languages of the European Council of 5 November 1992” was passed by the German Bundestag (Federal Parliament) and promulgated on 16 July 1998 in the Federal Law Gazette. On 16 September 1998 the instrument of ratification was deposited with the European Council. The Law entered into force in Germany on 01 January 1999.

By this charter regional and minority languages traditionally spoken in a contracting state are protected and promoted as a threatened aspect of the European Cultural Heritage. On the one hand the right is protected to use both in the private sphere and in public a regional or minority language, and on the other hand the charter comprises obligations for the states concerned to provide for and preserve opportunities, to the benefit of the relevant language communities, of making use of their respective regional or minority languages.

A first report on the policy pursued and measures taken in accordance with this charter was submitted by Germany also in 2000. Further reports of this kind shall be addressed at three-year intervals to the Secretary-General of the European Council.

In Germany, a supplementary second law to this charter has reached the stage of a draft form.

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

Minority languages:

- 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,
- Romanes, the language of the Sinti and Roma, in Germany, particularly in the Land Hessen.

Regional languages:

- Low German in the Freie Hansestadt Bremen, in the Freie und Hansestadt Hamburg, in the Länder Mecklenburg -Vorpommern, Niedersachsen, Schleswig-Holstein, Brandenburg, Nordrhein-Westfalen and Sachsen-Anhalt.

4. In Germany are considered as national minorities those segments of the population that meet the following criteria:

- their members are German citizens,
- they differ from the population majority by their own language, culture and history, which means have their own identity,
- they want to preserve this identity,
- they have traditionally been indigenous to Germany,
- they live here in their ancestral areas of settlement.

Dialects of the official language(s) and languages of immigrants do not belong to the minority languages within the meaning of the above mentioned law.

5. In Germany, these language areas have both only a small extent and a small number of members, and no statistical data according to ethnic affiliation are collected. The following data are therefore based on estimations.

The Sorbian people is presently estimated at around 60,000 members. The Danish minority is rated at ca 50,000 persons. Frisian is considered to be spoken by about 50,000 to 60,000 persons. In the Lower Saxon part of East Frisia the East Frisian language has become extinct. Saterfrisian is spoken only by a "Samtgemeinde" (administrative union/group of neighbouring communes) Saterland comprising four villages of about 20,000 inhabitants. The number of Sinti and Roma living in Germany is presently estimated at ca 70,000 who are mostly spread in the Land (state) Hessen. There is no information available concerning the number of persons speaking the regional language Low German.

6. 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 fall within the competence of the Länder (states) of the Federal Republic of Germany.