

Region of Southern Denmark
Haderslev Kommune
Kolding Kommune
Sønderborg Kommune
Tønder Kommune
Vejen Kommune
Aabenraa Kommune

The Minister
Holmens Kanal 22
DK-1060 København K

Tlf. 3392 9300
Fax. 3393 2518
E-mail ism@ism.dk
www.ism.dk

Dear Sirs,

Letter regarding the German minority in South Jutland

K O P I

25 November 2009

J.nr. 2009-7197

For many years, the German minority and the Danish majority have lived side by side in the border country enjoying mutual respect and beneficial cooperation. This is a strong foundation for a continued positive co-existence in the area.

The Local Government Reform has changed the local and regional borders which has also affected the German minority. As part of the reform a number of specific arrangements were made for the minority in terms of political representation in the municipalities of Aabenraa, Haderslev, Sønderborg and Tønder.

The new local and regional borders resulting from the Local Government Reform and the abolition of the County of Sønderjylland also entailed that the part of South Jutland that the minority considers its homeland is no longer reflected in the administrative division of the area.

For this reason the minority has requested clarification from the Government regarding the historic and geographic homeland of the minority.

Today, I have therefore sent the enclosed letter to the German minority. In the letter, the Danish Government confirms that the German minority in Denmark traditionally has lived in South Jutland. The most part of the minority lives in the border area in the southern and eastern part of South Jutland and the rest lives in an area that constituted the former County of Sønderjylland.

In its letter to the German minority the Danish Government acknowledges that the new borders in connection with the Local Government Reform do not change the homeland of the minority, nor have they any influence on the Government's definition of the application of the Framework Convention and the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages of the Council of Europe.

With this letter to the Region of Southern Denmark and the municipalities in the former County of Sønderjylland I wish to emphasize that the Local Government Reform does not change the homeland of the minority and the application of the conventions mentioned.

As the letter indicates, the Danish Government has, in accordance with the wishes of the minority, no plans to expand the specific arrangements that the minority has regarding representation in the municipalities of Haderslev, Sønderborg, Tønder og Aabenraa to include other municipalities.

I would also like to take this opportunity to inform the Region of Southern Denmark and the municipalities in the former County of Sønderjylland of the specific arrangements that apply in cases regarding the German minority.

The basic rights of the German minority, such as equal justice under the law, freedom of assembly, freedom of association, freedom of religion etc. are protected by the general provisions of the Danish Constitution and other legislation.

In addition, the Bonn-Copenhagen Declarations from 1955 include a number of individual and general rights that apply to the Danish minority in South Schleswig and the German minority in South Jutland. These declarations still constitute the framework for the good cooperation on both sides of the border region.

In addition to the Danish Constitution, general legislation and the Bonn-Copenhagen Declarations, the Framework Convention of the Council of Europe for the Protection of National Minorities and the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages apply to cases that concern the German minority.

Every three to five years, Denmark prepares government reports on the Framework Convention of the Council of Europe for the protection of National Minority and application of the European Charter on Regional or Minority Languages in Denmark. These reports provide a good picture of the application of the Framework Convention and the Charter. Denmark has up till now submitted two reports in accordance with both the convention and the Charter and submission of a third report is expected in April of 2010.

All the mentioned legal instruments and the government reports are available on the website of the Ministry of the Interior and Social Affairs and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

With this letter I would like to contribute to ensuring a continued positive development of the interaction between the German minority and the Danish majority through dialogues and mutual understanding and maintenance and further development of the inter-dependence, which has become an example to the rest of Europe, to the benefit of everyone involved.

Yours sincerely,

Karen Ellemann