

MEMORANDUM

concerning the future survival of the Sorbian people in the Federal Republic of Germany

During their 1,400-year history the Lusatian Sorbs have had to endure social exclusion and prohibition by nationalist and chauvinistic forces as well as the consequences of an extensive mining policy, which has destroyed over a hundred villages since 1924. Last but not least they survived the take-over by the 'real existing' socialism of the GDR by adopting a position between conformity and resistance. Their numbers have steadily decreased as a result of assimilation and Germanization.

New opportunities have opened up as a result of German reunification and the expansion of the European Union. The Sorbs are recognized by the Federal Republic as an autochthonous ethnic group and have a right to protection and support for their identity.

However, the continued survival of the Sorbian language with its two separate western Slavonic literary languages is threatened and Sorbian culture, which has been able to develop since the Reformation into a sophisticated advanced culture, is endangered in a free, democratic Germany. The background to this situation is a progressive under-funding of the Foundation for the Sorbian People as a result of a reduction in financial support by the Federal Government. An unresolved argument between central government and the states of Saxony and Brandenburg, which has gone on for years, is undermining German policy towards this minority group. It has so far prevented agreement being reached on a new financing arrangement, which was supposed to come into force in January 2008.

The Foundation for the Sorbian People was set up jointly in 1991 by the Federal Government, Saxony and Brandenburg to preserve the unique Sorbian cultural, educational and academic structures and to support work on necessary projects. It was designed to enable Sorbian art, culture and other traditions to be developed and presented, and thereby strengthen the ability of Sorbs and Germans to live in peace alongside each other.

The three contractual partners have always expressed their desire in public to secure the financial support for the Sorbian language and culture, the last occasion was on the 15th anniversary of the Foundation in 2006. Now, at the

beginning of 2008, despite all these expressions of sympathy, however, the professional organizations and registered societies of the Sorbs are faced with a dilemma. A decline in funding is endangering the execution of the most essential linguistic, cultural and academic tasks, and with it the future of the Sorbian people. The Foundation for the Sorbian People has nowhere near the necessary funds for 2008 at its disposal (it would need at least 16.4 million euros and an annual adjustment for inflation) in order to fulfil its aims.

It is difficult to understand that a liberal-minded country like the Federal Republic, which has supported and agreed to implement all the European standards for the rights of minorities, finds itself so overburdened by its financial support of the Sorbian people.

The remaining centres of a Sorbian identity, its cultural and academic institutions, its societies and supporters therefore call on those responsible in the Federal Republic and the states of Saxony and Brandenburg to guarantee the activities of the Foundation for the Sorbian People by granting it appropriate, long-term financial support, which also includes an annual allowance for inflation.

We call on German and international public opinion to press the Federal Government to implement a solution, which also allows the Foundation to undertake its work in the future for the good of this autochthonous minority in Lusatia.

In addition we expect the Federal Government and the German parliament, the state governments and parliaments in Dresden and Potsdam to clarify swiftly who is ultimately responsible for the protection and financial support of the Sorbs in Germany. We urge those who bear the political responsibility to recognize once and for all that support for autochthonous national minorities cannot be reduced to purely cultural support, thereby making it the sole responsibility of the individual states. It is rather a responsibility of the Federal state as a whole, as it encompasses all areas of life.

Further closures of Sorbian or German-Sorbian educational, cultural and academic institutions would condemn Sorbian life, which was once persecuted and suppressed for being inferior and lacking in culture, to gradual decline and its ultimate demise.

Bautzen, February 2008

Jan Nuck,

Chair of the Domowina -Association of the Lusatian Sorbs e. V.

Benedikt Dyrlich,

Chair of the Association of Sorbian Artists e. V.

Ludmila Budarjowa,

Chair of the Sorbian School Association e. V.

Martin Wirth,

Chair of the Sorbian Protestant Association e. V.

Wito Sääpan,

Chair of the Cyrill-Methodius-Association e. V.

Maria Matschie,

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Prof. Dr. Dietrich Scholze,

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