

# Sorbian in Germany

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## 1. Introduction

*There is no dat for this topic.*

## 2. The language in the country

### 2.1. General information on the language community

*There is no dat for this topic.*

### 2.2. Geographical and language background

Sorbian is spoken in Upper and Lower Lusatia in the German *Länder* of Saxony and Brandenburg. The main areas of diffusion are east of the town of Kamenz around the towns of Bautzen, Hoyerswerda, Weißwasser, Spremberg and Cottbus. Since Germany is a federal republic, both the German *Länder* concerned play a major part in the

preservation of the Sorbian language and culture. This has been the case, however, only since the reunification of Germany in 1990. Before that, responsibility lay with the Party (SED) of the German Democratic Republic.

Sorbian is also popularly referred to as Wendish and is divided into written Upper Sorbian and Lower Sorbian. It is from the Indo-European (Indo-Germanic) language family, belonging to the Western branch of the Slavic subgroup. Because of the German-speaking environment, numerous Germanisms have entered Sorbian vocabulary and syntax. The main dialects are the Bautzen, Kamenz and Cottbus dialects. The language is written in the Roman alphabet and diacritical marks are used in the spelling. The alphabet can be divided into Upper Sorbian and Lower Sorbian.

According to the last census in 1981, some 489 000 people live in the Sorbian-speaking area. Resettlement after the Second World War led to a high level of immigration from non-Sorbian-speaking areas. Between 1971 and 1981 there was a further increase of 54 000 immigrants as a result of the newly established industries in the area. The brown coal and energy industries in particular were expanded by the former GDR. The increase in the German-speaking population caused the number of Sorbian speakers to decline from some 30% to 10% of the total population, resulting in a reduction in the use of the Sorbian language in industrial enterprises and to a decline in the prestige of Sorbian in communication outside the family. According to our sources, there was a slight decline in the population in 1990/91. The reasons for the departure of the population were the economic decline, the absence of employment opportunities and the reduction in the number of jobs in agriculture following the reunification of Germany. According to the 1981 census, 10.7% of the population lived in rural areas, 17.2% in semi-urban areas, 40.2% in small to medium-sized towns and 31.9% in cities. According to this census, the population is divided between the following sectors of the economy: [omission] 39.4%, agriculture and forestry 18.3%, the arts and social welfare institutions 9.3%, the construction industry 9.1%, commerce 7.3%, transport, post and telecommunications 5.6%, the service sector 1.6% and other sectors of industry 1.6%.

According to random surveys in nine villages in the Sorbian-speaking area in 1987 and subsequent projections, it may be assumed that some 15 000 of the total of 489 000 Sorbs are now using Sorbian on a daily basis. This means that the number of Sorbian speakers has fallen by some 15 000 to 20 000 over the past 20 to 30 years.

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### 2.3. General history and history of the language

Until the 10th century, Sorbian was spoken between the Bober and Queiß in the east and the Saale in the west, the Erz and Lusatian mountains in the south and roughly as far as Frankfurt on the Oder, Köpenick and Jüteborg. The gradual decline in the use of Sorbian to the area covered today began in the 10th century with the loss of political independence by the old Sorbian tribes, the subsequent rural settlement of their territory by Franks, Thuringians and Saxons and the expansion of German towns, trade and commerce. As early as the 13th century there were bans on the use of Sorbian. The Reformation in the 16th century led to the first texts being written in Sorbian, for example the fragment of a liturgy (1543) from Zossen or the translation of the New Testament (1548) by M Jakubica from Laubnitz. The further fragmentation of the Sorbian-speaking area into a number of political territories in subsequent centuries led to the need to create a written language based on the dialects. In the mid-19th century, written Upper Sorbian based on the dialect spoken around Bautzen was introduced as the compulsory standard in the Sorbian-speaking area in Upper Lusatia, and written Lower Sorbian based on the Cottbus dialect was introduced as the *lingua franca* in Lower Lusatia.

In terms of the current situation, it should be noted that until 1945 Sorbian was subject to a subtle but constant pressure to become assimilated and Germanised as a result of the social and economic structures of the region and the prevailing ideology in Germany. After 1945, formal rights to preserve and promote the language were obtained, but their effectiveness was limited by extensive industrialisation and the prevailing ideology.

In recent times the objective of the official national organisation *Domowina* has been to promote Sorbian language and culture and to anchor it firmly in the national consciousness, whereas rather vague ideological objectives predominated between 1947 and 1989.

Up to 1989, the main objective of unofficial organisations was to persuade people to learn Sorbian and to promote Sorbian culture. Following the reunification of Germany in 1990, additional objectives were the provision of legal rights for the Sorbs in a unified Germany and a stronger presence of the Sorbian language.

In the past 10 years, promotion of the Sorbian language has mainly been reflected in the increase in the Sorbian media available, the continued fundamental pursuit of a policy to promote nationalities (even beyond the disintegration of the German Democratic Republic) and a guarantee of the right to acquire Sorbian by corresponding measures in the schools system.

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## 2.4. Legal status and official policies

The Sorbs' rights are enshrined in the Basic Law of the Federal Republic of Germany, the Unification Treaty and the constitutions of the German *Länder* of Saxony and Brandenburg. Since each German *Land* has autonomy in matters of education and culture, a clear distinction has to be made between the two *Länder* below.

In Saxony, the Sorbian-speaking community enjoys the right to cultivate and develop the language, as enshrined in the Constitution, while in the *Land* of Brandenburg it enjoys the right to preserve and promote the language and to include it in public signs.

Both *Land* constitutions and the Basic Law guarantee bilingualism in the Sorbian-speaking area. This means, for example, that Sorbian enjoys legal status as an administrative language and is recognised as a subject in grammar and other schools.

For the reasons mentioned above, central government has no specific policy on cultural minorities. On the other hand, the constitutions of both *Länder* have formulated language rights, but at present they are not supported by specific implementing regulations or follow-up legislation.

The *Land* of Saxony has enacted the following legislation:

- Provisional Administrative Procedures Act of 21.1.1993 (Saxon Law and Ordinances Gazette No 5/1993), which guarantees the use of Sorbian vis-à-vis the authorities.
- Local Authority Regulations for the Free State of Saxony (Saxon Law and Ordinances Gazette No 18/1993), which regulates the local government unit's responsibility to promote Sorbian language and culture.
- Schools Act for the Free State of Saxony and relevant Ordinance based on the Unification Treaty.
- Order from the government presidium in the early 1990s, regulating bilingual signs.

Apart from the first Act listed, similar regulations exist in the *Land* of Brandenburg.

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## 3. The use of the language in various fields

### 3.1. Education

Owing to the autonomy of the German *Länder* in education and cultural affairs, the individual education ministries of the *Land* of Saxony and the *Land* of Brandenburg are responsible for official policy and legislation in schools, apart from a few exceptions where central government is responsible. The presence of Sorbian in education is governed by the Schools Act for the Free State of Saxony of 3 July 1991 and by the First Schools Reform Act for the *Land* of Brandenburg of 28/1991. Both Acts legislate in a similar fashion in respect of the Sorbian schools in the territory and cover the following areas: definition of Sorbian as mother tongue, second language and foreign language, competitions to promote the Sorbian language, Sorbian schools, the German language in Sorbian schools, the Sorbian language in Sorbian schools, and Sorbian language tuition in other schools.

Other regulations governing the schools system are as follows:

*Land of Brandenburg:* Administrative regulations governing work in Sorbian and other schools in the Germano-Sorbian area (*VV Sorbisch*) of 22.6.1992.

*Free State of Saxony:* Order by the Saxon State Ministry for Education and Cultural Affairs governing work in Sorbian and other schools in the Germano-Sorbian area of 22.6.1992.

Sorbian schools in the Free State of Saxony are found in the administrative districts of Bautzen, Kamenz, Hoyerswerda, Weißwasser and Niesky. In the German schools (B schools) in the mixed national territory, pupils can learn or perfect their knowledge of Sorbian in the subject "Sorbian". There are 56 B schools. In the Sorbian schools (A schools) "Sorbian" is taught as a subject and a few other subjects are taught in Sorbian. There are 6 A schools, of which only two have A classes while 4 have A and B classes, 1 secondary modern school and 2 grammar schools in Cottbus and Bautzen. The 6 A schools and the 2 Sorbian-speaking grammar schools have some 1 400 pupils. Some 4 000 pupils in the B schools take Sorbian as an optional language. The following subjects are usually taught in Sorbian in the Sorbian A schools: mathematics in classes 1-4, local history and geography in classes 2-4, handicraft up to class 6, school garden up to class 4, English in classes 5-10, Russian in classes 5-10, history in classes 6-10, biology in classes 5-6, geography in classes 5-8, music in classes 1-10 and sport in classes 1-10.

In the Sorbian-speaking area there are 3 associations which may be regarded as supervisory bodies for Sorbian in education: the Ministry of Education and Cultural Affairs, the *Sächsische Akademie für Lehrerfortbildung* (SALF) in Dresden and the *Serbske \_ulske towarstwo* (Sorbian Schools Association). The monthly journal for Sorbian teachers *Serbska \_ula* also has a monitoring role.

Outside the traditional area, language tuition in Sorbian is given at the University of Leipzig (basic courses 05, N5 for beginners and advanced) and at the Universities of Saarbrücken and Hamburg. Individual language courses without a specific curriculum are also offered by the Universities of Prague and Lvov, for example.

Within the area the 2 language school for adults in Milkell, Upper Lusatia, and Dissenchen, Lower Lusatia, were closed in late 1993. The only courses now available are on the adult education centre model; although they provide information on Sorbian affairs, they no longer concentrate on the acquisition of the language (for instance, the project *Schule im Grünen*).

Apart from the 22 Sorbian-speaking nursery schools, there are mixed-language nursery schools where Sorbian is an optional language of instruction. Education in the mixed-language nursery schools also includes learning the basics of Sorbian history and culture. The Sorbian nursery schools are called *Serbska pestowarnja*.

In the A schools, Sorbian is the main language of instruction, and in the B schools of the area it is an optional language. In the Sorbian schools, which go by the name of *Serbska \_ula*, adequate teaching materials are available in Sorbian. In the B schools, the subject "Sorbian" was officially recognised as a foreign language in 1993.

As in primary education, Sorbian is the main language in the A schools at this level of education, but is an optional subject only in a few B schools in secondary education. Adequate teaching materials are also available at this level of education.

Sorbian is also the main language at the *Serbska fachowa \_ula* (Sorbian College of Social Education) in Bautzen. Otherwise, Sorbian is recognised as an optional language only in a few technical colleges and vocational training institutions.

At the University of Leipzig, the Institute of Sorbian Affairs in the Faculty of Language and Literature offers classes on the MA and teaching courses for 15 students in Sorbian. Tuition is accompanied by teaching materials in Sorbian (textbooks, specialist literature on methodology, audio-visual materials).

Sorbian is also used in teacher training programmes, and it is taught as a modern language in university institutions and on courses for mature students.

Although Sorbian is offered as a subject in adult education, owing to the changes following the reunification of Germany there are at present no exact details about this sector.

The *Sächsische Akademie für Lehrerfortbildung* (SALF) in Dresden regularly offers further training courses and seminars for Sorbian teachers. In addition to *Land* government endeavours to provide further training for teachers in the Sorbian language, the Sorbian Schools Association in Bautzen and Cottbus is concerned with the interests of Sorbian teachers.

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### 3.2. Judicial authorities

The use of Sorbian in the courts of justice in the bilingual area is regulated by the Unification Treaty, the constitutions of the *Länder* of Saxony and Brandenburg and the First Implementing Order to the Act governing the Rights of the Sorbian Population of 23 March 1948. The provisions set out in the Unification Treaty are found in the section entitled *Further Adjustment Regulations*:

*"Rights of the Sorbs.*

*The right of the Sorbs to speak Sorbian before the courts in the home districts of the Sorbian population shall not be affected by Section 184."*

Despite the Sorbian language being firmly encapsulated in the law at national and *Land* level, in practice the language is hardly ever used in court, since all Sorbs are bilingual and generally use German in official places and in dealings with the authorities.

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### 3.3. Public authorities and services

At Federal level, Sorbian is used in dealings with Sorbs who hold office in central bodies such as the *Bundestag* (Lower House). At *Land* level, Sorbian is used in dealings with individuals and institutions who are responsible for Sorbian affairs or are themselves Sorbs (eg *Land* representatives for Sorbs). The guaranteed use of Sorbian in the *Land* authorities is regulated by Section of the Provisional Administrative Procedures Act for the Free State of Saxony of 21 January 1993 and Section of the Local Authority Regulations for the Free State of Saxony of 21 April 1993.

Sorbian is not used with central authorities at Federal level. At regional and local level, the use of Sorbian depends very much on the proportion of Sorbian speakers in the relevant administrations. It is quite possible for Sorbian to be used at public meetings or in official announcements, for example. Unfortunately no detailed studies have been made of this.

Owing to the federal structure of the country, central government makes virtually no effort to encourage the use of Sorbian in administrative bodies. This policy is also pursued at regional and local level despite the fact that Sorbian is encapsulated in the law, since at this level it is assumed that people are bilingual in German and Sorbian. Sorbian is, however, taken into account by authorities at *Land* level when recruiting to the civil service and in the training of public servants. This applies in particular to officials and staff in Sorbian establishments, businesses in the service sector and institutions.

Where services such as telephone bills, signs to public institutions, etc., are concerned, it appears that these mostly use German. In rural areas, however, it is quite likely that Sorbian will be used alongside German in such cases; this applies mainly to the utilisation of services in rural areas and less to those offered.

Traditional place names are rarely used in Sorbian by the authorities. The conversion of German surnames and first names into Sorbian is not usually allowed either. Unofficial practice within the territory is, however, to translate German names into Sorbian (for instance German: Schneider, Sorbian: Krawc).

The use of Sorbian on public signs and road signs is the responsibility of the local administrations. For example, on 2 October 1991 on the basis of Article of the Unification Treaty, the government presidium of Dresden stipulated

that road signs in the Germano-Sorbian area of the districts of Bautzen, Hoyerswerda, Kamenz, Niesky and Weißwasser had to be bilingual. For the *Land* of Brandenburg, the Ministry for Urban Development, Housing and Transport Decree of 211992 governing road signs in the Germano-Sorbian area of the *Land* of Brandenburg regulates these issues. The use of Sorbian on business signs, etc., has, however, diminished over the past three years, particularly in the towns.

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### **3.4. Mass media and information technology**

Article 35 of the Unification Treaty permits the use of Sorbian in the mass media. This use is officially supported at *Land* level (Articles 25 and 26 of the Constitution of the *Land* of Brandenburg and Article 6 of the Constitution of the Free State of Saxony).

#### **Daily newspapers**

The daily paper *Serbske Nowiny* is published entirely in Upper Sorbian, while the weekly *Nowy Casnik* is published half in German and half in Lower Sorbian. The two newspapers have a combined circulation of 8 000. Since 1989 the number of subscribers has declined steadily.

#### **Periodicals**

The journal *Letopis*, published by the Sorbian Institute, appears twice a year. It contains articles, mainly in Sorbian, on Sorbian language, history and culture. The journals *Rozhlad* (Journal for Sorbian Culture and Art), *Serbska \_ula* (Education Journal), *Ptomjo* (children's magazine in Upper Sorbian), *Ptomje* (children's magazine in Lower Sorbian), *Pomhaj Bóh* (magazine published by the Protestant Sorbs of Upper Lusatia) and *Katolski Posot* (magazine published by the Catholic Sorbs of Upper Lusatia) appear monthly entirely in Sorbian. The publications are subsidised by the two *Länder* on the basis of the legislation mentioned above. According to unofficial sources, the number of subscribers declined steadily from 1989 but levelled off again from 1992.

#### **Radio**

Studio Bautzen (*Serbski rozhłós*) in Central German Radio's broadcasting centre in Dresden broadcasts from Monday to Friday (05.00 to 08.00), on Saturdays (06.00 to 09.00) and on Sundays (from 11.00 to 12.30) in Upper Sorbian to 30 000 listeners. Sorbian radio has a local news section located in the *Haus der Sorben* in Bautzen. East German Radio Brandenburg broadcasts in Lower Sorbian on Mondays to Fridays from 12.00 to 13.00 and on Sundays from 12.30 to 14.00.

The past 10 years have seen an increase in both transmission time and numbers of listeners. Financing comes from the *Länder*.

#### **Television**

Every 4 weeks from 13.00 to 13.30 on Saturdays, East German Radio Brandenburg (ORB) broadcasts the magazine *tuzyca* (Sorbian from Lusatia) in Lower Sorbian on regional television. Negotiations are being conducted at present with Central German Radio with the aim of broadcasting in Upper Sorbian.

The comprehensibility and audience coverage of the mass media are reduced by the division into Upper and Lower Sorbian, which is very evident owing to the fact that the media scene is fundamentally divided into two.

#### **Computers**

Sorbian can be keyed in on personal computers, apart from the diacritical marks on the letters e, o, c, c dz, t, z, s and r, which cannot be reproduced here, of course. Separate fonts for diacritical marks, which can be accessed via special keyboards, have been developed for Sorbian establishments. The software system used must, however, be capable of generating the character sets graphically: this will be possible in the near future with the software

package for Eastern Europe. There is no software program in Sorbian, however; nor are there any plans for one in the foreseeable future.

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### 3.5. The Arts

In 1991, 51 school-books and 55 works of literature were published, while the figures for 1992 were 40 school-books and 56 general works of literature; of the general works of literature, some two thirds are Sorbian or mixed-language, the remainder being German but with reference to the Sorbs. The picture for 1992 in more detail is as follows: 11 children's books with a print run of between 400 and 1 000, 3 books of poetry (some 500 copies), 3 short stories (some 750 copies), 1 international best-selling novel with a print run of 600, 1 novel (some 750 copies) and 1 encyclopaedia with a print run of some 500. Academic works and popular-science books such as dictionaries and works of history, folklore and linguistics, appear mainly in German or the two languages. There are also calendars, maps, paper modelling activities, song-books and the like in Sorbian.

The following folk and pop music groups use Sorbian in their repertoire: *the Sorbian National Ensemble* (song and dance) and the *Delany, Meja, Lipa, Budy\_in, Sprjwejan* choirs, among others. In pop and rock music, the groups *Mercin Weclich, Uta Bresan* and *Ingrid Raack*, among others, use Sorbian. Sorbian is also used in particular by local church choirs such as the Lower Sorbian Cottbus Children's Choir. Of the groups mentioned, *Sprjwejan* and *Mercin* have made 3 records in the past 5 years.

The professional *Nemsko-Serbske ludowe dziwadto Budy\_in* (Germano-Sorbian Folk Theatre) performs three productions in Upper Sorbian and one in Lower Sorbian each season, plus one production in Upper Sorbian for children and young people. Amateur groups such as the *Sorbian Crostwitz Amateur Players*, the *Sorbian Rosenthal/Zerna Amateur Theatre*, the *Sorbian Schöнау- Cunnewitz Theatre Group* and the cabaret act *Lózy hólcý* use Sorbian. All these groups receive financial support as a result of the *Land* constitution provisions governing cultural affairs.

Although Sorbian is not used in the public cinema, Sorbian films are produced by the *Sorabia Film Studios* in Bautzen using VHS technology; these are shown in unofficial establishments. In 1992, the following 3 films were produced: *Doma w Serbach/Heimat zu zweit* in German and Sorbian, *Skre/Wille und Wehr* in German and Sorbian and *Barokowy rezbar M.W. Jakula/Der Barockbildhauer M.W. Jäckel* in German, Sorbian and Czech. Films which have recently been dubbed in Sorbian are *Die schwarze Burg* (from the Slovakian) and *Tillebille* (from the German).

Other cultural activities are regional festivals of Sorbian culture and arts' days. For example, *Schadzowanka* is a meeting of Sorbian intelligentsia in Upper and Lower Lusatia, *Nazymski koncert* are autumn concerts and *Ptaci kwas* (which means "Bird Wedding") is an event designed to preserve Sorbian customs.

The official cultural policy is implemented by the *Foundation for the Sorbian People - Zalozba za Serbski LVD*, which is based in Bautzen and is a joint instrument of the Federation and the *Länder* of Saxony and Brandenburg. With the active participation of representatives of the Sorbian people, it serves to promote institutions to preserve the culture, art and homeland of the Sorbs, the documentation, publication and presentation of Sorbian culture, the Sorbian language and cultural identity. *Domowina* (the umbrella association for the Sorbs and Sorbian associations), sponsored by the regional authorities, organises cultural events and activities, for example. Other institutions supporting Sorbian culture at this level are, for example, the *Sorbian National Ensemble Bautzen*, the *Germano-Sorbian Folk Theatre Bautzen*, the *House of Sorbian Folk Culture Bautzen* with the *Sorbian Folklore Centre*, and *Sorbian Museums* in Bautzen and Cottbus. Activities in Sorbian outside the area are given considerable support by the authorities.

The academic society *Wissenschaftliche Gesellschaft e.V. Macica Serbska*, which is based in Bautzen and Cottbus, was founded in 1847, banned in 1937 and revived in 1990; it promotes academic involvement with the history, language and culture of the Sorbs and serves to disseminate information on the Sorbs at home and



abroad. Affiliated to this organisation is the Sorbian language commission *Serbska recna komisija*, which is concerned with issues of terminology and the standardisation of the Upper and Lower Sorbian language.

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### 3.6. The business world

A knowledge of Sorbian is not required when applying for jobs in the private sector. Only in the case of posts in Sorbian schools and institutions is an active (fluent spoken and written) or passive knowledge of Sorbian required.

Sorbian is not used in roadside advertising. Sorbian radio does not broadcast commercials. A few adverts in Sorbian are, however, found in Sorbian newspapers and magazines.

Consumer information is never given in Sorbian. The only product with a Sorbian name is *Serbske Kwasne Piwo* (Sorbian wedding beer).

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### 3.7. Family and social use of the language

Almost all parents in the Upper Sorbian Catholic focal area use Sorbian when speaking to their children. In the Upper Sorbian Protestant and Lower Sorbian-speaking area, only a motivated cultural minority use Sorbian with their children. Despite government assistance from the former SED regime, there was a 20-45% decline in the use of the language between 1955/56 (81 000) and 1987 (approx 60 000). No statistical information is available as yet for the period since 1990 when the area has been part of the Federal Republic, but our sources report the likelihood of a steady decline in the Sorbian language.

According to unofficial estimates, some 25% of Sorbian speakers now marry other Sorbian speakers. This percentage is higher in the rural Catholic focal area mentioned above.

There are no fundamental differences between men and women in the use of the language or in their behaviour towards their children.

Sorbian has no particular social connotations.

Denominational differences, which still played a major part until 1950, are steadily decreasing. According to unofficial estimates, at present some 15 000 of the 50 000 or so Sorbs are Catholics who use Sorbian on a daily basis. Of these, some 70% are regular churchgoers. In Upper Lusatia, 60-80% (in the focal area 100%) of the clergy speak Sorbian, while only three Protestant clergy speak Sorbian in Lower Lusatia. Services are therefore held in Sorbian in Catholic Upper Lusatia, while this is rare in towns and in Lower Lusatia. The *Domowina* publishing house organised Sorbian translations of the Old Testament (1973), the New Testament (1973) and a Prayer Book (1972). In church ceremonies the family is free to choose the language, although Sorbian is usually used in the Catholic focal area (for instance Sorbian wedding ceremony, traditional Catholic Sorbian dress and traditional Sorbian wedding breakfast).

Sorbian speakers believe that Sorbian will be of increasing importance if the authorities continue to support it. They see their knowledge of Sorbian as being fairly useful, as does the German-speaking population. Since the reunification of Germany, interest in learning Sorbian and in information on the language and culture has increased abroad. The younger generation also seems to be motivated to learn Sorbian. The learning of Sorbian is officially promoted in various other German *Länder* and in other countries in Eastern Europe.

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### 3.8. Transnational exchanges

Until the reunification of Germany in 1990, transnational exchanges by the Sorbian-speaking community were not really possible or possible only under Party control. Since 1990, there have been close contacts with the Danish and Frisian minority in Germany. The *Domowina* organisation mentioned above has been a member of the *European Bureau for Lesser Used Languages* and the *Federal Union of European Nationalities* since reunification.



In recent years, a regular exchange with other East European countries has been actively sought in order to support the general political objective of building a bridge between Germany and Eastern Europe.

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#### **4. Conclusion**

On the basis of the information given above, the legal position of Sorbian is thoroughly satisfactory. As to whether Sorbian will survive, attention should be drawn in particular to the rural Catholic focal area in Upper Lusatia where there are 15 000 active speakers of Sorbian. The position of Sorbian does not seem to be quite so strong in any of the other areas of the Sorbian-speaking and bilingual territory. Until now the Catholic church has played a major part in preserving Sorbian; like other institutions, however, since the reunification of Germany it has been subject to different laws, the effects of which cannot yet be properly evaluated owing to recent developments in the Federal Republic.