



Verband der deutschen sozial-kulturellen Gesellschaften in Polen
Association of German Social-Cultural Societies in Poland

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Mr Kairat Abdrakhmanov
OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities
Prinsessegracht 22
2514 AP The Hague
The Netherlands

- per Mail -

Dear Sir Abdrakhmanov,

In connection with the current legal and social situation concerning the German minority in Poland, we, the Association of German Social-Cultural Societies in Poland, inform you about the legal sanctioning of discrimination against the German minority and its language within the framework of the national and ethnic minority policy and education law, as well as the stigmatisation of children learning German as a national minority language. Along with this letter, we appeal to the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe to take possible measures to defend the European values regarding the rights of national and ethnic minorities.

On 27 January 2022, the Sejm of the Republic of Poland decided to adopt the budget for 2022, and thus also the amount of funds for minority language teaching. The Sejm adopted an amendment resulting in a significant reduction of the educational subsidy for teaching only the German minority language, thus discriminating against one of the thirteen national and ethnic minority languages in Poland. On 4 February 2022, the Minister of Education and Science, Przemysław Czarnek, issued a regulation reducing the number of hours of teaching German as a minority language from 3 hours to 1 hour per week.

The teaching of minority languages is based on both the national legislation and international regulations of the Council of Europe. Due to the decisions taken by the Sejm and the Government of the Republic of Poland, there is clear discrimination against citizens on the grounds of their nationality, a failure to comply with the articles of the Constitution of the Republic of Poland, the "Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities" and the "European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages". In the reports of the Committee of Experts of the Council of Europe concerning the implementation of obligations resulting from the European regulations in Poland, significant deficiencies concerning minority education are regularly pointed out. All the recommendations of the Committee of Ministers indicate that Poland has still not fulfilled many of the obligations concerning the teaching of minority languages, which it voluntarily agreed to put into practice.

The German national minority in Poland has the right to an education system in their minority language. Minority education, understood as a significant element of national, linguistic and cultural identity, should be supported, above all, in view of the long-standing ban on the teaching of the German language, cultural discrimination and the lack of legal recognition of the German minority under Communist rule. Despite this discrimination, already in 1975 in Helsinki, in the Final Act of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe, Poland undertook to respect the rights of persons belonging to minorities to equality before the law, ensuring their full and effective enjoyment of human rights and fundamental

freedoms. The Member States decided to recognise the contribution that national minorities can make to cooperation in various areas of culture, taking into account the legitimate interests of members of such minorities.

The Republic of Poland is also a signatory to the Charter of Paris for a New Europe of 1990. This Charter has become a symbol of the official closure of the period of division on the European continent. The rights of national and ethnic minorities resound very clearly in this document: *"We affirm that the ethnic, cultural, linguistic and religious identity of national minorities will be protected and that persons belonging to national minorities have the right freely to express, preserve and develop that identity without any discrimination and in full equality before the law."* As a consequence of the decision of the Education Minister of 4 February 2022, the German minority has lost this equality before the law.

In a Europe of many languages and peoples, it is important to realise that linguistic emancipation creates added value and does not negatively affect the ability of national and ethnic minorities to participate in the development of social and political life. At the 1999 OSCE summit in Istanbul, Poland signed the Charter for European Security, which emphasises the need for conflict prevention and promotes human rights.

As the Association of German Social-Cultural Societies in Poland, we express our indignation at the discrimination that only affects the German minority and its language. We refer to the provisions of the Istanbul Document, which Poland has signed: *"The protection and promotion of the rights of persons belonging to national minorities are essential factors for democracy, peace, justice and stability within and between member states. (...) Full respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to national minorities, besides being an end in itself, may not undermine, but strengthen territorial integrity and sovereignty. (...) We pledge to take measures to promote tolerance and to build pluralistic societies where all, regardless of their ethnic origin, enjoy full equality of opportunity. We emphasize that questions relating to national minorities can only be satisfactorily resolved in a democratic political framework based on the rule of law."*

This discrimination against the German minority in Poland is particularly incomprehensible in the context of the Polish Presidency of the OSCE. As the Association of German Social-Cultural Societies in Poland, we especially hope for an understanding of the situation of the German minority and for concrete measures to be taken by the Polish Foreign Minister Zbigniew Rau, who chairs the work of the OSCE and considers the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms to be one of the priorities of this work. It is difficult for us to imagine that such a discriminatory regulation could be in force in Poland.

We enclose the position of the Board of the Association of German Social-Cultural Societies in Poland against the legal discrimination of the German minority.

Yours respectfully,



Bernard Gaida
Chairman of the Board