

Pattern or Blueprint?

National Minorities in the Danish-German Border Area

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Zusammenfassung

Das Zusammenleben von Minderheiten und Mehrheiten im deutsch-dänischen Grenzraum wird oftmals als europäischer Modellfall beschrieben. In diesem Beitrag wird der Versuch unternommen, das „modellhafte“ in dieser Region zu ergründen. Ergebnis des Essays ist, daß es sich nicht um eine Blaupause handelt, daß sich auf andere ethnische Konfliktregionen übertragen läßt, sondern daß die besondere „Schleswig-Erfahrung“ Ergebnis eines langwierigen Prozesses ist, der bisher über 40 Jahre gedauert hat. Trotzdem gibt es Elemente, die bei Lösungsansätzen andernorts nützlich sein können. Somit muß eher von einem Muster als von einer Anleitung zu Konfliktlösungen gesprochen werden.

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In recent years¹, it has become common not only among German and Danish politicians, but also among scholars and diplomats, to characterize the minority regulations and the relations between minorities and majorities on both sides of the borderline between Denmark and Germany as an especially successful minority model-case.² The geographical area where these minorities live is identical with the up to 1864 Danish duchy of Schleswig (Danish: Sønderjylland, e.g. “Southernmost Jutland”). After the defeat of Denmark in the German-Danish war of 1864, the duchies of Schleswig, Holstein and Lauenburg were incorporated into the Kingdom of Prussia. From 1871 they constituted a segment of the German Empire. In 1920, Schleswig was divided following a plebiscite based on the principle of national self-determination. Since then, North Schleswig with its German minority population belongs to Denmark, while South Schleswig with its Danish population segment belongs to Germany.

This distinct “Schleswig Experience” in minority issues has been presented at international scientific conferences and on an international political level inside the framework of the Council of Europe and the CSCE/OSCE-process. The Danish and German government decided to present this so-called model-case in a joint report at the CSCE meeting on national minorities in Warsaw in 1993. It was emphasized as a positive example on how ethnic conflicts can be solved. A large number of study visits organized partly officially by the German as well as the Danish governments, partly by semi-official and private foundations and institutions have investigated the “Schleswig Experience”. On location, representatives of majorities and minorities from most of Eastern Europe have had the opportunity to form their own opinions on the situation and wider impact of the Danish minority in Germany and the German ethnic group in Denmark. The Danish-German borderlands have been presented as a model-case because of the belief, that this “Schleswig Experience” or at least elements of it can be useful in the attempt to solve nationalities conflicts in other European areas,

¹ I would like to thank Katherine Bieker Kühl and Farimah Daftary for their suggestions and comments on earlier drafts of this article.

² Kühl, Jørgen: *På vej mod den slesvigske model. Mindretallene i det dansk-tyske grænseland 1955-1995*. Aabenraa 1996. idem: „Auf dem Weg zum Modellfall Schleswig“. In: *Ethnos-Nation*. 5 (1997), 87–113. See also Lammers, Karl Christian: „Konflikte und Konfliktlösungen in der dänisch-deutschen Minderheitenfrage. Ein Beispiel für Europa?“ In: *Historische Mitteilungen*. 10 (1997) 2, 268–279.

especially in the post-communist East European states.³ The most interesting element in the positive coexistence between minorities and majorities in Schleswig is evidently that the once inflamed and tense national conflict between Danes and Germans has been mitigated and eventually solved to great satisfaction of all involved factions. It is this experience and the joint ambition of Denmark and Germany to underline the positive impact of this minority model-case that also lead to the creation of the European Centre for Minority Issues [ECMI] in Flensburg in 1995.⁴ The ECMI, however, does not deal with the Danish-German minority sphere but is devoted to ethnic issues in other European theaters of potential or manifest conflict.

The so-called “Schleswig Problem” of the 19th and the first half of the 20th century, which was connected to uncertain questions of ethnicity and identity, assimilation and inventions of specific traditions, language policy and reconstruction of history as well as to political goals of incorporation of Schleswig into either Denmark or Germany, has been solved by a general acceptance of the territorial borders and through the safeguarding of the minority groups. Both minorities in the area have in the last 45 years had their basic claims fulfilled. Today, they possess cultural autonomy and their own socialization-institutions: schools, church congregations and associations of all kinds. Consequently, however, they have also become pacified and were made passive since they no longer form a barrier or, on the other side, any central element in the general bilateral Danish-German relationship. The mitigation process succeeded and the conflict potential was dissolved. Nowadays, the minority conflict in the border area is no longer related to principled questions and matters of fundamental rights of the minorities, neither to the acceptance of their simple existence nor recognition of their joint ethnic identity. On the other hand, economic issues and especially the demand for hitherto unachieved financial equality between the minorities and majorities in the region are at the top of the political agendas of the minority groups. The minorities are, thus, fighting for enlarged appropriation to maintain and extend their level of cultural autonomy and their heritage. Their political goals, on the other hand, have turned into pragmatism on behalf of the minority and a search for common interests.

³ I have earlier discussed the “Schleswig Experience” in a European context in Kühl, Jørgen: “En mønsterkonflikt? Den slesvigske erfaring og de nationale spørgsmål i dagens Europa“. In: *Vandkunsten* 7–8 (1992), 243–272. idem: „Zusammenleben von Mehrheit und Minderheit. Das deutsch-dänische Grenzland als Beispiel.“ In: *Grenzfriedenshefte*. 3 (1996), 188–203.

⁴ For further information on the ECMI see the factsheet: The “European Centre for Minority Issues” (ECMI) is..., European Centre for Minority Issues, Schiffbruecke 12, D-24939 Flensburg; e-mail: info@ecmi.de.

In the following essay, I am going to analyze and discuss “The Schleswig Experience” in the Danish-German border area in the period 1955–1998. It is the development in this period as a whole which can be defined and seen as a model-case.⁵ The model, therefore, is an enduring evolutionary process that can not be crystallized into an instrument, which could then be transposed into other areas with actual minority conflicts. By examining distinct examples it will be discussed, whether and – if the occasion should arise – how elements of this experience might have a model-character for minority conflicts in other parts of Europe.

The Numerical Size of the Minorities

The minorities in North and South Schleswig are inconsistent and dynamic. Their size has been, and still is, on both sides of the dividing line determined by political, social, and economic conjunctures. Therefore, it is not possible to give any concrete numbers, that describe the size of the minorities reliably. It has become common to assert, that the Danish minority numbers ca. 50,000 and the German minority consists of 15–20,000 people. This quantitative data has not, however, been determined through statistical, scientific or demographic analysis. They are axiomatic. They have been stated and re-stated so often with only small differences that these numbers have become factual in the public discourse. In a publication of the Danish Foreign Ministry it is mentioned that the German minority numbers ca. 20,000,⁶ while the figure given for the Danish minority is 50,000 persons as usual.⁷ These estimates are part of the joint Danish-German report presented at the CSCE meeting on national minorities in Warsaw in May 1993. In this

⁵ The following historical summary is based on Landeszentrale für politische Bildung in Schleswig-Holstein (ed.): *Minderheiten im deutsch-dänischen Grenzgebiet. Gegenwartsfragen 69*. Kiel 1993 Johannsen, Peter Iver: „Die deutsche Volksgruppe in Nordschleswig“, 41–72 Runge, Johann: „Die dänische Minderheit in Südschleswig“, 73–158. The developments inside the German minority up to the beginning of the 1990’s is presented by Weitling, Günther: “Det tyske mindretal i Danmark“. In: Vollertsen, Nils et al. *Nation og mindretal. En samling artikler om nationale mindretal og mindretalspolitik i Europa 1945–1993*. Århus 1993, 31–52 Rerup, Lorenz: *Slesvig delt i 75 år. Symbiose, konfrontation, naboskab*. Copenhagen 1995 (= Grænseforeningens Årbog), gives an excellent synthesis on the historical developments among the minorities in the border region in the 20th century.

⁶ *40 Jahre Zusammenleben im Grenzland*. Copenhagen 1995, 13

⁷ *ibid.*, 18.

publication, no argumentation is given, nor is any authoritative source mentioned for these figures. The same figures are found in a publication of the Schleswig-Holstein Landtag.⁸ Here it is noted, that the numbers are based on information provided by the minorities themselves. The number of the German minority is estimated higher in an encyclopedia: Unfortunately, without any source, the figure in this context is ca. 25,000 Germans.⁹ The Secretary General of the main German minority organization “Bund deutscher Nordschleswiger” informs in an article, that the German minority numbers ca. 15–20,000 persons, which amounts to 6–8% of the population of North Schleswig.¹⁰ The former director of the Research Department at the Danish Central Library in Flensburg gives an estimate for the Danish minority of 40–50,000 persons, which amounts to ca. 8% of the population in South Schleswig.¹¹ The late historian (and from 1994 to his death 1996 Danish General Consul in Flensburg) Lorenz Rerup was more careful in his assessment. He chose to use political voting results and the number of pupils in the minority schools to assess the strength of the minorities. According to this method, the German minority party Slesvigsk Parti received 5,115 votes at the regional elections in the “amt” Sønderjylland in 1993, while the Danish minority party SSW registered almost 38,000 votes in the regional elections in 1994. In 1993, a total of 1,292 pupils attended the German minority schools. The same year, a total of 5,349 pupils attended the schools of the Danish minority. Finally, Rerup mentions that the main organization of the German minority, Bund deutscher Nordschleswiger, had 4,100 enlisted members in 1993, while the main cultural organization in the Danish minority, Sydslesvigsk Forening, had 17,300 members at that time.¹²

It is not possible to verify any exact figures, because the number of people in the Danish-German border area who identify themselves with the minorities varies and depends on

⁸ Der Landtag Schleswig-Holstein: *Bericht zur Lage der Minderheiten und der friesischen Volksgruppe für die 1. Legislaturperiode (1988–1992)*. Kiel 1992, 40.

⁹ Ludwig, Klemens: *Ethnische Minderheiten in Europa. Ein Lexikon*. München 1995, 128.

¹⁰ Johannsen, Peter Iver: „Die deutsche Volksgruppe in Nordschleswig“, 41–72. In: Landeszentrale für politische Bildung Schleswig-Holstein (ed.): *Minderheiten im deutsch-dänischen Grenzgebiet. Gegenwartsfragen 69*. Kiel 1993, 41.

¹¹ Runge, Johann: „Die dänische Minderheit in Südschleswig“, 73–158. In: Landeszentrale für politische Bildung Schleswig-Holstein (ed.): *Minderheiten im deutsch-dänischen Grenzgebiet. Gegenwartsfragen 69*. Kiel 1993, 145.

¹² Lorenz Rerup: *Slesvig delt i 75 år, symbiose, konfrontation, naboskab*. Copenhagen 1995, 33 (= Grænseforeningens årbog).

conjunctures. Neither does any state census – unlike the post-communist states in Central and Eastern Europe or Finland – register the ethnic background and/ or mother tongue of the individuals in this area. Thus, Denmark and Germany have no possibility to ascertain a precise, reliable size of both minorities. So far, no systematically scientific study of this problematic issue has been conducted. Even the minorities themselves are not able to state any proofed numbers to describe their own size. Consequently, minorities and majorities have to content themselves by calculating figures based on membership-figures, the number of pupils, and to a certain extent voting-figures. Fortunately, these single numbers together can give an impression of the size of the minorities, in spite of the element of uncertainty.

The Structure of the Minorities

Although the minorities are determined by conjunctures, there will still be a certain considerable hard “core” of people, who for longer periods or in many cases all their lives, have identified themselves with the minority and at no time felt any reason or urge to shift their personal ethnic identity. The persons in this category are either characterized by a strongly developed sense of national identity, or they simply feel at home among and naturally belonging to a minority group. It is the clarified ethnic consciousness of these people in the Danish minority in Germany and the Germans in Denmark that is regularly used to describe the whole group. This interpretation of nationality, ethnicity, and identity is not, however, representative of the minorities. It does not include all the people who at a certain time do belong or at some time did belong to one of the minorities. It is a fact that, for many people North and South of the border, the individual choice of identity and nationality has never been a final or irreversible process. People in the Danish-German border region actually do join or leave the minorities – not only in theory, but in daily practice. Some even perform a total cross-over from the Danish minority in Germany to the German minority in Denmark, just like the German minority’s Siegfried Matlok, who originally was a member of the Danish minority. Other examples are kindergarten teachers who used to belong to the Danish minority but nevertheless teach at German kindergartens in North Schleswig.

The motives and encouragements are in every case individual, although it is possible to crystallize a number of essential factors like, among others, the wish on behalf of the children for a Danish or German school education, pure sympathy for the Danish or German culture, mentality and lifestyle, the identification with a minority in general, personal inclination towards the social and political ideas of the Danish or German minority, and, finally, a conscious out-distance from the original ethnicity. The latter factor is common among former German academics who join the Danish minority, while a similar process is almost non-existent in Denmark in the case of the German minority.

On the other hand, a reverse process is also taking place: Some people do decide to leave the Danish minority and to (re-)identify themselves with the German majority – and vice versa in Denmark. This trend is also to be explained by an individual, personal choice, but in many cases this dissimilatory/disassimilatory move is happening as a conscious out-distance from the Danish/German identity in the way it is claimed inside the Danish/German minority.

Identification Processes within the Minorities

In the Danish-German borderland the internal structure of the minorities is determined by a number of concentric circles. In each of them, ethnicity and identity is composed and pronounced differently.¹³ In every single circle, the connection to the minority and its principal ethnicity, culture, and language is accentuated differently. In the innermost circles, there is a straight and plain identity between the subjective identification with the Danish culture in Germany/the German culture in Denmark on the one side and the connected objective criterias in the primary form of a distinct language, culture, and traditions on the other side. In the middle circles, this plain identification is no longer a fact: Here the objective criterias that constitute an ethnic group might still be present, but the linguistic connection has been interrupted. The main language at home, at work and, to a certain extent, in the minority associations is the majority language. Simultaneously, however, the subjective identification with the ethnicity of the minority is clarified and present in a distinct way. These groups in South Schleswig express their Danish identity in either German or the regional German dialect Plattdeutsch – and in North Schleswig their German identity is expressed in especially the Danish regional dialect Sønderjysk. In the outermost circles, the knowledge of the minority language is rudimentary or nonexistent. For instance, parts of this segment are Danish without the ability to speak Danish. Others do identify themselves as part of the Danish minority, although they in no way are prepared or willing to learn to speak or understand Danish. Their identification with the Danish or German minority is therefore not total. In conversations, this category of minority members tend to describe their connection to the Danish or German minority in terms of “with” rather than “of” – they for some reason feel good “with” the Danish or German minority, but they do not consider themselves as an integrated part “of” the minority.

¹³ See the detailed description of the relationship between national identity and the internal structure of minorities in Kühl, Jørgen: “Dansk identitet i Sydslesvig”, 50–67. In: *National identitet. Fem foredrag om dansk og tysk identitetsfølelse i grænselandet*. Aabenraa 1994 (= Institut for grænseregionsforskning).

These outer circles are semi-open towards the majority. Thus, the assimilation to or the dissimilation from the minority group is taking place through this part of the minority structure. Here it is possible to find people whose only relationship to the Danish or German minority is the fact that they are members of a sports club, that their children attend the minority kindergarten or school, or that they sympathize with the objectives of the minority party because its regionalist profile appeals to them. The minorities do – because of understandable self-interest – tend to read such a political behavior as an expression of national identification; but this does not seem to be realistic anymore for all those people who in recent years have elected minority parties in the Schleswig area.¹⁴ Quite often, they do not express any identification with the minority behind the party, but only with the party politics at this time. These political preferences that on the surface seem to imply ethnic identification elements as well, could very well be totally different in the consecutive election. More individual motives could be named.

A common element for those parts of the respective minority that are located in the outer circles is that their choice of identity is not necessarily a final decision. In these sections of the minority it is possible to make new choices, and it is further a possibility to choose an identification with the majority instead of the identification with the minority. This is called assimilation. On the contrary, it is also a matter of fact that members of the majority population without any connection to the minority could have felt, at one point in their lifetime, attracted by the minority and consciously through the choice of one or several institutions of the minority, like let their children attend a Danish/German minority kindergarten or school. They approached the minority with the wish to become an integrated member of it. This process is called dissimilation. Again, however, it is necessary to differentiate, when these newcomers dissimilate to the one or other minority. It is also a fact in many cases that the choice of, for example, a Danish school education in South Schleswig for their children does not imply that the parents get involved in other parts of the minority life as well. Quite often dissimilation is only a partial process: Only aspects of the, for instance, German minority in North Schleswig is chosen consciously, while other aspects are not a part of the individual decision of nationality. The membership in a minority is, thus, in many cases loose and is not consequently followed up by a total integration into the minority through an active participation in the cultural activities of the minority organizations.

The identification with and the choice of identity is a process that takes place in the outer layers of the minority. Here, it is possible to observe identity processes. These individual choices are made on the basis of a number of diverse, sometimes even contradictory

¹⁴ Kühl, Jørgen: "Nye danskere eller protestvælgere? Kommunalvalget i Slesvig-Holsten, marts 1994". In: *Sønderjysk Månedsskrift*. 5–6 (1994), 84–89.

motives where the national element in many cases only plays a minor role or no part at all. When the new choice of ethnicity has finally been made, both the minorities in the Danish-German borderlands, however, expect the newcomers to be consequent in the implementation of the newly chosen identity. In both minorities, the minority institutions socialize the members with Danish, respectively German, culture and mentality. In the minority kindergartens and schools, the children are influenced by the minority values, and they learn to speak the language of the minority. Simultaneously the life of the children outside the minority institutions, on the other side, is mostly influenced by the premises and values of the majority society. In this respect, it has to be taken into account that the socialization as a part of the majority society that is promoted through the media especially, but very often also through contact with friends and family members who belong to the majority, has at least the same identity-building influence as the socialization measures that are taking place inside the framework of the minority itself. The socialization, therefore, is very often a bicultural process with a number of actors that influence the individual minority member with values and mentalities. This is a phenomenon which can be observed among most ethnic groups in Europe living in regions where they do not constitute the dominant majority themselves. Consequently, a part of the minority is developing a unique identity that is influenced by the minority and the majority at the same time. It can hardly be different, unless the minorities chose total isolation and segregation from the surrounding world. In that case it certainly is possible to preserve a conservative, rigid ethnic identity that is in no way influenced by any interethnic or intercultural contact. This is often to be observed within minorities whose ethnic composition is identical with a religious faith that is totally different from that of other ethnic groups in the area. Whether the regular or “normal” case of “double socialization” and, consequently, the double identification process is going to lead to a kind of creolisation in the border region is uncertain. Observations among young members of the Danish and German minorities seem to indicate that an especially linguistic creolisation is taking place. In this case, the two original different cultures that are influencing the socialization and identity-building are combined into a newly produced culture that is more than just a simple mixture of the original cultures. If such a process of creolisation actually is more than a tendency, it would be possible to draw parallels, but also to conduct comparative studies between youngsters of the minorities in the border region and young immigrants of the third and consecutive generations.¹⁵

¹⁵ See the interview with the Danish sociologist Flemming Røgilds who explains his results of research on immigrants in: Pade, N.: “Fødder uden rødder”. *Weekendavisen*. June 9th-15th (1995), 4.

Complex Identity-Building

It is obvious that the minorities themselves do not sympathize with such complex identity building and instead maintain the imagination, that it is the genuine minority identity which has to be dominant. In reality, the situation is a lot more complicated. The members of the minorities do inevitably become bicultural. The way of being Danish or German is therefore also different from the kinds of Danishness or Germanness that are predominant in the cultural “motherlands” North and South of the border. Thus, the Danish identity among the Danes in South Schleswig is, firstly, different in each of the layers inside the concentric circles that altogether constitute the minority group; secondly, the Danish identity inevitably is composed, balanced, and expressed in other ways than in Denmark. The same applies to the German minority in Denmark. This is not reprehensible, although the minorities themselves do not appreciate such an interpretation due to ideological reasons and the prevalent self-image. But it is a fact. This does not, however, reduce or enlarge the genuine Danish or German identity in the majorities or the minorities. Ethnic identities are complex, and they are difficult to define in a concrete fashion. It is a fact that Germanness and Danishness are invented and constructed concepts that exist in a variety of expressions. For some, Danish culture is expressed through Danish shoes, butter, and the flag. For others, their personal Danish identity is related to cultural traditions, authors, philosophers, and language. For a third group of people, to be Danish simply means to sympathize with the Danish mentality and way of living. In the German case, for some people to be German includes a special bonding with the landscape, literature, and history. For others, to be German is to keep yourself, your surroundings and your family tidy, and to uphold the German values. And, finally, for a third group of people, Germanness is an ideal concept.

This short description of the internal structure of the minorities in the Danish-German border area should not be perceived as a static model. On the contrary, real life in the minorities has proven that it is possible to move from one circle to the next – closer to the inside and the total overlap between objective and subjective criterias, or the other way with a consequent abandoning of subjectivity and the choice of new objective criterias. The circles are, as a matter of fact, not dense structures but are permeable. On top of it all, there are also local differences in mentalities and behavior within an ethnic minority. The numerical basis for the minority life differs, and there are cultural differences between the center and the periphery. In the case of the Danish-German border area, there are especially evident differences between the mentality among the people who live on the West Coast and those on the East Coast of the area.

Significance of the Concentric Circles

This rather abstract model which attempts an analytical description of concrete processes in the Danish-German border area, may initially seem odd and unique. That is not, however, the case. The model does not characterize the Schleswig case only, but is also useful to describe the dynamics of most of the ethnic minorities in Europe.¹⁶ The fundamental principles of this model can be transposed to cases such as the Germans in Hungary, the Lithuanians in Poland, the Frisians in the Netherlands, etc. All these groups have in common that they are not – in contrast to the common concept of nationalities and nations – homogenous or static, but are very heterogeneous and dynamic in their internal structure. This is a fact, despite the initial impression that most of the minorities simultaneously due to their bearing and officially expressed ideological imaginations and self-legitimization seem to be rigid, conservative, and often appear to constitute (closed) communities. This “closed” phenomenon, on the other hand, can be explained by the fact that this inherent structural conservatism mostly has an anti-assimilation function for the group. Thus, it is possible to use this analysis of the minority structures in the Danish-German border region as an analytical approach to other European minorities. It is in itself a minority model. It can be used to analyze the composition of the minorities and to explain how these groups work and interact with the dominant, surrounding societies.

Conjunctures

The size of a minority is determined by conjunctures. It is determined by a number of external factors, on which the minorities have little or no impact at all. The massive growth of the Danish minority after World War II took place because of external factors without any relation to the minority itself. The Danish minority had no influence on the rapidly growing number of people who identified themselves with the group. The minority just had to accept that over 100,000 people changed their identity and chose to become Danish, and, consequently, wanted to join the Danish association. Although the Danish minority certainly benefited from this massive influx, it simply took place because the Danish minority existed, not because it played an active role. The only thing the Danish group could do, was to attempt a selection that denied former Nazis membership in the Danish organizations.

¹⁶ This model is also used in an analysis of the importance of objective and subjective ethnicity-criterias in the national identification among the German minorities in Eastern Europe and Asia. See Kühl, Jørgen: *Tyskere i Øst*. Aarhus 1997.

The German minority in Denmark, on the contrary, had to accept a drastic reduction in its membership after 1945. This is explained by the negative image it had due to its recent involvement with Nazism. Many former Germans did not want to be identified with Germany or the German minority after the defeat of Hitler's Germany so they decided to change their national identity to Danish. These two examples might – with some reservations – be generalized: Since 1945, the Danish minority has had a positive image, that has been attractive to many Germans. On the other hand, the German minority until a few years ago had a negative image that did not have any attraction for Danes in North Schleswig. At the same time, however, the German minority schools aroused interest and sympathy among Danes who moved to the region from other parts of Denmark and immediately saw the advantages in a bilingual education for their children.

These general circumstances, where the image of an ethnic group has a strong impact on the prestige and size of the group, is also to be found in the case of other minority groups. Some groups have a positive image, while others appear as negative entities. Finally, a third kind of group has had a rather neutral image. These perceptions of ethnic minorities are not, however, eternal entities. They are also subject to changes and conjunctures. Changes in external factors do have an impact on the prestige of a minority. When Denmark became a Nordic welfare state, the Danish minority simultaneously became a lot more attractive to and popular among a number of Germans than before. The German minority made another experience in the 20th century: When Germany turned into a totalitarian dictatorship, the German minority suddenly became attractive to parts of the Danish population. The voting results and membership numbers in the German minority have never been bigger than in the period the German minority was ideologically unified with Nazi Germany. Later, this Nazi experience had a negative effect, and the German minority was stigmatized after 1945 because of its participation in Nazism. In the post-communist Eastern Europe of the 1990's, on the other hand, the German minorities in, for example, Romania or Hungary, are very popular because the actual positive image of Germany as a powerful, wealthy nation reflects on the prestige of the German minorities in these countries. Only ten years ago, the German minorities in Eastern Europe were still stigmatized in the public life, because at that time the image of Western Germany was extremely negative in the public opinion. Then, Germans were hiding their ethnic background. Today, thousands of people rediscover their German roots and join the newly formed German minority organizations, which receive considerable economic and idealistic support from Germany.

Plebiscites as an Instrument

The instrument of plebiscite is the practical implementation of the (rather abstract) principle of self-determination. It was used in Schleswig after World War I to determine

the new Danish-German border line in accordance with the Versailles Treaty. As it has been mentioned above, it was possible to draw a border in 1920 that is still actual, despite agitation in favor of a change by Germans in the inter-war period, and by Danes in the first years after World War II. The Danish-German border kept its validity because the political will on both sides – regardless of changing political regimes – had the will to preserve it. This, however, does not imply in itself that the border solution in Schleswig can simply be transferred to other regions, where minorities live right outside their “homeland”. The Peace Treaty of Versailles of 1919 provided, that plebiscites had to take place in a number of minority and border areas to determine the new border of Germany after the collapse of the German Empire. The same principles were used in the case of the new state of Austria, whose borders with Hungary and towards the South were determined by plebiscites. Nowhere did these new borderlines survive. Only the cases of Schleswig and Austria were exceptions. In the Austrian province of Carinthia/Kärnten, the border between Austria and the SHS State (in 1929 renamed to Yugoslavia), and from 1991 Slovenia, on the one side, and in the province Burgenland on the Austrian-Hungarian border plebiscites took place in 1920 and 1921. These borderlines still exist, although in the end and the aftermath of World War II, Yugoslav partisans tried to change the border with Carinthia by occupation of the area.

Thus, the plebiscite instrument is to be viewed more as an exception rather than a model case. Only in regions where a political will exists to respect borders drawn by popular self-determination can this principle be used successfully. This was the case in Schleswig, despite agitation against the border. In other disputed territories in Europe this does not seem to be the case. Thus, today it can hardly be imagined that the Romanian or Slovak governments would in any way be willing to accept a change of their territorial borders with Hungary following plebiscites in regions with a large Hungarian population. In both Slovakia and Romania, large Hungarian populations live concentrated in compact areas, where they constitute overwhelming local and regional majorities. It is to be expected, that in the event of a plebiscite the Hungarian minorities in these areas would vote for unification with Hungary. The Hungarians would probably be quite satisfied with a peaceful border settlement and the consequent resolution of minority problems – but neither the Slovaks nor the Romanians would in any way accept the implementation of the plebiscite instrument. They would, of course, read every suggestion of national self-determination through plebiscites as a proof of separatism among the Hungarian minorities. Therefore, such a thought is doomed as being unrealistic. The Hungarian minority organizations have wisely realized that no kind of border revision will take place – especially not, since Hungary in recent years has solved disputed questions with its neighboring states by signing bilateral agreements with Slovakia in 1995 and with Romania in 1996 that also include regulations concerning

the rights of minorities, including certain levels of cultural autonomy. Hungary, like most other Central European states, has solved the minority disputes with its neighbors because the European Union and NATO made it clear, that only those states which do not have any open territorial questions with their neighbor-states would have any realistic chance to join these two Western organizations. Thus, the EU and NATO with their declared pre-conditions urged the Central European countries to negotiate solutions.¹⁷ On the other side, it also has to be taken into account that this so far positive, but fragile reconciliation process can still be reversed. There is a realistic danger that a NATO enlargement to include Poland, the Czech Republic, and Hungary, but not Slovakia or Romania, as decided at the Madrid NATO summit in mid July 1997, could cause renewed tension between these two states and Hungary. The nationalist parties might, irrationally, blame the Hungarian minorities for the fact that neither Slovakia nor Romania can join NATO, and they might initiate protest and, ultimately, actions against the Hungarian minority. So far, however, it can be concluded that the Hungarian minority in Romania has settled its long-term conflict with the Romanian state by joining the Romanian government in the end of 1996 and, among other governmental positions, by filling the position of a minority minister. No one among the leaders of the Hungarian minority would today advocate a plebiscite. Still, the nationalists among the Romanian opposition party regard the Hungarians as a irredentist fifth column that is seeking separatism. The Romanian side, however, might very well become inclined towards the implementation of self-determination through plebiscites on another border. Should ethnic Romanians in Ukraine actually demand plebiscites in the Romanian dominated villages on the border with Romania, there would probably be many Romanians in Romania supporting such theoretical efforts. In this respect, the bilateral treaty signed between Romania and Ukraine in 1997 did not have much effect on Romanian nationalism.

The same issues occur in other parts of Eastern Europe with tensions between minorities and majorities.¹⁸ Thus, Estonia will refuse every attempt to implement plebiscites in the Russian-dominated North-Eastern parts of the country. In Lithuania, the same resistance has been shown by the government against attempts of the Polish minority to conduct plebiscites in the area outside the capital Vilnius. Also in Belarus, the government is consequently against initiatives among the large Polish minority to separate from Minsk, declare the formation of a new Polish state, and, perhaps as a result of a plebiscite, to

¹⁷ NATO also caused the negotiations between Denmark and Western Germany in 1954/55 that eventually lead to the Bonn-Copenhagen Declarations.

¹⁸ The following analysis of ethnic issues in Eastern Europe is based on Kühl, Jørgen (ed.): *Mindretalspolitik*. Copenhagen 1996 (= Danish Institute of International Affairs).

unify with Poland. On the other hand, however, Belarusian nationalists do still have a claim on the area surrounding the Lithuanian capital Vilnius.

Options and Limitations of Plebiscites

In these sketched cases, the “model-case Schleswig” with its original implementation of the principle of self-determination can not be transposed, because nowhere in Eastern Europe does there seem to be any consent on the use of plebiscites to solve ethnic disputes. Furthermore, it is hard to imagine that plebiscites will take place with the endorsement of international organizations – except in the case of wars where the peace agreements include plebiscites. To prevent such post-war border regulations, however, the parties in the Balkans in the consecutive wars after the dissolution of Yugoslavia radically used the, in an European context of the 20th century almost “classical”, instrument of genocide and expulsions. In the Balkans, the euphemistically named “ethnic cleansing” has been conducted with extreme brutality to make sure that at least in the Serbian-dominated part of Bosnia-Herzegovina there remains no area with a Muslim majority that could vote in favor of Bosnia-Herzegovina in a theoretical plebiscite. If an ethnic group has already been expelled, terrorized away, deported, or has fled from an original multi-ethnic state, it seems almost impossible to replace its surviving members, and, consequently, to recreate the status quo ante as the basis for plebiscites. Also, the attempt to hold balloting in absentia by granting voting rights to members of an ethnic group who had fled or were expelled from the “ethnically cleansed” area seems to promise little or no success at all. The difficulties with the implementation of the Dayton-Agreement in Bosnia-Herzegovina, where Serbs refuse to let Muslims return to their home villages, proves the limitations of such concepts. In addition, many villages in the Balkans have witnessed a change of inhabitants. Refugees from other areas were located on the property of refugees, deportees, or expellees. And those formerly displaced persons that have been relocated in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, and Serbia, have neither the intention nor the realistic possibility to return to their homes, because other refugees from other regions have been settled there. The current situation in the Balkans clearly shows the limitations of the plebiscite instrument: Who is entitled to participate in a plebiscite and where in the ethnic conflict regions should it be held?

Another category of minorities that in theory could have their problems solved through plebiscites is that of ethnic groups without any homelands. In their case, plebiscites could lead to the creation of new states or confederations that would provide them with a certain degree of territorial autonomy. Such new state structures have evolved in the former Soviet Union, the former Yugoslavia, and the former Czechoslovakia. In these three multinational federations with strong centralist structures the existing state structures were dissolved, and new states were created. However, it has to be pointed out that these

new states already had the status of republics in formal federations, and might have even been full members of the United Nations – like Belarus and the Ukraine. In this respect, one can not speak of minority problems. They were titular nationalities who decided to form states in the territories they had hitherto been living in. A real minority problem would have, on the other hand, been created, if, for instance, the Crimean Tatars in the autonomous Crimea Republic where they are a growing minority due to continuous migration, implemented their aims to create an autonomous republic inside the Ukraine – a form of Tatar autonomy, that already existed in the inter-war period inside the then Russian Crimea. In Moldova, the Christian Turks called Gagauz, would certainly demand independence, if Moldova sometime in the future actually should decide to merge with Romania¹⁹ – as Romanian nationalists and orthodox priests have been demanding ever since Moldovan independence in 1991. The same would be the case for the Russian, or more exactly Soviet-dominated Dniestr SSR in Moldova. These few examples could be continued with a number of cases.

Although the plebiscite instruments in these mentioned cases could be used to solve acute ethnic problems, it will surely not be implemented. No state has any kind of interest to cede parts of its territory. Definitely not in Eastern Europe, where the states have only just in the last decade gained total sovereignty and territorial integrity.

Finally, a number of diaspora minorities exist in Eastern Europe. Among them, the Gypsy or Roma who form the single largest dispersed ethnic entity numbering between 5 and 10 million people. In their case, plebiscites do not have any real cause at all. They do not have their own “homeland” nor do they live as dominant groups in clearly defined and demarcated regions. Though, for some years the Macedonian Gypsies have pleaded for the creation of a sovereign Roma state which should have the name Romanistan. This project simply has to be doomed as unrealistic – not because such a project would not be legitimate, but because no state in Eastern Europe is prepared to provide territory for

¹⁹ Actually, the Gagauz a few years ago received a comprehensive territorial autonomy inside Moldova, which has been described as a model-case at least for those states, that emerged after the disunion of the USSR. See Socor, V.: *Gagauz Autonomy in Moldova: A Precedent for Eastern Europe?* o.O. 1994, 20–28 (= RFE/RL Research Report, III, 33, August 26). That such a model can not be created without obstacles is shown by King, C: *Gagauz Yeri and the Dilemma Of Self-Determination, Transition. Events and Issues in the Former Soviet Union and East-Central and Southeastern Europe.* 1995, 20–25 (= RFE/RL Research Report, I, 19, October 20). A recent and updated account of the situation in Moldova has been published by the European Centre for Minority Issues: *From Ethnopolitical Conflict to Inter-Ethnic Accord in Moldova.* Flensburg 1998 (= ECMI Report, 1, March 1998).

such new state-building. The Gypsies in Eastern Europe are nations without a state and without any international lobby to represent their interests. Therefore, any comparison with the successful ex-territorial existence of the Palestinians, that finally lead to the formation of autonomous Palestinian territories in Israel and the occupied territories, is also irrelevant.

It has to be concluded that the positive Schleswig experience with plebiscites is rather unique. It was not a unique specimen at the time the plebiscites took place in 1920. Then, the Schleswig plebiscites were two in a series of similar attempts to redraw borders due to the national identification of the population on the rim of the collapsed German Empire. In most cases, the instrument did not work out in the long run, the borders continued to be questioned and attacked – and, finally, they were erased as a consequence of the expansionist policy of Nazi Germany.

The Bonn-Copenhagen Declarations of 1955

Other elements of the Schleswig Experience are the governmental Bonn-Copenhagen Declarations of 1955. These declarations were – as described above – made by the Danish and German governments on March 29, 1955, and each guaranteed the minorities their fundamental rights.²⁰ The content of the declarations was in no way inventive or epoch-making. It is easy to find a number of much more far-reaching declarations, laws, and treaties on minority rights, which since 1990 have been signed in Central and Eastern Europe. Especially unified Germany has negotiated and signed a number of treaties including regulations of minority issues with, among others, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, the Russian Federation, and Romania. In each case, the minority issues have been solved through bilateral agreements, not by unilateral, parallel governmental declarations as in the Danish-German case. In this respect, the Schleswig Experience did not have any impact beyond itself. The Bonn-Copenhagen Declarations simply have not been considered by the German government as a useful model for solving ethnic problems. It is interesting to note that a government which on several occasions has described the Schleswig Experience in terms of a model-case, has not considered implementing the positive experiences in its bilateral relations with other states. Anyway, it has been proven that the Bonn-Copenhagen Declarations have had a very positive effect on the coexistence of minorities and majorities in the Danish-German border area.

²⁰ The best analysis of the declarations is Noack, Johan Peter: *Det danske mindretal i Sydslesvig 1948–1955*. Aabenraa 1997, 438–557 (= Institut for Grænseforskning). See in German: *Die Bonn-Kopenhagener Erklärungen. Zur Entstehung eines Modells für nationale Minderheiten*. Flensburg 1985.

They have probably had a much greater positive effect than any bilateral treaty would have had. This positive effect, however, can only be explained to a limited extent by the simple contents of the declarations. First of all, the attendant and external circumstances made it possible to implement the intentions with the declarations. Especially the moral and political obligations of the declarations lead to their practical importance.

Most important was probably the fact, that both countries – Denmark as well as the Federal Republic of Germany – did and still do belong to the wealthiest nations on Earth. The highly developed economic systems were able to produce the surplus to pay for the financial consequences of the solution of the national question and the creation of a framework of organizations and institutions providing cultural autonomy in the Danish-German border region. Denmark and Germany could afford such an optimal solution. Both states could pay for the school systems, libraries, institutions, and organizations for the minorities. The financial support of Denmark and Germany/Schleswig-Holstein was essential for the development of peaceful coexistence between minorities and majorities. The funding enabled the Danes in South Schleswig and the Germans in North Schleswig to preserve and develop their ethnicity without conflict and without ethnic hatred. Therefore, both minorities nowadays can provide their members with an autonomous Danish/German cultural existence within the framework of the minority institutions from birth to death.

Necessary Frameworks

Such circumstances and frameworks are not realistic in Central and Eastern Europe today. There, the financial surplus to pay for ideal solutions of ethnic problems is not available. The only exception is the comprehensive financial support given by Germany to areas with German minorities, and aimed at the development of regions with a variety of ethnic groups. However, the wise policy of Germany to develop entire regions instead of providing support for the ethnic Germans only, is quiet often criticized by the German minorities who have difficulties accepting that the comprehensive material assistance from Germany is not reserved for their group. Also, Turkey with its modest financial support to the Gagauz in Moldova contributes to appeasing ethnic tensions. Otherwise, none of the post-communist states have the ability to create comparable frameworks for minorities as in Schleswig.

Even in Schleswig, it has been proven in recent years that the allegedly model character of the minority regulations needs a constant financial support. If a fiscal surplus was found to satisfy the last relevant demands of the minorities, it is to be assumed that those claims, too, would be supported. In the course of the drastic reductions due to the ongoing economic crisis in Germany, such a surplus simply has not been accumulated. Consequently, to the understandable irritation of the minorities, they do not receive

financial support in an amount they expect or justifiably demand. Tensions do occur, when the fiscal balance providing for the minorities are disturbed. For instance, when the Schleswig-Holstein government in the end of 1997 announced a cut of DM 1.6 millions in the annual support for the Danish minority schools, the Danish minority for the first time ever reacted by a demonstration numbering 4–5,000 people outside the parliament building in Kiel on December 10, 1997. The consequence of these cuts in the funding would eventually lead to the shutdown of 16 minority schools, the Danish school Association in South Schleswig claimed.

Thus, the minorities in Schleswig have still not achieved an equal status with the majorities with regard to financial support – but these real problems within Schleswig must seem like luxury problems viewed in a European perspective.

Joint Interest in Minority Issues

Furthermore, both Denmark and Western Germany had a joint interest and the political will to reach a principal solution of the minority question. None of the states wanted to let the minorities constitute a bilateral problem any longer. This could partly be explained by the experiences that both states have had with the minorities in the period 1920–1950. On the other side, both states shared interests in the field of security policy, which during the Cold War was of far bigger importance than the minority issue. So it was no coincidence, that the West German application for NATO membership in 1954 lead to the Bonn-Copenhagen Declarations of 1955. Realistically, Denmark had hardly any interest in vetoing the West German NATO-membership, especially since West Germany was of great importance for the defense of Denmark. It was in the security interest of Denmark, Scandinavia and Western Europe that West Germany joined and was integrated into the NATO. This interest was, obviously, more important than the fate of the Danish minority. Anyway, it was a lot easier to convince the Danish parliament and the Danish population to accept West German NATO membership if the Danish government could present a political gain expressed by the solution of the tense “South Schleswig Question”. At that time, as it has to be recalled, Danish opinion was extremely critical towards the West German policy with respect to the Danish minority, since the Danish minority party lost its parliamentary representation in 1954. In this connection, the opposition in the Folketing during the debate on West German NATO membership instructed the Danish government of prime minister Hans Hedtoft to present the question of the rights of the Danish minority to the NATO Council meeting in Paris. Although the Danish foreign minister H.C. Hansen, who also became prime minister after the death of Hedtoft in January 1955, himself seemed to disfavor a linkage between the South Schleswig Question and West German access to NATO, he was able to reach a positive result in

the negotiations with Bonn.²¹ If this process is looked at in this way, then the minority issue just seems to have been a minor obstacle to Western German NATO membership. This has not, of course, hindered the widespread opinion in Denmark and among the Danish minority, that the South Schleswig Question and the safeguarding of the Danish minority was decisive for West Germany's integration into the NATO. Though it is a contrafactual way of thinking, it is probably not wrong to claim that West Germany would have joined NATO in any case – with or without any minority agreement. The United States had already made its decision.

A Symbol of the “Schleswig Model”

Nevertheless, the Bonn-Copenhagen Declarations have become an important symbol of the “Schleswig Model”. Some people even think, that the declarations themselves are the essential parts of the so-called model. This would be exaggerating their impact. The declarations were negotiated on the basis of a number of clear preconditions, and both sides were prepared to reach a fundamental solution. The declarations have been – as mentioned – obligating in a moral and political respect, but they did not constitute any basis for political or diplomatic interventions on behalf of the minority in the neighboring state. It was also agreed to let both states support their “own” minority in the other state financially and idealistically. First of all, the practical implementation of the intentions behind the declarations cleared the way to a solution of the minority question in Schleswig.

Democratic Systems and the Absence of Bloody Traditions

Furthermore, it has to be pointed out that Denmark and Western Germany were able to solve the minority question, because both lands had a lot in common. The security factor has already been mentioned above. Additionally, both states have been integrated parts of the same Western, democratic community of states. They also share economic interests as actors in the same European and Global economic cooperation structures. Finally, there has been no tradition of violence or bloodshed in the political struggles in the border region. The conflicts between minorities and majorities have primarily been verbal. These schisms were implacable and quite often extremely nationalistic on both

²¹ Villaume, Poul: „Allieret med forbehold. Danmark og den kolde krig. En Studie i dansk sikkerhedspolitik 1949–1961“. In: *Vandkunsten*. 11–12 (1995), 234ff. The German perception of the negotiations is presented by the late, in 1954–55 prime minister of Schleswig-Holstein von Hassel, Kai-Uwe: “Vorbild im Norden”. In: *Panuropa*. 2 (1995), 15–17.

sides; but even in periods with the toughest confrontation, the disputes never turned violent, although symbols of the other part in the conflict were vandalized or destroyed several times. No one at any time has seriously advocated the annihilation of the counterpart. In the first years after World War II, it regularly came to fistfights between Danish and German juveniles because of systematic provocation. But no systematic use of force became a legitimate instrument in the national confrontation.

In the 20th century, there has been no attempt either to solve the national question by resettlement of the minorities (the so-called ethnic or population transfer) as it has been the case in consecutive waves in Central and Eastern Europe. The *idée fixe* to solve the Schleswig minority problem through resettlement, however, still exists in the form of the naive question, that members of the Danish and German minorities are often confronted with: Danes from Denmark ask Danes in Germany or Germans from Germany ask Germans in Denmark, why they do not just move to Denmark/Germany since they obviously consider themselves so much as Danish/ German. The fact that such questions still are asked shows what little importance the former conflictuous minority question in Schleswig has got in modern Denmark and Germany. Most Danes and Germans simply do not know anything about the existence of a Danish and a German minority. A lot do not care. Hardly anyone would get upset because of the situation of these minorities. Nowadays, only a few extremists in Denmark and Germany seriously advocate border revisions. The minorities have actually become a kind of exotic group, remains from a past which are only interesting in the context of the present ethnic conflicts in Eastern Europe. And only the context gives reason for further studies, not the minorities themselves.

The bloody element in the relationship between Danes and Germans is hidden back in the 19th century. The memory of the two wars on the territorial status of Schleswig in 1848–50 and 1864 lived on in the historical self-understanding on both sides, but they have lost their former central importance and function for the identity-building process in the second half of the 20th century. In the 1990's, the wars over Schleswig just played a part in the public discourse in exceptional contexts, only like in public discussions on national symbols and monuments. This non-existence of a bloody tradition and violence has been a central precondition for the elegant settlement of the Schleswig question. Naturally, some people in both the minorities and majorities still hate each other. This hatred is sometimes displayed publicly, as the recent discussion on the Euroregion has proved. In general, however, minorities and majorities do not hate each other any longer. They live peacefully next to each other and with one other. They participate without any problems in the activities of the other part, but avoid speaking loudly about it. Otherwise, ignorance and indifference towards the minorities characterizes the attitude of the majorities on both sides.

Institutionalized Dialogue

An important step in mitigation towards the solution of minority conflicts is to engage the conflictous parts in a peaceful dialogue. In the case of the Schleswig minorities, there have been several attempts to not only engage in a dialogue, but also to institutionalize it in proper forums. Thus, the German minority in Denmark engaged in a contact committee with the Danish government in 1965. Under the chairmanship of the prime minister this committee meets regularly to discuss matters concerning the German minority. In 1983, the Danish government furthermore established a liaison office for the German minority competently attached to the prime ministers office in Copenhagen. These efforts have assured a regular information on issues of interest between the Danish government and the German minority.

The Danish minority in Germany already engaged in an institutionalized dialogue in 1950.²² In accordance with the Kiel Declaration of September, 26th 1949, a committee was established to examine complaints and suggestions by members of the Danish minority. It consisted of three members appointed by the Danish minority and three official representatives appointed by the state commissioner for Schleswig. Further, a secretary belonging to the Danish minority was appointed by the committee. The committee was able to work despite the severe crisis in the relationship between the Danish minority and the Schleswig-Holstein government under Lübke 1951–54, when the state prime minister tried to dissolve the Kiel Declaration. After the Bonn Declaration of March 1955, however, the committee was phased out by the Kiel government. In September 1955, the Kiel Declaration was annulled, and it was decided to abolish the joint committee at the end of 1958. When the Kiel Declaration was annulled on September 13, 1955, the Schleswig-Holstein Landtag decided to form a parliamentary committee concerning issues related to Danish minority. This committee consisted of 13 members of the Landtag and 2 experts appointed by the political party of the Danish minority. However, this committee never fulfilled the expectations that were attached to it. Only four meetings took place, and in January 1958 the Danish minority saw no further reason for cooperation. The committee was dissolved after the state elections of 1958, when the Danish minority was able to gain two seats in the Landtag and was enabled to participate in the political work on equal basis. In the meantime, the Danish minority was looking for a representation in Bonn. While the Danish minority from 1957 wished

²² I examine these committees in the forthcoming book: Henningsen, Lars N., Martin Klatt, Jørgen Kühl: *SSW-dansksindet politik i Sydslesvig 1945–1998*. Flensburg 1998.

to establish a liaison office, however, the West German government was not willing to accept any kind of institutionalized dialogue, unless the same was granted to the German minority in Denmark. The Danish government, though, was not willing to support such an institution, and told the Danish minority, that it rather should appoint a press officer. The Danish minority interrupted the negotiations with Bonn and appointed a journalist, who had the task to write articles to the newspapers of the Danish minority and to inform the politicians in Bonn on issues of interest concerning the Danish minority. This position existed, paid by the Danish government, in the period 1959–1963. First after the German minority was granted the contact committee in Copenhagen in the beginning of 1965 attached to the Danish prime minister, the West German government accepted to establish a similar forum concerning the Danish minority. However, the Bonn committee was placed under the auspices of the interior ministry and with the interior minister as chairman. Despite initial problems in the work of the Bonn committee, it turned out, that is as well as the committee in Copenhagen was able to institutionalize a dialogue between government and minority.

This experience might, indeed, have a model character for minority conflicts in other parts of Europe. However, it has to be pointed out that these committees were only dealing with relations between the government and the minority within the same state. No kin-state was involved in the actual negotiations. In Eastern Europe, the German government chose another instrument after the break-up of 1989: In the case of Russia and Romania there were established joint governmental committees consisting of representatives of Germany, Russia/Romania and the German minorities in the respective country. Thus, the minority issue was internationalized in a bilateral forum including the minorities. This instrument is, on the other side, only productive in the case of national minorities with a kin-state. Minorities without such a support-state will not profit from this experience. In their case, a structure similar to the contact committees in Denmark and Germany might be a constructive choice. At least, the then-time chancellor of West Germany, Ludwig Erhard, claimed in 1965, that the newly formed contact committee with the Danish minority had a European model function.

But there are other ways to safeguard the interests of minorities. In the transition period after the upheavals of 1989/91 so-called minority round tables including government and minority representatives were set up in several states to discuss minority issues. In Romania, the minorities have guaranteed representation in the national parliament, and a special committee on minority and human rights is dealing with their issues. In Montenegro, the Albanian minority also has guaranteed representation in the republics parliament. In Hungary, the government in June 1995 appointed an ombudsman for minorities, Kaltenbach, who happened to be member of the Hungarian German ethnic group. Thus, the Schleswig experience with institutionalized dialogue is not necessarily

adaptable to other minority areas, but it might very well form the basis for similar forums between governments and minorities.

Minorities and Majorities in Everyday Life

In everyday life, it is extremely difficult to see any difference between minorities and majorities, although in North Schleswig it is well-known who belongs to the German minority and who does not. When the situation in the borderland is viewed from the outside, it is almost impossible to point out differences. Danes and Germans do not differ on the outside, and only a relatively small share of the minorities actually speak the language of the group. In South Schleswig, most of the children who belong to the Danish minority speak German, in North Schleswig the young Germans speak Danish. So the language does not divide majority and minority, but actually links them together. The official languages of both minorities are for large parts of the common members almost foreign languages. The mother tongue of the majority is also the mother tongue of most members of the minority. The situation in Schleswig is not unique, but also describes most other regions inhabited by ethnic minorities in Europe. The paradox is very often the rule.

Assimilation Processes in the Danish-German Borderland

To the greatest frustration of the elitist layers of the minorities, serious linguistic and cultural assimilation processes are taking place. Germans buy Danish furniture and Danish shoes, they spend their vacations in Denmark, and even display the Danish national flag on the back of their cars to show their sympathy for Denmark (next to Norway, Sweden and Finland). Danes, however, are in no way characterized by the same openness and goodwill towards Germans. No Dane would dream about displaying a German flag, and when they visit Germany, they prefer to buy Danish products. The only difference between Germans and Danes in South Schleswig is, that while Germans display the “pure” Danish flag, the members of the Danish minority prefer their own version that includes the traditional lions from the Schleswig coat of arms and the word “Sydslesvig”.

The schools of the minorities are used today by many members of the majorities who see the quality of a bilingual education or simply sympathize with the values of the minority education. Despite the fact that the minorities themselves hardly agree with it it has to be realized, that the Danish schools in South Schleswig like the German schools in North Schleswig are no longer merely minority institutions attended by minority pupils. The schools are especially attractive to families that have moved to the area from other parts of Denmark or Germany. They do not have any reservations towards the minority

institutions at all. They use them as service institutions. The German kindergartens are even more widely used as attractive alternatives – but in many cases the children do not continue into the German minority schools afterwards.

This, on the other hand, does not imply that the differences between minorities and majorities have become leveled or erased. The minorities are extremely aware of their essentials and their ethno-cultural connection. The organizations and schools are clearly bearers of the Danish or German culture and disseminate the respective national identity and culture inside the minority. Still, they have not been able to prevent members of the majority using the minority institutions for a number of reasons. Thus, in South Schleswig there are a number of children in the Danish minority schools who come from families which recently migrated to the region from former East Germany and do not have any kind of physical, familiar or cultural connection to Danish culture. Nevertheless, they have decided on behalf of their children to join the Danish minority and to let them become socialized in the framework of the Danish minority. It even seems like Germans immigrated from Russia/former USSR are attracted by the Danish minority in Germany. This surprising tendency might be seen as indicative of a development where the minority schools in South Schleswig are either attractive to Germans or that the institutions actually are welcoming children from families without any connection to the “classical” Danish minority. It has to be added that children from non-Danish families are not automatically entitled to enter the minority schools. The precondition for acceptance of these children is that the parent do agree with the clear Danish-cultural objective of the minority schools – and that they sign their acceptance on paper. Parents wishing to have their children attend Danish kindergartens or schools must be informed about the expectations that the Danish minority has for the children and the parents. Even those parents who belong to the Danish minority and have leading positions like, for instance, teachers, have to accept these provisions.

Assimilation and Dissimilation

The absolute negation and the inherent conflict between Danes and Germans seems to be retreating. It seems certain, that 25 years from now, it will be even more difficult to point out serious disagreements between majorities and minorities. Thus, a interesting process is taking place in the Schleswig area, wherein assimilation and dissimilation characterize the relationship between majorities and minorities, and where national or ethnic differences lose their importance for the individuals in the border region. Meanwhile, however, the principled differences between Danes and Germans on the formal level still do exist and, consequently, are promoted by the minority organizations. When segments of the majority dissimilates to the minority, and parts of the minority assimilate to the majority, it becomes hard to point out demarcations between the

groups. A central question then arises: Who belongs to a minority – and who does not? The Danish and German minority organizations are challenged by these developments, because they have to define a policy towards the “newcomers” who join the minorities due to ideas of multi-culturalism and bilingualism. In order to preserve the unique character of the minorities, the organizations have started to discuss the implementation of certain criteria. The subjective choice of nationality is still accepted; but the minorities have responded to the new interest in participating in sectors of the minority life by demanding objective elements. It has been discussed for many years, whether the use of the Danish language in the Danish minority should be promoted and become essential. To support “objective Danishness”, it has been decided not to give financial support to German speeches or theater performances in the main cultural organization of the Danish minority. This, however, only triggered protest among the local districts where people – with a few exceptions – speak German only.

Therefore, the consequent question must be whether the Danish and German minorities are on the way to lose their objective ethnicity and sooner or later will become pure communities of interest and sympathy for Denmark/Germany, without the ability to communicate in the ethnic language with Danes/Germans in their “motherlands”, and without the ability to be influenced by cultural, social, and political developments in their “motherlands”, because most minority members no longer speak the language of the ethnicity. It is almost impossible to give a simple answer to this question. It seems, that it is actually possible to survive as a member of minority groups without the objective criteria for ethnicity. But it is probably going to be extremely difficult to preserve the existence and maintain the legitimization of the minorities as group-entities without the existence of an opinion-making elite that speaks the ethnic language. At the same time, it has to be pointed out that a large part of the minority members were actually at some time in their life able to speak the ethnic language. They either attended the minority schools and spent their entire educational life listening to the ethnic language, or the participated in language courses. After they finished school, however, many members of the minorities simply forgot their language skills, either because for a period of time they left the minority, or because they realized that these language skills were not essential for joining the “adult” minority life.

Especially in the Schleswig region, the objective criteria have to be central elements in the ethnic label of the minorities. If the minorities lose their language skills, the “motherlands” would probably no longer see any legitimate reason to support the existence of the minorities financially. Therefore, it is in the essential interest of the minorities to clarify their group identity and to disseminate the ability to speak and understand the ethnic language. These challenges are, once again, not unique to the Schleswig area. Many minorities in Europe are actually characterized by the fact, that

only a relatively small number of people have sufficient skills in the official language of the ethnic group. Most members of the minorities express their ethnicity through the language of the respective majorities. Exceptions are, for instance, the Russian-speaking minorities outside Russia, most of the Hungarian minorities in Slovakia, Hungary and Serbia, the remaining Germans in Transsylvania and the Banat area, but also the Finlandswedes, where the ethnic language still is dominant.

The Schleswig Experience

All these elements together constitute the special Schleswig Experience. It has been achieved to solve the national conflict and to develop an understanding between the cultures in the border region. Although prejudices and ignorance are still found, this has not kept the younger generations from using the cultural opportunities on both sides. The minorities, nowadays, are integrated entities, but they still hold on to their principled special status, and on the official level, they are still characterized by segregation. Furthermore, the German minority in Denmark, and the Danish minority in Germany have both pacified and were made passive as a result of the settlement of the minority questions by the governments. For decades, the minorities have only now and then been subject in the bilateral relations between Denmark and Germany. The minorities do not articulate far-reaching political demands, but participate in the mainstream of the political discourse. They like to demonstrate to visiting groups from other regions with tense minority questions how they are living peacefully together with the majorities in Schleswig. Mostly, the minorities are only objects of the policies. Today, cross-border cooperation is taking place without a preliminary involvement of the minorities. The minorities have been offered to join the cooperation process between Denmark and Germany, especially on the local and regional level; but they do not play any central or decisive part. Thus, pacification made the minorities passive. The minority problems have been solved, and the minorities today try, without internal debate or tension, to re-determine their importance and objectives.

It is this experience, and its special preconditions, which altogether form the so-called "Schleswig model-case". The model was not created with the governmental Bonn-Copenhagen Declarations of 1955. The model is rather a consequence of the implementation of the intentions behind these declarations. The model, thus, is an enduring and inert developmental process from confrontation to peaceful coexistence. The model, however, has not yet been completed. The evolutionary process is still going on. In future decades it will be proven how the development took place, and what the final result will be. It can be guessed that a bicultural region might emerge with strong, in a cultural and national sense very aware, but simultaneously non-nationalistic minorities. Another possibility is total assimilation, and the minorities will simply disappear. A

final scenario would be the reverse of the process. Dissimilation would characterize the mainstream inside the minorities. The objective ethnicity-constituting criteria will become of new importance, and, consequently, the measurable differences between the ethnic groups in the Danish-German borderlands will be demarcated. This would be the opposite reaction of the contemporary somewhat disillusioned cheering within the minorities of the subjective, individual identification as the deciding measure of ethnicity.

Whatever direction it is going to take, it has to be underlined, that this is a long-term evolutionary process. It cannot be applied to and implemented in a few days or months. It requires decades and is strongly influenced by external factors on which the minorities have little or no impact at all. Consequently, the Schleswig Model is not an instrument to be transferred to other minority areas. But the Schleswig Experience of minorities and majorities certainly might give inspiration for the solution of ethnic conflicts in other regions in Europe. Therefore, it is important to conduct comparative studies on this issue. It has to be recalled, however, that the preconditions, motives, and historical heritage will always be different in other regions, and, thus, require other approaches than in the Danish-German case.

The Schleswig Experience is no universal wisdom in the field of minorities; but with certain reservations, it might be useful to study when attempting to develop effective mechanisms for mitigation and conflict-resolution in other areas of ethnic conflicts. Thus, the solution of the minority conflict in the Danish-German border area rather has to be viewed as a pattern than as a blueprint.