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European Minority Language Dailies Association meets in Lusatia

The European Association of Daily Newspapers in Minority and Regional Languages (MIDAS) met in its fifth annual general assembly in Bautzen/Budyšin, Germany. MIDAS expressed its support for the demands of the local Sorbian-speaking minority and awarded journalists writing in favour of minority protection. MIDAS member newspapers aim to go on the internet with a joint e-paper soon.

Bautzen (or Budyšin in Sorbian), the cultural centre of the Upper Sorbians, is home to the Sorbians' only daily newspaper, Serbske Nowiny, who hosted the conference last weekend.

In her welcoming speech to the representatives of the 30 MIDAS member daily newspapers representing 13 minority languages, Barbara Ludwig, Minister of Science and Culture of Saxony, said that her Government funded the Sorbian-language media with half a million Euros a year.

While taking note of the support from Saxony, Serbske Nowiny Editor-in-Chief Benedikt Dyrlich and other speakers pointed out that Saxony had announced the closing down of Sorbian-language schools because of lack of funds.

MIDAS President Toni Ebner, from South Tyrol, said that governments should not only passively respect the right of ethnic minorities to use their language, but also be proactive in order to protect this freedom.

“Domowina” President Jan Nuck said it was a pity that the 60,000 Sorbian-speakers in Saxony and Brandenburg had to see the state support for their education in mother tongue more or less vanish.

The participants at the MIDAS general assembly adopted a statement in which they expressed their solidarity with the Sorbian minority, including the demand of Sorbian-language journalists for equal treatment from the state with their German-language colleagues.

MIDAS awarded Björn Mansson, journalist of the Swedish-language Hufvudstadsbladet in Finland, with the MIDAS Prize for Journalism 2005 for covering minority issues and language policies in the EU. Gian Antonio Stella, journalist of the Corriere della Sera in Italy, with the Otto von Habsburg Prize for Journalism 2005 for contributing to positive knowledge on minorities in Italy.

In the near future, MIDAS will consider launching an e-paper format containing versions of each newspaper on the internet.

The next MIDAS general assembly will be hosted by the German-language Der Nordschleswiger in Apenrade (Åbenrå) in Denmark next May. (Eurolang © 2005)