Postage stamps issued for use in the German plebiscite areas following World War I and in other areas under special status as defined by the Treaty of Versailles.

Parts II and III of the Treaty of Versailles define several border areas of the German Reich which because they contained large numbers of non-German populations were required to hold referendums (plebiscites) to determine whether they wanted to remain with Germany or not.

These plebiscites areas were Memel, Allenstein, Marienwerder, Upper Silesia, Eupen Malmédy, Schleswig.
Memel (Klaipeda)  Area:  2,660 km²  
Population:  ~ 145,000

According to part III, Section X, Article 99 of the Treaty of Versailles, this territory was detached from Germany and was assigned to be governed by a commission of the Allied and Associate Powers (not the League of Nations) and administered by France. This administration lasted until 1923, when Memel was forcibly occupied by Lithuanian troops. A plebiscite was not stipulated in the Versailles treaty.

In 1924, Memel became incorporated as a semi-autonomous district of Lithuania with the approval of the Allied powers and the League of Nations.
Memel (continued)

This is a stamp of the regular Germania series, overprinted Memelgebiet (Memel area) at the state printing office in Berlin and issued on 1 August 1920.

As of July 1921, stamps of the regular French series, over printed with MEMEL and with Mark values were issued by the French state printer. There were many mistakes (mark not Mark) and many overprints due to the inflation.

There were many air-mail overprints, too.

In January 1923 Lithuanian troops occupied the Memel territory without protest from the French administration. By 26 May Memel had been integrated into Lithuania.
The Allenstein plebiscite area covered a large rural area along the southern border of East Prussia. Though the area had a large Slavic minority, these were Masurians who were mostly Lutherans like their German neighbours.

The plebiscite commission arrived in February 1920, the vote was held on 11 July 1920 and the commission left on 12 August.

The vote by 371,189 people or 87.3% of the eligible population was 97.89% in favour of Germany.
Allenstein  (continued)

The first stamps issued by the German state printers in Berlin in April 1920 were overprints of the regular German series, reading PLÉBISCITE and OLSZTYN ALLENSTEIN.

In May these stamps were replaced by the same stamps but this time carrying an oval overprint reading TRAITÉ DE VERSAILLES ART. 94 et 95 inside the oval, and COMMISSION D’ADMINISTRATION ET DE PLÉBISCITE OLSZTIN ALLENSTEIN around the circumference.

The stamps though removed from sale on 20 August 1920 could be used until sufficient regular German stamps became available in mid September.
Marienwerder (Kwidzyn)  
Area: 2300 km²  
Population: ~ 161,000

This area is adjacent to Allenstein, but it had administratively been part of West Prussia, which had been handed over to Poland. The large German ethnic majority in this area required that a plebiscite be held.

The vote by 125,090 eligible voters with an 84.0% turnout was 93.73% in favour of Germany. Again, large parts of the Slavic speaking populations must have voted for remaining with Germany.
The first stamps, issued in March 1920, were printed in Milan bearing the inscription COMMISSION INTERALLIÉE and MARIENWERDER. Note: The Polish name of the area was missing.

Because of delays with the Italian printers, German stamps with the overprint Commission Interalliée Marienwerder had temporarily to be employed.

Finally, the correct Italian stamps, printed in Milan and bearing the inscription PLÉBISCITE and MARIENWERDER KWIDZYN, arrived 11 July, the day of the vote.

The stamps were removed from sale on 16 August 1920 but could be used until sufficient German stamps became available in October.
Oberschlesien (Gorny Slask)  
Area: 11,000 km²  
Population: ~ 2,073,000

The largest plebiscite area with a strongly mixed population was Upper Silesia including the important industrial and mining area around Katowice (Kattowitz), Gliwice (Gleiwitz) and Bytom (Beuthen).

The referendum mandated by Part III, Section IV of the Treaty of Versailles was carried out in March 1921 and resulted in 60% of the votes for Germany and 40% for Poland, even though the population was estimated at being 70% Polish speaking.

Before a border could be drawn up based on this vote, Polish forces started an uprising, which was opposed by German free corps. The final border settlement, essentially along the cease fire line drawn by the League of Nations awarded about one third of the territory with about half the population and 80% of the heavy industry to Poland.

remains in Germany

to Poland

to Czechoslovakia
These first stamps were printed at the Atelier du Timbre in Paris in February 1920. When different values were needed local print-shops used whatever type stock they had on hand. Hence there are hundreds of variations.

This is a stamp of the second series printed in Paris and issued in March 1920, reading COMMISSION DE GOUVERNEMENT HAUTE SILESIE, OBERSCHLESIEN - GORNY SLASK.

To publicize the referendum these same stamps were also issued overprinted with the date of the plebiscite.

German official issues were used with the overprint C. G. H. S. (Commission de Gouvernement Haute Silesie). Again, sloppy printing resulted in many variants.

East of the cease fire line locally printed stamps were used as of 14 June 1921. Though prohibited by the interallied commission the stamps were used within the area and for mail into Poland. This 40 Pfennig (40 F.) stamp shows the Polish eagle and Gorny Slask.
Both German speaking Eupen and largely French speaking Malmédy had formed part of the German Empire. Belgium claimed these areas since they had once belonged to the Bishopric of Liège.

A “plebiscite” was held in 1920, but as stipulated in the Treaty of Versailles (Part III, Art. 34) the vote was not secret, and people had to officially register to vote against joining Belgium. Since they feared reprisals, only 271 votes went for Germany.

The first stamps to be used in this area after Belgian troops had occupied it in early 1919 were regular Belgian stamps overprinted with the French and Flemish terms for Germany.
The next issue made early in 1920 and servicing both areas was overprinted EUPEN & MALMÉDY as well as with the applicable value in Reichsmark.

Shortly after and as soon as the territories had been integrated into the Belgian currency sphere, separate issues were made for EUPEN and for MALMÉDY.

In July 1940 Hitler reintegrated Eupen and Malmédy into Germany.
At the end of WW2 Eupen and Malmédy became Belgian again.
The people of Eupen still speak German today.
Schleswig (Slesvig)

Area: ~ 6,000 km²
Population: < 1,000,000

Schleswig had become a Prussian province in 1866 in consequence of a succession disputed between Prussia and Austria.

The plebiscite commission divided the territory into a northern more Danish speaking area (Zone 1) and a southern more German speaking area (Zone 2). Plebiscites were held in February and March 1920, Zone 1 opting for Denmark and Zone 2 for Germany.

The Schleswig plebiscite area:

Initially the stamps at left, denominated in Mark and Pfennig were used in both zones.
As of May 1920 stamps denominated in Danish Kroner and overprinted with 1.Zone were used in North Schleswig.
Danzig (Gdansk)

The City of Danzig - though surrounded by areas in which the percentage of Slavic speakers was very high - was itself nearly 98% German speaking. It therefore could not be turned over to Poland, and yet Poland needed a harbour. Special arrangements were called for. Hence, on 10 January 1920, the city became an independent political entity with the mandate to provide free transit for goods to and from Poland.
Initially German stamps with a **Danzig** overprint were used. But soon - in January 1921 - stamps bearing the coat of arms of Danzig started to be used.

The hyperinflation in Germany caused the Danzig administration to introduce a new **Gulden currency** in 1923.

Danzig was occupied by German troops at the very beginning of WW2. Overprinted Danzig stamps were used for some months before regular German postage became legal.

In accordance with the Versailles Treaty Poland maintained a post office in Danzig where Polish stamps with the overprint **PORT GDANSK** were used.

To commemorate the reintegration of Danzig into the German Reich two stamps were issued in September 1939.

After WW2 Danzig became Gdansk, the principal port city of the new Polish state.
Saar (Sarre)  

The Saar basin – named for its main river - had been one of Germany’s most important coal mining areas and heavy industrial provinces. France feared this industrial potential and tried to sway its population to integrate into France.

However, the mandated plebiscite after 15 years (in 1935) showed that 90.5% of the people preferred to return to Germany.

Since the territory had been partially Prussian and partially Bavarian beforehand, the first stamps used were German and Bavarian stamps overprinted with Sarre.
Soon, in February 1921, stamps printed by Vaugirard in Paris were issued.

This 25 Mark stamp shows the Burbach steel works.

Three months later the same series was overprinted with the values shown in centimes and francs.

As of March 1921, a similar issue entirely in French currency was printed-up.

To remind people to vote some stamps of the 1926 standard series were overprinted with VOLKSABSTIMMUNG 1935 (Plebiscite)

At the same time in late 1934, Germany issued two electoral propaganda stamps.

After WW2, France again attempted to incorporate the Saar. After an election in 1955 the Saarland became a province of the Federal Republic of Germany.