



Federal Union of European Nationalities (FUEN)  
Union Fédéraliste des Communautés Ethniques Européennes (UFCE)  
Föderalistische Union Europäischer Volksgruppen e. V. (FUEV)  
Федералистский Союз Европейских Национальных Меньшинств

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## **Democracy, federalism and multiculturalism – the example of Switzerland**

*from 17th - 27th June 2003 in Grisons and Bern*

### **Introduction**

In 2003, the Swiss canton of Grisons celebrates 200 years as part of the Swiss Confederation. To mark the occasion and as a 'gift to Europe', the Federal Union of European Nationalities (FUEN) took the initiative to hold a seminar entitled 'Democracy, federalism and multiculturalism – the example of Switzerland' in this canton. The reasons behind this initiative are that the Canton of Grisons is home to two linguistic and cultural minorities, and FUEN's vocation to promote the interests of national minorities in Europe. Switzerland with its federalist structure and highly developed democracy is generally recognised as a model of statehood worthy of emulation, particularly for multiethnic regions in conflict.

The seminar will focus on Georgia, a multicultural society currently experiencing serious difficulties making the transition from a Soviet Socialist Republic to a genuinely sovereign democratic state. The country has experienced a decade of regional conflicts which have created an unstable political situation and complicated the process of democratisation and its search for suitable institutional structures. Georgia is a member of the Council of Europe.

FUEN has cultivated close contacts with Georgia and, as a non-governmental organisation, wants to highlight the importance of the role of civil society in the process of democratisation and the creation of a federal system in the country. FUEN is responsible for the organisation and implementation of the seminar. It will work closely with the Swiss canton of Grisons, which is providing financial and moral support, together with the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) and Lia Rumantscha, which are supporting the project with both funds and consulting services.

### **GEORGIA**

Georgia, like Switzerland, is a multicultural country where in addition to a population made up 70 per cent of Georgians there are other national minorities, some of which are located in relatively compact communities in specific regions. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union a number of ethnic minorities put up resistance to the rigid nationalisation policy of the new government of Georgia. Civil war broke out in Abkhazia and South Ossetia; Ajaria successfully defended itself against the influence of the central government, and in other regions the situation remains precarious. Although in recent years, armed conflicts have been only on a small-scale, the overall situation is still unstable. As a result of the armed conflicts and destabilisation, the country has become increasingly fragmented and the various regions and their inhabitants are leading increasingly separate existences. This is particularly noticeable with the younger generation.

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## **Objectives**

The aim of the project is to allow 30 Georgians of both sexes and of different ethnic groups from the spheres of politics, media and academia to come together for a period of 10 days to enable them:

- a) to experience the multicultural world of Switzerland and familiarise themselves with its political structures;
- b) to learn about the Council of Europe's standards for the protection of minorities;
- c) to benefit from contacts and exchanges with other participants who represent a variety of social groups.

Georgia's size, topography and climatic conditions, and its multicultural composition (four language regions) are features it has in common with Switzerland. The Swiss model of federalism seems at least worth examining as a possible institutional approach to resolving regional conflicts and as a stabilising factor.

Participants in the seminar will have the opportunity to learn about Switzerland's political structures by gaining first-hand experience at the local, cantonal and federal levels. The aim is to help them find out more about how cultural and linguistic diversity is managed in Switzerland, in particular with regard to the political system and the media. This is clearly best achieved by 'seeing for oneself', i.e. by travelling to and staying in the four language regions. A thorough introduction to and discussion about the Swiss experience and institutions will provide the participants with a new outlook and references, as well as an impetus that can be of use to them in the context of the current situation in Georgia and in the future.

The further aim of the seminar is to promote Georgia's integration in the Council of Europe. For this reason a special effort will be made to inform participants about the Council, about the instruments available for the protection of ethnic minorities, and to encourage discussion on these topics.

The seminar is aimed at younger generation Georgians from various social and professional backgrounds who are destined to play a prominent role in their country's future development. It will be an opportunity for these people to meet and establish contact with each other, contacts which can be followed up on their return to Georgia. This is particularly important for representatives of political and state organisations and of ethnic minorities, as well as of other members of Georgian civil society.

## **FEDERAL UNION OF EUROPEAN NATIONALITIES**

FUEN was founded in 1949 in Versailles with the following aims:

- to bring together the national minorities and the minor linguistic and cultural communities in Europe under a single umbrella organisation;
- to promote exchange of information and solidarity between communities;
- to improve the legal status of minorities within their respective national states.

From the outset, one of the main focal points of its work has been the creation of legally binding international instruments for the protection of minorities in Europe. Since the 1950s, it has petitioned for the establishment of universally recognised standards for the protection and promotion of national minorities. In 1992, it presented its own draft convention for the protection of ethnic groups to the Council of Europe. Its activities are guided by the following principles:

- apply only democratic and constitutional methods;
- reject all forms of violence;
- respect individual state borders and reject separatist tendencies.

FUEN has consultant status at the UN and at the Council of Europe. Its official languages are English, French, Russian and German.

## **Structure**

Since May 2003 FUEN has 48 full and 25 associate members, making it the largest and most representative non-governmental organisation for linguistic and cultural minorities in Europe. Full members are representative organisations of national minorities and small ethnic groups. Organisations wishing to become familiar with FUEN's work or those interested only in specific aspects of minority policy are admitted as associate members.

It has a democratic structure. Currently, the committee comprises seven member organisations representing the German minority in Denmark, the Sorbian minority in Germany, the Croatian minority in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, the Hungarian minorities in Hungary's neighbouring states, South Tyrol, the Cornish in Great Britain and the Raeto Romansch minority in Switzerland.

FUEN also has a very active cooperation with the Youth of European Nationalities YEN ([www.yeni.org](http://www.yeni.org)); the President of YEN is the 8th member of the committee. Each full member organisation has two votes at the annual delegates' meeting, which is held at the conclusion of the International Congress of Nationalities. The purpose of two votes is to allow each member organisation to take two different positions, representing diverging views within the group, on any one issue. Associate members do not have voting rights at the annual delegates' meeting.

Organisations applying for membership to FUEN are required to receive a delegation of FUEN representatives for talks which centre on ascertaining the democratic credentials of the candidate organisation and its relationship with its national government. The delegation also makes a presentation to the national government about FUEN and questions it about its relationship with the candidate organisation. To gain admission, candidate organisations must undertake to pursue FUEN's policy principles, to base their activities on democratic principles and the rule of law, and to reject violence and separatism.

FUEN regularly invites representatives of regional and state governments and parliaments from the countries of member organisations to participate in an informal advisory board of representatives of such bodies to provide active support for FUEN's work. This project has not yet been completed.

FUEN receives financial backing in the form of annual contributions or project donations from a number of territorial bodies including the Federal State of Schleswig-Holstein (Germany), the Federal State of Carinthia (Austria), the Trentino region of South Tyrol (Italy), the Swiss Confederation, and the Federal Republic of Germany.

## **Activities**

FUEN holds an annual congress (this year in Italy); it organises regional events in particular for minorities with the same or a similar language, and it undertakes fact-finding missions in countries with minority groups with a view to visiting them and compiling a report on the situation in the country concerned for the attention of the Council of Europe. (Last year, missions visited Georgia and Serbia.) It publishes a periodical bulletin, makes statements and resolutions on current events and problems concerning member organisations.

As the umbrella organisation of and expert in ethnic minority questions, FUEN provides consulting services both to the national minorities and to interested state bodies. One of FUEN's basic principles is to engage representatives of ethnic nationalities and of state bodies as partners in all of its activities. This principle is based on the awareness that compromise can only be reached at the negotiating table, and that the most important element in this context is dialogue.

Further information is available at [www.fuen.org](http://www.fuen.org)

## **LIA RUMANTSCHA**

Lia Rumantscha is the umbrella organisation of the Raeto Romansch communities in eastern Switzerland. It has been a member organisation of FUEN since the 1950s. Congresses were held in Zuoz in 1956 and in St. Moritz in 1994. For the first time in FUEN's history, the organisation is headed by a Romansch, Romedi Arquint, a former president of LIA RUMANTSCHA and currently member of the parliament of Grisons.

## **Consultants in Georgia**

The Swiss embassy and the Tbilisi office of the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) Ambassador Heidi Tagliavini, head of the UN Observer Mission in Georgia (UNOMIG).

## **Partners:**

- Public Movement Multinational Georgia (Arnold Stepanian)
- Alexi Gerasimov, Assistant to the President of Georgia on Interethnic Relations
- Caucasian Institute of Peace, Democracy and Development (Dr. Ghia Nodia)
- Azeri, Armenian, Greek and German organisations of Georgia
- DFA Berne
- Canton of Grisons
- Council of Europe

## **Partners, speakers and accompaniment in Switzerland**

- Prof. Daniel Thürer, University of Zurich
- Bruno Hartig and Regina Jensdottir, Representatives of the Council of Europe
- Andreas Gross, MP of the Swiss National Parliament and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe member of the Swiss National Council
- Ruth-Gaby Vermot-Mangold, MP of the Swiss Parliament and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe
- Prof. François Grin, University of Geneva
- Remigio Ratti, Director of radio and television in Italian-speaking Switzerland (RTSI)
- Romedi Arquint, member of Grisons parliament, FUEN President
- Mr. Engler, president of the Government of the canton of Grisons
- Stephan Hug, headmaster of the primary school of Samedan
- Thomas Nievergelt, mayor of Samedan
- Achille Casanova, Vice Chancellor of Switzerland

## **Seminar participants**

Efforts will be made to ensure a balanced mix of participants at the seminar to include members of the Georgian parliament, members of the administration of the various ethnic communities and regions, academics, media personalities and other representatives of civil society. The participants should be young and interested in a democratic Georgia and with their careers still ahead of them. An indispensable prerequisite is the readiness of all participants to engage in dialogue with each other. Knowledge of English is an advantage, but not essential. However participants who do not have English should have a good command of Russian.

The composition of the delegation might be as follows (overlapping is possible):

government and administration (3)  
parliament (4)  
media (1), academic (1)  
civil society (NGOs): 4  
representatives of the regions of Abkhazia (3), South Ossetia (2), Adjara (1)  
representatives of ethnic minorities (1 Azeri, 1 Greek, 1 German, 1 Russian, 1 Meskhetian, 1 Yezid)

## **Translation team**

Translators for translations into Russian, English and German will be provided.

## **Dates**

17 June – 27 June 2003 (Tuesday to Friday)

## **Venues**

Samedan, Berne

## Activities

# Programme (provisional)

1. (Tuesday 17 June) Arrival in Zurich and continuation on to Chur; reception in the cantonal parliament by Mr. Engler, president of the Government of the canton of Grisons at the Staatskeller Chur; journey to lodgings in Samedan; introduction to the seminar
2. (Wednesday 18 June) Principles of Federalism - a) Switzerland and its institutions (Claudio Caratsch, former ambassador), b) Federalism as a state model (Prof. Daniel Thürer).
3. (Thursday 19 June) a) Language and Education - a) Education and the benefits of multilingualism (Prof. François Grin); b) authentic Engadin lunch prepared by a school class c) Visit of the primary school of Samedan and discussion of the bilingual education model (Stephan Hug, headmaster)
4. (Friday 20 June) Multilingual and decentralised canton of Grisons - a) a small town: visit of Samedan and introduction to the workings and duties of a local authority (Thomas Nievergelt, mayor) b) The Raeto-Romansch language and culture: visit to the towns of Ardez with excursion from Lavin across Guarda to Ardez (Chasper Pult and Romedi Arquint).
5. (Saturday 21 June) Media –  
a) The media in a multicultural state (Remigio Ratti, director Radio e Televisione della Svizzera Italiana);  
b) Democracy Building Process - Program of democracy building in the new democratic states (Andi Gross, MP of the Swiss Parliament and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe).
6. (Sunday 22 June) Civil Society a) - The role of the civil society in a democratic state (Ruth-Gaby Vermot-Mangold, MP of the Swiss Parliament and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe).
7. Transfer to Berne (on the way: visit of the radio e televisiun rumantscha in Chur)
8. (Monday 23 June ) The Council of Europe and its contribution to the maintenance of regional and minority languages – a) The framework Convention on the Protection of National Minorities (by Bruno Hartig, CoE); b) The Charter of Minority and Regional Languages (by Regina Jensdottir, CoE)
9. (Tuesday 24 June) Switzerland: The Confederation and its Institutions –  
a) Visit of the Federal Parliament;  
b) the Swiss Confederation and the use of the official languages (A. Casanova, Vice Chancellor);  
Sightseeing
10. (Wednesday 25 June) Peace building in multicultural states,  
a) Visit of the Swiss Peace Foundation,  
b) Assessment of the visit / implications for Georgia  
Meeting and dinner with members of the Swiss-Georgian Society
11. (Thursday 26 June) Switzerland: Host of international institutions - Excursion to Geneva; visit to the UN, the International Committee of the Red Cross and the Geneva Centre for Security Policy
12. (Friday 27 June) Evaluation; Visit of Stapferhaus-Foundation in Lenzburg; Departure to Airport

## Evaluation

A Georgian expert in federalism will evaluate the presentations and discussions of each day and assess the impact of the findings on the situation in Georgia. At the end of the seminar an internal evaluation will take place.

## Project conclusion

The possibility of a follow-up seminar in Georgia remains open.