



FUEN - Federal Union of European Nationalities
UFCE - Union Fédéraliste des Communautés Ethniques Européennes
FUEV - Föderalistische Union Europäischer Volksgruppen
Федералистский Союз Европейских Национальных Меньшинств

Participatory Status to the
Council of Europe
and Consultative Status to the
United Nations

Statut participatif auprès du
Conseil de l'Europe
et Statut consultatif auprès des
Nations Unies

Teilnehmender Status beim
Europarat
und Konsultativer Status bei den
Vereinten Nationen

Статус участника при
Совете Европы
и Статус консультанта при Организации
Объединенных Наций

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Dear Delegates, Dear Member Organisations, Dear Friends!

In my first speech before this assembly of delegates as president of the FUEN I would like to take stock of what has been achieved over the last year. But there are really two main objectives I would like to pursue with this speech:

- 1) I would like to give you an insight into our strategy, how we as the board of the FUEN want to continue to develop in the coming years, and where we, as European umbrella organisation, want to be in two year's time.
- 2) The second main point of this speech is closely associated with the first point. In this speech I want to emphasise to you why it is worthwhile to get actively involved in the FUEN's work. Such active involvement is a very important issue for me – because this is the only way that we can ever achieve the ambitious goals we have set ourselves.

And I would like to make this guiding idea our focus: How can we manage to develop our organisation TOGETHER, to make it what we believe it is self-evident that it should be: The advocate of the autochthon minorities of Europe, and a professional umbrella organisation, which properly and effectively represents the interests of its members.

Over the last year we have made very good progress and we have a good idea of how we should continue along this road.

The FUEN – in my opinion – is currently developing at a fast rate. There are two pieces of evidence for this – the formal co-operation at the European Forum (Dialogue Forum) and the establishment of a language network.

And such speed is necessary – we have to be more professional and more active if we want to implement our idea of being the advocate of the autochthon minorities and their European umbrella organisation.

Before I start my review of the year and then present the strategic agenda for 2008/2009 adopted by the board, I would like to say a few words about the Brussels project.

As you know, in 2006, with the support of several member organisations and on the initiative of YEN, we set up the “Brussels Project”. The aim of this co-operation is to concentrate the European commitment of both organisations to represent the concerns of the autochthon minorities.

We are pleased that, despite all the difficulties and doubts, this project has been continued. We would like to thank those responsible - our representatives Susann Schenk and Jan Diedrichsen – because alongside the board they are responsible for the initiatives and the orientation of the subject matter, as well as developing the strategic agenda you have before you.

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Together with YEN we adopted the charter of the autochthon, national minorities / nationalities in 2006. If anyone has not already read the charter, there are copies outside in the lobby. The core piece of our charter is the 13 fundamental rights of the European minorities. These 13 fundamental rights will now be examined by the FUEN congresses year after year and should end in a compendium of fundamental minority rights in Europe.

We made a start in Tallinn in 2007 with fundamental right to education, which we have successfully adopted and which has been or will be investigated by some of our member organisations locally.

After the fundamental right to education, we are now dealing with the fundamental right to have ones own media and information, which was the framework for yesterday's media day.

We would like to thank the Mercator Media Centre in Wales, which has been involved in the planning along with the Brussels Project.

Generally speaking, I think it is important that we give our congresses more of a subject-matter profile than in the past. We want to address topics which are important to you – dear delegates – and your member organisations and which are close to your hearts. Our goal should be that congress participants return home after the congress with new knowledge and perception, and new motivation for their own work locally.

Let me now move on to the two main topics I mentioned, the Dialogue Forum and the Language Network. Following my speech I will mention some specific details about the Dialogue Forum and the elections to it.

The signing of the document establishing the Dialogue Forum at the European parliament last month was an important step forward and in this context I would especially like to thank the President and Co-President of the Intergroup for National Minorities in the European Parliament Csaba Tabajdi and Michl Ebner. Together with their colleagues they have named the FUEN as the most important strategic partner in the field of minorities work.

After long negotiations, words have been followed by deeds. In association with the Youth of European Nationalities, we as the FUEN have achieved a formalised co-operation with the European Parliament. Based on the experience of the existing contact forums in some European countries thoughts were made how it would be possible to enable minorities to have a direct influence on the work of the European Parliament in the area of European minority issues through their umbrella organisations.

The Dialogue Forum is the result of these considerations: This body discusses current challenges, problems and long-term strategies for the autochthon, national minorities in Europe, and it gives the contacts between politics and the European minorities an institutional framework. Positions, recommendations and resolutions are discussed and adopted in this forum.

The FUEN shares the secretariat functions of the new formalised co-operation with the secretariat of the Intergroup.

Today at this congress of delegates we will be electing the delegates to the forum – you've all received copies of the explanations. It pleases me to see that so many organisations have shown such interest in representing the minorities in the forum.

I personally expect a great deal from this co-operation. When we can now show that we as the FUEN can, through our delegates to the Dialogue Forum, act professionally as the advocate of the minorities of Europe, we will not just be more interesting dialogue partners for representative of the EU, but also the Council of Europe, the national states, and the EU Commission etc., but can also act on behalf of our mutual interests more forcefully and more effectively.

The declaration of establishment of the Dialogue Forum is also available in the lobby.

Besides the Dialogue Forum, promotion of languages has also been a centrepiece of our work. In 2007 in Tallinn we passed a resolution that obliges us to promote regional and minority languages which takes the small and smallest languages in Europe into special consideration. We are – and I mention this in all modesty – very pleased that several members of the European Parliament have immediately seized upon our resolution

and used this as a basis for questions to the EU Commission. The question submitted by MEP Michl Ebners is also available in the lobby.

We have turned to you, dear member organisations, regarding a survey on language promotion. A survey of the actual need should be the basic prerequisite for our further work in this complex area. We are pleased to have received the answers of our member organisations that took part in the survey.

The FUEN's interest is to know that the small and smallest languages are taken into consideration especially in the European Union's new subsidy policy and that the European Union establishes a sustainable language policy in association with the regional and minority languages.

We have formed a consortium with several partners and advertised ourselves to the EU as a language network. In this context our thanks must go to the governor of South Tyrol, Louis Durnwalder, who in discussions in South Tyrol declared himself willing to give financial support to this FUEN initiative to strengthen the smaller and smallest languages in Europe.

In addition, we have also drawn up a resolution/declaration that summarises what we have worked out, and which we would like this congress of delegates to adopt.

Besides the two main points that I have just outlined, the past year has also been notable for various other activities.

After my election in Tallinn I emphasised that I considered it important that we the board must establish contact to our member organisations locally – and we the board have already made some progress in this direction, and want to expand this local presence further.

We have begun implementing our fundamental right to education in Flensburg, where about 30 representatives of the FUEN member organisations took part. During the meeting of the FUEN Slavic working group in Burgenland we also touched on the subject of education and we also visited Cornwall, and on the invitation of our member organisation of the West Thracian Turks I also acted as moderator at an event in the European Parliament and at the UN in Geneva. Together with YEN we had discussions with some of our Austrian member organisations in Vienna and had a joint board meeting with YEN.

We want, and I repeat myself here, to have even closer contact with you – our members. And to do this we need information from you.

There is a list hanging outside in the lobby showing which members are responsible for particular areas in Europe. Have a look which member of the board is “responsible” for you – speak to them, discuss with them. Talk to Susann and Jan from the Brussels Project or Frank from the Secretariat in Flensburg. We can only effectively act on your behalf when we know what issues concern you.

Now I'd like to make a few remarks about our involvement at the Council of Europe. The Council of Europe is an important, if not the most important contact for the minorities in Europe. So it gives me great pleasure to welcome Judit Solymosi, a representative of the Council of Europe.

When in the 1990's the two most important minority documents – the Language Charter and the Framework Convention were passed (back then the FUEN was very active at European level with its Cottbus Declaration for a minority convention) the Council of Europe was a central actor. We were organised in the INGO Conference, the union of non-governmental organisations at the Council of Europe.

Through the mediation of state representatives who look favourably on us I was able to present myself in Strasbourg at a meeting of the minority advisory committee for autochthon minorities to the Council of Europe – the so-called DH-MIN. We have applied for a permanent post as observer on this committee. We are – as are many of the national representatives on the committee – of the opinion that it makes sense to have the representatives of the minorities around for the discussion of topics affecting minorities.

But this is not quite as easy to arrange as we thought. Our first attempt to get a post as permanent observer failed due to the opposition from several state representatives. The chair of the DH-MIN committee has now informed us that after subsequent discussion we will be given an ad-hoc observer post in the main human rights committee at the Council of Europe and can take part in meetings there when invited by the DH-MIN committee. The first meeting will be taking place between 15 - 17 October. The fact that we will now be

regularly participating in meetings of the DH-MIN committee can also be seen as a successful result of our work.

In co-operation with the INGO Conference at the Council of Europe we will now consider how we can more strongly promote the topic of minorities in Europe at Council of Europe level.

Now I draw to the end of my review of the year with an item that is particularly dear to my heart. The co-operation with the Youth of European Nationalities.

I am pleased to be able to welcome my colleague Aleksander Studen-Kirchner here among us. Over the past two years Aleksander had added his personal touch to the co-operation between YEN and the FUEN. He has not just been very actively involved in the work, something we in the FUEN would be very pleased to see more of – he has also kept a critical eye on our work.

Dear Aleksander, I must admit that you are quite right in saying that the active integration of the youth is pivotal for a sustainable minority policy. What you said at the YEN Whitsun Meeting has really stuck – and I'd like to quote your words. "The youth is not just the future, first and foremost it is the present."

This is a good and proper idea, and one that I am pleased to pick up on. This means that is right and logical, and here we are in complete agreement, that we involve the youth today, here and now, and in the active shaping of our work. This is something where we still have quite a bit to learn. I hope that you will remain with us and YEN and still give us your advice, even though you handed over your office as president of YEN to a West Frisian two weeks ago - to Hester Knol.

And I wish you, dear Hester, all the best for your many new tasks.

In this context I would like to explicitly repeat a demand made last year and to add some criticism. It is not a particularly pleasing fact that some of our member organisations still have not managed to include a youth representative in their delegation. The FUEN has expressly called for this, and will continue to do so. I would be very interested to hear the reasons why no young people have been included in the delegations and in association with YEN I would like to suggest the right representatives for the next congress, so that in 2009 we will not have to mention any member organisations that have not brought a youth representative. I would like to remind you that the future of the FUEN depends on whether or not we can get today's YEN members interested in our work.

Dear Friends, I hope I've been able to give you a small overview of the past year. We are constantly publishing information about our activities on the FUEN website, or on the joint information portal at www.living-diversity.eu which also sends out a monthly newsletter to over 3,000 recipients. You can also receive the newsletter by adding your email address to the distribution list outside in the lobby.

Now, as I mentioned in my introduction, I would like to come to the second main item, the further strategic orientation of the FUEN.

You have all been sent our strategic agenda for 2008/2009, and this paper is the basis for my following comments.

I consider it important that later – in the discussion in the delegates assembly – we discuss this strategic orientation.

We want to know what you want from the FUEN, and how we can better act on your behalf.

In this Strategic Agenda for 2008-2009 the board has laid out the goals, priorities activities.

The starting point is the ascertainment that European minorities are often not recognised, or given the recognition for the added value they represent in many regions and for Europe in general.

In this context it is the FUEN's wish that by strengthening its organisation as the civil society representative of the minorities it will gain more weight in Europe and thus be able to better emphasise the added value of minorities.

To this end a European strategy was drawn up in 2006 in the form of a feasibility study. To implement it, the FUEN is pursuing specific medium and long-term target formulations. Let me quote these goals:

- The recognition of the positive relevance of the autochthon, national minorities for the development of the European civil society and the European citizenry,
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- The preservation of natural bi- and multilingualism and the regional or minority languages at risk of extinction as a natural wealth of Europe
- The necessity of extensive minority protection, and active funding of minorities as a guarantee for stability, peace and diversity in Europe,
- The need to reinforce action for the further development of European minority protection so that the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities and the Council of Europe's European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, are not the final words in a sustainable European minority protection,
- To continue political discourse at regional, national and European level by including the autochthon, national minorities, and thereby guarantee participation in political dialogue on an equal footing
- To guarantee the mastering of the challenges of social and demographic change with the inclusion of the European minorities,
- The recognition and reinforcement of the organisations of the autochthon, national minorities in a civil society in Europe,
- An active inclusion of the young generation as a guarantee for the future development of the autochthon, national minorities, and a continuous and sustainable promotion of youth.

In addition, we continue to work on the further implementation of the stated strategy for the establishment of a permanent representative of the European minorities at European level. This has the following goal:

- Monitoring the relevant political areas,
- Participation of the European minorities,
- Presence of the European minorities,
- Concentration, articulation and representation of the interests, wishes and opinions of the minorities,
- Representation of the added value of the European minorities in the European regions and for the preservation of the linguistic and cultural diversity in Europe,
- Information of the European minorities and other interested parties about European policies and the values that constitute a civil European society.

Another focus of the FUEN's activities is the implementation of the recommended activities for an active minority policy.

Based on these goals and the principle document, The Charter of the European, Autochthon Minorities, the task is now to implement the recommendations developed. These especially include increased dialogue with the political decision-makers and disseminators. This activity is aimed at the European Union and the Council of Europe, as well as the nation states.

The FUEN's activities and involvements in 2008-09 will be determined by the following priorities:

- The focus of the FUEN's activities for 2008-09 is to represent the interests of the European minorities at the international organisations, and the expansion of the FUEN's involvement in these international organisations, such as the European Union (EU), the Council of Europe, the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) and the United Nations (UN).
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- The goal is formalised co-operation with the European Parliament and the development of a permanent minorities representative in Brussels.

You will receive more information about the political fields that have been mentioned, and our involvement

in the Brussels Project activity report.

In my opinion, as well as dealing with the strategy before you, in the coming months the FUEN must also deal with the subject of an accompanying organisational development, and working out an overall concept.

We would welcome it if in this context it would be possible to set up a working group, which would like to supervise this process together with the board and interested member organisations.

Now let me finish my speech with the wish that we now have a lively discussion about the other main focal points of the FUEN's work, what we are aiming for, and where we as an umbrella organisation want to set our priorities.

I have very much enjoyed working with the board over the last year, with the minority organisations and all the others involved. Even though I didn't realise how much time I would have to invest in this work – I am pleased to do it and enjoy it immensely.

Next year the FUEN celebrates its 60th anniversary.

We the board have decided to hold this congress in Brussels, and in the year of the elections to the European Parliament, in the year of the 60th anniversary of the Council of Europe, we will position and showcase ourselves in the "Capital of Europe" as the professional representative body and advocate of the European minorities. Because of the European Parliament elections in July we have decided to hold the congress in March.

If we continue our dedicated development over the next few months, and when we can motivate you, dear member organisations, to work with us even more actively, the next milestone - the establishment of a permanent representation of the autochthon minorities in Brussels – is a thoroughly achievable goal.

Dear Delegates, I thank you for your attention.