



Ladies and Gentlemen,

Guests,

Friends of the European Minorities,

FUEN Members,

Today – on the opening day of the FUEN Congress, when we also celebrate our organisation’s 65<sup>th</sup> anniversary – it is a great pleasure to be able to welcome so many people here in the Hotel des Nordens.

As president of FUEN, this congress is of course a special one for me, because it is being held here in my homeland, the German-Danish border country.

I would therefore like to start by thanking the two co-organisers, the *Bund Deutscher Nordschleswiger* from the German minority in Denmark and the *Sydslesvigsk Forening* from the Danish minority in Germany, who have made it possible for us to be here today. It is their contribution and their support that has enabled us to hold this congress here, literally on the German-Danish border.

We did celebrate here once before, exactly fifteen years ago, on FUEN’s fiftieth anniversary. And a lot has happened since then.

The congress in 1999 was held on just the Danish side of the border, hosted by the German minority. Today, fifteen years later, it would be virtually unthinkable to organise such a conference in the region without the involvement of both national minorities and without it being on both sides of the border. And that is more evidence that times have changed in the border country in recent years, and that they continue to change.

Life is good in the German-Danish region. That’s the case generally, but especially so for the four minorities – the German minority in North Schleswig, the Danish minority in South Schleswig, the Frisians and the Sinti. All these “pioneers of cross-border cooperation” have rendered outstanding services and are fully integrated in working to develop the region.

This development from working against one another to working with one another has taken over one hundred and fifty years. People here really got on with each other quite well until the mid nineteenth century. Then came the growth of nationalism, giving greater significance to the terms “us” and “them”. After a popular revolt, which ended in a bloody battle between the Schleswig-Holsteiners and the Kingdom of Denmark on 25

July 1850, the nationalist movement intensified and culminated in the War of 1864, which ended after the Battle of the Dybbøl Redoubts.

Chancellor of the Reich Bismarck exploited a piece of political stupidity by Denmark to provide the groundwork for creating a German empire by getting all the different German states to fight together in a war against Denmark.

1864 was also decisive in setting the course for a violent history of Europe that culminated in the two world wars. The crushing defeat by Prussia and Austria also laid the foundations for the modern Danish nation-state.

Denmark, which was still a major power in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, was now a small state. A great humiliation, which the modern Danish state admirably coped with by applying the motto: “What we have lost outside, we must make up for inside“.

The site of the Battle of Dybbøl is now a museum, which is also a good way to document the progress from conflict to cooperation.

Enmity belongs in museums.

And tomorrow you will be able to see for yourselves.

Exactly 150 years after the bloody Battle of Dybbøl, on 18 April 2014, there was a ceremony on the former battlefield, which was attended by the Queen of Denmark. Germany sent an ambassador. That shows the different significance of a war in Germany and Denmark.

Quite rightly it was the new normality that exists between Germans and Danes that was celebrated, and that is not something that is self-evident. The current situation in Ukraine and Crimea reminds us just how quickly normality can be finished.

What we currently see when we look towards the east of Europe shows that power politics – just as in 1864 – always has a negative impact on the “ordinary population”.

Violence and hate, those unloved relatives of peace, are on the advance again.

A month ago, during the disturbances, I spent three days in Kiev attending the 7<sup>th</sup> Kiev security Forum. There I met several minority representatives, so that I could get a small insight into their present situation. The impressions I got coincide with what we see daily in the press: fear and insecurity rule, and there is no solution in sight.

Nor do we have an answer. But it is our mutual task, to give the national minorities, individuals and groups, a voice.

There has been a lot of talk about de-escalation in recent weeks, when people talk about Ukraine. De-escalation means relieving tension, trying to find a peaceful solution. To bring about peace one has to understand what motivates the others, and what their wishes and fears are.

Understanding is prerequisite for communication. Humiliation often arises because people lose respect for the values of others, because they can or will not see things from their perspective. That is something people can't take.

There is however a great difference between humiliating a head of state and humiliating a minority. A head of state – as in the case of Putin – would not tolerate this, whereas a minority cannot defend itself and will often be ignored.

Allow me to very warmly welcome the former chair of the Crimean Tatars, our member organisation Meclis, Mustafa Dzhemilev.

Dear Mustafa Dzhemilev, we can only imagine what psychological trauma you and your people have had to go through, seeing the descendants of the people who expelled you from your homeland now annex your country.

As difficult as the situation is for you, we are very glad that you are here with us. We will deal with the current situation in Ukraine intensively in the topical debate slot after lunch. The situation in Ukraine will also be the topic of the keynote speech.

#### *Address*

Minorities, it would appear, get nothing for free. Last year we set ourselves an ambitious goal, to instigate a citizens' initiative for more rights for minorities in Europe, the Minority SafePack Initiative.

Our Minority SafePack did not contain any maximum demands; we wanted to use the instrument of a citizens' initiative to gain an audience for our justified demands.

We wanted and still want political dialogue on a level playing field. But apparently that was/is not what the European Commission wanted, and did not adopt our initiative.

The reason they gave us was that minority issues are not a matter for EU, but for the countries involved.

This however takes the European idea of united diversity to absurd lengths. The door was loudly slammed closed on us, and also on the European idea.

We cannot accept this, and we are now considering a lawsuit against the commission. The European Court of Justice in Luxemburg will decide if the EU is serious about civic involvement and minority protection.

And just a comment in passing: the EU provides the instrument that is the citizens' initiative, but no money to cover the cost of an online petition. To put it politely, it is naïve to believe that such a campaign doesn't cost anything. A campaign is a campaign, and has to be well prepared and well handled. The way things are at the moment; it is again only the big guns that profit from the instrument of the citizens' initiative.

We have always seen ourselves as a community of solidarity. We have suffered under this rejection, but on the other hand we have also experienced a great deal of solidarity. The solidarity increased significantly when we started work on our citizens' initiative. This pleases and motivates us.

And we also experience solidarity from outside our own ranks. And here I would like to highlight the unanimous declaration of the Schleswig-Holstein state parliament in favour of our citizens' initiative, offer my thanks once again, and underscore what the president of the Danish parliament said in his speech fifteen years ago: show me how you treat your minority and I'll show you how democratic you are.

And that still goes today.

We have to learn another lesson from the current crisis. That the European community – whereby I mean the European Union and those other countries that are part of Europe – have to do an about-turn in minority policy, because they themselves will profit from it if they do.

We have been demanding this for a long time. And because it is so important I will repeat our arguments:

- The minorities do not pose any danger for the internal cohesion of Europe or any of the states.
- In reality, through their diversity, minorities are an enrichment of political and social life and must therefore be protected and supported.

- Many politicians and policymakers are once again discussing protection of minorities, the right of a people to self-determination, territorial integrity of the state, and language rights.
- We minorities, and FUEN as our mouthpiece, have grappled with these topics intensively in recent years.

Unfortunately we see that there is once again a tendency to talk **about** us more than with us.

Read for yourselves what is in our 2013 programme declaration or in our European citizens' initiative Minority SafePack.

- We have specific demands and suggestions and are prepared to share our expertise.
- Minorities, languages and regional identities must be taken seriously and carry political weight, when it comes to the future of Europe. Otherwise we can forget about the proverbial European diversity, which is an important part of our mutual cultural heritage, and just become a "big melting pot" like the USA.
- That might also be a goal, but it is not our goal.
- We have the impression that our knowledge in this field is acknowledged, but is also annoying. It is annoying because politicians have the impression that we only think about minority politics, whereas they think about the big picture.
- Quite the opposite is the case; only we discuss the big picture, namely the diversity of Europe, from the perspective of the poor relations. We know that poor relations aren't meant to have much of a say, and that is why we are annoying.

With such a minority policy, or to put it slightly controversially, more not-minority policy, as currently practised in the EU and some European states, it is hardly surprising that there is an increase in regional secessionist movements, internally displaced Roma, social dissatisfaction and acute death of culture and language, which are creating immediate and very specific problems.

Because these problems are becoming increasingly obvious, and because a new broom usually sweeps cleaner, we hope that it will be possible to have serious, results-oriented dialogue with the new European Parliament and the new European Commission.

When Magali Diallo, a young representative of the German minority, was asked if there is such a thing as European culture, and if yes, what it is based on, she answered: "The fact that we can take along our cultures with us. That we can integrate, and not assimilate, the cultures in a mutual framework."

That is the position of a young high-school girl, which gives us hope.

This is why I call upon you to vote in the European elections on 25 May. We very much hope that our representatives will get into parliament again – and the same goes for the Hungarians in Romania and Slovakia, and the South Tyroleans.

- There can only be real change when we all act together, and apply our efforts wisely.
- We want to achieve something definite and measurable for minorities, languages and diversity in Europe. This is our mission, and we are working on it.

We all know that the problems that minorities have are very different, and that is why I would like to emphasise another key pillar of our work: exchanging experiences, commonly known as best practice. Here we inform each other about our worries and hardships, but also about the things that have gone well. Best practice is something that bonds us together, because it helps us learn more from each other and to assist one another.

Another pillar is language skills and their added value for the regions. For years now, Judith Walde and her team have successfully dedicated themselves to improving language skills as part of two EU projects with the motto: Monolingualism is curable. With humour and vigour, and with the assistance of many young Europeans drawn from the minorities, RML to future and proML have become showpiece projects. Tomorrow we will witness the triumphant culmination of our language team's project at the end of Europe Day.

And today we have a workshop dedicated to the subject of language.

And I would like to mention a third pleasing item. The citizens' initiative has had a great publicity effect for FUEN. Even representatives of states that one would not exactly classify as minority-friendly want to talk to us. We recently had a visit from the Slovakian ambassador to Denmark, and when I asked him why he was visiting us, he said:

We consider your organisation to be the most competent when it comes to minority issues.

We all know how difficult it is to get anything done in the European parliament when it comes to minority issues. And this is why I would like to point out that the social-democrat group, in the persons of its Austrian president Hannes Swoboda and Ulrike Rodust from Schleswig-Holstein, has sent an open letter to the two candidates for the job of Commission President, Junker and Schultz. In this letter they appeal to both gentlemen, and I quote from the letter:

A change is needed if the EU has to live up to the values enshrined in article 2 of the Treaty on the European Union and in article 21 of the EU Charter of fundamental rights.

If we want these citizens to be fully part of the European project, the new European Parliament and the new European Commission must take up the challenge of fighting discrimination and promote empowerment at all levels, involving minority citizens in the decision making process, defining a coherent set of EU policies and guidelines in all relevant EU policy areas, starting from employment, education, training and research.

So that's what Ulrike Rodust and Hannes Swoboda have to say.

It would of course be desirable if the conservative camp also supported this letter, but I dare not be so optimistic. We will deal with this topic again tomorrow.

### *Address*

There are many wise people here who still, even if they are advanced in years, work to change things for the good. They – we – continue to address what is still in a sorry state. And sometimes we also resign ourselves to the fact that we talk so much, and everything takes far too long for our taste, and because nothing much comes out of it. But what the philosopher Jürgen Habermas said in his Theory of Communicative Action is still true:

Whoever addresses an issue, changes reality.

So we will continue to speak on the issue of minorities – here at our annual congress, with our neighbours, and out there, in Europe.

Thank you for your attention.