



FUEEN

Activity Report 2013



INTRODUCTION

In this annual review we would like to inform you about the developments of FUEN in the past 12 months. Together, we achieved a lot. The FUEN Congress in South Tyrol was a full success, we accepted new members, adopted resolutions and a programmatic declaration now forms the political framework for our work. 2014 will see the important elections to the European Parliament, a new European Commission will be appointed and the new seven-year financial framework of the European Union is beginning. These are all developments that will have a decisive effect on the future of Europe; developments that we as the minorities in Europe want to influence.

But we also experienced some setbacks over the past 12 months: it was a bitter disappointment, when on 16 September 2013 we received the decision from the European Commission rejecting our citizens' initiative, the "Minority SafePack Initiative". With the very brief reason that "minorities fall manifestly outside the framework of competence of the European Union". Together we wanted to collect one million signatures in Europe for diversity, for the minorities and for the languages. But they refused to let us do that.

At once the journey that started with much conviction and enthusiasm (and that of course also cost a lot of money) seemed to have ended.

However, as representatives of minorities for minorities, we know that we need stamina if we want to reach our aims. Professor Oeter said it very clearly during our successful conference about language rights in Europe in Cottbus lately: "Rights have to be conquered sometimes". How right he is!

I am grateful to my colleagues Kelemen Hunor, Anke Spoorendonk, Valentin Inzko, Luis Durnwalder and Karl Heinz Lambertz in the citizens' committee, that they together decided to resist and not simply accept the decision of the European Commission "without a fight". We decided to lodge an appeal to the European Court in Luxembourg. We are very much convinced that minorities are part of the "framework of competence" of the European Union and for that reason we are ready to go to court.

We need your support to do so. We have to continue to use the massive solidarity that came as a wave when we presented our citizens' initiative in Europe. We must use the coming year 2014, with the elections to the European Parliament and the appointment of the new European Commission, to build up political pressure. We must keep the ball and use our joint strength, and make clear that people have to take us seriously. We are ready to continue with this major task together with you:

But that will not only require much commitment and stamina, but also money; money that we as an NGO active throughout Europe have only in a limited amount. It therefore remains our main challenge how we will manage the balancing act between what we want to achieve and the financial realities.

I hope that this overview of our multifaceted activity in this annual review will stimulate your appetite for more minority networking, and more joint minority action on the European level.

Hans Heinrich Hansen
FUEN President

MOVING TOWARDS 100 YEARS

FUEN is not only the oldest (in 2014 our organisation will celebrate its 65th anniversary), but also the biggest umbrella organisation of the autochthonous minorities / ethnic groups / nationalities in Europe. We are very pleased that membership in our organisations is coveted and that we receive new applications for membership every year again.

Three years ago in Eisenstadt we started with a new system of our memberships. Together with our members we had long discussions and we made the necessary adjustments in the statutes. It resulted in a transparent membership and payment system. The results of the process are promising until now. The number of applications is rising, the income is increasing and the payment behaviour significantly improved. We thank all the member organisations for this feat.

However, this also means that in the process we will have to say goodbye to some member organisations, who for a long time did not participate in our work anymore, or who have not paid their dues for some time. We do not exclude anyone. Those who don't want or cannot pay their membership fee have the chance to remain a welcome member of the "FUEN-family", but then as a supporting member. No longer with direct influence, but as a welcome guest.

It is our goal to grow over the 100-members threshold within the next three years. We are convinced that only a strong organisation will be able to succeed in promoting the interests of the European minorities effectively.

Anyone who would like to have an overview of our members – including short descriptions and photos – can find this information on our new "members area" in the internet: www.bit.ly/1h8G8Db

CONGRESS IN SOUTH TYROL

The South Tyroleans know how you should do it! 200 representatives of minorities from more than 20 countries, who travelled to the beautiful town of Brixen were well catered for. After 2003 once again a FUEN Congress took place in South Tyrol.

A varied programme was offered, with amongst other things a visit to the castle of Reinhold Messner, who welcomed the guests personally. Excursions, convivial evenings with food, drinks and music made the congress of 2013 into a special experience.

However, it is common knowledge that FUEN Congresses are no holiday trips. They offer the opportunity to exchange and work actively on the development of the umbrella organisation.

Consequently, several substantive topics formed the core of the congress:

Autonomy / self-determination. Brilliantly and powerfully eloquent a friend of FUEN, Prime Minister Luis Durnwalder, opened the congress with a speech about the development of South Tyrol from an economically weak region to one of the most prosperous areas of Europe. According to Durnwalder, the far-reaching autonomy of South Tyrol is the reason for this success story. He made the case for making the regions in Europe stronger. The "grand old man" of the South Tyrolean People's Party promised to FUEN to remain available and support FUEN, also after his retirement.

Minority SafePack Initiative. With the active support of our “Language Diversity Team” the public event of the FUEN Congress was used to present our European citizens’ initiative, the “Minority SafePack Initiative”. Four members of the citizens’ committee: Prime Minister Luis Durnwalder, RMDSZ Chairman Kelemen Hunor, UN High Commissioner Valentin Inzko and FUEN President Hans Heinrich Hansen attended the official launch. Less than 1 million balloons – but a great many anyway – were released from the Cathedral Square of Brixen on the occasion of the launch of this biggest minority action in the history of FUEN.

A beautiful short-movie captures the optimism of the day: www.bit.ly/OmGoFb

Photos of the FUEN Congress: www.bit.ly/1fHSVJf

Elections. The elections for the FUEN Presidium and the FUEN Dialogue Forum (responsible for the contacts with the European Parliament) were awaited with great excitement. For both official bodies there were more candidates than positions. After 20 years in the Presidium and 6 years as President Hans Heinrich Hansen run for office once again and he was re-elected with impressive numbers. The candidates for Vice President had to compete for their position. Heinrich Schultz, Zlatka Gieler and Hauke Bartels left their positions in the Presidium and Urs Cadruvi already before had to leave from his active Presidium duties.

The new / old Presidium is composed of the following persons (as of June 2013):

1. President Hans Heinrich Hansen, Bund Deutscher Nordschleswiger (BDN)
2. Vice-President Martha Stocker, Regional Assessor and Deputy Chairwoman of Südtiroler Volkspartei (SVP)
3. Vice-President Bernhard Ziesch, Managing Director of Domowina – Federation of Lusatian Sorbs
4. Vice-President Loránt Vincze, International Secretary of the Alliance of Hungarians in Romania / Romániai Magyar Demokrata Szövetség (RMDSZ)
5. Vice-President Olga Martens, Vice-President of Internationaler Verband der Deutschen Kultur (IVDK)
6. Vice-President Dieter Paul Küssner, Chairman of Sydslesvigsk Forening (SSF)
7. Vice-President Halit Habipoglu, President of Avrupa Bati Trakya Türk Federasyonu (ABTTF)

Into the Dialogue Forum have been elected:

1. David Statnik, Chairman of Domowina, Lusatian Sorbs
2. Jens A. Christiansen, Secretary-General of Sydslesvigsk Forening (SSF)
3. Nanti Olip, Vice-President of NSKS, Carinthian Slovenes
4. Koloman Brenner, Member of the board of Landesverband der Ungarndeutschen , Germans in Hungary
5. Herbert Heuss, Managing Director of the Central Council of the German Sinti and Roma
6. Bernard Gaida, Chairman of VdG, German minority in Poland
7. Gabriela Novak-Karall, Managing Director of Hrvatski centar, Burgenland-Croats

Programmatic Declaration. FUEN presented a “Programmatic Declaration” prepared by the FUEN Presidium, which was unanimously adopted by the FUEN Delegates. The Programmatic Declaration defines the policy demands of FUEN. The proposals from the European Citizens’ Initiative are substantiated and concretised. This makes FUEN well prepared to play an active role in the elections to the European Parliament and to increase its political weight on the European level.

Three new member organisations were accepted:

Party of Hungarian Community in Slovakia / Magyar Közössék MK

Friendship, Equality and Peace Party from Western Thrace / Dostluk Eşitlik Barış Partisi

Breton Party / Strollad Breizh

The Assembly of Delegates of FUEN adopted the following resolutions:

Domowina – Federation of Lusatian Sorbs/Zwjazk Łužiskich Serbow/Zwězk Łužyskich Serbow
Strengthening the cultural autonomy of the Sorbs

Internationaler Verband der deutschen Kultur / International Association of the German Culture – Russian Federation
Concerns about the new Statute No. 121 FS: NGOs as “foreign agents”

Mejlis of the Crimean Tatar people
Continuing discrimination against the Crimean Tatars in the Crimean region (Ukraine)

Hrvatski Centar Beč / Croatian Centre in Vienna
Hrvatsko kulturno društvo / Croatian Cultural Association in Burgenland
Narodni svet koroških Slovencev / Council of the Carinthian Slovenes
Ethnic group law in Austria

Rat der Deutschen der Ukraine / Council of the Germans in Ukraine
Ethno-politics and German minorities in Ukraine

Western Thrace Minority University Graduates Association (WTMUGA)
Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF)
Prevention of hate-motivated attacks against the Turkish minority in Western Thrace

Western Thrace Minority Graduates Association (WTMUGA)
Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF)
Violations of the rights of the Western Thrace Turks as a minority

The full text of the resolutions is published at: www.bit.ly/1mzPkpI

DIVERSITY WILL HAVE TO WAIT (A LITTLE) – EU THWARTED CITIZENS’ INITIATIVE

Euphoria was at a high point at the time that at the FUEN Congress the European citizens’ initiative for diversity, the citizens’ initiative for the minorities in Europe – the Minority SafePack Initiative – was officially presented at the Cathedral Square in Brixen. With balloons that symbolically rose into the sky, the entertainment by our Language Diversity Team, our self-produced promotion film and the summer weather created a brilliant atmosphere. The two most influential “minority”-representatives of Europe, Prime Minister Luis Durnwalder and former Minister and Chairman of the numerically largest minority of Europe, Kelemen Hunor, could not resist the opportunity and attended the presentation of our citizens’ initiative in person. The FUEN President was so excited that he allowed himself to sing a self-composed citizens’ initiative-song. From the north Minister Spoorendonk and from Belgium Prime Minister Lambertz came with a video message on a big screen. Nothing could spoil the mood: the minorities wanted to collect one million signatures for diversity in Europe in a solidarity action that had never happened before. Together we would succeed in showing those in power in Brussels and in the states of Europe that we are here, that we are with many and that we want to have a say in the decisions that will determine the future.

But only few weeks later the mood was quite different. Anger was mixed with disappointment and disbelief: with a terse letter the European Commission rejected our “Minority SafePack” citizens’ initiative. Because some of the 11 proposals in total for concrete actions were outside the framework of competence of the European Commission, the citizens’ initiative as a whole allegedly would be outside the framework of competence. And as a result the Commission could not allow the minorities in Europe to start with the citizens’ initiative.

But as the FUEN President already underlined in the introduction: the minorities know from a long experience that they have to fight for their rights and opportunities. After the political blow from Brussels and a short period of recovery it was quickly clear: we will not give up so easily and will now carefully and professionally examine our options.

With the support of our members in the European Parliament and in particular MEP I. Winkler from the Hungarians in Romania we organised a crisis meeting. In the presence of several MEPs and many representatives of minorities a joint statement was written, which clearly emphasised that we don’t give up easily and will examine all possible actions, including legal action. Together with the Intergroup for National Minorities in the European Parliament, the European Commission was cross-examined and in a well-attended hearing, with more than 50 people – MEPs and representatives of minorities – a Commission director had to answer tough questions. But we could not notice any opening towards dialogue.

So what now? Giving up? That was the question that the citizens’ committee, who officially submitted the citizens’ initiative, had to answer. After a detailed assessment Hans Heinrich Hansen, Luis Durnwalder, Kelemen Hunor, Valentin Inzko, Karl-Heinz Lambertz and Anke Spoorendonk decided to go the legal way and to lodge a complaint at the European Court of Justice in Luxembourg. We engaged Professor Johansson from Kiel as our lawyer, who makes in his appeal the legal argument that all the proposals of our citizens’ initiative are within the framework of competence of the European Commission and that therefore the initiative was illegitimately rejected.

After the turbulent year of 2013 it is worth to look back at the history and origins of our Minority SafePack Initiative.

The European Citizens’ Initiative is an instrument of direct political participation of the citizens in the decision-making processes of the European Union and was established with the European Treaty of Lisbon. It received a lot of premature praise, especially from politicians and from the EU Member States. The citizens’ initiative is a breakthrough in order to overcome the chronically deplored democratic deficit in the European Union, or at least decreasing this deficit. One million signatures from seven European countries are enough to oblige the European Commission to deal with one or more concrete issues within the framework of competence of the European Treaties.

It was Gabriel Toggenburg, a friend of FUEN and the deputy director of the Fundamental Rights Agency in Vienna, who at the FUEN Congress of 2010 in Ljubljana called our attention for this new instrument of exerting influence and the opportunity to make the minorities and their demands better heard on the European level. What happened then, was that especially the Hungarians from Romania sped up the process and came out strongly in favour of the idea. We succeeded in bringing on board the South Tyrolean People’s Party as a founding partner and to establish a citizens’ committee consisting of high-level representatives of the regions in Europe. Formally, it was the citizens’ committee who submitted the initiative to the European Commission.

But what should be the content of such an initiative? How do we compile an attractive package, which allows us to convince people belonging to minorities to sign? Over the course of many meetings and consultations with experts, MEPs, minority associations, etcetera the Minority SafePack was developed. It includes many different proposals: from political participation to concrete funding for language and culture. In 2013, several minority regions in Europe were visited to promote the idea of this unique minority action, something that never had been done before. The idea was a success. MSPI became well-known and we looked excitedly forward to the start of signature-collecting and the breakthrough on the European level. But the Commission had other things in mind.

Despite the huge disappointment among the “MSPI-activists”, then and also today, it also has its positive aspects. First of all there will be legal clarification on the role of the minorities in the future EU. Will they be mere scenery for pretty speeches, or will they have an effect on how the community will be developed, also in the politically relevant policy areas.

The political solidarity that developed, and that, after the decision rejecting the initiative, for instance in the Landtag (parliament) of Schleswig-Holstein led to a unanimous resolution in favour of the MSPI and that was debated in the European Committee of the Danish Folketing (parliament) and will probably be discussed in plenary as well, cannot be underestimated. In many regions in Europe, from Finland to Italy and from Romania to the Netherlands the rejection by the European Commission was denounced and was given much coverage in the media.

Now the courts will decide and we will wait patiently; not with our hands in our pockets, but politically active. There will be important political developments in 2014. A new European Parliament will be elected and a new Commission will be appointed. Once we are coming out of the financial crisis the discussion on the future of the EU will become louder again. And it will be crucial how the minorities position themselves in the debate – also without collecting signatures.

HOUSE OF MINORITIES IN FLENSBURG AND A PERMANENT REPRESENTATION IN BRUSSELS

A new “House of Minorities” is being developed in Flensburg: a centre of information, documentation and action with meeting facilities. In 2013, we succeeded in getting together the finances for a second phase of this ambitious project from regional INTERREG-funding in the German-Danish border region.

In 2012, the Danish government had provided the funds to examine the feasibility of such a project. In the meantime the premises in which the House of Minorities shall be established have become the property of our member organisation SSF – the cultural organisation of the Danish minority in Germany. Together with BDN – the umbrella organisation of the German minority in Denmark – an application to implement the third phase was both submitted and granted. Denmark and Schleswig-Holstein promises to provide co-funding and so there is now about 500,000 Euro available to elaborate the concept for the House of Minorities and to set up a “campaign-office” in the historical buildings. We hope that at the FUEN Congress we can present the first visible results.

The idea of the House of Minorities is expressly not limited to the German-Danish border region, but has as its aim to include all the regions in Europe – preferably with their own locations and focus. From the start it has been obvious that European minority policy cannot solely be pursued from the regions in Europe. It has always been our aim to establish a “permanent representation” of the minorities in Brussels.

We are very glad that Anke Spoorendonk, a representative of the Danish minority-party SSW, Minister for European Affairs and member of the European Citizens’ Committee of our Minority SafePack Initiative said at a debate in the Landtag (parliament) in September 2013:

In any case we should guarantee that the initiative gets the best-possible political support. We should be proud that the umbrella organisation, i.e. FUEN, which launched the first referendum on minority issues and coordinated this for the whole of Europe, has its seat here with us in Schleswig-Holstein. (...)

We should also regionally strengthen this work. It is necessary to support the activities of FUEN in Schleswig-Holstein too. Because that will also mean that we secure the important minority-policy-centres of Flensburg and Schleswig-Holstein. (...)

A large project for the future that will have to be tackled in the coming years, is the European House of Minorities. The government of Schleswig-Holstein, together with our Danish neighbours who financed the feasibility study for the House of Minorities, draws on the expertise of a non-governmental organisation, on the expertise of FUEN. Accordingly Schleswig-Holstein made a comeback on the minority-policy-stage of Europe. From 2014 we will also make it possible for FUEN to be present in Brussels under the roof of the Hanse Office. Schleswig-Holstein will cover the operating costs.

We look forward with excitement to the developments in 2014 for both the House of Minorities and also for the “permanent representation” in Brussels.

SOLIDARITY – THE SITUATION OF THE ROMA IS DETERIORAT- ING BY THE DAY

The situation of many of the 14 million Roma in Europe is a disaster. The financial and economic crisis made the situation even more urgent. With several strategies and approaches the European Union tries to help the Roma and to respond to the imminent mass emigration of Roma, who especially in South East Europe live in appalling conditions in “third world islets”. Without much success so far.

Within its limited resources FUEN tries to make a contribution. The project “Minorities helping minorities. Solidarity with the Roma” continued in 2013 and the project team of Dr Jürgen Schöning and Dieter Lubeseder visited Hungary with experts to find the right partners and to press ahead with the list of concrete ideas. The project is financially supported by the Robert Bosch Foundation and by the Hermann Niermann Foundation. A comprehensive project design was elaborated and a first test phase is now in the process of being implemented together with several partners.

The guiding principle of the project is to use the expertise and networks of the well-established minorities in Europe in order to assist the Roma in areas where they have very specific needs.

A crucial partner of the project is the Central Council of the German Sinti and Roma, and their chairman Romani Rose.

LANGUAGE DIVERSITY TEAM: ONLINE, ON THE MOVE, ALWAYS THERE

The major eye-catcher, also in 2013, was our Language Diversity Team, which made sure that at a multitude of events last year information has been given about multilingualism in Europe. By creatively making use of the possibilities of modern communication, attractive graphic design and with a friendly approach many interested people were reached.

The activities included visits to school classes, where awareness was raised about the diversity of languages and cultures, “promotion actions” during festivals, political meetings and many other events.

The Language Diversity Team of Judith Walde was very active in the social media and in the internet. It is worthwhile to take a look at www.language-diversity.eu. Maybe you also want to be visited by the friendly Language Diversity Team?

“Language Diversity” is a European campaign with a duration of two years, which raises awareness for multilingualism and linguistic diversity in Europe.

The core of the project is to develop a number of target-group-specific tools and products to raise awareness and to disseminate information. We do so by basing ourselves on the latest scientific research about the positive effects of multilingualism.

The campaign is supported by the European Commission.

FUEN ON THE MOVE

The great diversity in minority work is proven daily by you – by the member organisations of FUEN. At the Cherry Festival of the Western Thrace Turks, the successful gala evenings of the Germans in Russia, the annual ball of the Burgenland Croats or the Folklore Festival of the Sorbs in Lusatia. FUEN and especially the presidium tries to participate in as many occasions as possible. And furthermore there are many presidium meetings and working meetings.

Last year we had to travel a lot. Especially because of the citizens’ initiative we visited many of you. We thank you for your hospitality and for many constructive talks and meetings.

Additional to the FUEN Congress we organised several activities. Three of these FUEN-activities of 2013 have to be mentioned separately in this place:

Also this year we thank Domowina, the umbrella organisation of the Lusatian Sorbs, for once again taking the responsibility for organising the meeting of the Slavic minorities. In 2013, the meeting took place in Košice, Slovakia, and was attended by seven different Slavic minorities.

Much attention – and here we once again have to thank our Language Diversity Team – was raised with the celebration of the European Day of Languages in Brussels. Although the atmosphere was a little gloomy because of the rejection of our citizens’ initiative, the effective promotion action with flyers, information materials and directly approaching people in the corridors of the European Parliament can be considered a total success.

The third example from the array of activities is the “Language Conference” in Cottbus, organised by former FUEN Vice-President Hauke Bartels, who is also the director of the Lower Sorbian Institute. We succeeded in bringing together several representatives of the Council of Europe (Committee of Experts), politicians and minority speakers at one table. The subject was the future of sustainable language policy in Europe.

At the end we also would like to thank the Youth of European Nationalities, who attended many activities of FUEN. In 2014 we look forward to even more intense, constructive cooperation. After all, both organisations celebrate their jubilee. YEN (30) and FUEN (65).

You can find an overview of our multifaceted programme on our homepage at www.fuen.org or at Facebook and Twitter.

FUEN IN FINANCIAL TROUBLE – WHO IS GOING TO PAY?

It seems to be a never-ending story. Every year again the activity reports ends with a serious and depressing overview of our financial situation. Every year again we refer to the fact that despite an ever-increasing level of activity and a continuously increasing influence, we have to achieve all this with far to little financial and human resources.

This is also the case in 2013. Although the income from membership fees and project funding increased, we again did not manage to receive funding for our work from the European Union – despite our application. We also did not succeed in bringing in new structural institutional funding or raising existing funding for a longer period.

On the other side the expenses were high, not in the last place because of the European Citizens’ Initiative, and we still face the question how we can bridge the gap between our ambitions and financial viability.

Unfortunately, additional funding and additional long-term institutional funding can only be raised once we show that we cannot be missed as the active, well-positioned umbrella organisation that acts on behalf of the European minorities. At the moment we do not have sufficient funding to do so. It is a vicious circle from which we also in 2014 will try to break out.

But we do not want to end the annual report with a negative tone, but instead thank you, the timely and reliable payers of the membership fees and by the large number of institutional funding partners, some of which have been with us for several decades. Without you, we would not have been able to look back at such a full and successful year for the minorities in Europe. **Thank you very much.**

© Federal Union of European Nationalities (FUEN) February 2014

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