

Dear Mr FUEN-President!

Dear Mr Chair!

Dear Ms High Commissioner!

Dear Mr President!

Dear Ladies and Gentlemen! Dear Guests!

Respect and openness towards minorities is the duty of the majority; it is a criterion for freedom and democracy. After the tragic experiences with nationalism, which plummeted our continent into a sea of conflicts and wars; after a victory over the totalitarian ideologies, based on dominance, hatred and contempt – Europe learnt to appreciate its ethnic and cultural richness. The legal protection for national minorities, the recognition of difference, diversity and peaceful coexistence as a resource for development – are among the pillars under the European project. I am glad that at this moment in Wroclaw, the European Capital of Culture, we are able to welcome the participants of the so important Federal Union of European Nationalities at your Congress. I would like to extend a warm welcome for our dear guests here on our Polish soil.

I have a great appreciation of all that your organisation is doing for European partnership and solidarity. For building bridges between people and peoples, bringing people into contact with one another, for promoting rapprochement and intercultural dialogue within single countries and also throughout Europe.

One example for your successes and achievements is the work done by the FUEN members, the Union of Poles in Germany and the Association of German Socio-Cultural Societies in Poland (VDG). These are organisations that contributed to the German-Polish dialogue and reconciliation. The German-Polish reconciliation and cooperation, taking into account the extremely difficult and painful burden from the past, became a major achievement of people with heart and good will, a historic success for Europe as a whole. We currently celebrate the 25th anniversary of the signing of the *“Treaty between the Federal Republic of Germany and the Republic of Poland of Good Neighbourliness and Friendly Cooperation”*. This is one of the milestones in the relations between our countries and our peoples. As with the anniversary of the Neighbourliness Treaty, this year will also be the 25th anniversary of the Association of German Socio-Cultural Societies in Poland (VDG), the host of this congress. I very warmly congratulate your organisation for the propagation of the cultural richness of our country and your achievements in civil society.

Poland is a good place for your debate. The Polish history and identity is characterised by centuries of experience with coexistence, openness and tolerance between the cultures, traditions and religions. The multi-ethnic republic of Poland, which connects the Poles, Lithuanians, Ruthenes, Germans, Jews, Armenians or Tatars, was already in the 16th century a proper model for the current European Union. It is exactly this phenomenon of which our grand compatriot, Saint John Paul II, spoke as he said that the Polish Nation is basically diversity and pluralism, and not narrowness and reticence”. Out of these wonderful traditions we find inspiration, we develop dialogue and are pleased about all forms of activities of the Poles living in Germany and the ethnic groups. I hope that the Polish achievements will much contribute to the atmosphere that will accompany your discussion. I wish you a successful debate and I wish all our guests good memories from Wroclaw.