

EUROPEAN MINORITIES BEING GUESTS IN WROCLAW/BRESLAU

OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities Astrid Thors will give the opening speech



HCNM Astrid Thors with FUEN President Hans Heinrich Hansen and FUEN advisor Frank de Boer in Vienna, 2015

From 8-22 May 2016 the European autochthonous, national minorities gather in the European Capital of Culture Wrocław/Breslau to have their annual congress.

On the invitation of the German minority in Poland, more than 150 delegates from over 30 European countries are expected.

They are all committed to the preservation and promotion of their own identity, language, culture and traditions, as part of the irretrievable European heritage.

In history and in the crises of Europe, conflicts are often related to minorities and the cohabitation of different peoples. The FUEN Congress will show that in many regions of Europe minorities have been active for many decades; peacefully, confidently and forward-looking. Minority policy is peace policy.

“We look forward to be guests in the European Capital of Culture Wrocław/Breslau with our congress. The city and the minorities both look back on a turbulent history. We want to listen to the stories and invite you to get to know us”, said FUEN President Hans Heinrich Hansen, who belongs to the German minority in Denmark.

The OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities Astrid Thors will give the opening speech at the FUEN Congress in Wrocław / Breslau, which will be from 18-22 May 2016.

“We are very glad that Astrid Thors is willing to share her experience and thoughts about minority protection in Europe”, says FUEN President Hans Heinrich Hansen.

“It is our common goal to create better conditions for the minorities in Europe.

We live in an era in which the anxiety and despair of the people in relation to the wars and conflicts are imminent and concrete. Millions of refugees seek protection and help in the safe countries of Europe. There is a danger that Europe may almost break down over this.

It is therefore even more important that organisations working within a European context show their human and humanist face. This applies to international organisations such as the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), and also for NGOs such as FUEN.

Organisations exist to serve people, not the other way around.

The OSCE also supports us, FUEN, because it works to decrease tensions and conflicts in those areas where minorities are living”, says Hans Heinrich Hansen.

Since August 2013 Astrid Thors has held the office of OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities (HCNM). She was a Member of the European Parliament (1996–2004) and served as Minister of Migration and European Affairs (2007–2011) in Finland.

Since the office of High Commissioner was established in 1992, the four incumbents have been involved in many situations in which there were inter-ethnic conflicts in different parts of Europe. They do not seek publicity so much, but try to prevent and de-escalate tensions, mostly by using silent diplomacy. This way the High Commissioner is able to set the course for the development of minority protection in Europe. The High Commissioners have developed authoritative recommendations and guidelines on e.g. education rights, linguistic rights, participation, media, policing, integration and inter-state relations.”

In 2016, Germany holds the Chairmanship of the OSCE. Together with its Member Organisations, FUEN is engaged in several projects and programmes and cooperates with the office of the High Commissioner.

The annual congress of FUEN in Wrocław / Breslau will also, and in particular, deal with the latest developments in Europe, which constitute an increased risk for the minorities.

Many of the 90 member organisations of FUEN were and are affected by the latest conflicts in Europe, caused by the on-going economic crisis and major migration as a result of the war in Ukraine and the war in Syria that is overshadowing everything else. FUEN is furthermore concerned about the apparent tendency of renationalisation, disintegration and reinstatement of borders in Europe.

“The OSCE is not in the last place a natural partner for FUEN, because it deals with both security as well as with the important human values, namely with human rights”, says the President of FUEN, Hans Heinrich Hansen.

Within the framework of the German OSCE Chairmanship, FUEN has been requested to explore the role of the national minorities as bridge-builders between states and to define how this can facilitate finding international solutions in Europe.

Information

Congress: The FUEN Congress takes place from 18-22 May, and is organised in cooperation with the organisation of the German minority in Poland VDG (Verband der sozialkulturellen Gesellschaften).

The delegates will arrive on 18 May. After the opening of the congress, the first day of the congress will be dedicated to the current situation in Poland and its minority policy, with a focus on the German minority. The second day of the congress will be a thematic day with the motto: “Quo vadis Europe? The multifaceted crisis of Europe”. Within the framework of the congress, there will also be the Assembly of

Delegates of the largest umbrella organisation of the minorities. A minority market offers plenty of opportunity to get into contact with the many minorities, before the participants themselves will experience the Capital of Culture.

In Poland there are 13 recognised, autochthonous minorities. Among them are the Germans, Ukrainians, Slovaks, Kashubs, Lemkos, Jews and Roma. In the whole of Europe there are more than 400 national minorities and small peoples; in total more than 100 million people. They speak many different regional and minority languages.

Within the Federal Union of European Nationalities (FUEN), more than 90 minorities are organised. Among them are the Kashubs in Poland, the Ladins in Italy, the Hungarians in Romania, the Finns in Sweden, the Bretons in France, the Lusatian Sorbs in Germany, the Crimean Tatars in Ukraine, the Burgenland Croats in Austria, the Aromanians in Macedonia, the Meshketian Turks in Russia and the Western Thrace Turks in Greece.

FUEN is an interest organisation, platform for exchange/encounters and a community of solidarity. FUEN represents the interests of the European minorities on the regional, national and in particular on the European level. It is the largest umbrella organisation of the autochthonous, traditional minorities in Europe.

FUEN works for the preservation and promotion of the identity, language, culture, rights and traditions of the European minorities. It is the voice of the minorities at the international organisations, in particular at the European Union and the Council of Europe, but also at the United Nations and the OSCE.

FUEN was founded in 1949 in Paris. Nowadays, the organisation has three offices: in Flensburg, Berlin and Brussels.



FUEN CONGRESS
WROCLAW / BRESLAU / WROCLAW - 18. - 22. MAY 2016



FUEN President Hans Heinrich Hansen, FUEN Secretary General Susann Schenk and Chairman the Masurian Association Tadeusz Willan, Chairman of Verband der deutschen sozial-kulturellen Gesellschaften (VdG: Germans in Poland) Bernard Gaida, Representative of the German youth association BJDM Katrin Koschny, Chairman of Sozial-Kulturelle Gesellschaft der Deutschen im Oppelner Schlesien (SKGD: Germans in Opole-Silesia) Rafal Bartek.

More information:

Factsheet High Commissioner on National Minorities - <http://www.osce.org/hcnm/33317>

HCNM Thematic Recommendations and Guidelines – 1996 until now - <http://www.osce.org/hcnm/66209>

OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities discusses how to strengthen the inter-ethnic institutional framework in Ukraine - <http://www.osce.org/hcnm/226841>

Serbian Prime Minister inaugurates OSCE-supported multilingual university department in southern Serbia - <http://www.osce.org/hcnm/203026>

The FUEN Contribution to the German OSCE Chairmanship 2016 -

<https://www.fuen.org/news/single/article/the-fuen-contribution-to-the-german-osce-chairmanship/>

FUEN President Hans Heinrich Hansen in Vienna: “The basic principles for successful minority policy are equality and genuine dialogue among equals” - <https://www.fuen.org/news/single/article/fuen-president-hans-heinrich-hansen-in-vienna-the-basic-principles-for-successful-minority-policy-are-equality-and-genuine-dialogue-among-equals/>



High Commissioner Astrid Thors with FUEN President Hans Heinrich Hansen and FUEN Vice President Dieter Küssner



High Commissioner Astrid Thors