

## FUEN CONGRESS RESOLUTION 2016-01

At the Assembly of Delegates in Wrocław / Breslau, on 21 May 2016, the Delegates of the Member Organisations of the Federal Union of European Nationalities adopted the following resolution:

We witness a period of major dissonance in Europe. The EU faces unprecedented challenges: major immigration, unemployment, terrorism, economic crises, and wars raging in Ukraine, in Syria, in Libya, in the South Caucasus. All these lead to uncertainty and as a reaction we see political forces, wanting to reverse the process of European integration. Apparent tendencies of renationalisation, disintegration and reinstatement of borders arise in Europe. We witness with great concern the rise of extremist political forces and movements, which not only threaten the social cohesion and peace in our societies but also directly target the most vulnerable groups, such as the autochthonous ethnic minorities.

The FUEN, bringing together a great many nationalities, reiterates its believe that these major European challenges should not threaten our values, but should become opportunities and catalyst for the discussion about identity and to be able to develop a new perspective on the minority protection in Europe as well.

During its long history FUEN made many and important proposals on the creation of inclusive European societies which ensure a wide range of rights for the protection of individual and collective rights of the ethnic minorities and language groups. We believe in the basic concepts Europe of regions and the Europe of citizens. The role of the regions should be strengthened, since this could be the place, where the dichotomy between minorities and majorities in cultural and linguistic diversity is neutralised, contributes to the cooperation between the two parts, and the development of the communities. At the same time, the EU needs to adapt its structures and treaties in such a way that enables direct citizens' participation with representatives of civil society to the decision taking processes.

We remind of the basic principles and fundamental rights defined in the Charter for the autochthonous national minorities in Europe from 2006; the demands formulated in the Programmatic Declaration adopted in Brixen in 2013, the Minority Manifesto adopted in Flensburg in 2014, and the congress resolution adopted in Komotini in 2015; the legislative proposals included in the European Citizens' Initiative Minority SafePack from 2013; the relevant documents adopted by the Council of Europe, the European Union and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe regarding the situation and rights of autochthonous national minorities in Europe.

### ON RECOGNITION, RIGHTS AND SELF-GOVERNMENT

Even though the right to identity and free association are fundamental, some European states still question them and unrecognized minorities suffer the consequences. What is given by default in the case of the overwhelming majority of European minorities is not accepted in all European states. Without official recognition, the existence of the minority communities is in jeopardy, and their assimilation becomes a real threat, since they are unable to claim any linguistic, cultural and educational rights.

In other states, the minority question is still far from being solved albeit the national minorities are recognized as such. In the last year we have noticed in many places stagnation in the cooperation between minority and majority. In many states authorities refuse to apply their own laws in matters related to minority protection, they persecute individuals and communities for the use of national or community symbols. In many states the legitimate claim for protection of the cultural heritage and

mother tongue is often disregarded; education in mother tongue remains limited; education establishments for pupils coming from ethnic minorities are under scrutiny; national and minority symbols are banned from public use; the bilingual signage in municipalities remains partial or it becomes victim of vandal and xenophobic acts.

Moreover, nation-states simply reject the idea of self-governance for regions populated by minority groups, wrongly arguing that autonomy would be a form of ethnic separatism. In fact it is nothing but a manifestation of the basic European principle of subsidiarity. Minority rights and autonomy are not a threat; they are a solution for managing and preventing conflicts arousing between the majority and minority communities.

Experience has shown that while in the last decades the Council of Europe adopted important minority provisions in lack of sanctions it has no true power to enforce the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities or the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages. Similarly, the EU introduced no mechanism of supervision on the application of the Copenhagen Criteria regarding the respect for and protection of minorities. It is clear that Europe has become too weak to protect its minority and language groups and policy change is necessary to ensure that some states would not take a step back.

We welcome the intention of the German Chairmanship Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe to concentrate in 2016 in particular on topics closely linked to the current crisis in the European security order. Furthermore, as foreseen, a focus will be put on the situation of minorities in times of crisis, their positive contribution to social integration and their potential to build bridges in international relations. The FUEN will have several joint projects during the German OSCE Chairmanship.

## ON MINORITY LANGUAGES AND LANGUAGE REVIVAL

Language is not only a means of communication, but also the individual's natural form of expression as well as that of the community to which he belongs. If we protect our language, we protect the individual and their community, because the use of our mother tongue is a fundamental human right.

The European Union's motto is "United in Diversity" but there is a tendency to limit this to the national cultures and the official languages. Yet, the cultural and linguistic dimension of Europe is much more diverse: there are more than 60 minority languages, besides the 24 official EU languages. The number of minority language speakers is estimated at 40 million in the EU and 100 million in Europe. The majority of these languages, such as Ladin, Rhaeto-Romance, Sorbian, North Frisian or Kashubian are below the critical threshold of 300,000 speakers that some experts mention as the necessary minimum for survival.

Many endangered languages are merely spoken by elderly people nowadays, therefore the youth needs to be encouraged – speaking minority languages has to be 'cool'. We witnessed important local initiatives, but those are not enough, the Union should also intervene. The EU has to pay attention to the small and endangered languages as to an important part of the European cultural heritage.

### **The Federal Union of European Nationalities repeatedly stresses:**

- the voices of the autochthonous minorities in Europe need to be recognized, heard and taken into account in all possible domains;

- the European Union and its member states shall pay more attention to the specific needs and problems of the autochthonous minority groups;
- the protection and the revival of the endangered languages of Europe need tools and means supported by the EU and its member states;
- the voice of the Federal Union of European Nationalities and that of the European autochthonous minorities shall be heard and taken into consideration by the European institutions and the member states.

As minority umbrella organization, for us it is important to contribute with our expertise as bridge-builders, by sharing best practices from our regions, and to put several minority issues in Europe that need solutions or at least dialogue on the agenda.

### **We urge**

1. The European states to officially recognize all autochthonous minorities and minority languages living on their territories, to support them morally and financially to protect their identity, language and culture as well as to refrain from intimidation or persecution of the national minorities.
2. The Council of Europe to sanction the delay of state reports and the failure to implement the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities and the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages.
3. The EU to create a legal basis for the protection of the autochthonous minorities and nationalities, including an effective mechanism to monitor and sanction the member states in case of breach of the Copenhagen Criteria.