

RESOLUTION 2016-12

Urgent Resolution on the expansion of the boundaries of the city of Opole disregarding the regulations concerning the protection of national and ethnic minorities

submitted by the Association of German Social and Cultural Societies in Poland

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:

One of the basic principles of European democracy is the principle of respect for human and civil rights. In addition to broadly defined personal and economic rights and freedoms of citizens, this includes the principle of tolerance and respect for the rights of minorities living in a given society. One of the definitions of democracy states explicitly that democracy denotes “majority rule with respect for minority rights”.

In this context the Assembly of Delegates of FUEN expresses its negative opinion about the plans of the Mayor of Opole to expand the boundaries of the City of Opole. The initiative of the Mayor of Opole was not preceded by dialogue, so essential in such situations, with the local communities living in the municipalities of Dąbrowa, Dobrzeń Wielki, Komprachcice, Prószków and Turawa, some of the villages of which are to be incorporated into the City of Opole. The proposal for such changes contravenes the well-established, centuries-long, historic as well as economic structure of these local communities. That is why people living in these communities have started a grassroots movement, expressing their opposition to the idea. Public consultations held in February and March 2016 in each municipality covered by the expansion plan showed that over 93% of the residents were opposed to the proposal.

The localities that are to be affected by the planned changes of administrative boundaries have been inhabited for many generations by, among others, members of the German minority, as is evidenced by the most recent censuses as well as social and cultural activities of this community in the municipalities in question. In these municipalities the results of the last National Census of Population and Housing of 2011 were as follows: 14% of the residents of the Municipality of Dąbrowa, 17.8% of the Municipality of Dobrzeń Wielki, 17.4% of the Municipality of Komprachcice, 26.2% of the Municipality of Prószków and 21% of the residents of the Municipality of Turawa said they were part of the German minority.

As an international organisation bringing together nationalities from all over Europe, FUEN supports positive development of European regions, which is in the interest of all citizens of Europe. We believe, however, that in 21st-century Europe of considerable importance to the development of cities and regions is the integrated territorial approach, which is a response to a growing need to see territories and the planning of their development from the perspective of their functional areas and not administrative boundaries. This means that projects are to be implemented in a coordinated, complementary manner producing synergies. We are convinced that the strengthening of a multicultural Opole region, taking into account the development of the City of Opole, should unfold in conditions of social consensus and respect for the subjectivity of local communities.

This is why our opinion is negative when it comes to attempts to apply measures – without the consent and acceptance of the interested parties – that will alter the proportions of the population in the local communities and limit the possibilities of proportional political participation in these areas inhabited also by persons belonging to the German minority. We would like to note that such plans contravene

Article 5(2) of the Polish Act on National and Ethnic Minorities and Regional Languages, which introduces a ban on “measures aimed at changing national or ethnic proportions in areas inhabited by minorities” as well as Article 16 of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, under which the “Parties shall refrain from measures which alter the proportions of the population in areas inhabited by persons belonging to national minorities and are aimed at restricting the rights and freedoms flowing from the principles enshrined in the present Framework Convention”.

We are convinced that the strength of a state lies in, among others, its approach to the minorities living within its territory. By ratifying both the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities and the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, Poland joined countries with very high standards in the protection of minority rights. What remains an elementary part of this legal system, however, is dialogue, which makes it possible to look for solutions respecting minority rights. The Assembly of Delegates of FUEN asks the Polish state authorities not to consent to the expansion of the boundaries of the City of Opole and to revive the social dialogue which is essential to proper development of the region.