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Minority Congress

Europa being guest in Lusatia

51st FUEN Congress 2006





Federal Union of
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Europe being guest in Lusatia

In May 2006, the bilingual town of Bautzen/Budyšin in Lusatia, Germany, was the meeting point for 250 representatives of several European minorities. The Federal Union of European Nationalities (FUEN) invited them for its 51st annual Congress.

Apart from these minority representatives from 33 European states, also guests from politics, science and culture had come. Amongst them the prime minister of the Free State of Saxony, Georg Milbradt, the chairman of the Intergroup for traditional national minorities in the European Parliament, Csaba Tabajdi and the Commissioner of the German federal government for national minorities, Christoph Bergner, participated in the conference.

The host was Domowina, the Federation of Lusatian Sorbs, who organised the congress from the 24th of May until the 28th of May.

The highlight of the 51st FUEN-Congress was the adoption and the official signing of the “Charter for the autochthonous, national minorities in Europe”. Starting from the Charter, the fundamental right to education, the right to schools and the right to education in the mother tongue was tabled and the congress had as its major subject: “Schools and education based on selected examples”.

On the following pages, apart from the Charter, an overview will be given of the discussions, reports, resolutions and cultural highlights, which characterised the largest annual congress of the European minorities. At the same moment this documentation gives an insight into the work of FUEN and its member organisations and explains their engagement to preserve the linguistic and cultural diversity in Europe.

Facts

The Sorbs (Upper Sorbian Serbja, Lower Sorbian Serby) are a West-Slavic people, recognised in Germany as a national minority. The home of the Sorbs is Upper- and Lower-Lusatia in the German States of Saxony and Brandenburg. The umbrella organisation of the Sorbs is Domowina.

The Sorbs in the internet: www.domowina.de

» And so, at the beginning of a congress in which the linguistic richness of Europe is the central, sounds the mother tongue of a mountain people in the Alps, living faraway from the Sorbs. The Rhaetian language, like also Sorbian or German belong to the 6000 – 7000 languages of the world [...] The Rhaetians and the Sorbs as well as many who have gathered today in Bautzen are joined in the awareness that we belongs to one of the “species rarae”, which may be exposed to threatening frost and cold winds, but claim their place in the linguistic meadow of Europe and give it a fascinating and unique blaze of colours because of their variety.

*Romedi Arqint, President of the Federal Union of European Nationalities (FUEN)
Rhaetian from Switzerland in his opening speech that he gave partly in Rhaetian.*

The full text of the speech you can find in the internet under www.fuen.org

The diversity of Europe

Every seventh citizen of Europe, or in other words, about 100 million people on our continent acknowledge that they belong to a national minority / ethnic group. Within the European Union around 36 million people belong to an autochthonous, national minority. ¹

Examples are inter alia the Sorbs in Lusatia, the Frisians, Catalans, Ladins, Bretons, Rhaetians etcetera – these are all minorities / peoples without a kin-state. Apart from them there are also national minorities, who came into existence because of the turbulent European history and border changes because of that – like the Slovenes in Italy, the Germans in Poland, the Hungarians in Romania, the Croats in Austria. The member organisations of the Federal Union of European Nationalities range from the South Tyroleans in the north of Italy to the Danish minority in Schleswig-Holstein, Germany – from the Bretons in France to the Krim-Tatars in Ukraine.

The minorities that have been listed here as an example, are in their European regions often the bridges between the different countries.

The cultural diversity of the European minorities is commonly recognised. With their richness of languages they contribute to a colourful Europe and they are recognised as added cultural value. Members of minorities live in two cultures, are born bi- or multilingual, and language competence is an important factor for sustainable economic development.

The most recent conflicts in the youngest European history, reaching their absolute low in the disastrous wars on the Balkans, were mainly nationality conflicts. The minority issue is decisive for a peaceful and stable development of Europe. A dialogue with the minorities is an effective, essential way to prevent future conflicts and to release tensions.

In many countries of Europe the diversity that we just have written about and the relevance of the minorities is not questioned – they are respected as partner and are supported. This is however not the case for all countries and minorities still have to fight for their rights and support in the year 2006.

Self-conception:

“To the autochthonous, national minorities/ethnic groups belong the minorities that came into being as a result of developments in European history, as a result of the change of state borders and other historical events. To the autochthonous, national minorities/ethnic group also the peoples of Europe belong who have never established a state of their own and who live as a minority in the territory of a state.”

From: “Charter for the autochthonous, national minorities in Europe”

» I would note that the existence of a minority is a question of fact and not of definition. In this connection, I would like to quote the Copenhagen Document of 1990 which (...) states that “To belong to a national minority is a matter of a person’s individual choice.” (...) I would dare to say that I know a minority when I see one.”

Max van der Stoep, OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities, 1993-2000.

1) Source: National Minorities in Europe – Handbook by Christoph Pan and Beante Sibylle Pfeil; Euromosaic study I, II, III <http://www.uoc.edu/euromosaic/web/homean/index1.html>

FUEN - The umbrella organisation



The Federal Union of European Nationalities (FUEN) is an independent umbrella organisation of associations of autochthonous, national minorities / ethnic groups in Europe. FUEN was founded in 1949 – in the same year as the Council of Europe - in Versailles/France. Today it represents 81 member organisations from 32 states. In 1989 FUEN was recognised as non-governmental organisation (NGO) with “participatory status” at the Council of Europe and in 1995 it gained the consultative status at the United Nations (UN).

The minority organisation works closely together with the Youth of European Nationalities (YEN). YEN holds a consultative seat in the board of FUEN.

FUEN regards itself as interest broker on behalf of the European minorities / ethnic groups. In this context it assumes the position of a civil society organisation that represents the interests of minorities on the European level. In this process the umbrella organisation uses its political influence within the European and international organisations – like e.g. the European Union, Council of Europe, OSCE or the United Nations.

It is a designated aim to work closely together with the member organisations and to unite into a network for the benefit of minority protection that is capable of acting. The dialogue and the concrete cooperation between the umbrella organisation and its members should help to secure effective and sustainable minority protection on the European level.



» The Allied Powers [after the Second World War] were right of course; minority problems often, and not just in both World Wars, had been the reason for war. What they did not see, was that not the minorities as such were to blame for the wars, but the unsolved minority problems. They did not see that neither the denial of the existence of a minority nor its expulsion would solve the problem. The doctrine of the Allied Powers, which held that minorities were not to play a role again in the new Europe, was also acclaimed by the United Nations, the newly founded UN.

[...]

Looking back we cannot deny that the almost concurrent establishment of the Council of Europe and our Union – let alone the very different extend – have both contributed to a turning of the tide of the post-war-politics of the Great Power and the UN in regard to the minorities.

Frisian Dr. Frederik Paulsen †, one of the founding fathers of FUEN, in his speech on the occasion of the 40-years existence of FUEN in Versailles in 1989.

The Congress in Bautzen / Budyšin

Representatives of European minorities from Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Belarus, Switzerland, the Czech Republic, Germany, Denmark, Estonia, France, Finland, Georgia, Greece, Hungary, Croatia, Italy, Kirgizstan, Kazakhstan, Latvia, Moldova, Macedonia, the Netherlands, Poland, Romania, Russia, Sweden, Slovenia, Slovakia, Ukraine and Uzbekistan were hosted at the FUEN-Congress in Bautzen / Budyšin from 24th May till 28th May 2006.



During the congress the FUEN Assembly was carried through and resolutions that had been sent in were discussed and adopted. The main subject of the four congress days was however the special importance of education for the autochthonous minorities of Europe. The highlight was the adoption of the “Charter for the autochthonous, national minorities in Europe” and after that the signing of the Charter at

a joint reception of the prime minister and the chairman of the parliament of the Free State of Saxony Georg Milbradt and Erich Iltgen.

The guests from all over Europe underwent four days with an intensive programme. But apart from speeches, lectures and discussions there was also time to be together, to experience culture together.

Singing together

Before the congress several member organisations of FUEN had been requested to send in some songs that were typical in their minority. These songs were collected and given to the participants of the congress in the form of a songbook. The songs were however not only presented in paper-form – at the first day of the congress, during the “unofficial opening” in the Sorbian restaurant “Bjesada”, the participants proved that they all were able to sing. Minority songs could be heard in many different languages.

» “A great idea. Singing together miraculously loosens the often rather dull atmosphere during such a congress – people directly get to know each other in another way”.

Csaba Tabajdi, Member of the European Parliament, who proved himself a real singer during the unofficial opening.

Official opening

Around 350 persons, FUEN-delegates as well as guests from politics, science and culture had come to the official opening of the FUEN-Congress in Bautzen/Budyšin and the congress hall was filled to full capacity.

The president of FUEN, Rhaetian Romedi Arqint, was delighted that in Saxony so many friends of FUEN had come together. In his opening speech, which he spoke out partially in Rhaetian, he spoke out his expectations for the congress.



- » This ladies and gentlemen is the goal of our congress. To start a thinking process and to strengthen it, that reassigns the language to the place where it belongs: Language as a home to the individual and to the community. And to remind the state that it has to fulfil its primal duty: because citizens that live on its territory – independent of their numerical size – should be granted the fundamental right to their own language and all the means to implement this right!

Romedi Arqint, President of FUEN



As patron of the congress the first guest speaker at the official opening was the prime minister of the Free State of Saxony, Georg Milbradt.

The prime minister emphasised the special relation between Sorbs and Germans in Lusatia. During history, living together has not always been without tensions, but Saxony has not least in its constitution spoken out its commitment for the Sorbian people to secure the rights and protection of the Sorbs.

- » “Normally one reads here in school Lessing’s book ‘Nathan the Wise’. The German speaking persons amongst you will know this poet. “Nathan the Wise” the play is an example for tolerance, for tolerance between religions. [...] And therefore I think you should know that this Lessing comes from here, from this bilingual region, from Kamenz and I am strongly convinced that he only could have written this play, because he experienced this tolerance between Germans and Sorbs.”

Georg Milbradt, Prime Minister of the Free State of Saxony

The prime minister of Saxony caused a long-lasting applause and joy amongst the delegates because of his promise to support the work of FUEN in the next year also by a financial contribution.

Apart from the patron, during the opening also the state-secretary in the Federal ministry of internal affairs, Christoph Bergner spoke to the delegates as commissioner of the federal government for national minorities and expatriates and also the minister for science, research and culture of Brandenburg, Johanna Wanka, gave a speech.

» The Federal Union of European Nationalities stands for a Europe that averts nationalist excesses and that at the same time enables people to feel at home. To find identity in your own roots, speak your own language with confidence, foster your own traditional cultural expressions without looking down at others and forgetting the common grounds of the traditional heritage - that really is European spirit.
Johanna Wanka, Minister for Science, Research and Culture of the State of Brandenburg

The mayor of the town of Bautzen / Budyšin, Christian Schramm, also spoke to the guests, just like the representative of the Council of Europe, Françoise Kempf. The president of the Youth of European Nationalities, Aleksander Studen-Kirchner, also addressed a word to the guests:

» “Finally I would like to say something personal, a little impression from Bautzen. You cannot imagine, what a feeling of happiness it brings – if you live in Austria, like I do – and you all know the problem of the Carinthian Slovenes – to walk through Bautzen / Budyšin and to see bilingual signposting all over the place. Therefore I would like address from this place the Carinthian governor Haider and – please allow me this wording as youth representative – recommend him warmly: better bi- than never! (lieber Bi als nie!)”
Aleksander Studen-Kirchner, president of the Youth of European Nationalities
YEN in the internet: www.yeni.org

As the host on behalf of the federation of the Sorbs in Lusatia, Domowina’s chairman Jan Nuck in the end welcomed the many European guests:
“I am very glad to be able to welcome you on behalf of Domowina – Federation of Lusatian Sorbs at the 51st FUEN-Congress in Bautzen. That the congress is taking place right here, in the “capital of the Sorbs”, is for us very enjoyable, because it shows that Domowina – which belongs to the Federal Union since the year 1991 – is one of its esteemed members.” Referring to the actual demographic developments that touch upon all minorities the host formulated concrete expectations for the thematic focus of the congress: The consequences on the minority school system are already visible. Here at the conference we will deal with this subject. I hope we will succeed in formulating the basic conditions for a minority school system that also meet our Sorbian expectations.”

The speeches spoken out during the opening of the congress can be read once again in the internet at www.fuen.org.

Land of ideas

During the football world-cup 2006 Germany was host to millions of visitors from all over the world. To show the many guest “how German poets and thinkers, researchers and inventors, artists and composers have been making life more comfortable, secure and enjoyable for centuries” the initiative “Germany – land of ideas” was brought into being.

Deutschland Land der Ideen



The patronage for this image-campaign was held by the German president Horst Köhler. In the framework of the campaign “Land of ideas”, initiators of various projects and plans could apply for becoming official partner. On the initiative of Domowina the congress of the European minorities in Lusatia was selected out of over 1200 contesters. Under the motto of “Europe being guest in Lusatia” the 51st FUEN-Congress with its colourful series of events became official partner of the campaign Land of ideas.

<http://www.land-of-ideas.org>

Football-match

But the delegates at the FUEN-Congress would not, being part of the cultural framework programme of the football-world-cup, refrain from an own football match. And thus short-term a European minority-football-final was organised. A team from the Sorbian village of Crostwitz/Chrósćicy was willing to play against a European selection of the minorities. The spectators were enthusiastic, even though probably the quality of both teams would not have sufficed for the world-cup...



The Danish newspaper “Flensborg Avis” wrote about the match with the headline “Sorbs won with 4:1” about the “football-delicacies”. (translation from Danish):

The Danish newspaper “Flensborg Avis” wrote about the match with the headline “Sorbs won with 4:1” about the “football-delicacies”. (translation from Danish):

“Not just serious words and endless sitting on congress-chairs are the main occupation, when the European minorities meet each other once a year at the congress. [...] The physical fitness reached it’s climax, when a football match between a Sorbian team and a team consisting of FUEN members queued up. The FUEN members of course didn’t have the opportunity to train a lot with each other before and although the physical condition was sufficient, the coordination within the FUEN team was somewhat lacking. Not-surprising the trained Sorbs won therefore with 4:1.”

But they were not short in enthusiasm. “It was real fun and during shower we discussed what we should have been doing to win. Mind you, in different languages”, one of the FUEN-players explained after the game.

Keynote speech from the European Parliament



The person that spoke out the keynote speech at this year's FUEN-Congress was the chairman of the Intergroup for Traditional National Minorities, Constitutional Regions and Regional Languages, Hungarian Csaba Tabajdi.

In a very pacy, driven speech the politician gave a profound view on the current political and legal situation of the minorities in Europe. Already at the

FUEN Congress in Munich in 1990, Tabajdi said, he had been given the opportunity to speak about the future of the minorities in Eastern Europe, then as representative of the countries of the former Warsaw Pact that had just become independent states.

“During the preparation of my current speech I had a look at my contribution of that day, to see what since then has changed in the world. I tell you this, because the fight for minority rights sometimes reminds you of the infamous Don Quijote and his fights against the wind mills. A heroic fight with no or only little result. But we should not forget how far we have come within the last 16 years since 1990. Nobody in Munich expected then that we would now have two legally binding documents of the Council of Europe, which most of the member states of the Council of Europe also have signed. Minority rights became part of the Copenhagen Criteria for membership of the countries of Central and Eastern Europe in the European Union, which has been an important impetus for the improvement of minority policies in these countries”, according to Csaba Tabajdi.

But the minority politician, who already in the early nineties had been active in the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe and who later in the European Parliament advocated the rights of the autochthonous minorities, used his lecture to speak in detail about the many problems and difficulties for the minorities.

Especially in regard to France and Greece this member of the Socialist Group in the European Parliament spoke hard words and he denounced their non-recognition of the their minorities.

“We have a serious problem of double standards in Europe. The old member states demand from the new member states and candidate countries to live up to the EU-minority standards, which they themselves do not comply with”, according to Tabajdi.

He warned in his speech for the mingling of definitions. “We must distinguish between the traditional or autochthonous minorities and the new immigration minorities. Both groups need legal protection and regulations at the European level. But they should be treated separately, because their problems are very much different.”

Csaba Tabajdi called upon the delegates of the FUEN-Congress to start another ‘fight for the Constitutional Treaty’ of the European Union. “We should support the text of the Constitution, because it lays down the respect for human rights including the ‘rights of persons belonging to minority groups’. This is the first legally binding reference to minority rights in the history of the European Union. It is a historical turning point.”

Csaba Tabajdi clearly emphasised that the issue of minorities in Europe is a decisive challenge for security policy. He referred to the well-known conflicts, aroused by minority tensions, which in part (especially in Chechnya) have been reason for massive violence. He also mentioned the situations in the Basque Country, Corsica, Cyprus, Northern Ireland, the problem of the Kurds in Turkey, the situation in Transnistria and the situation in Kosovo.

The speaker called upon the minority organisations and their umbrella organisation, the Federal Union of European Nationalities, to stronger and more visible engagement on the European level. Concretely he offered cooperation with the European Parliament and floated the suggestion of a 'strategic partnership'.

"We should take into consideration to establish a 'Committee of the Minorities', as mutatis mutandis for the Committee of the Regions of the European Union – why not with the member organisations of FUEN as a basis", according to Csaba Tabajdi at the end of his speech, which was received with great applause.

Following the congress already several talks have taken place between FUEN and the chairman of the Intergroup, in order to mint the commencing cooperation into concrete results. The Federal Union of European Nationalities for example participated regularly in the monthly sessions of the Intergroup of the European Parliament in Strasbourg.



The Charter is adopted



The highlight of the congress was when the 'Charter for the autochthonous, national minorities in Europe' was adopted and signed during a reception of Prime Minister Georg Milbradt as well as the chairman of the regional parliament of Saxony Erich Ilgen together.

The Charter was compiled as a common effort of both the FUEN and the Youth of European Nationalities (YEN) and serves as basis for the further direction in the work of both organisations, so that the profile as the most important minority umbrella organisations on the European level can be sharpened. The Charter is the 'political business card' of both European organisations and communicates the self-conception of the European minorities in the Europe of the 21st century.

The Charter defines the fundamental rights and basic principles of minority protection and subsumes the political demands on the European level on the medium and long-term.

The compilation of the Charter was prepared with the support of several scholars and was an important part of the work of the last half year.



DEFINITION

A legally binding definition of autochthonous, national minorities has been under discussion for decades, but it has not been possible yet to reach consensus. A legally binding definition is important because only a defined group can exercise rights collectively.

The signatories refer here to the definition in the FUEN declaration of 1994, which is given here in an adapted version.

An autochthonous, national minority / ethnic group should be understood as community,

1. that is resident in an area of a state territory or scattered around a state territory,
2. that is of smaller number than the rest of the state population,
3. the members of which are citizens of that state,
4. the members of which have been resident in the area in question for generations,
5. that is distinguishable from the state's other citizens by reason of their ethnic, linguistic or cultural characteristics and who wish to preserve these characteristics."

The Charter was presented by the common representative of FUEN and YEN, Jan Diedrichsen. Together with YEN secretary-general Susann Schenk he initiated and coordinated the work on the Charter. For that the delegates expressed their thanks to both of them during the FUEN Assembly.



During the FUEN Assembly in Bautzen / Budyšin the Charter was discussed vividly and in the end it was unanimously adopted by the delegates.

During the congress in Bautzen the Federal Union of European Nationalities agreed to regularly work out one of the fundamental rights, as listed in the Charter. With the support of experts and together with the member organisations in the course of time a compendium of fundamental minority rights will then be developed.

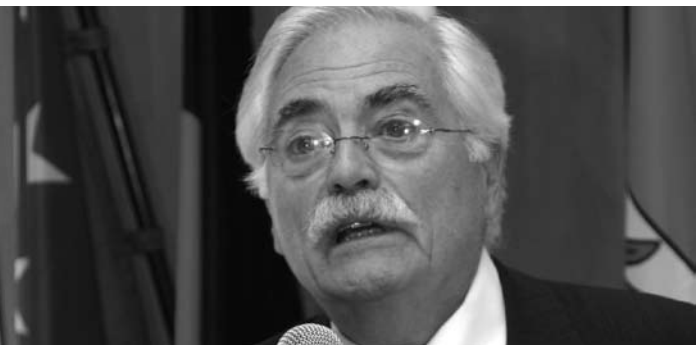
FUNDAMENTAL RIGHTS

Minority protection as part of human rights in general ensures the following fundamental rights to the autochthonous, national minorities / ethnic groups:

1. The right to language/the right to use the mother tongue in dealings with public authorities and in a court of law.
2. The right to education/the right to schools and the right to classes given in the mother tongue
3. The right to culture
4. The right to religion
5. The right to establish organisations of its own
6. The right to unhindered contact across national boundaries
7. The right to information and media of one's own
8. The right to representation in public administration
9. The right to adapted forms of self-administration and cultural autonomy
10. The right to political representation and political participation
11. The right to spell and pronounce one's name in one's own language
12. The right to use and make visible traditional place, field and street names in signposting and other topographical signs
13. The right to protection of the ancestral area of settlement"

In September, the Youth of European Nationalities also adopted the Charter unanimously during a congress in Palic in Vojvodina, Serbia.

Education



The decision to work out one of the fundamental rights from the adopted Charter of YEN and FUEN in regular tranches was undertaken for the first time already in Bautzen/Budyšin. The subject of several lectures, discussions and debates was the theme of education, with a particular focus on the school and education system of the Lusatian Sorbs.

The main speech on the subject of education and multilingualism was delivered by language scientist Prof. Wolfgang Wölck from the Research Centre on Multilingualism at the University of Brussels.

In his chequered contribution the scientist even convinced the last sceptics with powerful arguments about why multilingualism is without exception an advantage.

» I can prove it. Multilingual people are more tolerant than monolingual people and older multilingual people keep their ability to concentrate longer, they do not “calcify”.
Prof. Wolfgang Wölck, University of Brussels

Unity in the language area and the development of a language standard are according to Wölck deciding for the status of a language; division and splitting into dialects lower this status.

Pupils in bilingual education have according to Wölck “steeper learning-curves”, are often overtaking the pupils that speak only the majority language also in their language, learn faster how to read and are stronger involved in the language community.

The full text of the lecture of Prof. Wolfgang Wölck can be found in the internet at www.fuen.org

Apart from Prof. Wolfgang Wölck also the Minister for education from the German speaking community in Eupen / Belgium, Mr. Oliver Paasch, was invited as speaker. As a politician he could – relatively satisfied with the situation in Belgium – tell about the high level of autonomy in the field of education for the German-speaking community. Paasch proved, based on the PISA-study on the school system of the German-speaking community in Belgium – how competitive in the European context a minority school system can be.

» “In the lecture of minister Paasch we just have heard– at least for me it looks like – a report from minority paradise.”
Gerhard Baumgartner, FUEN-rapporteur on the subject of education

In addition Anna Kerner, who is principal in the ministry for education in Budapest and there responsible for the German minority and German education in Hungary, gave a report on the minority school system in Hungary. Michael Gutowning outlined the situation of the Carinthian Slovenes in Austria and Claude Nadeau gave a lecture about the Europe-wide known ‘Diwan’-model of the Bretons in France.

Apart from the lectures from academic experts and politicians, a group of professionals came together during the congress. This group consisted of the different speakers and about 20 European linguists, legal experts, journalists, historians and education experts. Together they discussed the theme based on the example of the Lusatian Sorbs. The result of this interdisciplinary dialogue was the ‘Guiding principles in education for the Lusatian Sorbs’ as an example for the European minorities in general.

» “The decrease in population size and the resulting decline in numbers of pupils combined with migration from the region reinforce the assimilation of the Sorbs. Despite reputed exemplary school legislation also Sorbian schools are being closed. The decisions are not taken based on criteria that are crucial for the preservation and the development of a stable Sorbian identity in the youngest generations. [...] The situation in the majority is taken as the basis, to define the norms for minority policy as well. This pretended equalisation of Sorbs and Germans alike leads to further deterioration of the Sorbian school system.”

(From the presentation of the Lusatian Sorbs)

Next to the demand for more administrative competences and clear co-determination for the Sorbian people, in the guiding principles the experts demand inter alia the establishment of self-determined schools for the Sorbian people, the guarantee that the conditions for the maintaining of language areas or the creation of new ones are secured, that material and financial resources to sustain the range of education and schools are ensured and that the federal government is involved in the realisation of the plans. The Guiding principles in education were accepted by the delegates of the FUEN-Congress with great applause.

As rapporteur of the group of experts, journalist and historian Gerhard Baumgartner from Austria gave his comments about the work on the guiding principles in education for the Sorbs: “For me this is one of the most interesting experiences during a congress – namely that a group of experts has been intensively working on a concrete document. I am sure that we have been able to write a basis on which one can align in the discussion about a sustainable education concept for the particular situation of the Sorbians in Lusatia. This will also contribute positively to the development of the region as a whole.”

The chairman of Domowina, the federation of the Sorbs, Jan Nuck, who himself took part in the session as well, underlined the relevance of the theme for the future of the Sorbian people and spoke out his acknowledgement for the contribution of the experts.

“I think that with the different lectures and intense consulting of the expert group we have had a first insight about possibilities and approaches that an effective education programme can offer for the minorities. I am also glad about the guiding principles in education for the Sorbs, which have been worked out together and which will help us in our further efforts to implement a workable Sorbian school concept”, Jan Nuck, chairman of Domowina, stressed.

During the congress was decided that the guiding principles in education for the Lusatian Sorbs should be used as a basis for working out the fundamental right on education, so that it can be adopted at the coming FUEN Congress in 2007.

Bautzener Frühling (Bautzen Spring-festival)



Once a year the 1002-year old town of Bautzen / Budyšin celebrates the festival 'Bautzener Frühling'. The complete centre of town changes for a weekend into a public feast. This year the theme of 'Bautzener Frühling' was "Europe being guest in Lusatia"; together with the FUEN-Congress in the framework of the contest 'Germany, land of ideas'.

The various minorities, represented at the congress, had been asked beforehand to bring with them presentation material and culinary delicacies that are typical for their minorities. A small minority market developed and the guests were able to give an insight into the diversity of Europe to a large public. Curious passers-by were informed about the Rhaetians from Switzerland or about the German minority in Kazakhstan. There were several animating discussions between the Sorbian hosts, minority guests and 'majority-visitors' from Lusatia.

On stage Domowina, the Sorbian federation, was offering a cultural programme that lasted the whole day. The two presenters guided the public through the diversity of minorities in Europe. The cultural day in Bautzen / Budyšin was completed by several Sorbian music and dance-groups, who showed their abilities and who danced a typical Sorbian 'Kolo' – a Sorbian dance in a circle – together with the visitors and bystanders.

For FUEN there was a special highlight, when a 'veteran' of European minority work was invited on stage: Ernst Meyer. This representative of the Danish minority from South Schleswig, Germany, was member of the board of FUEN for many years and as such responsible for the development of the organisation. But, what only few visitors knew – Ernst Meyer celebrated in Bautzen / Budyšin a jubilee. He participated in a total number of 45 minority congresses of FUEN.



'Back then, in 1961, everything was completely different – when I arrived at my first congress. The congress was dominated by many, gravely looking men, dressed in black and among them were Counts, for whom we young people had to bend down our heads', Ernst Meyer remembered.

Civil Society Dialogue and the FUEN-Advisory Board

In the year 2000 the FUEN Advisory Board was founded in Komarno / Slovakia. The Advisory Board is an informal body of representatives of governments and parliaments, which support the work of the European minorities and are willing to advise and counsel the board of FUEN.



The first chairman of the Advisory Council was the president of the regional parliament of Brandenburg, Dr. Herbert Knoblich (1999-2001). He was succeeded by the minority commissioner of the prime minister of Schleswig-Holstein, Renate Schnack (2001-2005). At this moment the chair is being held by the Head of Section of the German Ministry of the Interior and chairman of the Committee of experts on issues relating to the protection of national minorities (DH-MIN), Dr. Detlev Rein.

In addition to support in finding financial support for the largest minority umbrella organisation in Europe the Advisory Board is also involved in the work of FUEN with concrete projects.

With the ‘Civil Society Dialogue’, initiated by chairwoman Renate Schnack and continued by her successor Dr. Detlev Rein, the Advisory Board chooses its emphasis in form and content. At the FUEN-Congress the chairman of the FUEN Advisory Board presented the current state of the Civil Society Dialogue.

“The project ‘Civil Society Dialogue’ has set itself the task to explore the possibilities for dialogue between the minorities and the institutions of government, and to find solutions for both the minorities and the governments”, Dr. Rein explained.

To be able to assess the results from different countries and make them comparable, a questionnaire was developed. In small seminars representatives of governments and minorities meet each other at one table and discuss about different forms of participation. Such seminars already took place in Bucharest and twice in Sankelmark near Flensburg. The forthcoming seminar will take place in Eupen, in the east of Belgium.

The current state of the meetings and the results of the questionnaire can be found in the internet at www.fuen.org



“Majorities cement the existing; progression is only possible through minorities ...”
Chairman of the FUEN-Advisory board, Dr. Detlev Rein

Gala programme and a traditional Sorbian evening



An important part of each FUEN-Congress is also to get to know the host-minority. Apart from the cultural day in the framework of the 'Bautzener Frühling'-festival there have been two parts of the programme in which the participants had the opportunity to experience the rich cultural life of the Sorbs in Lusatia.

The Sorbs have their own national theatre, which sees itself as the 'cultural ambassador for the Sorbian people' and which has every year about 200 performances both at home and abroad. The repertoire ranges from fairy tales performed as a dance, musicals for children, modern dance theatre up till traditional folkloristic shows.

In the framework of the 'Bautzener Frühling'-festival and the FUEN-Congress in Bautzen the musicians and dancers braved the relatively unfavourable weather conditions and offered an open air gala programme.

A little more 'country-style' was the typical Sorbian evening at a farmstead near Horka, where the participants of the congress were carried off to. Despite rain no one could prevent the participants from singing and dancing together. The undreamed-of competences of the director of Domowina, Bernhard Ziesch, led to articles in several minority newspapers, because with his singing abilities and entertaining talents (Quote Flensburg Avis), he was able to entertain the participants with Sorbian songs and to teach the guests how to dance Sorbian dances together.



Because of the rain the people fled into a barn and in there, in a cosy atmosphere, many different minority songs could be heard for several hours.

Information about the Sorbian National Theatre you can find in the internet at:
<http://www.sorbisches-national-ensemble.de/netprodukt/web/html/english/home.php>

Youth of European Nationalities

For the president of the Youth of European Nationalities, Aleksander Studen-Kirchner, it was his premiere. At the FUEN-Assembly in Bautzen/Budyšin he presented his first report about the Youth of European Nationalities. The Carinthian Slovene took over the position at the top of the youth organisation from the previous president, Stephan Kleinschmidt from Nordschleswig, in April 2006 in Pécs / Fünfkirchen, Hungary.



Apart from the president the board consists of Štefan Emrich, Katalin Sebök, Chatrina Josty and Christiana Walde / Wałdźic. The YEN-office in Bautzen is being led by Susann Schenk.

With a Powerpoint-presentation and a film about the last Easter Seminar in Hungary the board of YEN gave information about the work and the main emphasis of YEN.



Apart from the Easter Seminar with around 150 young participants from all over Europe the main events of YEN are the Youth Leader Seminar in autumn and the festival Voices of Europe as cultural highlight.

President Aleksander Studen-Kirchner emphasised in his speech the good cooperation with FUEN, from which both organisation will benefit. In particular the opportunity for cooperation in minority politics on the European level was stressed by the Carinthian Slovene.

As a clear result of this cooperation he mentioned the Charter of both organisations together, which was adopted at the FUEN-Congress and prepared together and coordinated by YEN. “That was the start and I am sure that our organisations will also in future work together on the implementation of sustainable minority policy on European level”, according to Studen-Kirchner, who referred to the plans of both organisations to establish a minority representation in Brussels and to develop the engagement in this field.

Short outline of YEN

The Youth of European Nationalities (YEN) is a network of 31 youth organisations of the European minorities. YEN is an independent international non-governmental youth organisations (INGYO), which is represented in 17 European states.

YEN works for the interests of minorities and strives together with its member organisations for the building-up of a dynamic and active network of youth organizations in a multicultural and multilingual Europe.

Since its foundation in 1984 in Knivsterg / Nordschleswig, Denmark, YEN characterises the activities of the minorities on the European level and influences therefore at the same time the regional involvement of the member organisations. YEN's work is much and varied. Networking through bi-, tri- and multilateral exchanges, by congresses, cooperation, by projects from youth for youth, as well as the expansion of communication structures are in the focus of our common commitment.

More information about YEN, its member organisations and activities you can find at: www.yeni.org



Political demands

The FUEN-Assembly during the congress also spoke out it's opinion about the current political situation of minorities in Europe. In this context eight resolutions were adopted, handed in by various member organisations.

The full text of the resolution is to be found in the internet at www.fuen.org



Apart from the topical minority problems, after thorough discussion the delegates agreed on a number of principal political demands / recommendations for action to the international organisations, the European Union, the Council of Europe and the European States:

In the Charter for the autochthonous, national minorities in Europe the FUEN-delegates demanded inter alia:

- binding minority protection under international law and a definition of minority protection in human rights legislation.
- participation in political dialogue on the basis of equality and constructive involvement in social change.
- recognition and strengthening of the civil organisations of the autochthonous, national minorities/ ethnic groups in Europe.
- full cooperation between the international organisations, in particular the European Union, the Council of Europe, the OSCE and the United Nations, in the field of the protection of and support to minorities. The signatories warn against the creation of competing structures.

Aimed at the European Union demands were made for:

- the implementation of the Union's motto 'United in diversity' – however, not merely restricted to the national cultures and languages of the member states, but extended to all the cultures and languages of Europe.
- the reopening of negotiations concerning the future of the European Constitutional Treaty respectively the adoption of the fundamental rights – Part II – of the Constitution.
- that non-compliance with minority standards as laid down in the Copenhagen criteria will remain a condition for refusal of membership of the EU. In this connection, we urge for an improvement in the monitoring system and refer to the experiences and competences of the Council of Europe.
- an end to the 'double standards on minorities' under which new member states are called upon to implement effective regulations in favour of minorities while many 'old member states' do not apply them or even deny the existence of minorities in their state territory.
- minority protection to be integrated into the monitoring system for human rights of the European Union, thereby establishing European minority standards.
- minorities to be integrated into all projects, funding programmes and other proposals – especially where the support for multilingualism and language teaching as well as regional development are concerned.
- it to become a party to the European Convention on Human Rights.

From the Council of Europe the delegates in Bautzen / Budyšin demand:

- to expand its hitherto very innovative mechanisms with a new, strategic orientation in minority protection and a clear concept aimed at preserving linguistic and cultural diversity.
- a concept that enables organised civil groups that are directly affected to have a say in the policy-forming and decision-making process of the Council of Europe.
- the stringent further development of functioning minority protection mechanisms which have by no means come to an end with the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages and the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities.
- a further development of control mechanisms within the scope of the existing legal documents. Thereby the direct involvement of the minorities affected and the organisations representing their interests must always be taken into consideration.
- referring to the recommendation on an additional protocol to the European Convention on Human Rights by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe and to the proposed draft European Convention for the Protection for Minorities by the Venice Commission of the Council of Europe – concrete further development of minority protection to be initiated in a consistent way. The top priority here must be minority protection with enforceable collective rights.

From the States of Europe the delegates in Bautzen / Budyšin demand:

- the recognition of all autochthonous, national minorities/ethnic groups in their state territory.
- the ratification of the European documents – the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities and the European Charter for Regional and Minority Languages.
- the appropriate and complete implementation of the provisions of the documents mentioned above.
- the consistent implementation of the laws created in the course of accession to the EU as well as their application in the ‘old member states’ of the European Union as well.
- to upkeep and improve the minority standards already achieved in close dialogue with the minorities and the organisations representing their interests.

Europa z hosćom we Łužicy
Europa zu Gast in der Lausitz
Europe being guest in Lusatia



Domowina - Zwjazk Łužiskich Serbow
Domowina - Zwjazk Łužiskich Serbow
Domowina - Union of Lusatian Sorbs
Domowina - Bund Lausitzer Sorben



European Union of European Nationalities
Evropski Zwjazk narodnosćnych menšin
Evropski Zwjazk narodnosćnych menšin
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Deutschland
Land der Ideen
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