



FEDERAL UNION OF EUROPEAN NATIONALITIES · FÖDERALISTISCHE UNION EUROPÄISCHER VOLKSGRUPPEN  
ФЕДЕРАЛИСТСКИЙ СОЮЗ ЕВРОПЕЙСКИХ НАЦИОНАЛЬНЫХ МЕНЬШИНСТВ · UNION FÉDÉRALISTE DES COMMUNAUTÉS ETHNIQUES EUROPÉENNES

**FUEN Annual Congress from 01/06-04/06 2011**  
**Welcome Speech on 2/6 2011 Eisenstadt.**  
**Hans Heinrich Hansen, President**

**Address**

I take great pleasure in welcoming you all here today in delightful Eisenstadt / Željezno in Burgenland.

I would like to thank the Burgenland Croats for inviting us here, and our member organisation HKD, Hrvatsko Kulturno Društvo, for all the effort they have put into providing us with the appropriate environment for the congress. Thank you, Dr. Horvath, for your friendly words of welcome.

Here at this congress there are many to thank – so on behalf of all those in front of and behind the scenes I would like to thank the Chamber of Commerce and the Burgenland government for the support they have given us, both financial and ideological.

We will feel good here with you, of that I am sure.

**Address**

For several years now, Europe has been in a crisis that, for lack of better words, we call a financial crisis. In truth, I have the feeling that we have been in a global system crisis for much longer, and that we are perhaps approaching a collapse of the system. The politicians are just limping along, while the economy and money seem to determine the path we are on.

Progress is no longer the universal remedy – we have all reached the limits of growth, and the citizens are increasingly noticing that representative democracy has limitations, and that governments do not have the right answers to the urgent questions about the future.

Citizens are showing that they have come of age. In Germany they have been demonstrating against nuclear power plants and oversized building projects. The conservatives and the left are taking to the streets together.

In some Arab countries around the Mediterranean, citizens are out in rebellion against the rulers who have kept them in servility for decades.

Some are of the opinion that the world has been turned upside down.

For us, these are symbols of hope, because they show that citizens are taking things into their own hands and seeing themselves as a single unit. And this could in turn lead to governments having to finally think about how they can implement their own plans in the Copenhagen Criteria, for the integration of civil society in political decisions. Here I see a chance that an NGO like FUEN, which has devoted itself with great voluntary commitment to the interests of the minorities in Europe for 60 years can be taken more seriously in future.

Once more: they call it a financial crisis, and that's bad enough but it is far more: it is a crisis of values and identities.

## **Address**

FUEN is a collecting pot for different cultures, an expression of European diversity, itself a piece of Europe, itself a piece of potentiality and vision. FUEN, even though it is made up of national minorities and small and lesser spoken languages in Europe, does not pay homage to any form of nationalism; its very substance cosmopolitan and liberal.

This is something we are experiencing in my homeland Denmark: Nationalism has a tendency to exclude certain ethnic groups, and it is usually the weakest in society who are hardest hit.

I can illustrate how fragile things are in crisis situations with the example of the minority model for the German-Danish border country. The strengths of this model lay in the fact that resolutions relating to minorities were passed in contact committees after dialog with the policy makers within the majorities and the minorities, and usually by consensus. But this changed in the autumn of 2010. Germany unilaterally revoked its part of the contract, the so-called Bonn-Copenhagen Declarations. This means that Denmark is now financing over 70 per cent of the total outgoings for the minorities in the border region.

But in this case it's not so much, and certainly not all, about money, but with such a mass it's about equal treatment, and thus about a value that is in danger of being forgotten.

Are equal treatment and equality luxuries, one is tempted to ask, are these values that can simply be suspended in times of crisis? Or are they not an indispensable foundation of every functioning society?

We are once again experiencing how politicians are exploiting minorities for their own ends. But we know that contented minorities, whose contentment up to now was not just based on equality but also on equal treatment, is something that stabilises a region. It does not just contribute to cultural diversity, it also increases the intellectual standard of the society.

## **Address**

What did the German politician Heiner Geissler recently say when he was asked about NGOs? A non-governmental organisation must, in order to be able to represent the interests of its members before parliaments and governments, must have the same means that they do.

That is what democracy is, and we are working for this equality.

Why is so hard for politicians within the majority population in so many states to believe?

For me, there can be no doubt that it is the democratic structure of YEN that has been instrumental in its survival as a minorities organisation, and that our membership fees give us a certain degree of independence. But if funding cut off, things will become difficult, and one would ask oneself: what does membership give me?

We know about the difficulties our member organisations are in.

But: We are a mutually supportive society, and we are trying to meet and master this challenge together.

## **Address**

It is FUEN's aim that the governments of the various countries take the interests of our member organisations seriously. We do everything we can to ensure this objective, despite the polite reticence of our patrons.

- We are very glad that in the last three years we have been able to find new sources of funding for our organisation so that we can almost make up for previously lost funding.
- We can say with satisfaction that we are increasingly being called upon to provide expert advice. The individual member organisations may not notice this very much, but I hope that the EU notices it, and does not just appreciate us as an NGO, but will also fund us. We were able to go into more detail about this topic in Brussels a few days ago when we had a meeting with the EU Commissioner for Human Rights Issues, Viviane Reding.
- FUEN's reputation is also growing and there is an increasing amount of interest in our organisation. The EU and the European Council invited us to participate in the conference on the Balkans, the OSZE invited us to Kazakhstan, and we in Hungary on the occasion of it taking over the EU presidency.
- We consider it a particular honour that Denmark, in the shape of joint action by FUEN and the Danish minority, has asked FUEN to develop a concept for a centre of expertise and a think-tank for minorities. On the edges of our conferences we hold talks between high-ranking representatives from the field of linguistic diversity from the NLPD (Network to promote linguistic diversity) from EBLUL, the European Bureau for Lesser Used Languages and the management of our language network RML2future.

## **Address**

We all want freedom and democracy. But I have to grant the same freedom to my fellow men that I claim for myself, and I soon realise that my freedom has limits. Democracy is dialogue, dialogue at eye level, discussion about how we can shape society.

If we don't want to end up as folklore, we must also make a stand on current topics, and be involved in shaping Europe. We, and I mean all of us in FUEN, must decide how we want to behave on political issues like immigration, discrimination and the future of Europe.

Following the arrest of the Butcher of Srebrenica, Mladic, another wanted war criminal will get his just punishment, and the EU now sees its most important requirement for Serbia's acceptance as fulfilled.

Violence must be paid for, because it is inhuman. But what is being done to effectively prevent the origin of such violence, the disrespect for elementary minority rights, and consequently for human rights countries of the EU? Could one not for example set minimum requirements for the states in this regard, when they demand solidarity from other member states when it is their own fault when they get into trouble?

## **Address**

It gives us great pleasure that Hungarians from Romania are here with their members of parliament, to present an initiative for a plebiscite at European level.

- We have decided that we will adopt the Roma issue at this conference, not just because it affects most of the countries in Europe, but also because we are of the opinion that the Roma are autochthonous national minorities in their respective countries.
- They have the right to the same protection that we claim for ourselves.

I know that this topic evokes the most varied feelings in all of us. but I also know that human beings are equipped with both understanding and empathy. We need both so that we can smooth the way for this minority to achieve equality in society. We should make our contribution to this, and we have also prepared some concrete suggestions.

Minority protection is more than just non-discrimination.

It is:

- Recognition of cultural diversity.
- Protection of human dignity.
- Political participation.
- And it is prerequisite for peace and security.

Let me end my introduction to our congress with a small story from Rainer Maria Rilke.

When he was in Paris, Rilke observed how a beggar, with lowered eyes secreted away each coin she was given into her pocket as quick as a flash, and without a word of thanks. A few days later he himself went over to the beggar and gave her a rose. The woman thanked him, kissed his hand, and walked away. For three days she did not return to her place.

But what did the woman live on for these three days, asked Rilke's friend.

Rilke answered: From the rose.

I wish us a lively, active and dignified congress.