



Federal Union of European Nationalities (FUEN)  
Union Fédéraliste des Communautés Ethniques Européennes (UFCE)  
Föderalistische Union Europäischer Volksgruppen e. V. (FUEV)  
Федералистский Союз Европейских Национальных Меньшинств

Consultative Status  
to the Council of Europe  
and to the United Nations

Statut consultatif  
auprès du Conseil de l'Europe  
et des Nations Unies

Konsultativer Status  
beim Europarat  
und bei den Vereinten Nationen

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Event **Opening of the FUEN CONGRESS in Bolzano 2003**  
**The national minorities in the “new Europe”**  
**Where do we stand, what have we learned from the past and**  
**where are we going?**  
Date **2003-05-29**

The first half of 2003 was under the sign of a dramatic and tragic war, which pushed other current and potential sources of war into the background. But even a tense political situation throughout the world cannot hide the fact that great things are also happening in Europe. At the end of 2002 in Copenhagen and in April this year in Athens, the extension of the EU to 25 states was celebrated. Individual states—Slovenia, Malta, Hungary and Lithuania—have politically approved membership. Europe, which according to Hobsbawm is always a political club and never a territorial figure, is redefining itself. The difficulties faced in doing this are immense and provide arguments for sceptics and grumblers on a daily basis to favour a backward direction for European policy. The FUEN for its part has a positive attitude to this huge construction site “Europe”.

The new Europe is also the theme of this year’s congress. It was the focus of the main resolution passed by the delegates yesterday. And so it seems appropriate to begin the congress by reminding ourselves of 3 important elements in this resolution, 3, of which we are convinced, are the major pillars for the new house of Europe.

#### 1. WE NEED TO STRENGTHEN EUROPEAN IDENTITY

More strongly focusing eyes on Europe can contribute to the European conglomerate of individual states being led out of the mental trap of nationalism. The creation of a political European “sense of belonging”, which did not succeed after the Second World War, now deserves to be tried again with a little more momentum than existing European institutes have so far been capable of. We are convinced that nationalism cannot only be overcome by economically and politically necessary reforms; after all, emotional identification is also a part of this. The variety of peoples, languages, cultures and mentalities are one of the essential elements of the European heritage. Free development of all and even the smallest of European peoples and ethnic groups, without any political or administrative barriers, is thus a condition for a united Europe.

This European spirit should be “gathered up” and defended against any kind of nationalistic tenden-

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cies: diversity versus uniformity, emotional warmth versus global forcing into line, tolerance versus assimilation, being different as an enrichment and not as a threat. The young Polish woman understood a lot of this when she says: “Today, the expression home as a country is losing its meaning among young people. Most of them associate it with the area they live in. The people want a common Europe. A Europe without borders—I support this vision, too. But I also know that it will take a very long time for all borders to fall”.

When we speak of a European identity we must clarify one thing: the borders in place today and tomorrow that have been prescribed by the EU must not stand in the way of a European identity. Europe extends beyond these!

## 2. WE NEED TO STRENGTHEN REGIONAL IDENTITY

At first glance, this seems to be a contradiction of what has just been said; the development of language and culture as an essential condition for individual and collective identity is bound to small regions. The young Polish woman also understood this. Consequently, the attraction of a clear regional identity that generates security runs parallel to cultural globalisation. What we are to learn from countless tragic experiences—particularly where national minorities have been battling for their individual and collective identity, and still are—is this: the region is a suitable space for attending to lingual and cultural issues to be approached, pragmatic approaches to solutions are possible here and fleeing into ideological domains is more difficult than in a nation-state environment. And so, under the aspect of preserving peace, FUEN is in favour of upgrading the value of regions and adapted forms of cultural and political autonomy.

## 3. WE NEED BINDING EUROPEAN STANDARDS ON THE PROTECTION AND PROMOTION OF LINGUAL AND CULTURAL DIVERSITY.

FUEN has been concerned with these standards since it was founded. It has also carried out pioneering European work in this field. FUEN was already a pool of European ethnic groups in the fifties which, like the South Tyroleans or Catalans, were fighting for their rights, as neither the Council of Europe or the nation-states had any consideration for this. A summary of its demands were set out in Cottbus in 1992 where FUEN—before the ethnic motivated hostile conflicts broke out—passed a draft law governing ethnic groups compiled by the internationally acclaimed human rights specialist, Felix Ermacora, and Professor Christoph Pan. This was a draft, which essentially formed the basis for the Framework Convention on the Protection of National Minorities. FUEN insisted that previous standards passed were totally insufficient and constituted no more than just one, although important, first step. As long as the standards achieved are neither binding for states nor legally enforceable, as long as it is left to the discretion of the states whether they ratify these or not, as long as the EU only makes the policies of classic minorities into an export article and does not apply them at home, as long as things are like this, there are few reasons to be quiet. What has so far been achieved is a far too blunt weapon which may preserve and kindle far too much conflict potential.

I am extremely delighted that this year’s congress, at a historic time for the development of Europe, can take place in Southern Tyrol. It is an exemplary region for “old Europe”, a region which has fought for the preservation of its regional identity under adverse conditions and finally achieved an autonomous status, which allows a constructive, peaceful and democratic coexistence within a nation-state. It is a region that has afforded the new states in Europe major aid in developing suitable forms of regional self-administration and still does. It is also a region that has been supported by FUEN for centuries, that has actively contributed to FUEN and which supports FUEN today. It ultimately also underscores the significance of cooperation as a partner with state institutions and civil organisations.

I now pronounce the 48th international congress of the Federal Union of European Nationalities open.