



FUEN - Federal Union of European Nationalities
UFCE - Union Fédéraliste des Communautés Ethniques Européennes
FUEV - Föderalistische Union Europäischer Volksgruppen
Федералистский Союз Европейских Национальных Меньшинств

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

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

Teilnehmender Status beim
Europarat
und Konsultativer Status bei den
Vereinten Nationen

Статус участника при
Совете Европы
и Статус консультанта при Организации
Объединенных Наций

Place **Pécs / Hungary**
Date **2008-05-23**
Venue **53rd FUEN Congress / Opening Speech**

Ladies and Gentlemen,
Representatives of the Hungarian Government
Mr. State Secretary Gemesi,

Dear Delegates and Representatives of our Member Organisations
Dear Friends of THE FUEN,

The long list of names from the various regions shows that we have gathered a piece of Europe here that you will not find anywhere else, not in this configuration, not with this profile. Everyone has come to show us that they take the subject of minorities in Europe seriously. And that they take us, the FUEN, seriously.

The FUEN is the largest minority organisation, with 84 member organisations from 32 countries. This is something we always have to keep our eye on – and with this knowledge we can also take pleasure in the fact that we meet here at the annual general meeting of the FUEN as friends, and that we do not overestimate our own importance, because it is the cause that is important – not all the peripheral stuff. For us it is important that we have similar issues and similar aims despite the very different lifestyles.

Why we decided to come to Pécs, in Hungary, is obvious.

As European Capital of Culture in 2010, Pécs is not just a symbol of European diversity, but also the centre of the German minority in Hungary, and the homeland of nine autonomous minorities. An ideal conference venue for the largest umbrella organisation for the autochthons; the traditional, old minorities in Europe.

As far as this diversity is concerned, let me just mention a few figures: In the 45 states in Europe there are 337 ethnic and national minorities, with almost 105 million people. This is about 14% of the total population.

The Roma live in 28 European states, and German-speaking nationalities live in 22 states. Other large groups are the Russian, Hungarian and Slav minorities.

This means that every 7th citizen in Europe is a member of a national minority.

This should ensure the minorities of Europe great influence, but the unfortunate fact is that the minorities in Europe have neither the influence nor the recognition that they should be afforded on the basis of their numbers alone.

The European minorities need a strong lobby – both on nation state level and European level.

I am therefore also very pleased that State Secretary Ferenc Gemesy is here today. As a representative of Hungary he has repeatedly taken up the cause of the European minorities and has always accompanied the FUEN's work very benevolently.

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A few weeks ago we signed up to a dialogue forum with the European Parliament – under the direction of the former Hungarian state secretary and President of the Intergroup for minorities in the European Parliament, Csaba Tabajdi. This dialogue forum will give the minorities direct access to the European Parliament, and consequently open up the doors to the European decision level. As umbrella organisation we want to guarantee that the topics that move the minorities in Europe are also communicated on.

As the FUEN – with over 80 member organisations in over 30 European countries – we want to ensure, together with our friends in Europe and the member states, that the European minorities achieve more importance, better conditions, and better protection and promotion provisions. This is the only way that European diversity, can really be guaranteed.

We have dedicated this congress to the topic of media. This is the main topic over these coming days, because the media are very important to us for two reasons: on the one hand, the media convey our concerns, and disseminate knowledge about us – because the way they report on us determines whether we are seen as sectarian outsiders or an important component in the oft-claimed diversity of Europe. The Mercator Institute of the University of Wales has done a stocktaking of the media of the minorities, which we will be presenting here.

Let me put it another way: because of our multilingualism which we have from birth, we minorities are a piece of the future of Europe, and with the tenacity with which cling to what is near and dear to us, we will make our contribution in ensuring Europe retains its profile of diversity and autonomy. This is why we demand the fundamental right to media presence, and it would be desirable that at the end of the congress, our media representatives and those working at scientific and practical level, join forces to meet the challenges set by the new media, as well as to deal with the chances these new media offer.

The task is to find information and patterns in the new media that are ideally suited for the minorities. Through the new media, especially the Internet, we have this chance. And the old adage applies here as well: Together we are strong.

The French philosopher Charles de Montesquieu once said: “I am a human out of necessity, French by chance”.

We, whether we are majority or minority, are first and foremost human beings. The national identity that identifies us as Hungarians, French or Germans depends on where we are born, from what parents, with which language and culture.

We all know that the dream of the national states to achieve ethnic uniformity within their borders has not and never will be achieved. Minorities have been established within the state borders because a border has by some chance been altered, or because settlements have arisen as a result of migration where the people have retained their language and culture, and lie like islands in the national state.

Ladies and Gentlemen,
Dear Friends,

I look forward to two days of intensive work, two wonderful and informative days. And here, on behalf of the many helpers involved in preparing this congress, I would like to thank the Chair of the German minority in Hungary, Mr. Otto Heinek, for his active support.

Dear Otto, the congress is just starting and - although we shouldn't count our chickens before they hatch – we would like to thank you for providing the framework for this congress.

Europe is often compared with a symphony orchestra in which everyone plays his or her instrument. And of course minorities do not play first violin, but solo instruments that tend to make just rare appearances – like the kettledrum. And what would Haydn's Surprise symphony be without the kettledrums?

You cannot dispense with the minorities, as demonstrated here.

I thank you for your attention, and wish us all a successful FUEN Congress.