

FUEN Assembly of Delegates
Hans Heinrich HANSEN, FUEN President
Hotel des Nordens, Flensburg 10 May 2014

Dear FUEN Delegates,

Dear Ladies and Gentlemen, I hope you agree with me. We already spent two successful days in the German-Danish border region. Today, with the Assembly of Delegates, we have come to the actual reason why we meet once every year. Namely, for the Assembly of Delegates – the supreme democratically legitimised decision-making body for the things FUEN has to decide about. The Assembly of Delegates is a must. Our Congress is a window to the outside world. If you allow me to make a summary of the past two days, I think we did a great job. From prominent politicians from several countries we heard very clear statements on European policy. Also, about how they want that minorities will be protected in Europe in the future.

At this point I would like to say thank you for the fact that the window to the outside has been pulled through so well at the symposium in Sønderborg yesterday and also at the current affairs debate of the day before yesterday. I think Jan Diedrichsen deserves applause for this.

Applause

I think that we have changed FUEN in the past 5 years, since we were in Brussels. We succeeded in becoming an actor on the European level and I am very grateful for that. Right here I would also like to express my special thanks to the diligent helpers from Bund Deutscher Nordschleswiger BDN, from Sydslesvigsk Forening SSF and from FUEN, who made it possible that everything went so well here. I think they also deserve applause.

Applause

To conclude for now, I would like to thank Susann Schenk – our Head of Office, who managed to keep all the pieces together and who steered FUEN – and not only financially – safely through the cliffs. Susann, I would like to thank you and give you these flowers and also a vase.

Applause

I welcome all the Member Organisations who are present today. FUEN is only as strong as its Members, who work for our common cause and make it possible for FUEN to represent the cause of its Members. We changed. Our voice has, in my opinion, become more powerful. FUEN is younger, more dynamic. And therefore FUEN is on a good track, on the right track. And more importantly: the good cause is coming from within. The young adults, who come from YEN, the minorities from both sides of the borders had a profound influence on the previous days. I think these days showed a great commitment, with humour and self-irony. I think it is a good mix of how we present ourselves. It shows the diversity that we often speak about, in real life. I would like to express my special thanks to Judith Walde, who is the project manager who together with her team prepared and organised the programme of yesterday with the symposium and the MiLaS prize ceremony.

Applause

New thoughts. New ways of communication. Occasionally the new methods of communication are a bit unusual for oldies like us. But it is a good development. It becomes clear to many people that we have come

to change things. We need strong Members. We need you. My colleague Halit Habip Oglu will present the development of our membership numbers once again. It shows how the membership fees have developed

I would like to give a short overview of the work of FUEN in the past year. Some of it you can read in the Activity Report. Together we achieved a lot. The FUEN Congress in South Tyrol was a complete success. We admitted new Members, adopted resolutions and a Programmatic Declaration. These provide the substance for our political work. In two weeks the elections to the European Parliament will take place. A new European Commission will be formed. And a new seven-year financial framework for the Commission has begun.

I would like to remind you about how important the words were that the Prime Minister of Schleswig-Holstein, Mr Torsten Albig, spoke out in public yesterday: we need a Commissioner for the minorities. We could not have wished for a better statement by a Prime Minister from a Federal Land of Germany.

We only can hope that he will be able to convince his colleagues at the level of the Federal Republic of Germany. In this regard I remind you that Mr Koschyk at the first day expressly called for a stronger representation of the European minorities in the European Parliament. If that will be with a round table, a Commissioner, or a stronger Intergroup, like presented yesterday, will be something we will see in the future.

We can only have an influence on the developments after the elections if we take part in the elections on 25 May and make the cross at the rights spot. We hope that we will then have the basis for better conditions. Within and with FUEN we will work on this, in Brussels and at home.

The past twelve months did also bring some disappointments. It was a bitter disappointment, when on 16 September 2013 we received the decision from the European Commission rejecting our citizens' initiative, the "Minority SafePack Initiative". The very brief reasoning was that "minorities fall manifestly outside the framework of competence of the European Union". Together we wanted to collect one million signatures in Europe for diversity, for the minorities and for the languages. But they did not want that. At once the journey that started with much conviction and enthusiasm (and that of course also cost a lot of money) seemed to have ended. However, as representatives of minorities for minorities, we know that we need stamina if we want to reach our aims.

Professor Oeter said it very clearly during our successful conference about language rights in Europe in Cottbus lately: "Rights have to be conquered sometimes". How right he is! I am grateful to my colleagues in the citizens' committee: Kelemen Hunor, Hungarian from Romania, Anke Spoorendonk, Minister in Schleswig-Holstein, Valentin Inzko, Chairman of the Carinthian Slovenes and High Representative for Bosnia and Herzegovina, Luis Durnwalder, former Prime Minister of South Tyrol and Karl Heinz Lambertz, Prime Minister of the German-speaking Community in Belgium

Grateful, that they together decided to resist and not simply accept the decision of the European Commission "without a fight". We decided to lodge an appeal to the European Court in Luxembourg. We are very much convinced that minorities are part of the "framework of competence" of the European Union. For me it has been contradictory that the Commission made this statement. If you compare that with the demands the European Union made before 2004, as EU candidate Member States stood before accession. The conditions for accession were the fulfilment of the Copenhagen Criteria of 1993. These Criteria encompass the enactment of minority legislation and minority protection. And then now the assertion ... that this would not fall within the framework of competence of the European Union – for me that is inconsistent.

We need your support if want to do something. We must continue to use the enormous solidarity that came as a wave rolling through Europe when we presented the citizens' initiative. We must use the year 2014, with the elections to the European Parliament and the appointment of the European Commissioners, to build up political pressure. We must keep on the ball and use our common strength. We must make it clear that people should take us seriously. We are ready to continue these actions together with you. But that will not only require commitment and stamina, but also money. Money that we as an NGO have only in very limited amounts. You see, nothing has changed in that regard. Therefore our main challenge remains, how we will manage the balancing act between what we want to achieve and the financial realities. Later during this meeting Bernhard Ziesch will present the latest numbers.

I would like to thank my colleagues in the Presidium, with whom I have been working intensively on the development of FUEN. From my part I would like to ensure you: I think that we have a very, very good team. And for that I thank my colleagues.

Applause

I am curious about the challenges that will come in the next twelve months. There will be financial, political and organisational issues that we will have to solve. We are working seriously and intensively with a Presidium that stretches its work to the limits of what can be expected from volunteers. Once again, I would like to thank my Presidium members. You can be certain: the Presidium and the Secretariat will continue to work for the interests of the minorities in Europe. Together with you, for you. Already now I would like to express my thanks for the interpreters. Thank you very much.

Applause.