
**PROGRAMMATIC DECLARATION AT THE
2013 FUEN CONGRESS IN BRIXEN**



Programmatic Declaration at the 2013 FUEN Congress in Brixen:

At home in our region, strong in Europe!

1 The debate about the present situation and the future of Europe is dominated by the
2 financial crisis. Its effects threaten the economic livelihood of millions of people on
3 our continent and take away the chances of part of the younger generation. The
4 Members of the Federal Union of European Nationalities and the signatories of this
5 Declaration look at the developments in Europe with increasing concern.

6

7 Millions of people are without a job. The youth unemployment in some countries is
8 over 50 percent. There is a fault line between the economically strong regions, which
9 until now have been little affected by the crisis, and those areas where the
10 concentrated impact of the crisis is felt.

11

12 The minorities and ethnic groups / nationalities in Europe and the speakers of
13 regional or minority language communities¹ are often living in economically weaker
14 regions or in border regions that are particularly affected by the crisis. Especially the
15 largest national minority in Europe, the Roma, are in a precarious situation.

16

17 The people in Europe are unsettled. The problems are complex and the trust in
18 political actors both on national and European level is decreasing. Never before have
19 the approval rates for European cooperation been lower. Instead of the required
20 intensification of European cooperation, renationalisation of the continent is
21 imminent.

22

23

24

25 FUEN is the civil society representative organisation and the umbrella organisation
26 of the autochthonous minorities and ethnic groups and the organisation that
27 represents the regional and minority language communities in Europe, which
28 comprise of about 100 million Europeans. FUEN joins together 90 organisations from
29 30 countries.

30

31 FUEN was founded in Paris in 1949. It's main purpose then was to create a federal
32 Europe of the regions, as an instrument to secure peace. In the decades after the First
33 World War, the nation states had failed. The horrors of the Second World War, the
34 planned annihilation of Jews, Sinti and Roma and the persecution and exploitation of
35 minorities required radical rethinking. The call for a stronger role for the regions was
36 the right answer to the abuse of power exercised by the centralised states. The
37 respect for cultural, linguistic and national differences that is inherent in
38 regionalism characterises the ambitions of our organisation to the present day.

39

40

41

42

43 The European Union goes by the motto "United in Diversity". This diversity is not
44 restricted to the national cultures and the official languages only. The cultural and
45 linguistic dimension of Europe is much more diverse:

46

47 In the 47 states of Europe there are circa 340 autochthonous minorities, totalling

¹ Definition from the FUEN Charter (2006):

- A 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.

48 about 100 million persons. Every seventh European citizen is part of an
49 autochthonous minority / ethnic group.

50
51 In the EU alone there are more than 60 regional or minority languages, next to the 23
52 official EU languages. The number of speakers of these languages is estimated at 40
53 million.

54 Among the larger languages that do not have a national state of their own, are
55 Catalan with about six million speakers, and also Welsh, Basque, West Frisian,
56 Breton. Also the languages of some peoples in Russia, such as Bashkir and Chuvash
57 are above the critical threshold of 300,000 people that some experts mention as the
58 minimum number for the survival of a language. Below this threshold are the
59 majority of the regional and minority languages in Europe, such as Ladin, Rhaeto-
60 Romansh, Sorbian, North Frisian or Kashubian.

61
62
63

•

64 Since the start of this millennium, some of the new EU States introduced minority
65 standards in compliance with the Copenhagen Criteria. There was an omission,
66 however, in the sense that no mechanism was introduced on the European level that
67 ensures that the agreed standards and legal norms are adhered to. After these States
68 were admitted to the EU, we notice that several of them are backpedalling from
69 agreed minority standards.

70

71 Moreover, the Copenhagen Criteria created a system of double standards. Whereas
72 the new EU-states were obliged to implement minority protection, there are still
73 countries, which deny the very existence of minorities within their territory.

74

75 The Lisbon Treaty for the first time explicitly mentions the minorities and cultural
76 and linguistic diversity. This has created an attitude of expectation among the
77 minorities in Europe. It changed into a sense of disillusionment, as there has been no
78 real discussion on the issues of the autochthonous minorities so far.

79

80 Protection and support for the autochthonous minorities on the European level are
81 increasingly losing their significance. In this context we could speak of a "lost
82 decade" for minority protection in Europe.

83

84

85

•

86 Since it was founded in 1949 the Council of Europe time and again dealt with
87 minority / ethnic group issues. The Framework Convention for the Protection of
88 National Minorities and the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages are
89 binding international law.

90

91 From the outset the Council of Europe has played a leading role in the development
92 of human rights. The minorities / ethnic groups have benefited from the
93 jurisprudence of the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) and the provisions in
94 specific treaties, such as for example in the European Charter of Local Self-
95 Government. Unfortunately, not all member states respect the decisions of the Court
96 and several of them delay the ratification of important treaties. At present there is
97 no significant momentum for the further development of the system of protection of
98 the minorities beyond the Framework Convention and the Language Charter.

99

100

101

102 **The Federal Union of European Nationalities calls for a change of policy:**

103

104 Within the European multilevel system the minorities / ethnic groups and
105 nationalities and related, the linguistic and cultural diversity, have to be recognised
106 as added value. The minorities are no threat for the cohesion of Europe or for the

107 states. In their diversity they lead to enrichment of the state and of society.

108

109 The subsidiarity principle and the principle of proximity to the citizens have to
110 inform the discussion on minority issues. That means that the municipalities,
111 regions and states of Europe are under the obligation to ensure adequate protection
112 of and support for the minorities. It is unacceptable “to pass the buck” to the
113 European plane alone; this would be contrary to these principles.

114

115 Europe, however, carries its own self-defined responsibility for the minorities and for
116 linguistic and cultural diversity. This responsibility has advanced into a new
117 dimension with the Lisbon Treaty and the European Charter for Fundamental Rights.
118 The legal obligations must now also be reflected in a tangible approach in regard to
119 issues of protection of and support for the minorities / ethnic groups.

120

121 FUEN expects from the European Union that it considers itself as the “protector of
122 the minorities”. There is the opportunity to work closely together with the Council of
123 Europe, which works for the protection and further development of human rights
124 and fundamental freedoms.

125

126

127 **Europe of the Regions**

128

129 FUEN advocates a stronger and more powerful role for the regions of Europe. Next to
130 influence from the national level, the European integration process needs new
131 impulses from the regions.

132

133 Most citizens feel closely connected to their own region. Especially the minorities /
134 ethnic groups are strongly rooted in their regions. It is here where the dichotomy
135 between minorities and majorities in cultural and linguistic diversity is neutralised
136 and where the basis for reconciliation and peaceful coexistence is developing.

137

138 Concretely this means that the political influence of the regions in the decision
139 process of the European multilevel system has to be genuinely strengthened. The
140 Committee of the Regions (CoR) of the European Union must be granted more
141 competences. The same accounts for the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities
142 of the Council of Europe in regard to their competences. The Congress too needs
143 more powers to be able to play its important role in regard to diversity in Europe and
144 minority protection more effectively.

145

146 FUEN demands that in a future review of the EU Treaties the issue of a stronger
147 position for the regions and the political participation of the minorities / ethnic
148 groups and nationalities is taken into due account.

149

150 Research of voters’ behaviour shows that voters in minority regions are more
151 positive towards the European idea and cooperation than the voters in areas with a
152 mainly majority population.

153

154

155 **Europe of the Citizens**

156

157 The alienation of the citizens with respect to Europe and the European institutions is
158 an alarming signal. The citizens of Europe have a feeling of dispossession in regard
159 to those decision-making processes, in which they are not involved. Many speak of
160 participation of civil society but in fact the decisions within the European context are
161 made by states and by the political parties.

162

163 The institutions in Brussels are often blamed for the current crisis – whereas in most
164 cases the major decisions were taken by the heads of state and government of the
165 national states in the European Council.

166 Europe and the decision-making processes have to be brought closer to the citizens.
167 The call for a “European public sphere” has been heard for many years and from
168 many groups in society.

169
170 FUEN calls on the European Union to adapt its structures and treaties in such a way
171 that will enable direct citizens’ participation with representatives of civil society.
172 This means foremost that the European Union must support actors of civil society
173 and has to provide the financial means to allow them to play an adequate role in the
174 process of awareness raising and decision-making within the European multilevel
175 system.

176
177 FUEN calls for the improvement of legal certainty of citizens by reducing the number
178 of open cases at the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR), which are often cases
179 dealing with minority issues. Furthermore, the member states must be more
180 committed than at present to implement the binding decisions of the Court.

181
182

183 **European Citizens’ Initiative: One Million Signatures for Diversity in Europe**

184

185 The Members of the Federal Union of European Nationalities launched a European
186 Citizens’ Initiative at the FUEN Congress in Brixen in 2013:

187

188 “You are not alone! One million signatures for diversity in Europe”

189

190 We are focusing actively on the new instrument of political participation in the
191 European Union, which was created with the Lisbon Treaty. In one year time we
192 want to collect one million signatures, so that the European Union will be obliged to
193 engage in an active dialogue about improving the participation of the European
194 minorities and the regional and minority language communities.

195

196 Together with the European Parliament, which will be newly elected in 2014, and
197 with the new European Commission, negotiations will have to take place on how the
198 concerns of the European minorities and in relation to that, the cultural and
199 linguistic diversity, can be implemented in the European multilevel system. With the
200 support of one million citizens in Europe, we will have a strong position to negotiate.

201

202 The Founding Members of the European Dialogue Forum are:

203

204 Prime Minister Luis Durnwalder, South Tyrol, Italy
205 Prime Minister Karl-Heinz Lambertz, German-speaking Community, Belgium
206 Minister Anke Spoorendonk, Schleswig-Holstein, Germany
207 Valentin Inzko, High Representative for Bosnia and Herzegovina, Austria
208 President Hunor Kelemen, Alliance of the Hungarians in Romania
209 President Hans Heinrich Hansen, FUEN / Denmark
210 Minister Jannewietske de Vries, Province of Friesland, the Netherlands

211

212 With a team of experts we elaborated our “Minority SafePack”, a package of
213 measures and concrete legal acts (laws) to promote and to protect the European
214 minorities and the regional or minority languages.

215

216 Because of the constraints of the instrument, the citizens’ initiative is aimed at the
217 European Union. With the citizens’ initiative we furthermore want to canvass for a
218 minority system based on solidarity in the whole of Europe and to make it possible
219 for citizens of all European countries to participate symbolically in the collection of
220 signatures.

221

222 Based on the “Charter for the autochthonous national minorities in Europe”, which is
223 the document on principles of FUEN, and with reference to the “Minority SafePack”,
224 the signatories of this Declaration have the following demands:

225 **To the states in Europe:**

226

227 As a basic prerequisite we expect from all states in Europe that they recognise the
228 autochthonous minorities and regional or minority languages in accordance with the
229 two international treaties of the Council of Europe – the Framework Convention for
230 the Protection of National Minorities and the European Charter for Regional or
231 Minority Languages. We urge all countries that did not yet ratify the two treaties, to
232 do so.

233

234 We further call on the states of Europe not only to protect the minorities and the
235 regional or minority languages, but also to actively promote and support them.
236 Because of assimilation pressure in some countries the cultural and linguistic
237 diversity is in acute danger.

238

239 We demand from the states of Europe that they adapt their minority policy
240 according to the principle of “positive discrimination”. We are not looking for more
241 favourable treatment or unfounded privileges. With supporting measures we want to
242 create factual equality. In many cases equality does not exist in comparison with the
243 majority and can only be achieved by enacting specific arrangements.

244

245 Decisions on national or regional level that directly affect the minorities – such as for
246 example decisions on new territorial subdivisions or legislation with a direct effect
247 on the minorities / ethnic groups – shall not be taken or changed without their
248 consent. Solutions have to be elaborated in negotiations between minorities and
249 majorities, based on a dialogue of equals. There are some good examples in Europe
250 on how close cooperation can be of mutual benefit for both the majority as well as
251 for the minority.

252

253 The states that already for years have been supporting their minorities should
254 promote their “best practices” with more emphasis on the European level. It must
255 become fashionable and self-evident to take the minority issues into account on the
256 regional, national and European level, if their interests are affected.

257

258

259 **To the European Union:**

260

261 On the basis of our “Minority SafePack”, the first European Citizens’ Initiative
262 launched by the minorities, we call on the competent institutions of the European
263 Union to engage in a dialogue with the minorities in Europe. A dialogue among
264 equals will be beneficial for all parties involved – for the European Union and its
265 Member States and also for the minorities in Europe, who are represented by FUEN.

266

267 The organisations united in FUEN are not opposed to the states in which they are
268 living. We want, together with the Member States, to create a Europe with strong
269 regions and build a European Union that has the power to act.

270

271 We demand that our special role is recognised, a role that goes beyond the European
272 national state. This special role of the European minorities / ethnic groups and the
273 regional and minority languages is already recognised by many actors. Yet the
274 notion that we are added value for Europe and not a threat, has not been
275 acknowledged by everyone.

276

277 With the adoption of the Lisbon Treaty and the European Fundamental Rights
278 Charter, the European Union has entered into legal obligations towards the
279 minorities in Europe. As civil society representative organisation we offer to
280 implement these obligations together with the European Union to the benefit of all
281 parties involved.

282

283

284 **To the Council of Europe:**

285

286 FUEN appreciated and with gratitude the pioneering role of the Council of Europe in
287 relation to human rights and fundamental freedoms. Since the Lisbon Treaty, the
288 adoption of the European Fundamental Rights Charter and the establishment of the
289 Fundamental Rights Agency in Vienna, the EU is increasingly dealing with human
290 rights. As an institution, however, that has a pan-European legitimacy in the field of
291 human rights and minority issues the Council of Europe remains indispensable.

292

293 With the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities and the
294 European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages two seminal treaties were
295 created. They both established a monitoring system. This monitoring procedure is
296 now for a part already in its fourth round. In the past decades an extensively
297 researched compendium has been developed that is of great value.

298

299 Right now a sense of “reporting fatigue” can be noticed, both among the minorities
300 and among the governments/administrations who participate in the reporting
301 system with sometimes comprehensive opinions and in short intervals. Therefore
302 we propose that the responsible bodies at the Council of Europe consider together
303 with the contracting states and with involvement of the European minorities how
304 the reporting system can find more practical application. Apart from scholarly
305 conferences and symposiums, the question of how the outcomes are relevant for
306 and can be applied by those affected, i.e. the minorities and the regional or minority
307 language communities, is something that must be focused on.

308

309

310

311 **At home in our region, strong in Europe!**

312

313

Concrete measures

314

315 The Members of FUEN and the signatories of this Declaration, want:

316

317 **a Europe of the Regions**

318 **a Europe of the Citizens**

319 **a Europe of Cultural and Linguistic Diversity**

320 **a Europe of the Minorities / Ethnic groups / Nationalities**

321

322

323 In order to realise these goals we would like to cooperate with the regions, the states,
324 the European institutions and all the relevant civil society organisations and
325 individuals in Europe who are interested.

326

327 On the European level we want to share our powers and skills and we focus thereby
328 on concrete proposals:

329

I) Participation:

331 We demand that long-lasting political involvement of the minorities and the regional
332 or minority communities is to be ensured in the European multilevel system. So far
333 the European minorities have been excluded from direct participation. In
334 comparison, EU states with only a few hundreds of thousand inhabitants have a
335 disproportionate larger influence, with their own EU Commissioner and permanent
336 seats in the European Parliament. It is reasonable to ask that the right of the
337 numerically large minorities / ethnic groups, with more than one million people, to
338 have a say, shall be guaranteed in an adequate way.

339

340 **-Political Representation in the European Parliament**

341

342 In some states in Europe there are representation models for the minorities / ethnic

343 groups, which can serve as an inspiration for an arrangement in the European
344 Parliament. The different national representation models have to be analysed and
345 based thereupon a recommendation for a model of representation on the European
346 level should be formulated.

347

348 -Minority Platform at the **European Commission**

349

350 We propose to institutionalise direct exchange between the European minorities and
351 the European Commission. A similar procedure has already been established by the
352 Commission with the “Civil Society Platform for Multilingualism”.

353

354 -Permanent Representation of the Minorities / Ethnic Groups at the

355

356

Committee of the Regions

357 We propose to establish a permanent representation of the minorities / ethnic
358 groups at the Committee of the Regions. Minority issues are often closely related to
359 the regions in which they are living. The Committee of the Regions is the right
360 platform to discuss minority issues on the European level.

361

362

363 -Funding for European activities by the **European Commission**

364

365 At the moment the minorities are financing their political participation on the
366 European level through project funding and their own contributions. It would be
367 appropriate, similar to the support for parties that work on political decision-making,
368 to provide a financial grant to support the social commitment of the European
369 minorities.

370

371

372 **II) Language / Culture:**

373 Since the adoption of the Lisbon Treaty, minority issues and linguistic and cultural
374 diversity took on new weight. Already in 2003 the European Parliament showed the
375 way for realising these new priorities with the adoption of the Ebner-report.² These
376 recommendations were never implemented. Based on this report and with reference
377 to the “Bozen/Bolzano Declaration of FUEN”³ from 2012, we propose the following
378 measures:

379

380 -Developing a language policy and strategy for the regional or minority
381 languages in Europe

382

383 -Easing the access to EU funding with micro-projects for the regional or
384 minority languages

385

386 -Establishing an action plan to promote and protect the regional or minority
387 languages

388

389 -Establishing a European centre of expertise for the regional or minority
390 languages

391

392

393 **III) Regional Policy**

394 The European minorities and the regional or minority language are inextricably
395 connected to the regions in which they are living. In some regions they form the
396 majority. The European minorities / ethnic groups with their different models of self-
397 administration and autonomy are not a threat; they enrich Europe. They are no
398 recipients of subsidies, but offer added value, which should be utilised better for the

² Report with recommendations to the Commission on European regional and lesser used languages – the languages of minorities in the EU – in the context of enlargement and cultural diversity (2003/2057(INI))

³ www.fuen.org

399 benefit of the society as a whole. This includes the following measures:

400

401

402

403

404

405

406

407

408

409

410

411

412

413

414

415

416

417

418

419

IV) Media

420

421

422

423

424

425

426

427

428

429

430

431

432

433

434

435

436

437

438

V) Anti-Discrimination

439

440

441

442

443

444

445

446

447

448

449

450

451

452

453

454

455

VI) EU-Enlargement and Neighbourhood Policy

456

457

In the event of a future enlargement of the EU, especially in view of the Western Balkans and Turkey, minority issues must be given more emphasis than in the last

458 enlargement rounds. Also in regard to the neighbourhood policy of the European
459 Union, the protection and support for minorities / ethnic groups must play a central
460 role. The following actions shall be taken:

461

462 -The Copenhagen Criteria in the accession procedure must be organised with
463 concrete conditions and requirements that can be verified. The obligations
464 that a state agrees to fulfil in order to become a member of the EU also have
465 to be ensured for the time after admission.

466

467 -The priorities of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) also have to
468 include a written reference to the protection of minorities and the
469 involvement of civil society.

470

471 -The programme “Democracy in Dialogue”, which was initiated by FUEN,
472 needs Europe-wide support. The programme aims at improving the situation
473 in potential crisis regions by informing them of practical experiences of well-
474 established minorities in Europe.

475

476

477

478 **VII) Citizenship**

479

480 -In many cases people belonging to minorities have multifaceted identities
481 and are at home in different cultural surroundings. We are in favour of
482 opening up the possibility to have dual citizenship Europe-wide. Precautions
483 shall be taken that prevent the exploitation of minorities / ethnic groups for
484 domestic or bilateral disputes.

485

486 -Improvement of the position of stateless people in Europe. Especially the
487 Russian-speaking population groups in the Baltic countries and the Roma are
488 affected by this.

489

490

491 **VIII) Roma**

492 Europe’s largest minority – a great majority of the ten to twelve million Roma live in
493 bitter poverty. Down to the present day they are frequently oppressed, despised or
494 discriminated against and in some regions they are the victims of racist hostilities.⁴

495

496 -**Examining existing funding schemes** based on the communication of the
497 European Commission for “an EU Framework for National Roma Integration
498 Strategies up to 2020”: Is funding used according to the set objectives, or are
499 the accusations right that a large part of the money is not appropriately used
500 to improve the situation of the Roma?

501

502 -An **analysis of the national Roma-strategies** with a particular focus on
503 which measures the countries want to take to improve the social inclusion
504 and participation of the Roma.

505

506 -The **conception and development of a “Roma Development Agency”** – to be
507 led by the Roma themselves. The expertise of the Roma has to be bundled
508 and strengthened; the Roma must become competent to take over the tasks
509 of international intermediary organisations themselves.

510

511 FUEN has initiated a comprehensive and ambitious Roma-project under the
512 motto “**Minorities help Minorities**”. This project, which aims at using the
513 expertise of established minorities for the social integration of the Roma, is

⁴ Eisenstadt Declaration 2011 (www.fuen.org)

514
515
516
517
518
519
520
521
522
523
524
525
526
527
528
529
530
531
532
533
534
535
536
537
538
539
540
541
542
543
544
545
546
547
548
549
550
551
552
553
554
555
556
557
558
559
560
561
562
563
564
565
566
567

implemented as a pilot project in Hungary. After evaluation and with adequate funding by the European Union the project could be rolled out in all the target countries.⁵

⁵ www.fuen.org



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

www.fuen.org

FUEN · Schiffbrücke 41 · 24939 Flensburg · Germany
Telephone +49 461 128 55 · Telefax +49 461 18 07 09 · info@fuen.org