



Beauftragter der Bundesregierung
für Aussiedlerfragen und
nationale Minderheiten

Greeting

from the

Federal Government Commissioner

for Matters Related to

Ethnic German Resettlers and National Minorities

Hartmut Koschyk MdB

on the occasion of the FUEN Congress 2015

from

13 to 17 May 2015

in

Komotini, Greece

Almost exactly a year ago, I had the honour of being in Flensburg to congratulate the Federal Union of European Nationalities on its 65th birthday. I still enjoy thinking back to the celebrations in May last year, so I find it all the more regrettable that I am not able to attend the 2015 FUEN Congress in beautiful Komotini.

Last year I emphasised that FUEN has to be a *beacon* for minority protection in Europe. In my capacity as federal government commissioner for matters related to ethnic German resettlers and national minorities I have always supported this goal most vigorously. I am therefore very pleased that in 2015 it has been possible to increase the appropriations for FUEN in the federal budget to 100,000 euros. Ultimately I believe it is necessary that FUEN receives institutional funding from the federal budget and also see increasing cross-party approval for this idea in the Bundestag.

With the funding currently available from the federal budget it is possible to fund such events as the annual FUEN congress, a seminar for the Working Group of German Minorities, and both an Easter and autumn seminar for the Youth of European Nationalities. There is also federal funding available for the establishment of a contact office in Brussels. This is a major step forward. Every one of the supported events and facilities are important for exchanging experiences, creating networks and showing the flag for minority protection in Europe. FUEN represents and organises the interests of the various ethnic groups in dealings with the public, government agencies and international organisations. It does this emphatically and tenaciously. And it must not be otherwise.

But in the long term this is not enough. For me, as federal government commissioner for matters related to ethnic German resettlers and national minorities, it is important that that broad minority policy issues should also be dealt with broadly. That is why I also support the idea of a House of Minorities in Flensburg. Compared with the previous year, we have already progressed considerably further. So today we no longer talk about *if* you get project funding, but are already at the level where specific projects have taken shape. In a few days there will be talks about the relevant financing issues in Berlin, so that we can move a step forward with the matter. I am confident that this means that a point of contact for minority issues can be established in Flensburg.

And there are two more points I'd like to stress:

In recent months I have been working towards getting the activities of the Working Group of German Minorities on a solid footing by establishing an office in Berlin, and here I am also confident that it will be possible to set it up very soon.

I also emphatically support the citizens' initiative *Minority Safepack*, which was initiated by FUEV in association with the South Tyrol People's Party, the Democratic Alliance of Hungarians in Romania, and the Youth of European Nationalities. I have also promoted this topic in recent months with colleagues in the German Bundestag and the European Parliament. During my recent visit to Bozen/Bolzano, together with South Tyrol's governor Arno Kompatscher and FUEN vice-president Martha Stocker, we discussed how the FUEN *Minority Safepack* initiative for strengthening minority protection within the European Union could be better supported. I am also personally committed to raising this issue with the vice president of the EU Commission, Mr Timmermans, in the weeks ahead.

The Russia-Ukraine conflict has very clearly illustrated how a lack of sustainable minority policy that protects the rights of the national minorities and endeavours to keep things balanced between the ethnic groups, can lead to such violent tensions not seen in Europe since the horror of two world wars and the disintegration of Yugoslavia at the beginning of 1991. At the same time we are seeing how minority issues are being misused to justify breaches of international law.

I also think about the degrading living conditions of thousands of Roma in several European states. It must be an important EU goal to improve the situation of these people in their home countries. This is a particularly important issue for me. This is why I regularly raise the subject of the necessity of having a comprehensive policy on minority issues whenever I have meetings with my foreign dialogue partners.

I very much hope that in the end we will also achieve effective minority protection firmly anchored at European Union level.

My special thanks go to all of you who, in so many different ways and so many different functions, are involved the preservation, protection and promotion of your respective ethnic groups. You may be assured that I will continue to advocate the protection and promotion of minorities with great commitment.

What I wish, and my urgent request to you: remain the constant guardians and advocates that you are, especially for those minorities in Europa who still do not have equal standing with the majority population, whose voice is not yet listened to in the

democratic decision-making process, and who still face discrimination! These minorities need vigorous support. And they should know that in FUEN they will continue to have a strong partner at their side.

So with this in mind, I wish this year's FUEN Congress in Komotini a successful outcome!
