

To whom it concerns

Flensburg, 21 November 2016

**LETTER OF SUPPORT TO STOP PENALISING THE USE  
OF MINORITY LANGUAGES IN ELECTIONS IN BULGARIA**

According to the law in Bulgaria, election campaigns shall be conducted in the Bulgarian language only. Many politicians in Bulgaria have been penalised for using languages during election campaigns other than the official language, which is Bulgarian.

The Federal Union of European Nationalities (FUEN), the largest umbrella organisation of the autochthonous, national minorities in Europe, finds it totally unacceptable that citizens are withheld their rights to political participation in their mother tongue. The fact that in Bulgaria persons belonging to a national minority can be penalised for using their own mother tongue in their communities during election campaigns is contrary to the effective equality on the grounds of ethnic self-identity that is guaranteed by the Bulgarian Constitution. The prohibition has a chilling effect on the exercise of minority rights in general and violates their rights to freedom of expression.

The ban on the use of languages other than Bulgarian in election campaigns is clearly in violation of the rights and values enshrined in both the European Union Treaties and the human rights treaties to which Bulgaria is bound. According to the European Court of Human Rights, “*a regulatory framework consisting of a total prohibition on the use of unofficial languages coupled with criminal sanctions cannot be held to be compatible with the essential values of a democratic society, which include freedom of expression as guaranteed by Article 10*” (Case: *Şükran Aydın and Others v. Turkey*, paragraph 55).

Mr Ilhan Kyuchyuk MEP tabled a petition to the Petition Committee in the European Parliament addressing the discriminatory ban on the use of languages during election campaigns in Bulgaria. The petition is currently open for support. FUEN strongly recommends supporting this petition and underlines that national minorities shall have the possibility to promote their effective participation in the election process in Bulgaria.



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