

Europe's National Minorities: Ways Forward for Minority Protection
'Ewald Ammende' International Expert Conference organised by FUEN

Brussels 4-5 March 2024

Representation of the European Region Tyrol - South Tyrol – Trentino

47 Rue de Pascale, B-1040 Brussels

Context

We witness increasing restrictions on the use of national minority languages in some European countries. In 2021, the European Commission refused to initiate legislative action on any of the Minority SafePack European Citizens' Initiative proposals. In 2023 European Court of Human Rights' conclusion that education in a minority language – and the content of the Framework Convention on the Protection of National Minorities – are not part of 'a European consensus'. These are only some of the recent negative evolutions in the field of minority protection in Europe. We can surely state that minority rights protection is not stagnating in Europe, it is clearly going backward. This is surprising insofar as the examples of good minority protection in Europe all show that they have brought peace and prosperity and thus represent an advantage not only for the minority concerned, but for the entire granting state and that respect for the rights of persons belonging to a minority is, supposedly, one of the core European Union values if not of the entire European project.

Primary goal

The 'Ewald Ammende' International Expert Conference organised by FUEN aims to discuss the current situation in order to reflect upon and formulate solutions for counteracting the grave regression in the protection of national minorities so as to enhance minority protection. Now is the time to recognise the grave dangers national minorities face and move forward to ensure their equal rights as well as new or stronger approaches to minority protection.

Programme

Monday, 4 March 2023

12.30 - 13.30 Arrival of participants and light lunch

13.30 - 13.45 Opening remarks: **Loránt Vincze, President of FUEN, and Member of the European Parliament**

Moderator: **Johan Häggman, FUEN Policy Advisor**

13.45 - 15.30 National Minorities Protection in Crisis? – First Topical discussion -
Keynote address: **Prof. Fernand de Vareennes, former UN Special Rapporteur**

- Crisis, what crisis?

- What is the overall impact of European mechanisms for minority protection (OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities, Council of Europe Framework Convention on National Minorities, European Charter on Regional or Minority Languages, European Union institutions), and how is it now evolving in recent years?

15.30 - 16.00 Coffee break

16.00 - 17.30 Speaking the same language: National or ethnic, and linguistic minorities - Second topical discussion

Keynote address: Paul Videsott, Professor at the Free University of Bozen-Bolzano

- Can we develop and agree on a unitary definition and designation of national minorities?
- What is the significance of the differences – and even contradictions – between European ‘approaches’ and the United Nations understandings.
- What is the significance of European approaches being more restrictive than the global, UN understandings, and that European States continue to deny completely the existence of minorities on their territories, or may often exclude certain communities from recognition in European mechanisms?
- Should a more ‘universalist approach’ be useful?

19.00-21.00 Dinner at Brasserie „Ommegang“, Rue de la Montagne 4, 1000 Brussels

Tuesday, 5 March 2024

9.00 - 10.30 Do national minorities really have rights in Europe? - Third topical discussion

- Rights, what rights? Individual or collective rights?
- If the rights of minorities are human rights, why are they not acknowledged or applied throughout Europe? What could be the role of the EU in minority protection?
- What are the main shortcomings of the existing minority protection standards of the Council of Europe, the UN, and the OSCE?
- How should different actors interact to achieve change?
- What is the role of the academia/experts and minority NGOs in shaping change? How can minority organizations, experts be better consulted, heard, and engaged into decision-making on the European and national levels, and more effectively?

10.30 - 11.00 Coffee break

11.00 -12.00 Ways forward: Formulation of Expected Outcomes - Conclusions of the conference

Moderator: Loránt Vincze, President of FUEN, Member of the European Parliament

- What could be the new norms in the field of minority protection? Which new standards, and instruments are needed for arriving at a better protection regime for minorities in Europe?

- Should there be a radical call for the replacement by a Minority Rights Protocol to the European Convention for Human Rights, instead of weak Framework Convention on the Protection of National Minorities and European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages?
- Should minority organisations in Europe mobilise to support global minority rights treaty instead?
- How to achieve better cohesion between norms and their implementation across Europe and on the EU and Council of Europe levels?
- Is a permanent expert platform an effective tool to achieve the above-mentioned ambitions?

12.00 - 13.00 Buffet lunch and departure of participants