



Internal News:

Europe and its national minorities

The FUEN (Federal Union of European Nationalities) Presiding Committee is disappointed at the outcome of the second ministers' summit in Strasbourg. The still very critical and explosive situation of the national minorities in many parts of Europe was not adopted as a topic for negotiation. Even though ministers at the first summit in Vienna had called for an additional protocol to protect the cultural rights of national minorities, the issue was discreetly glossed over. Similarly, no further measures to improve the international mechanisms for protecting and fostering national minorities in Europe were resolved in Strasbourg.

In contrast, the Presiding Committee was pleased to note that both the framework agreement on the protection of national minorities and the European Charter of Regional and Minority Languages will be taking effect in 1998.

However, it must emphatically protest at the dilution of the—already weak—provisions on protection in the framework agreement with the resolutions made by the Committee of Ministers regarding the work of the independent committee of experts, who are to be charged with supervising the implementation of the framework agreement.

A majority of nations, particularly those having considerable problems with their national minorities, are attempting to practically circumvent the convention. They have apparently succeeded in restricting the competence of the Committee of Experts by ensuring that the latter have to seek permission from the ministers before they themselves may actually obtain information from the minorities concerned. The absolute minimum criterion an independent expert committee should be entitled to if it is to pursue its work properly and objectively is freedom of information. The fact that national minorities must be able to express themselves in the evaluation process is also self-evident and conforms to the basic purpose

and intention of both conventions. FUEN supports unrestricted dialogue between organisations representing national minorities and state representatives as the basis for relieving tension and solving conflicts in a peaceful and democratic manner.

The FUEN Presiding Committee expresses anxiety at the hesitant progress in the ratification of both mechanisms by the nations. The Charter has so far only been ratified by 5 states and the framework agreement by 13. It thus combines persistence and hope with an appeal to the states who have not yet signed to ratify both agreements as soon as possible. In this way, the states will contribute to strengthening the basis for constructive and mutually fruitful coexistence and for the promotion of the diversity in Europe.

23rd October 1997
Flensburg

The European Charter of Regional and Minority Languages Comes into Force

The European Charter of Regional and Minority Languages, passed in a resolution by the Committee of Ministers to the Council of Europe four years ago, can become effective as from the beginning of 1998. Following Finland, Hungary, the Netherlands and Norway's example, Switzerland has now ratified the charter. Thus the 5 ratifications necessary for the charter to come into force have now been obtained. FUEN is convinced that, with the charter, a new chapter in the history of European minorities will begin. FUEN hopes that the charter will bring about a growing awareness of Europe's linguistic and cultural diversity, greater fostering of national minorities as well as pragmatic policies within the various states aimed at furthering dialogue and constructive co-operation. At the same time, however, FUEN requests its member organisations to work towards other states also ratifying the charter. The Secretary General's Office and the FUEN Presiding Committee will be pleased to assist interested member organisations with the planning and implementation of informative events, seminars etc. on the European Charter of Regional and Minority Languages.

Chingis Aitmatov:

»Nationalism Has Gained Terrible Momentum«!

" ... Aitmatov: Nationalism has gained terrible momentum. It divides people and causes bloodshed, violence and war. We are faced with the new task of how to strike a balance between general human interests and the national interests of the individual nationalities? We have to draw up new

behavioral norms such as, for example: Yes, naturally you can love your people, value your nation. But if you don't value your neighbours equally, this love will lose its meaning and serve only to harm you."

from FACTS 25/1996; Interview: Reinhold Rainerer

Sections of Slovakian Language Law Unconstitutional

The Slovakian constitutional court has declared the controversial Language Act to be unconstitutional on two counts. This was reported by the chairman of the court on Slovakian radio. He explained that the provision of the Act, under which members of minority groups were required to conduct all official correspondence in the Slovakian language, was unconstitutional. In

addition to this, Paragraph 12 of the Act, which rescinded the Language Act of 1990, has been overturned. Experts fear that the decision of the Supreme Court could lead to a contradictory legal situation. This is because the Language Act of 1990 permits the use of minority languages in official dealings in all municipalities in which the minority is greater than 20%. Conversely, the

Chingis Aitmatov was born in the Kirgiz village of Sheker in 1928. In 1935 he moved with his parents to Moscow. His father fell victim to Stalinist cleansing: the family returned to Kirgiziya. After graduating, Aitmatov worked at a kolkhos as a veterinary technician. When his father was posthumously rehabilitated in 1956, Aitmatov moved back to Moscow where he began his literature studies at the Gorki Institute, completing them in 1958 with the novella "Jamilia".



Chingis Aitmatow

Language Act passed in 1995 rules out all use of minority languages in official correspondence.

Critics of the Act were disappointed by the judge's verdict. A group of 33 opposition members of parliament had in their petition to the constitutional

court appealed against 9 paragraphs and 20 clauses of the Act as being unconstitutional. The Act had been the subject of harsh criticism from abroad due to its restrictive provisions.

NZZ 970910

The Rhaetians' SCUNTRADA 1997 in Domat-Ems

Under the patronage of FUEN, the Swiss UNESCO Commission and the FUEN member organisation LIA RUMANTSCHA, a meeting of European minorities took place to coincide with Romansh Week which is organised every three years. Those invited were representatives of the Catalonians in Spain, the Bretons in France, the Welsh, the Ladins from the Dolomites and Friuli, the Sorbs from Germany and the Serbs in Croatia. Dr. Fabritius attended in his capacity as a member of the Bureau for National Minorities in Romania and



The member of the Bureau for National Minorities in Romania, Dr. Klaus Fabritius.

- a circumstance worthy of special recognition - the Romanian Ambassador to Switzerland, Radu Borolanu, honoured the occasion with his presence. Under the auspices of FUEN President Romedi Arquint, the participants presented the particular situation of their respective ethnic group in a relaxed and casual manner. The various specific solutions cannot be copied as there are no universal solutions or even simple model solutions due to the differences in the historical, religious, economic and political background of each group. On the other hand,

such occasions do provide a welcome opportunity for personal encounters and exchange and it is not rare for participants to return home with interesting new ideas for their own work. A close examination of a national community in the former Yugoslavia showed

oppressively that there is still a very long way to go before mutual understanding, tolerant behaviour and the development of new, sustainable structures enabling peaceful co-existence can be achieved in these regions.

Prof. Joan Vallvé new President of the Intergroup of Minority Languages



The Intergroup of Minority Languages of the European Parliament elected a new president at the september meeting in Straßburg: The Catalanian Prof. Joan Vallvé (left) and the former President, MEP Bernd Posselt (right).

The Aromanians - An Endangered Nation of Herdsmen

Progressive Assimilation in the Balkan States

The Council of Europe recently called for the fostering of the Aromanian language and culture. It is questionable whether this appeal will really be heeded and whether, as a result, the assimilation of the Aromanians, which has been taking place for centuries due to economic and social change and the formation of national states in Southeast Europe, can be halted.

Ekr. The Aromanians (Romanians), as they call themselves - most Balkan peoples term themselves Vlachs - speak a Balkan-romance language which, unlike Romanian, has never had a standard written language form. According to their origins, the Aromanians are Romanised Thracians. Their original home is held by linguists to have been what is today Southern Serbia. During the period from the 6th to the 10th century, they migrated to the mountainous regions of Macedonia, Southern Albania, North and Central Greece and especially to the Pindus and Grămmos mountains where their existence as a predominantly herd-tending, partly nomadic ethnic group has been documented since the mid-Byzantine period.

Mobile Way of Life

The Aromanians are also on record as guardians of mountain passes. In the 11th century, there is even a mention of a Vlach bishop who was subordinate to the Archbishop of Ohrid. As they had to move between summer and winter pastures, Aromanian settlements spread into the plains even in those days, and into Thessalonica in particular. Although the Aromanians did

not come into evidence as a state-founding people, they certainly had a hand in establishing the Second Bulgarian Empire at the close of the 12th century under the Asenid Dynasty which was of Aromanian origin. Under Turkish rule, they were often able to evade the Osman tax collectors due to their mobile way of life. As merchants they provided a distinctive feature of long-distance trade far into Central Europe with their mule caravans. Since the 17th century, several urban centres have been established by Aromanians, the most important of these being the present-day Moshopolis (Voskopoye) in Albania which boasted a population of 60,000 in the 18th century. Situated on the route from the Adriatic to Istanbul, Moshopolis dominated trade with Venice, Vienna and Brindisi. It is also the home of one of the first Greek printing houses in the Balkans. Another important centre was Metsovo which is situated in the Greek Pindos Mountains.

Awareness of Regional Identity

The social advancement and urbanisation of a section of the Aromanian population at the same time accelerated their assimilation into the

dominating peoples of the various national states. This applies particularly to Greece. As orthodox christians, the Aromanians were accustomed to Greek and only extremely rarely to ecclesiastical Slav. For those engaged in commerce, it was

Central Europe, which were not originally formed according to any ethnic criteria, the Aromanians took the part of the Greeks when, at the end of the 18th century, the Serbs broke away from the Greeks. During the Habsburg monarchy, a new ethnic

Recommendation of the Parliamentary Assembly in Favour of the Aromanians Passed Unanimously

The Aromanians, Vlachs, Istro-Romanians and Macedonian Romanians have for centuries lived in isolated regions of five Balkan states, separated by state borders. The recommendation is restricted to furthering efforts on behalf of the language and culture of the Aromanians. This language is not standardised and is therefore unique as it is written in three different types of script (Roman, Greek and Cyrillic).



The member of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, the Catalan Lluís-Maria de Puig

A member of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, the Catalan Lluís-Maria de Puig, presented the situation of this language group in a comprehensive report and drew up recommendations for the cultivation of the Aromanian language in education, the church and the media and for fostering cultural and scientific endeavours.

necessary to speak several languages and Greek was not only the lingua franca of the traders but also the language used in schools. Awareness of Aromanian identity did not focus on ethnic background or language but on the region of origin and family as well as membership of the orthodox church. In the colonies of orthodox Balkan merchants in

consciousness only very rarely came into being as a result of contact with Romanians from Transylvania when, as a result, the Aromanians broke away from the Greeks and also - as was the case at the beginning of the 19th century during the Hungarian plague - founded their own church.

The Aromanian national movement, which arose out of such contacts, did however remain a minority cause. Since the 18th century, there have been unsuccessful attempts to create a written Aromanian language. In the



In the presence of Aromanian representatives, the report on the Aromanians was accepted without opposition by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe and its recommendations were acknowledged at a small celebration. Also attending the celebration were FUEN President, Romei Arquint (5th from the right) and also the President of the Aromanian Language and Culture Union, Prof. Vasile Barba (far right).

19th century, Romanian schools were founded and the formation of an Aromanian church was considered with the aim of forcing back the influence of Greek-dominated orthodoxy. In 1905, the Sultan granted the Aromanians millet status (originally only regarded as a religious community, from the 18th century onwards increasingly also as an ethnic group). The great majority of Aromanians was, however, sceptical towards such trends and tended to sympathise more with the Greek national movement. Many Aromanians are also unlikely to have missed the fact that Romania, which at that time lent its support to the cultural demands of the Aromanians, was merely using them as a trump-card in political disputes.

No State of Their Own

The formation of national states in Southeast Europe doomed the Aromanian culture to gradual decline. Due to settlement areas being scattered, the establishment of an independent Aromanian state was out of the question. The new borders prevented unimpeded movement from summer to winter pastures. This forced many Aromanians to abandon their traditional way of life and to move to the towns where their assimilation progressed rapidly. Just how many people in Southeast Europe still have a command of Aromanian is difficult to estimate. In most states, it is extremely difficult to conduct such statistical surveys. In Serbia in 1991, nearly 18,000 people declared themselves to be Aromanians, in the Republic of Macedonia in 1994 some 8,000. On the other hand, Aromanians have not been appeared for decades in Albanian, Bulgarian, Romanian or Greek statistics. Experts estimate their number

at 15,000.

Most Aromanians probably still live in Greece. A large number of Greek politicians, intellectuals and entrepreneurs were and are of Aromanian extraction. The plebiscite of 1951 was the last occasion on which the question of Aromanian as a mother tongue arose. The official number of Aromanian speakers was at that time recorded at 42,000. The subsequent Greek Foreign and Defence Minister Evangelos Averof, himself of Aromanian extraction, spoke in a book published in 1948 of 150,000 to 200,000 Aromanians. Up to the period between the wars, a few Romanian schools still existed in Greece. Some 12,000 former pupils, however, emigrated to the Dobruja in the Twenties and Thirties at the suggestion of the Romanian government with the aim of boosting the population. These schools were closed down after the Second World War. The majority of Aromanians attended Greek schools in any case. Today, it is unlikely that there are any Aromanians remaining who are not bilingual. Formerly it was chiefly the men who were bilingual, whereas the women, who were not sent to school, frequently spoke only Aromanian, a circumstance which did also ensure that the language was passed on to the next generation.

Decline in Knowledge of the Language

As the term "Vlachs" not only denotes a particular ethnic group in Greece but also generally means "country bumpkin", Greek tends to predominate in mixed marriages. Even in Aromanian families, children are usually brought up speaking Greek in order to pave the way for their social

advancement and to prevent them from being ostracised. Today, linguists assume that even a passive knowledge of Aromanian can now no longer be expected of Aromanians born after 1970. Only in remote areas does the younger generation have a command of the Aromanian language. Crystallisation points of Aromanian cultural

awareness are therefore more readily found in emigrant groups. In informative papers and transcripts of originally spoken texts, Aromanian is used as a written language although, to this day, no recognised system of spelling has been devised. NZZ 9708

FUEN Co-patron of Democratic Embassy

The "Congrès des pouvoirs locaux" of the Council of Europe has launched the idea of the democratic embassies. Along with the autonomous region Trentino-Alto Adige and the "Observatoire transfrontalier San Sebastian Bayonne" and the Council of Europe, FUEN is co-patron of such a democratic embassy in Split. The embassy serves primarily to strengthen the people's faith in international solidarity with regard to the integration of Croatia in the European institutions and to build bridges in the form of personal encounter, cultural co-operation and debate on questions of democracy and the co-existence of different ethnic groups under one joint state roof. The official opening of the democratic embassy in Split is planned for the month of October, 1997.



AVAILABLE

from the FUEN Secretary General:

STATUS REPORTS

Status reports from Slovakia	1995-09
Status reports from Slovakia	1996/97
Status reports from the Carpathian region	1996-03
Status reports about the Crimean Tartars	1996-10

FUEN-Now ACTUEL

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No. 54 Slovenes in Italy	1995-09
No. 55 Sorbs in Germany	1996-02
No. 55 Carinthian Slovenes in Austria	1996-02
No. 56 Rhaeto-Romanics in Switzerland	1996-07
No. 57 Sinti and Roma in Germany	1996-10
No. 58 Crimean Tartars in the Ukraine	1996-12
No. 59 Carpathian Germans in Slovakia	1997-04
No. 60 Finns in Sweden	1997-07

DOCUMENTATIONS

41st Congres of Nationalities Timisara/RO	1996
42nd Congres of Nationalities Pörtlach/A	1997

RESOLUTIONS

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