



FORUM

OF EUROPEAN
MINORITY REGIONS

2016–2019



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INTRODUCTION

Regional and minority languages are spoken by roughly 40 million people in Europe. In many regions they are spoken by a majority. The regions where linguistic or ethnic autochthonous minorities live cement European Unity.

Europe's minority regions form bridges between Member States and play a crucial role in European integration.

The minorities contribute to the economic and social development of these regions. It is therefore no coincidence that some of these regions are among Europe's most prosperous. Many minority regions with enhanced autonomy are also the richest in their respective Member State, for instance officially trilingual South Tyrol has the highest GDP per capita in Italy and the Basque Country and Navarra are Spain's richest regions.

Many more minority regions, with their bilingual or multilingual population, have the potential of prospering and thus contributing to economic growth not only for the region, but for the country as a whole.

‘A Europe of the Regions’ was an idea launched by the European Commission under its former president Jacques Delors. The aim was to give the regions an important role in the supranational decision-making. Competences in the European Union would not only be re-allocated from the Member States to the Union, but also delegated to the different regions.

As part of this process of making the regions real actors in European politics, changes were made in the structural funding rules of the European Union. The Treaty of the European Union or Maastricht Treaty, with its legal and institutional innovations, created new opportunities for the regions to acquire financial resources and to participate in the EU policy process.

Within many European states, the regions have been given more competences since the 1970s. The process of European integration combined with the decentralisation of many Member States have provided the regions with tools for a more active role in the European Union. In order to increase their influence in Brussels many regions have created networks.

In this context, the Federal Union of European Nationalities has set up its “Forum of the Minority Regions”. The Forum brings together European minority regions and is a venue for cooperation. These networks would enhance the political weight of the individual regions and speaking with one voice would strengthen their position when influencing the policies of the European Union.

The Forum is also the setting for exchanging and discussing differences in the defence and promotion of minority rights. Furthermore, it provides an opportunity to learn from both best and worst practices.



Bundesministerium
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PROVINCIA
AUTONOMA
DI BOLZANO
ALTO ADIGE

PROVINZIA AUTONOMA DE BULSAN
SÜDTIROL



FUEN

FORUM OF EUROPEAN MINORITY REGIONS

MINORITY COMMUNITIES AND LANGUAGES IN EUROPEAN REGIONS

JULY 18TH 2016, SOUTH TYROL





The first Forum of the Minority Regions organised by FUEN on the 18th of July 2016 in South Tyrol was the starting point of the European minority region project. The first Forum was held in connection with EUROPEADA, the European football championship of the autochthonous, national minorities. EUROPEADA is organised every fourth year, the same year as the European Championships, by the Federal Union of European Nationalities. The aim of the Forum was two-fold:

1. Bringing together national, regional and local decision-makers

The different decision-makers would meet once a year during an annual forum to learn from each other's experiences, not only from best-practices but also from mistakes and setbacks. Another important reason for creating a stronger network is to be able to better tackle common challenges with bundled expertise and to speak with one voice.

The competences of the different European regions vary, some have an extended autonomy in a state that has delegated a decisive part of the decision-making powers to the regions, whereas others lack competences that would enable active language planning and promotion. As a consequence of this and due to scant attention by the central governments, many of these regions are lagging behind both economically and socially. They can profit from the exchange with and the support of other regions in a strong network.



2. Enhancing the regional funding of the FUEN

The Forum would be a yearly get together of representatives of regions that already support FUEN with funding, but also, and perhaps more importantly, the Forum would attract new regions to bond with FUEN and become future partners.



THE ROLE OF THE REGIONAL AUTHORITIES

Ways in which regional authorities can foster development and economic growth and promote regional or minority languages was an important issue of the first Forum. Different practices were presented. The positive role of bilingual and multilingual administrations and cooperation methods were also among the topics of the forum.



Arno Kompatscher, president of South Tyrol welcomed the participants to Bolzano/Bozen. In his speech Mr Kompatscher said that “this is an excellent opportunity to meet leading politicians from Europe’s multilingual regions, the regions where minorities live and where regional or minority languages are spoken”.

“We will have the chance to speak about how our regions could work together to maintain and foster cultural and linguistic diversity in Europe and also promote the European ideals of solidarity”, Kompatscher added.

Renate Schnack, Minority Commissioner of the German state Schleswig-Holstein, stressed the importance of the Forum of the Minority Regions in terms of guaranteeing co-funding for FUEN. “This should be the aim of the Forum”, according to Schnack. Apart from strengthening the current cooperation between

FUEN and many regions, the Forum should be seen as a tool to attract more partners and increase the co-funding of FUEN activities, according to Schnack.



Oliver Paasch, President of the German-speaking community in Belgium, explained the different roles of language communities and regions in Belgium and mentioned that the German-speaking language community is a partner of FUEN and looks forward to continue and develop the well-functioning cooperation.

Hartmut Koschyk, Member of Parliament and Commissioner for national minorities of the German parliament, mentioned the role of the regions regarding the future funding of FUEN.

Gorazd Zmavc, Minister for the Slovenian diaspora, welcomed the initiative as a best practice of how FUEN can work together with both regional and national governments.

Encouragement and support was also expressed by representatives of the counties with a Hungarian majority in Romania, **Sándor Tamás**, President of the County of Covasna and **Csaba Borboly**, President of the County of Harghita. Others present, backing the initiative, were **Maria Michalk**, Member of the German Parliament and Head of the Council for Sorbian affairs, **Reinhart Rohr**, President of the Austrian federal state Carinthia, **Stephan Kleinschmidt**, president of the cultural committee in the region South Denmark and finally **Barbara Gabrielli**, from the department of culture of the government of Graubünden.



DEEPLY **ROOTED** IN THE REGIONS

Minority communities and language groups in the EU regions

30 November – 1 December 2017

Brussels



Minorities are bridge builders –

in interregional cooperation across national borders and in between the population groups on one country.

How can this potential be recognized better and be put to use?

The autochthonous minorities of Europe live in regions with particular historical, linguistic and cultural aspects. This level of government is critical to the development of the ethnic identity of these communities, the protection of minority languages and cultures, the existence and functioning of their own institutions, as well as the good relations between the majority and the minority communities. The dimension of interethnic relations perfectly adds up to the existent economic and infrastructural collaboration between regions.



The Forum of the Minority Regions on minority communities and language groups in European regions called Deeply Rooted in the Regions was held in the Committee of the Regions in Brussels, on the 30th of November and the 1st of December 2017.

Welcome Address

“Fifty million people belong to a national minority or language group and live in one of the European regions, which they call homeland, as they express a strong regional identity. Regional policy offers one of the most effective frameworks of cooperation in Europe, which created effective solutions and common projects aiming economic, social and cultural development. Unfortunately, the role and the contribution of minorities in this framework is not obvious. So far, too little use has been made of the opportunities that minorities offer for the strengthening of economic and social development and territorial cohesion, and it is time to do more” – said FUEN President Loránt Vincze in his welcoming speech.

The regional policy is one of the core elements of FUEN’s most important project, the Minority SafePack Initiative. FUEN aims to call on the European Union to amend the common provisions of the regional funds in such a way that the thematic objectives include the protection of national minorities and the promotion of cultural and linguistic diversity, said Vincze.



Added Value – The Contribution of Minority Communities to Social and Economic Development in the EU

The first panel of the conference was moderated by multilingualism expert, **Johan Häggman**. Häggman pointed out that the two richest regions in Italy in terms of GDP per capita, South Tyrol and the Aosta Valley both have three official languages and the two richest regions in Spain, the Basque Country and Navarra have two official languages. According to Häggman this is not a pure coincidence. The multilingualism in these regions have an economic added value that attracts investors and they should be valued by the European Union since they attract growth and jobs.



In her keynote speech the Vice President of the Csongrád County Council (Hungary), **Anna Magyar** pointed out that 15% of European citizens have a different identity than the majority of the country they live in, and they have the right to keep their identities, because this is true diversity. Minorities contribute to the culture, to the preservation of the cultural heritage, and they can promote tourism in their regions. Local and regional politicians may support this, but sometimes the national decision-makers block regional initiatives, Magyar said.

Mikel Irujo Amezaga, the Brussels representative of the Navarra region, described an economically strong and autonomous region of Spain, where he thinks the key to success has been the Basque language and the cooperatives, a large-scale form of social entrepreneurship practiced in the region.





Member of the Committee of the Regions and president of Harghita county in Romania **Csaba Borboly** presented the county where Hungarians, forming the majority, are the driving force of the region. The impact of the Hungarian language and culture is particularly important in tourism. He stressed the need for European funding programmes, which aim to keep the young generation from immigrating or to make them return. Maintaining the young people in the region is key to identity preservation. Europe will only work if all citizens feel at home in their region, Borboly concluded.

Jens A. Christiansen, Chair of the FUEN's European Dialogue Forum and Secretary General of Dansk generalsekretariat, presented the German-Danish border region, where the minorities are the bridge-builders, facilitators of dialogue and collaboration between the regions. Minorities are gradually being seen as a resource, he said, adding that it is not enough to recognise the minorities, a framework for collaboration also needs to be created.



Davide Zaffi, Board Member of the Society for the Enhancement of National Communities in Europe explained why the province of SouthTyrol is doing so well economically. Part of the answer is the high level of autonomy given to the province: with more competences and more money you have a better chance of answering your people's needs. The role of language is equally important: in the eyes of South-Tyroleans the language is not a good to be preserved, or just a part of the cultural heritage, but the base for everything. There is no field of activity that remains excluded from the language policy, and everything needs to be shaped accordingly, Zaffi explained. His advice was that public life must consider the linguistic aspect.



Open Discussion of Minority and Minority-friendly Regions

Thursday's session of the conference was concluded with an open discussion of minority and minority-friendly regions, with an active input from members of the FUEN Presidium **Halit Habib Oğlu**, **Olga Martens**, **Dieter-Paul Küssner** and **Gösta Toft**.

In his introductory remarks MEP **Csaba Sógor** stated that an arrangement with the majority is a prerequisite for the wellbeing of autochthonous minorities, and this can be obtained through dialogue. Unfortunately, not all European states have such an arrangement with their minorities, and the total rejection of dialogue is unacceptable. „Without legal and institutional guarantees there is no long lasting peaceful coexistence between majority and minority. The Minority SafePack Initiative is important because it reaches out to the European institutions to intervene and raise the minority issue on the agenda in countries and regions where there has been no dialogue”, Sógor concluded.



Anchored in the Homeland – Regional Identities to Strengthen Territorial Cohesion and to Protect Cultural and Linguistic Heritage



In his keynote speech of Friday's first panel, **Herwig Van Staa**, member of Committee of the Regions and president of the Austrian Land Tirol, stated that Europe simply would not exist without diversity. But, when it comes to diversity, Member States sometimes tend to see it on state level only, and the same applies to some regions as well. Minorities have the right to take part in the decision-making process and they deserve self-governance, said Mr Van Staa.

In the panel moderated by FUEN Vice-President **Dieter Paul Küssner**, the President of the German-speaking community in Belgium, **Oliver Paasch** presented the German speaking community's situation in Belgium. Although



they are a small community of less than 1% of the total population, they have their own region and autonomy, which helps them to take measures, which answer the needs of the German speaking community. This is why currently they are the only one of five Belgian regions with a positive budget and a very low unemployment rate. Paasch said that their example proves that giving self-governance to small communities does not hurt anybody.



Peter Kaiser, Member of Committee of the Regions and Governor of Carinthia, home of the Slovenian minority in Austria had a more philosophical approach towards the issue, stating that every person can have several homelands, depending on the different identity-creating aspects. We need to strengthen these identities, since the minorities have to feel at home in their region, in their state and in Europe, was his conclusion.





Johannes Callsen, Minority Commissioner of the federal state Schleswig-Holstein, said in his intervention that minorities are an added value for the society, but in order for them to act as bridge-builders the majority has to build the foundation of such a bridge. The organisational integration of minorities and creating a legal framework for participation are essential in this process, Callsen added.

Roman Kolek, the Vice-Marshall of the Polish Voivodship of Opole presented the smallest region of Poland, where 80,000 Germans live. He presented the region's plans for next year regarding minority programmes and added that in the last two years the nationalist rhetoric have made things harder and the role of the self-government has diminished due to centralisation.





Updating Priorities

In the conference's last panel **Aleksandra Pivec**, deputy Minister for Slovenian Minorities and Slovenians abroad, presented the Government Office for Slovenians Abroad. The institution is in permanent contact with Slovenians living in neighbouring countries and in other parts of the world and finances these communities. They aim to facilitate cross-border cooperation and have special projects developed to involve young people.



Gyula Winkler, Member of the European Parliament, stated that when the Minority SafePack Initiative has been adopted and become a success, “we have to make sure the European Parliament and the other EU institutions recognise the formal consultative role of FUEN on minority issues. We also expect the European Commission to develop EU funding programmes to support minority communities in culture, education, language use and local development to preserve their identity and build a predictable future in their homeland for future generations as well. It would be very useful to have a funding program that would

help FUEN and other minority organisations build a network of language and minority centres in the regions where this is needed”, Winkler proposed.



David Statnik, President of Domowina presented the Sorbs in Germany and drew attention to the fact that every region is different, and that there is thus no magic potion or universal cure for the different problems minorities are facing.

Tove H. Malloy, Director of the European Centre for Minority Issues said that there is a total lack of references to minorities in almost all of the essential EU funding programmes, and that saving the culture and language of minorities is not mentioned as a priority objective. ECMI's studies have shown that minorities contribute to regionalisation and to general development. This is why the EU policies must acknowledge minorities as active partners and participants, and must recalibrate the definition of regions, including the minority factor, Malloy concluded.



Concluding Speech

The President of the Committee of Regions, **Karl-Heinz Lambertz** was presented at the Forum by FUEN President Loránt Vincze as a great supporter of FUEN and the Minority SafePack Initiative. Lambertz is a member of the Citizens' Committee of the MSPI. The President of the Committee of the Regions told the audience that two national delegations have asked him not to host this event. His answer was that what has been discussed here was not the official position of the Committee of the Regions, but stressed that FUEN is a credible partner who can always start a dialogue during his mandate as president. Lambertz proposed the creation of an interregional group within the Committee of the Regions for border-regions or for minority delegates from the regions and a resolution in the Committee to support the Minority SafePack Initiative. Minority rights should be connected with general policies we already have inside the EU and UN, such as multilingualism, regional cohesion, human rights, cultural heritage and foreign policy, Lambertz concluded.



SHAPING
OUR REGIONS

Minority communities and language
groups in European regions

ECONOMIC AND SOCIETAL
CHALLENGES IN OUR
REGIONS



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SHAPING OUR REGIONS

Minority communities and language
groups in European regions

SOUTH TYROL

13-14 December 2018

The EU is home to
24 official languages
and over
60 indigenous regional or minority
languages.

Multilingualism is in most cases an
economical asset for the regions.

**How can bi- and multilingualism
be strengthened in the regions,
administrations and politics?**



The 3rd forum of the minority and minority-friendly regions, entitled Shaping our Regions, organised by FUEN and hosted by South Tyrol on 13-14 December 2018 was an opportunity to learn from each other's successes and struggles. The participants representing regions from all over Europe debated the role of the state in helping or hindering the development of less favoured regions. An important issue was the role of the regional authorities. How can regional authorities foster development and economic growth and promote regional or minority languages? Good practices were presented. The positive role of bilingual and multilingual administrations and cooperation methods were also among the topics of the forum.



Vice President of the South Tyrolean State Parliament and FUEN Vice President **Daniel Alfreider** welcomed the participants to Bolzano/Bozen. Alfreider stated how important cooperation between minority regions is. 'If we join our forces, we can move forward, we can overcome the fears that block us' Alfreider said. He added that in this critical situation for Europe, South Tyrol has to build a small Europe inside Europe, where the German, Italian and Ladin groups have found a way to collaborate and make progress together.



FUEN President **Loránt Vincze** said that FUEN is entitled not only to talk about culture and language issues, but also about the everyday life of minority communities, the way they live in their homelands. The regions are crucial for our communities. He also reminded the audience that perhaps the most important part of the Minority SafePack Initiative is about changing the regional policies of the EU in order to better serve the minority communities.

In his keynote speech on regional policy and minority languages **Dr. Régis Dandoy**, professor at the University of Ghent and expert on federalism, decentralisation and regional policy presented the EU policies regarding the use of regional and minority languages.

The EU is home to 24 official languages and over 60 indigenous regional or minority languages. European Parliament resolution and legislative report on regional and lesser-used European languages (13 Dec. 2001) calls for a more active policy from the EU with respect to regional and minority languages. The European institutions can use languages that are recognised by the constitution of a Member State, even if they are not official EU languages, for instance when interpreting in the EU institutions to and from the Spanish and British regional languages.



Regional and minority languages are fairly well present in the areas of media, culture & languages in the EU, life & rights in the EU, work & education, business & industry, environment, food & natural resources, EU in the world, but almost absent in other fields such as health, wellbeing & consumer protection, infrastructure, research & innovation, economy, finance and investment. In the field of media, culture & languages in the EU, the budget line that funded the European Bureau for Lesser-Used Languages (incl. EuroLang) and the Mercator network (Mercator Media, Mercator Legislation, Mercator Education) has disappeared. Regarding the selection of the European Capital of Culture in 2016, the selection panel recommended exploring cooperation with Leeuwarden or Irish cities regarding minority languages and cultures. The selection panel also appreciated the prominent position of the role of lesser-used and minority languages in Europe and the connection the programme intends to build with other minority cultures speaking their respective minority languages in other European countries.



Despite claiming the opposite, minority and regional languages are not really a priority of the European institutions. The situation might, however, be better than we think. Dandoy presented areas in which improvements should happen. He underlined that policies and cohesion policy interaction with regional authorities should be available in minority languages. The common agricultural policy is another area where documents should be available in regional and minority languages that are not official languages of the European Union. The same goes for the Digital Europe programme. Dandoy also explained how multilingualism works in Belgium, a country with three official languages, Dutch, French and German. Belgium has a system of regions existing in parallel with the language communities. The regions are territorial, contrary to the language communities. Persons in the same household can belong to different language communities.





Economic and Societal Challenges in our Homelands

The first panel was about how regions, where national minorities reside, are often discriminated against by the central government and thus lagging behind in social and economic development.

Daniel Alfreider presented a short history of South Tyrol and described how they developed a system of having percentages in the public administration for speakers of German, Italian and Ladin instead of using a territorial approach for language use. Alfreider stressed that minority communities have to work together. He also said that the young generation has to be convinced of the economic added value of regional and minority languages.

Aleix Sarri, international coordinator of the Catalan president, described the economy of Catalonia, stressing the negative effects political and fiscal centralisation can have on a region, since it drains the region of important human and financial resources. Their solution is to open the Catalan economy to the world and to become less dependent on the Spanish economy. Links to Spain will remain important, since 70% of Catalans have relatives in other regions. Finally, he pointed out the economic advantages of the Catalan language.

Róbert Grün, Vice President of the Covasna county council, identified some of the main problems local leaders face: the lack of funds in order to carry out a real bilingualism policy with positive discrimination for the minority, the lack of competences since the country is centralised. In for instance Romania regions don't have administrative competences. Finally, the lack of perception about the region's Hungarian inhabitants constitutes a problem. Still there are some positive tendencies in the counties where the Hungarian party rule. The local police in Târgu Mureş/Marosvásárhely, for instance has introduced bilingual signs on their buildings and in offices.



Tourism is important in improving regional development. The county has a strategy to restore 160 mansions and manors. In Covasna, nature and local traditions can contribute to improving the image of the county. The Hungarian language and culture make the region attractive for Romanian tourists.

Meto Nowak, speaker of the State Commissioner for Sorbian and Wendish Affairs in Brandenburg, spoke about the problems the Sorb minority faces in the historical region of Lusatia. The region is no administrative unit and has no real competences. The fast deindustrialisation after 1990, with the closing down of lignite mines and factories in the region led to a crisis in the region. 140 Sorb villages have been destroyed and 25.000 Sorbs and Germans have had to resettle. Unfortunately, many Sorbs are not aware of the added value to society of their language and culture. Sorbian is a small language limited to the region. The Sorbs try to learn from other best practices such as Wales, the German-Danish borderland and South Tyrol.



Experiences and Interventions to Boost Development

The second panel started with **Petra Szávics**'s introduction. Szávics explained the potential contribution of minorities to social and economic cohesion, as well as to the EU growth and jobs objectives. The regional policy expert said that in less favoured, multi-ethnic regions divisions between minorities and majorities exist. This can have an impact on social, economic or political development. Social in the sense that there is widespread prejudice and discrimination of minorities. Not recognising minorities can lead to social conflicts. Political in the sense that rising social problems can lead to populism. Patterns of ethnic/minority segregation intersect strongly with socio-economic disadvantages and inequalities in the labour market.



Knowledge of multiple languages can open up a new 'potential' for both individuals and for entire societies. It can also be an added value for the society in which people live. Multilingualism is a source of innovation through creativity and thus contributes to economic growth and social cohesion, Szávics added.

Martha Stocker, Councillor for health care and social policy of South Tyrol, highlighted their successful education model, in which every community has its own school system instead of having bilingual or trilingual schools. She said that South Tyrol is a region strongly focusing on European issues, aware of its past and history. Furthermore, South Tyrol serves as a bridge between Italy and Austria.



Ydwine Scarse representing the Youth of European Nationalities mentioned how multilingualism is important for the economy of the Fryslan region in the Netherlands, where 92 % understands Frisian, but only 13 % can write it. The region does not have that much competence, but has managed to buck the trend and revitalise the Frisian language.



She also presented some best practices, for instance the European Capital of Culture. During the European Capital of Culture year many of the events promoted the Frisian language and culture and showed that the language is an asset for the region. This gave the impression of a cool language that creates positive vibes. Scarse also mentioned the importance of the trilingual schools. Children growing up trilingual is an asset not only to companies but also to the whole region since a trilingual population, fluent in Dutch, Frisian and English can boost investments.



Wienke Reimer representing Graenseforeningen, an organisation promoting the Danish language and culture in the Danish-German border area, presented the project called Minority Changemakers. The aim of the project is to explain how a good level of education and cooperation between regions can contribute to economic development. A crucial factor for regional development is, according to Reimer, a good education system in the minority language. Finally, Reimer hoped to train future “Minority Changemakers” which are able to contribute to Europe’s democratic and linguistic diversity.

Sebastian Wladarz, State Managing Director of East and Central German Association of the German Christian Democratic Union, spoke about the minorities in the German region North Rhine Westphalia and the Polish region Upper Silesia, where the German language attracts investors from German-speaking countries. However, the lack of a continuous education system in German from kindergarten to university hampers Upper Silesia’s development into a flourishing minority language region. Improving education in German is essential in order to exploit the full potential of the region.





In his concluding remarks **Paul Videsott**, Dean of the Faculty of Education of the Free University of Bozen pointed out that in Europe only 16 minorities number more than 300,000 members while 87 minorities have less than 5000 members, and these small minorities need ‘parapolitical’, societal interventions in order to survive. He also highlighted the positive impact that minorities can have on the economic development of a region. This could be an element that could help convince the majority to support the minority. He also considered the advantages of multilingualism a unique argument when reaching out to the majority population.

Anna Magyar, rapporteur for the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages in the Council of Europe, started the second day of the Forum by presenting a report celebrating the 25th anniversary of the Charter, which analyses the challenges, results and presents best practices. Magyar stressed the importance of regional level, since language policy is often a regional competence. She also underlined that recommendations are not always implemented at the regional level. But the central governments have to provide the regions with the tools to put the recommendations into practice.





The Added Value of a Bilingual or Multilingual Administration

The first panel of the second day was on how bilingual and multilingual communication with the citizens is crucial for good governance. There are several models of language use in the public administration in Europe, some regions are role models, providing the citizens service in their mother tongue, while discrimination prevails in others.



Daniel Alfreider explained how the small Ladin community is supported by the majority in South Tyrol: it has its own institutions, competences and school system, and its associations, music, sports, cultural activities are funded by the government of South Tyrol. He pointed out that the Ladin community is trilingual in all senses, street signs are trilingual and the public administration also offers services in three languages.

Óscar-Adriá Ibáñez Ferreté representing Plataforma per la Llengua presented the activity of the organisation working for the normalisation, revitalisation of the Catalan language, promoting linguistic rights in public administration, justice and business. Ibáñez Ferreté stressed that bilingualism is an economic advantage in Catalonia. 86 % of Catalan speakers use the Catalan in their relation to regional authorities, 82 % with local governments, but only 50 % with state administration located in Catalunya. The regional administration works very well in both languages, while there is still room for improvement in the service provided in Catalan by the Spanish state authorities.



Former Member of the European Parliament and member of a local council in the Basque country **Iñaki Irazabalbeitia Fernandez** spoke about the status of Basque in the public sector in the Basque Country. He pointed out that the situation of the Basque language is very different in three different areas, the Basque Country which is an autonomous community, in the neighbouring autonomous community Navarra and in the French Basque country. There are also differences in language policies between the different provinces of the Basque country, Álava, Biscay and Gipuzkoa. Irazabalbeitia said that this has led to three different sociolinguistic realities. In the first the loss of Basque speakers stops and there is a slow start of recovery, in the second reality you have a moderate recovery and in the third and final a huge recovery. There are also policy differences at the local level.

The Basque language has recovered tremendously in the last 40 years and this has also stimulated economic growth. Regarding language use in the public administration, Irazabalbeitia pointed out that both the autonomous and central administrations are obliged by law to attend citizen in both official languages, both orally and in written. Does it work in practice? Not really. In the Spanish administration, the Basque language is an exception. In the regional Basque administration it depends a lot on the civil servant. In all provinces, Basque is a service language and not a working language in the administration. This should change, according to Irazabalbeitia.



All civil servants should be bilingual in principle, but in practice that's not the case. One reason for this is that in 1982 the sociolinguistic situation led to hiring many Spanish monolinguals and the Basque administration incorporated civil servants coming from the Spanish system, for instance nurses and doctors. There has only been a limited effort of teaching the civil servants Basque. Irazabalbeitia concluded by presenting concrete plans on how the Basque government would improve the knowledge of Basque among the civil servants.

Sergiu Constantin, researcher on minority rights at Eurac Research spoke about the importance of some contextual factors like the size and concentration of the speakers of a regional or minority language. He explained how different states approach language rights. The approach can be either territorial or linguistic, or a combination of the two. Many states, such as Poland, Slovakia or Romania have introduced a threshold of 20% belonging to the minority for municipalities to become bilingual. These thresholds can have serious consequences when it comes to municipality mergers if the percentage belonging to the minority drops below the threshold in the 'new' municipality and the minority loses its right to public service.





Cooperation Methods and Best Practices in the Field of Language Use

In the last panel **Michele Gazzola**, lecturer at Ulster University explained why language policy is special in nature. A substantive public policy which aims at solving a problem politically defined as collective in nature. An institutional public policy regards the transformation of state institutions. e.g. a change in the structure of public offices or a re-organisation of human resources. Institutional public policies aim at creating the conditions for the accomplishment of the tasks of the state, including the implementation of substantive policies. This distinction is not always straightforward in language policy. Because the choice of a set of official and working languages and the constant implementation of multilingualism in an organisation such as the Irish or the Welsh government, the European Union or the Swiss federal public service has both substantive and institutional elements. The government and public administration can be at the same time the subject and the object (target) of language policy. Gazzola presented examples from Friuli-Venezia-Giulia, Switzerland, Canada, Slovenia and the Ladin-speaking area in Italy.

Gazzola concluded that in order to implement successfully multilingualism in public authorities, targeted policy instruments need to be used, which have to be evaluated through effective monitoring indicators.





Colin Williams, professor at the University of Cardiff presented best practices in the fields of language use in the public sector. The UK and Canada have an identifiable policy cycle. It has very clear, consistent and well communicated objectives. Wales has a statutory consultation on language strategy, in the Basque Country it is evidence-based policy development. Catalonia has a language indicator system, while Canada has chosen an active offer of service. Ireland and Scotland have set out targets and timetables for delivery. Williams stressed that the increased emphasis on economic added value of the target language is welcomed, but warned that it can become so instrumental that it threatens to reduce the emotive, identification and socio-cultural aspects of language transmission and group dynamism in favour of individualisation. Williams also compared language policies in how they increase the use of the minority language, create new speakers, develop linguistic rights (individual and community), ensure policy consistency in the medium term, and spreads responsibility and commitment beyond politicians and civil servants. Promoting a language is good not only for the minorities, but for all, it is something that also the majority can take pride in, Williams concluded.

Tom Moring, professor at the University of Helsinki talked about the dangers of regional and minority languages lagging behind in the digital era. He mentioned the example of Gaelic and said that young Gaelic speakers use English in all digital contexts, also with Gaelic-speaking friends. On the positive side Moring mentioned the latest developments with the Minority SafePack European citizens' initiative and the European Charter for Minority Languages monitoring taking a broader look on digitalisation. Also the OSCE prepares new guidelines on national minorities and the media in the digital age. Moring concluded that we need to put minority languages into digital mode: if they are not available online, they will die out.



In his concluding remarks FUEN president **Loránt Vincze** noted that the conference gave the participants food for thought, many new ideas, and that this kind of cooperation has to continue. „Minority rights and languages need some innovative approaches. If we try to change the perspective and approach the issue of language use in public administration from the perspective of good services and economic development, we may succeed easier and avoid the clashes with the majority”, Vincze said.

FORUM

DER EUROPÄISCHEN MINDERHEITENREGIONEN OF EUROPEAN MINORITY REGIONS

THE DEMOGRAPHIC CHALLENGE

11-12.12.2019 | POTSDAM, BRANDENBURG, GERMANY




Bundesministerium
des Innern, für Bau
und Heimat




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**The brain drain
affects minority
communities the most.
Many young people
leave our communities.
How can we
make them return?**



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about migration in itself, the existence of more opportunities and gaining of international experience are all assets, but the challenge is how we attract these highly skilled workers back home, so that their home countries and minority communities will benefit from their much needed knowledge and experience. During 11-12 December 2019 experts, regional and minority leaders as well as decision makers discussed the ways in which minority regions can counter the effects of workforce migration and brain drain in Potsdam, at FUEN's Forum of the European Minority Regions.



Video on Facebook
<https://bit.ly/2RSphy5>



The Forum was held in the State Parliament of Brandenburg, where Barbara Richstein, Vice President of the Parliament greeted the participants. „It is a great honour for us to host the Forum of the Regions and the FUEN, an international minority organization with excellent reputation. The theme of the conference, the exodus of intelligent young people is familiar to us, as we also had to deal with this situation after the fall of the Berlin wall” – she said. Mrs. Richstein added that they consider it a real asset that the Sorbs and Vends in Lusatia has maintained their identity and culture, and Brandenburg supports this process also with legal acts.



Video on Youtube
<https://tinyurl.com/ydg98vrg>

FUEN President and Member of the European Parliament **Loránt Vincze** expressed his gratitude to the Brandenburg State Parliament and the regional government. He noted that the exodus of young, highly skilled work force and labour migration in general have an additional very severe impact on minority communities, as the political weight of a minority community is directly linked to its number, so losing the young, skilled members of the community has severe future consequences on its political representation capital. It also makes the communities more vulnerable, weaker, with less internal resources for recovery and development. He also presented some statistical data: In 2018, there were almost 17 million EU28 movers. Germany (33%) and the UK (20%) absorbed more than half them, while the top countries of origin were Romania, Poland, Italy and Portugal.



Tobias Dünow, Secretary of State, Ministry of Science, Research and Culture of the State of Brandenburg said that this conference shows that minority policy is by no means something obsolete and folkloric, it is about forming our future.



David Statnik, Chairman of Domowina, the Union of Lusatian Sorbs talked about the importance of rural development: “Logic says it makes more sense to build a motorway near Berlin than a rural road near Cottbus, because more people are going to use it. But in fact it makes sense to build rural roads, as they are the way back home.”



Klaus Freytag, Lusatia Commissioner of the Prime Minister of Brandenburg welcomed the forum on behalf of the Prime Minister. Minorities are not only a folkloristic value, they are a real economic asset, and added value, for example in doing business with our neighbour countries, he said.



Kathrin Dannenberg, Member of Brandenburg State Parliament pointed out that the first law when the Parliament moved to this building was the act on the right of Sorbs and Vends.



Péter Vida, Member of the Brandenburg State Parliament praised FUEN, saying that the organisation’s work “gives many minorities a voice, a hope that they will be heard. It is important for us and to all minorities in Europe”.



According to the survey of the South Tyrolean Chamber of Commerce, the brain drain of young people moving to Germany and Austria is the biggest single threat to the German-speaking community of South Tyrol. As we learned in the first panel discussion, many minority communities face similar problems. Even though South Tyrol has a positive migration rate, this does not apply to the highly skilled work force: young and educated people leave and move to richer neighbouring countries, as we have learned from the presentation based on the research of **Nina Overhage**.



Paul Videsott, Professor at the University of Bolzano/Bozen and head of Südtiroler Volksgruppen Institut said that Italy loses around 200,000 skilled workers a year, and they have the same amount of unqualified workers coming in. Italy now offers tax breaks to any skilled worker who comes to Italy. If a skilled worker with a completed degree decides to settle or resettle in Italy, he or she does not have to pay taxes for 70% of earnings for six years, with more incentives added for families with children and for those who start building a home. This is the biggest incentive in recent years for recruiting colleagues to South Tyrol, Mr. Videsott said. He also named mobility, fast internet and a good childcare system as good motivations.

Stephan Rohde, Head of Department for Structural Change of Saxony explained that in his region 30-40 thousand jobs depend on coal mining. He presented their financing program for small community projects made on participatory basis, their plans on higher education, which is appealing not only for young people but also attracts companies looking for qualified workforce to the region, and their commuting, settlement and innovation strategy.



Professor **Elin Haf Gruffydd Jones** from the University of Trinity Saint David, Wales said that brain drain appears even before young people turn 18, this is why her university organizes vocational courses for pupils aged 16-18. Currently, about 562,000 people speak the Welsh language, and through their language revitalization programme the plan is to have one million speakers of the language by 2050. Regarding the topic of migration she pointed out that choosing your first job is also a strategic decision where you contemplate if that area can sustain your future career. She added that language is a social phenomenon and it cannot survive without economic and social value.



István Horváth, professor at the Babes-Bolyai University in Cluj-Kolozsvár, talked about the situation of higher education in Hungarian language. In the 1990s the system in Romania was underdeveloped, and Hungary started to offer scholarships and to attract young Hungarians from Romania to study there. As the Hungarian language university education started to develop in Romania, this gradually changed. The tipping point was 2008, when 3263 Romanian citizens studied at universities in Hungary. Since then, their number decreased to 1329, while there are already more than 10,000 studying in Hungarian in Romania. This shows that a good system can lead to a decreasing number of immigrants, said the professor.

The transformation of the current economy to one that is both ecologically and economically sustainable is one of our major challenges and can result in an economic downturn and increased unemployment, but also provides us with opportunities that contribute to economic growth.

In the Forum of European Minority Region's second panel, **Rónán Mac Con Iomaire**, Director of Regional, Community & Language Development of Údarásna Gaeltachta presented such solutions of his organization, focusing on the economical development of the small, isolated places where the Irish language is still spoken. Stabilizing economically the communities and looking to create employment linked to the region are their main objectives, and one of their largest projects is a maritime innovation park, which will become a research hub for aquaculture.



Video on Youtube
<https://tinyurl.com/yawzbboe>

Mikel Irujo Amezaga, Director for General Foreign Action, Government of Navarra talked about the importance of cross-border collaboration, saying that if only 20% of the existing obstacles were removed, border regions would increase their GDP by 2%.



Katja Müller of the Economic region of Lusatia presented the many projects they run to win back the young people who have moved out of the region. One of the main challenges they face is to secure visibility to these opportunities.

Olivia Schubert, Vice Chair of the National Self-government of Germans in Hungary, said that being a German in Hungary is a blessing and a curse, as many German companies invest in Hungary and they are looking for German-speaking employees but still many of the Hungarian Germans move to Germany, Austria or South Tyrol.



Cross-border commuters contribute to the prosperity of border regions and enhance cross-border trade. Commuting also keeps the European Union together and favours integration and unity, but states take different approaches towards this phenomenon. The panellists of the first panel of the second day of the Forum of the European Minority Regions presented the situation in their homeland.

Moderator **Gösta Toft**, FUEN Vice President talked about the German-Danish border region and the large number of commuters being tremendously supported. In this border region, commuting is more common than emigration or immigration, with 15,000 people crossing the border daily to work. This means billions of Euros, if you look at the numbers – he said.



Kaisa Kepsu, Head of Research at Magma Think Tank from Finland studies the migration of the Swedish-speaking community in Finland to Sweden. They are overrepresented in the flow, as 35% of migrants from Finland to Sweden are members of the Swedish-speaking community (they represent 5.3% of the total population). Regarding commuting for work she pointed out that approximately 65,000 Nordic citizens live in one country and work in another, so this model is more common than migration. Despite daily commuting is difficult because of the sea, the Swedish-speaking community is very mobile and more prone to commute. Commuting has to be encouraged, as it is much better than losing the citizens to migration, she pointed out.

FUEN Vice President **Angelika Mlinar** talked about the Slovenian minority in Austria, saying that commuting happens in both directions, but the mountains form a natural barrier which makes the process harder. Also, Austria is not a pioneer in this sense, they do not have the attitude of helping commuters. Far too little is done in terms of exchange and communication – she said.



Walter Bandelj, President of the Confederation of Slovene Organizations in Italy talked about the use of EU programmes in cross-border collaboration and also mentioned an initiative where two cities from different sides of the border have applied together for the title of European Capital of Culture in 2025.

Zsolt Horbulák, professor at Selye János University talked about the Hungarian minority in Slovakia, living in the Southern border region of the country. He pointed out that unemployment rates are higher in this community as in the whole of Slovakia and also higher than in Hungary. The West of Hungary is economically more developed, but commuting is difficult because they are divided by the Danube, with only three bridges to cross the river. In the east both sides of the border are underdeveloped and there is a lack of jobs.



Young people leaving the minority region to study or work elsewhere and acquire new skills is something positive. But how can we lure them back to the home region in order to benefit from the skills they have acquired abroad or in neighbouring regions? The closing panel of the Forum, moderated by FUEN Executive Director **Éva Péntzes** focused on these questions.



Rafal Bartek, Chairman of the Opole Regional Parliament (German minority in Poland, Silesia) said that the emigration of Germans from Poland is not something new, as it also happened during communism, and also long before Poland became an EU member, because the Germans could apply for German citizenship and the free movement within the EU that came with it. He said that Poland never paid attention to its German community, but the economics have taken over from politics, with many international companies choosing Silesia because there they could find German speakers. Despite the increasing wage level in Poland, the state would have to invest much more in social policy and take employee-friendly measures. Bartek believes that niches need to be found in the regions to counter emigration and that the diversity of minority regions offers great potential. Mr. Bartek addressed an invitation to FUEN to organize the next Forum of the European Minority Regions in Opole.

YEN President **Giuanne Beeli**, part of the Romansh community of Switzerland talked about the low possibilities of her moving back home, as the region does not offer good conditions and perspectives regarding her personal development. She said that for young people to move back from urban areas to rural areas, public transport, road networks, broadband internet, think tanks, industry, childcare facilities and tax breaks are needed, and the costs of living and wages also need to be harmonized.



Madlena Kowar from the Minority Secretariat in Berlin, member of the Sorb community considers growing up as a bilingual a treasure, and she would like for her child to also receive bilingual education, but this leads the family to a hard choice, as there are no bilingual schools in Berlin, and moving back to Lusatia would mean losing the advantages of living in a big city.



Lucia Abiuso, responsible for school and education system in the regional government of Calabria talked about the importance of highlighting the cultural heritage as a way to lure people back to the region.

Scientist **Michael Thomas** of the Brandenburg-Berlin Institute for Studies on Social Sciences reported that after the fall of communism in 1989 more than 3 million citizens left the state of Brandenburg, but since 2014 there has been a positive balance and more people migrate to Brandenburg than emigrate. The large number of young families in particular offers creative social potential for the development of rural structures. The creation of a good infrastructure is of immense importance, as these families are prepared to stay in rural areas for a long time with a corresponding standard of living. There would be many possible solutions against emigration. The region or state must create many spaces with creative possibilities, which are then filled by the people themselves with creative projects.



In his concluding remarks FUEN Vice President **Bahne Bahnsen** pointed out that the brain drain is a global problem which even New York has to face. The presentations showed us that this is a formidable challenge, but there are already successful ways of promoting remigration through politics, policies, cross-border collaboration and civil activism, he said. Further, he pointed out that migration from rural to urban areas is something the European Union has to deal with, helping the regions with European structural programmes in this regard.



Video on Facebook
<http://tiny.cc/5ayenz>





S U M M A R Y

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uropean regions play an indispensable role in strengthening international cohesion within the EU. They provide for cross-border contacts and exchange and bring together people who live in close proximity and are separated by national borders. Especially the regions where minorities live and minority languages are spoken, offer considerable added value. Many minorities have only come into being through the drawing of borders, and minority and majority societies benefit equally from contact with neighboring regions in the border area - both from cultural exchange and in terms of the economy. The networking of minority regions facilitates mutual exchange and enables minorities to stand up for their rights even more effectively at the European and national level.

Minority regions such as the German-Danish Borderland or Friesland, which stretches across the German and Dutch North Sea coast, or the autonomous regions of Navarra and the Basque Country in Spain are examples of how different the situation and perceptions of minorities are in the regions of the different countries, even though the challenges for minorities are often similar. Learning from each other's best practices and networking is and will continue to be the goal of the Forum of European Minority Regions.

The Forum of European Minority Regions has evolved from a fringe event of EUROPEADA to a conference that brings together experts on specific issues and challenges affecting all minorities in Europe, and provides a platform for exchange and getting to know each other.

The first forum in 2016 determined the guidelines and objectives, it set the goals of the forum such as networking of regional decision makers, cooperation with stakeholders and to build a network to strengthen the regional co-financing of the FUEN.

The second Forum in 2017 took place during the Committee Week of the European Committee of the Regions (CoR) and provided many expressions of support for the FUEN by the members of the CoR and thus the optimal environment for the Forum of Minority Regions. The European Committee of the Regions is the assembly of local and regional authorities of the European Union, which as a European institution plays an important role in the legislative process of the EU.

From now on the Forums were formulated under specific topics and thus provided for an even more profound and knowledge-based exchange of information between the minority regions, the minorities, and their umbrella organization of the FUEN.

Under the title “Shaping our regions” the third forum followed in 2018, which built on regional cooperation and discussed the role of the state in supporting disadvantaged regions. An important topic was the role of the regional authorities in the development and economic growth of the regions, as well as the promotion of regional and minority languages using the example of best practices.

Migration and labor migration are more topical issues than ever before. What does this demographic challenge mean at the regional level and how can emigration be counteracted? Labour migration can be an advantage if those who have emigrated return to their home region with new skills. How economic migrants and thus the knowledge and experience they gain during their stay abroad can be regained in order to counteract the lack of skilled workers was the topic of discussion at the fourth Forum of Minority Regions in 2019 under the title “The Demographic Challenge”.

With over 200 participants from more than 20 countries in Europe, 14 European minority regions have already been represented at the forums over the past four years. The FUEN will continue to work to reach even more regions through the Forum and to increase its reach.

The European Forum of Minority Regions has developed within four years with the commitment and work of the FUEN from a spontaneous meeting to one of the most important annual conferences in Europe and a brand for stakeholders in the field of minority rights and multilingualism and will continue to promote the development of European minority regions.

In order to successfully implement these goals, it needs partners and sponsors. Therefore, all who are interested in supporting the regions are welcome to join our forums.

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