

Dear Delegates,

Let me start by saying a big thank you to FUEN and your member organisations for the decades-long efforts and work you have done since your network was established in 1949 – I would like to express my gratitude to all the national minority communities, then and now, who fill the provisions of the relevant international treaties and domestic legislation in your respective countries with the diversity and colourfulness of minority life and, like me, work every day to better enforce national minority rights.

And let me continue by expressing my heartfelt gratitude for the trust you have placed in me by voting me the FUEN Prize 2025! Those who know me know that I like being the centre of attention but only when I teach human rights and minority rights as a university professor. In fact, I don't mind, I actually love it when I have the opportunity to fight for a professional position, especially when I can speak up for those whose voices don't reach the decision-makers.

Today, the very special attention by your organization that is exceptional and unique on the international stage is, however, an **unusual occasion** for me. Your 75-year-old umbrella organization of national minorities, ethnic groups, linguistic groups represents more than a hundred minority organizations, making it clear that we need a Europe in which the values of these communities are recognized and protected, and in which they are free to make decisions on matters that affect them. There can be no greater recognition for someone who considers herself/himself a defender of minority rights, like myself! My sincere thanks and gratitude for this exceptional honour!

What makes this occasion truly special for me is **the place and the time**. On the one hand, I am very happy to receive this award here in the Region of Trentino-Alto Adige/Südtirol (South Tyrol), in the city of Bozen/Bulsan/Bolzano an iconic location for the protection of minority rights. On the other hand, I am touched that this event is taking place one week before the end of my 12-year term of office. I can see many faces in this room with whom I have worked over the past decade. This award, as a "double gift" – place and time –, not only represent recognition of my professional work to date, but also provide strong motivation and "fuel" to continue my work – now as a university professor and the head of the Centre for European Research and Education of the University of Pécs.

Back in time, at the beginning of my professional career, as a young university lecturer – almost forty years ago – when my first readings included FUEN publications and documents, I would never have dared to imagine that one day I would be standing here before you, deeply moved and paying tribute to the persistent and successful work of FUEN and its member organizations. As a university professor and ombudsperson responsible for national minorities, I am grateful for all your activities in the field of identity protection and preservation! As an ordinary member of AC FCNM, I would also like to express my sincere gratitude to you for your wide-ranging and thoughtful work in the field of European minority protection!

Allow me to share with you a few thoughts based on my own professional experience to date. With these thoughts, and in part with these messages, I will attempt to reflect on the reality that currently surrounds us and on the aspects that I consider important in order to protect our common cause. Wars, crises, unprecedented and multifaceted social and international tensions all indicate that we need to pay much greater attention, with meaningful and mutual assessment of situations, and we also need more actions at all levels in order to achieve social stability and peace.

My work in the field of the protection of human and minority rights has focused on serious questions: issues that affect the individuals concerned, and through them their immediate

communities, and ultimately broader groups within society. Political, economic, social, and environmental crises, as well as the effects of devastating wars, directly or indirectly, and unfortunately exponentially, affect our fellow citizens who are in a vulnerable situation. The decline of mutual solidarity and the general atmosphere of mistrust have a particularly serious impact on people who live in special situation or are already disadvantaged, so I have tried to handle their cases with particular empathy and professionalism. We have done this together with my team back home, whom I am particularly grateful.

1. I consider it an important message, from the changes experienced over the past decades, that **young people** must be strongly involved in making decisions affecting their community more widely than ever before, as every measure concerns their future. The cultivation and development of minority cultures and languages is not an abstract goal, but clearly and beyond doubt the path to shaping the identity and self-identity of future generations.
2. The other important message is that **greater solidarity and cooperation** are needed between individual minority communities: unified action and assertion of interests in dialogue with legislators and the ones implementing the law is of paramount importance, but also sends a message to community members and the outside world. Those concerned need to know and understand the system of rules and rights that apply to them and the opportunities offered to them, as well as how to access these rights and opportunities. It is also important that they jointly seek answers and tools to solve the problems that arise within their own communities.
3. The third message: **cultural diversity**, the **idea of an inclusive, supportive society**, and the recognition, protection, and preservation of multiple identities are key to social harmony and even economic and social success, as well as being the foundation of future society. The role of social networks that create a reliable environment within reach, is gradually becoming more important, and understanding the social environment and strengthening social cohesion are becoming increasingly important alongside legal and administrative tools.

Despite all efforts to the contrary by political and non-political actors, **I firmly believe** that in the long term, only the idea of an inclusive, solidarity-based society, the recognition of multiple identities, and the preservation of cultural diversity can serve as basis and guarantee for economic and social success **for all**.

And finally:

- Thank you for allowing me to become a member of the wider FUEN family through this award!
- Vielen Dank, dass ich durch diese Auszeichnung Teil der großen FUEN-Familie werden darf!
- Köszönöm, hogy a díj révén a tágabb FUEN-család tagja lehetek!
- Vă mulțumesc că mi-ați permis să devin membru al marii familii FUEN prin intermediul acestui premiu!
- Grazie per avermi permesso di far parte della grande famiglia FUEN con questo premio!
- Ďakujem veľmi pekne!