

**Concluding Remarks by Claus Larsen-Jensen, MP (S),
Chairman of the European Affairs Committee in the Danish Parliament Folketinget**

to the Conference on National Minorities in Europe, Christiansborg, 5-6 November 2002

“From Confrontation Risk to Co-operation Wish”

Yesterday and today we have received very detailed political and technical descriptions of the work done by the Council of Europe, the OSCE, the EU and other European international institutions and organisations in the field of national minorities in Europe.

We have also heard a detailed description of the conventions, agreements etc. adopted on national minorities in Europe.

The need for new convention texts is limited. What is needed is implementation in practice.

It is clearly described, that the candidate countries have done and are doing a tremendous and admirable work to implement the Copenhagen Criteria's also on minority rights, the *acquis communautaire*, and the conventions to live up to the demands of membership to the European Union.

This enlargement process – where 10 countries are expected to be welcomed to the EU at the EU-Summit in Copenhagen in December 2002, and Bulgaria, Romania and Turkey are given clear perspectives of membership – is the best ever prepared enlargement in the history of the European Union.

The criteria used to evaluate the rights of national minorities should also be used to evaluate this in the EU 15. The enlargement of the EU to 25-28 – or even more countries – will not lead to the abolishment of the question of national minorities. The need for a permanent continuing process with focus on national minorities in the EU will still be great.

The problem will not disappear in the enlarged EU.

The rights and conditions for national minorities are preconditions for political, social, economic stability in the future Europe. To prevent conflicts in Europe and to safe guard the peace in Europe.

We must get everyone to understand this fact. The time for revision of national borders in Europe is gone. We have already tried that too many times during the 20th century.

We all know the consequences of these historical experiences. It is not an advantage for the national minorities and the states. It creates new national minorities.

If we have forgotten this, just think of the development in former Yugoslavia. The risk is there always....

For that reason in Europe, we must develop a common European policy on national minorities.

National minorities are not just touchy problems, which it is better to try to overlook. It's an integral part of the civilised, democratic, political, social, cultural, and peace experiment that EU is.

In many parts of Europe we take the EU for granted. We discuss whether the union could risk developing into a centralised union threatening the sovereignty of nation states.

Most people overlook the risk that the EU – the skeleton binding us together – could collapse as a consequence of new nationalistic tendencies. In this relation it is important to say, that to be proud of one's identity, language, culture, nation – is natural – and not nationalistic intolerance.

National minorities have to be seen as an important part of the diversity of European culture and languages. It is delivering a richness to Europe, that is an advantage to Europe, compared with a more uniformed culture – USA.

National minorities have to be a part of the permanent European agenda of the future.

The debate yesterday and today has been very kind and very diplomatic. My question is: is this in reality covering the factual situation in Europe – or are we just closing our eyes?

- In western Europe because we already have new nationalistic parties/movements
- In eastern and central Europe because the countries want to be members of the EU
- And the EU wants to close all chapters of the *acquis communautaire* when the formal legislation is adopted in the applicant countries

We need to focus more on building trust among the majority and minority populations in the countries, and move from confrontation risk to co-operation wish.

We have focussed on the German-Danish model to be a model for Europe. I believe it can be used equally with other models but we have to remember how it historically came to reality. The number of minority people in DK and Germany is very small. The question is much more tense and touchy in countries where the minority is much higher in size (Estonia/Latvia), looking at the history and the independence roles of these countries. It will take generations to overcome and build the necessary trust – let's face this reality. The question is: Does a minority represent a Trojan horse to the security and independence of the country?

What is needed for the future in Europe is to develop the national minority policy in the EU and in the member countries.

Proposals for the future:

1. The Charter of fundamental rights has to be a part of the new constitutional treaty for the EU, including the rights of national minorities. This does not have to overrule the work done by the OSCE, The Council of Europe, the European Convention on Human Rights and the Human Rights Court. It shall merely implement the rights as a common value for the people and nations in the European Union. As legal signatory EU will be able to live up to these standards.

2. The Copenhagen Criteria's should be developed as a Code of Conduct (minimum standards) for national minorities in all present and coming EU-member countries. The development in this field has in to be followed systematically in the future enlarged European Union. This Code of Conduct has to be the skeleton for a European model.
3. National minorities must be put on the political agenda. It can be done in different ways:
 - In the Convention, in the IGC and in the new constitutional treaty for the EU.
 - In the European Parliament
 - By the national parliaments in COSAC, and at the Conference for the Speakers of Parliaments.
 - At Council meetings
 - Whether there should be established a formal Committee on National Minorities to co-operate with the EU-institutions, or the work done by the NGO FUEN has to strengthen and the co-operation with the EU-institutions organised systematically.
4. The regional co-operation in border regions has to be intensified, including the Interreg-programme. It does not only have to be bilateral co-operation, but also co-operation between the border regions in Europe, keeping in mind that it is not the only kind of national minorities, that also have to be involved.
5. Cultural diversity programme. In general, diversity should be developed and supported (language, culture, film, music, paintings, songs, literature etc). In a Europe with so many varieties and cultural qualities and in a more and more uniformed commercial culture industry, this will a strong advantage for both the majority and minority cultures. Cultural co-operation is bridging people.
6. The Role of the NGO FUEN. The role of FUEN has to be recognised and enforced. Funding from the EU has to be fund as a part of the systematic co-operation with the EU-institutions. Countries with national minorities also have to look at possibilities for funding the work done by FUEN.

What is needed for the future is organised permanent political and NGO-structure to be the meeting points for a permanent development of the policy for and with national minorities. It has to be moved from the backyard of the political agenda to the agenda.

As EU-Presidency this half year and with our experience from the German-Danish border region we feel a special responsibility to achieve this goal and to get it on the European agenda.

What we can't reach during our EU-presidency, we can follow up afterwards, and with so many countries represented here, we have a common task for the future.

To finalise my concluding remarks: It's time for action. It is my hope and wish that the proposals from this conference can be followed up. We know that as the organisers of this conference we have a special obligation and responsibility to follow up on this conference.

