

**Speech delivered by József Szájer, Hungary At the European Convention
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Ladies and Gentlemen,

The subject I would like to raise is closely related to the regional dimension of the EU, however, it brings us to a different cross-section of our common European enterprise.

It is my deep conviction, that the Union is not only the union of its member states but also a composition of different nations and ethnic groups. Some nations and some ethnicities in Europe do not have their own state. Some ethnic or national groups live in minority position, even if they may have a mother-nation which has her respective state.

The Eastern and Central European part of the continent, which is about to join the EU brings into the union also a great number of national and ethnic minorities, among them the very specific and difficult problems of the roma population. The Copenhagen democracy criteria give clear guidelines for the candidate states concerning the safeguarding of national minority rights. The recent decade in Yugoslavia has demonstrated to us clearly how significant it is to find a democratic way for the dissolution of ethnic and national conflicts.

Unfortunately neither the present EU institutional system and the *acquis communautaire*, nor the Charter of Fundamental Rights which we are about to incorporate into the future European Constitution do not deal sufficiently with the ethnic and national minority questions. My country, Hungary - as many other European countries - has a great variety of national minorities and we have a large number of Hungarian minorities (about 3,5 million) beyond our borders. We introduced years ago a minority institutional system to deal with this area.

The special situation of the minorities in Europe should be reflected also within the institutional structure of the European Union. Therefore I propose to the Convention to consider setting up the advisory Committee of National and Ethnic Minorities after the already existing pattern of Economic, Social and Regional Committees. This new committee should be provided with the advisory competences in areas which are closely related to the life and the interests of the national and ethnic minorities like culture, education, cross-border cooperation, employment policy etc.

I am sure that the national and ethnic minorities are constitutive elements of our common and united Europe. The EU finally has to face this enduring issue of promoting ethnic peace and cooperation through democratic institutions.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I will submit soon my detailed proposal to the Convention. I would like to ask your support for this important deeply European idea reinforcing our unity in diversity.