



Mrs. Ursula von der Leyen
President
European Commission

Mrs. Dubravka Šuica
Vice-President
European Commission

Copy to:
Mr. Donald Tusk
President, EPP

Brussels, 8 May 2020

Dear President von der Leyen,
Dear Vice-President Šuica,

The Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic has brought pain and sorrow to our societies, led to unprecedented challenges for health care systems and has had dramatic socio-economic impacts across Europe and in the whole world.

After the acute phase of the crisis, our societies will have to find the means to repair the social and economic damage, to regain trust in our institutions and to safeguard Europe's founding values of democracy, the rule of law and human rights.

In Europe, we can only recover together. No one country can respond by itself to all the problems, and even cooperation between Member States is not enough. We need the EU to play an effective and visible role in leading a common strategy, in implementing a contingency plan, in coping with the challenges at various levels and to give citizens the confident feeling that the EU as an institution, together with governments at all levels, as well as all stakeholders, are acting together to create effective solutions.

Dear President,
Dear Vice-President,

As president of the European Seniors' Union (ESU), I would like to express in this letter some concerns of our members, active senior citizens from all over Europe, who are in permanent contact with their fellow-citizens. As we seek, through our Associations, to build bridges between the

European policy level and citizens, we have continued to keep in regular contact with them, especially in these difficult times. Let me highlight some concerns:

- 1 In every situation, especially in the acute phase of the COVID-19 crisis, human rights are valuable. Older persons' human rights must be protected without discrimination on an equal basis together with others. Advanced age should never by itself be a criterion for excluding persons from specialised care. Every person must have access to the health care and long-term care he/she needs. In the first phase of lifting containment measures, it is essential that the risks of relaxing the containment measures are taken into account. Vulnerable groups, such as older fragile persons with underlying health conditions (e.g. cardiovascular disease, diabetes, chronic respiratory or cancer diseases), need protection but again reference to age solely must not be used as a criterion to make decisions concerning the lifting or not lifting of these measures, or to keep 'people of a certain age' in longer isolation.
- 2 During the acute phase of the spread of the COVID-19 virus, older persons, who are often grandparents, persons deserving respect from all generations, have lived through a very difficult situation. In residential care homes in particular, residents, medical and caring personnel have experienced a dramatic change in circumstances. Social distancing rules have aggravated the risk of social isolation in care homes, as well as for persons living alone. 'How does our society respect older persons? How do we care for the older generations? How do we organise long-term care in our societies?' These were already important questions over several decades in our ageing societies, but they became burning questions during the period of the CORONA crisis. Even when we take into account the competences of governments at several levels, and have the greatest respect for subsidiarity, we cannot deny that we are all concerned. Governments, stakeholders and citizens alike. Our societies need health, social and long-term care systems which encourage individualised support for older persons, while promoting their full inclusion in the community.
- 3 We welcome the European Roadmap towards lifting the COVID-19 containment measures, a gradual, coordinated approach and the continuing attempts to reach common agreements between member states. We all feel that we need solidarity more than ever. Starting with respect for all generations (no ageism), and creating structural and informal ways to connect with each other.
We hope that the recent dramatic experiences will elicit a broad reflection about our life-style, and especially for the protection of the most vulnerable persons in our society and how we care for vulnerable older persons. Long-term care is certainly one of the social and economic challenges across the EU. Therefore, we call for the integration of long-term care in the Social Scoreboard indicators, feeding into the preparation of the Country Reports in the context of the European Semester. It would complement the more qualitative assessment of the economic and social challenges across the EU, and it is thus one of the answers to the permanent challenges of demographic changes in our societies.
- 4 We need to boost initiatives for healthy ageing and life-long learning. Physical distancing should not lead to social isolation. Although the use of digital communication is very common in some countries, even for older generations, in other regions many older persons never learned it, and therefore miss out on an important instrument to communicate. In an inclusive society, cohesion between groups requires also that older persons have access to the available technology. Life-long learning, participation in the digital world of science and


culture and even social networking with children, grandchildren and friends, are all important gains of such learning processes. Access to the digital world: no generation should miss it.

Dear President,
Dear Vice-President,

Citizens hope that we will overcome this crisis together, therefore we need Europe, acting in solidarity 'with one great heart', as was highlighted several times. Whatever measures are taken, they should be assessed from the perspective of people's well being. This is what citizens expect and deserve.

We thank you for your attention to this letter and we wish you abundant success in the realisation of the European Roadmap for Recovery. As the European Seniors' Union (ESU), we are ready to support your efforts and initiatives via our Associations throughout our societies.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'A. Hermans', written in a cursive style.

Em. Prof. Dr. An Hermans