



EUROPEAN SENIORS' UNION (ESU)

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"Overcome the problems together!"

New Year's Message from An Hermans and Guido Dumon

In their year-end message conveyed on the internet, ESU President Prof. Dr. An Hermans and Secretary-General Guido Dumon sent all colleagues and friends of the ESU their best wishes for the New Year. In 2015, Europe had experienced one of the most difficult periods of its existence, they state: economic crises, an unknown number of refugees and asylum seekers, terror, danger of war... these challenges can only be encountered effectively together and in solidarity towards people in need. All political decision-makers are called upon to do everything possible to lead them to this goal. The 20th anniversary of the European Seniors' Union, celebrated in November, has given expression to the suffering of many people affected by war. At the same time, hope was awakened for the completion of European integration - "as a guarantor of peace and prosperity" - for which we feel responsible, together with the younger generation.



Bon Nadal i felix 2016!

Joululoa ja onnea
vuodelle 2016!

Frohe Weihnachten und
alles Gute für 2016!

All children in this world should grow up in peace

The European Capitals of Culture 2016

are **San Sebastián/Donostia in Spain, and Wrocław (Breslau) in Poland**. They were chosen as early as 2011. The opening ceremonies will begin soon. The number of planned events is huge.

Situated on the Atlantic coast, Basque **San Sebastián** is famous for its music and film festivals. Local artist Eduardo Chillida created a landmark for the city of 200,000 residents with a sculpture group of steel. Visitors are also fascinated by the quaint, winding Old Town, and praise San Sebastián for its (world famous) restaurants. Since the end of ETA terrorism, the attraction of the cultural, gourmet and coastal city, with its sandy beaches and promenades, increased further. Contact: www.dss2016.eu. Only about 75 kilometres away is Bilbao, another city rich in cultural sites and experiences, with more than 1 million inhabitants, the largest in the Basque Autonomous Community. Very popular is the Guggenheim Museum, built between 1991-1997 by Frank Gehry (Canada/USA); the transporter bridge in Bilbao, operating since 1941, is the oldest ever and a UNESCO World Heritage Site since 2006.

Wrocław/Breslau numbers over 600,000 inhabitants. It is the metropolis of Lower-Silesia/Województwo Dolnośląskie. The university town rich in culture, with its architectural sights from Gothic brick churches and baroque palaces to neoclassical residences, lies on the river Oder/Odra. The Gothic cathedral, with a wealth of historical art treasures, rises on an island. In the middle of the market-place (Rynek in Polish), laid out in 1241, is the Gothic town hall from the 14th/15th centuries. Its east façade, with a magnificently decorated central gable, is a landmark of the whole of Silesia. The "Centennial Hall"/"Hala Ludowa", built in 1913, is a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Towards the end of the 2nd World War, the Nazis had declared the then German Breslau to be a fortress against the Red Army. Thousands of residents, as well as convoys of refugees and soldiers, lost their lives. The devastation was immense; the reconstruction achievements undertaken by Poland are admirable. In Wrocław, a group of the Polish Seniors' Union PUS has been formed, whose registration however, is still pending. Maybe that will succeed in this year...

A Cross of Nails from Coventry...

... was awarded to the Human Rights Center e.V./ penitentiary memorial Cottbus (DE; Brandenburg) on 10th December. The award was presented during an evangelical church service in which the bishop of Berlin-Brandenburg-Silesian Upper Lusatia (EKBO), Dr. Markus Dröge, delivered the sermon. With the tribute by Canon Dr. Sarah Hill from Coventry (UK) and Olivier Schuegraf, the work of the Association, predominantly former political prisoners from the GDR era (1949-1990), is acknowledged. Also, four members of the Cottbus Seniors' Union, who are connected to the Association (MRZ), witnessed the ceremony in the "Pentacon-hall", in which the former prisoners had to assemble parts for cameras. The Cross of Nails was received by Dieter Dombrowski (CDU), as Chairman of the MRZ, and Sylvia Wähling, Executive Chairman and director of the Memorial. It is the first time that a non-sacred space was added to the Cross of Nails Community. The Cross of Nails received its place of honour in a room in which Christian prayers were held during the GDR era, in which the Catholic priest from that time remembered with moving words. Furthermore, it is unique in that the buildings of the former penitentiary were purchased by its previous prisoners, and are now their responsibility.



OKR Oliver Schuegraf of the Community of the Cross of Nails in Germany and Dr. Sarah Hill from Coventry cathedral (UK) present the award to Sylvia Wähling and Dieter Dombrowski, who was himself a political prisoner in Cottbus.

... and a memorial stone for the Peace Centre

Immediately after the award of the Cross of Nails on International Human Rights Day, at the same place there was another highlight: ESU Vice-president Janusz Marszalek received, for the future Peace Centre in his home-town of Oświęcim (PL), a memorial stone that came from the masonry of the former Nazi and GDR penitentiary Cottbus.

It will be included in the already considerable collection of the Polish Seniors' Union (PUS), whose chairman J. Marszalek is. Responsibility for the project "Centre for Peace/Peace Mound Centre" is in the hands of the PUS. The contributions of donations from around the world and testimonials are symbols of the desire for reconciliation and peace. Already since 2001, Cottbus is represented by stones from the medieval monastery church and the former weaving school in the temporary "Auschwitz" called "City of Peace" - an initiative of the local Seniors' Union.



Canon Dr. Hill blesses the memorial stone from the Human Rights Center donated to Oświęcim.

2nd from right: Janusz Marszalek, to his left, the chairman of the Jewish Community in Kraków.

Far left: Armin Dieter Ehrlichmann, Seniors' Union Cottbus, far right: the Editor

Karel Schwarzenberg (CZ) honoured

On the eve of the International Day of Human Rights, Manfred Weber, Chairman of the EPP Group in the European Parliament, honoured the Czech politician and enthusiastic European with the Robert-Schuman-Medal. With that, Schwarzenberg's commitment to human values, the construction of Europe and the struggle for peace was recognized.

Under President Vaclav Havel, Schwarzenberg was Chancellor of the Czech Republic, later he became foreign minister and chairman of the new party TOP 09, which belongs to the EPP family. The abbreviation TOP stands for tradice, odpovědnost, prosperita (tradition, responsibility, prosperity). In 2013, he was narrowly defeated by Milos Zeman in the presidential election. Since November 2015, Schwarzenberg is an honorary chairman of TOP 09; the chairmanship was taken over by Miroslav Kalousek. Ludek Niedermeyer, chairman of the Czech Group in the European Parliament, stated on the occasion of the award that this is the first time it has been given to a Czech, and emphasised the courage and determination of his well-known European compatriot. Unfortunately, the suggestion by the ESU to set up a seniors' association is still refused by TOP 09.

Vandeputte and Kremer remain in office

With this decision of the EPP-management committee (Political Assembly) in November, the trio of the General Secretariat is once again complete: after confirming Antonio López Istúriz (ES) as Secretary General at the Congress in Madrid in October (*in SI No. 126 it had accidentally moved to Dublin – apologies!*), his former deputy Luc Vandeputte and Christian Kremer now received the vote for another term. ESU President An Hermans has congratulated them warmly.

Concerns about Poland's direction

have been expressed publicly on 2nd January, according to Manfred Weber (EU). The Law and Justice/Prawo i Sprawiedliwość (PiS) party, which took over government responsibility in the autumn, has put core European principles up for debate, expressed the EPP-Group Chairman. He referred to laws that restrict the powers of the Constitutional Court and jeopardise the independence of public service media. The Vice-president of the EU Commission, Frans Timmermans, sees the danger of diffracting European law. Werner Gaebler, a long-time county chairman of the Seniors' Union in Brandenburg (DE), sees the good results of Polish-German reconciliation being threatened. In Warsaw before Christmas, tens of thousands have protested in the streets against the “dismantling of democracy” and a “turbo-Orbanisation”.

OSCE chaired by Germany

A focal point of the next twelve months is the stabilization of the situation in Ukraine, where the officially renewed recent ceasefire between government and separatist troops is crumbling again. At the time of the change in the OSCE chairmanship on 1st January, the EU's free-trade agreement with Ukraine came into force, that provides an almost complete absence of customs barriers in mutual trade. Another priority issue for the OSCE in 2016 will be the overcoming of the refugee flows and aid to their countries of origin.

The CDU chairman and Federal Chancellor, Angela Merkel, has acknowledged in this connection in her New Year's address: “Thank you for the overwhelming and actually moving wave of spontaneous readiness to help that we have experienced over the past year.” In view of the refusal of several EU countries to accept asylum-seekers, the Austrian Chancellor remarked recently: “Solidarity is not a one-way street”.

For Gernot Erler, the Special Representative of the German government for the period of the OSCE chairmanship, the involvement of citizens, therefore civil society in the political processes of the present and the future is a matter of urgency. At the same time, he wants to contribute to a better implementation of human rights obligations by the OSCE member-states. Foreign Minister Frank Walter Steinmeier, according to his own words, would rather have “cooperation instead of confrontation.”

Maria del Carmen Quintanilla Barba remains an MP

In the elections to the Spanish Parliament (Cortes Generales) on 20th December, her party, Partido Popular (PP), remained the strongest political force with almost 29 percent of the valid votes cast, however it lost 60 seats, and by this edition's deadline, the formation of a government was then not in sight. Nevertheless, the Chairman of the National Commission for Equality and ESU Vice-president,

Maria del Carmen Quintanilla Barba was re-elected as a member of the Chamber of Deputies. She stood as a candidate in her home region of Ciudad Real. Congratulations! The Chamber of Deputies has 350 members; in the second Chamber, the Senate, the regional parliaments send 266 MPs. The current Prime Minister, Mariano Rajoy, is chairman of the PP; he was in an electoral alliance with the Partido Aragonés (PAR).

Added to the UNESCO World Documentary Heritage (“Memory of the World”)

in October last year were the original manuscript of the “Mass in B minor” by Johann Sebastian Bach (originally called the “Catholic Mass”), the so-called “Hand Bible” of Martin Luther (printed in 1494 in Brescia/Italy) and a print of the 95 Theses of Luther (Nuremberg 1517). These three documents of the highest value are kept in the Berlin State Library, Unter den Linden. At the beginning of December, they were available to the public for a day. The Hebrew Bible served the Reformer as an important, though not the only, source for the (first) translation of the Old Testament from Hebrew into German, which appeared in 1534. (Before Luther, it was translated from Latin.) The Bible contains margin notes and small misprint corrections by Luther as well as two previous owners (probably Jewish). Bach wrote at the end of the Mass-autograph the letters SDG (= Soli Deo Gloria/Glory to God alone) - testimony to his deep roots in the Christian faith, and he did not hesitate, as a Lutheran, to compose a conventional Mass in Catholic churches.

In Brief

ESU Vice-president Elke Garczyk was re-elected as deputy Chairman of the CSU Seniors' Union (DE/Bavaria).

Tatjana Zelko (Minsk) is hindered for a prolonged period by a handicap (hand fracture) of her activities for the seniors' organization "Our Generation".

In the magazine “Souverän” of the CDU Seniors' Union (DE), Issue No. 4/2015, is a report about the ESU anniversary event on 6th November 2015 in Brussels. Since 2001, the ESU has reserved at least one page in each “Souverän”.

At the national party-day of the CDU in Karlsruhe in mid-December, the Seniors' Union was present with an information stand, which was well attended.

The information portal of the CDU Seniors' Union, run by Claus Bernhold (DE), was taken off the internet at the end of December; with it, the most current publication of our Newsletter was omitted. However, on the website of the ESU (address: see below), “SI” continues to be available – in German followed shortly by the English edition.

The CDU Seniors' Union has renewed its internet presence/website, which has greatly facilitated the finding of sought-after contributions and contact addresses. Homepage: www.senioren-union.de. On the home page, the number of members of the Seniors' Union is given as 56,000. E-mail address: seniorenunion@cdu.de

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