



## **EUROPEAN SENIORS' UNION (ESU)**

**Newsletter "SENIOR INTERNATIONAL" Issue No. 129 February 2016**

### **Europe: majority of citizens want a fair distribution of refugees**

"The refugee situation splits Europe's governments," it says in the preface of a new Bertelsmann study from Germany that was published on 16<sup>th</sup> February - just before this Issue was finalised. "Some want to accommodate asylum seekers, others refuse. Different to the majority of the EU population. "Because 79 percent of people surveyed in 28 EU-member states on asylum and migration "expect a common response to the new challenge and want a fair distribution of new arrivals across all European countries". It continues: "The EU institutions should take the lead in responsibility, -according to the opinion of more than half of Europeans. 27 percent would like a division of responsibility between the EU and member States. Only 22 percent said they would rather leave migration policy exclusively to their own country. A majority of almost 70 percent also support the demand to reduce EU funds to those states who refuse to carry their share of responsibility".

According to ZEIT ONLINE, 87 percent of the nearly 11,500 people questioned agreed with the common security of the EU external border. According to the same source, of the countries incorporated in the EU between 2004 and 2007 such as Poland, the Czech Republic, Bulgaria and Romania, only 54 percent approved the fair distribution of asylum seekers – in the old member states, with 85 percent it is clearly higher.

For Aart De Geus, chairman of the board of the Bertelsmann Foundation, it is certain that a distinct majority of Europeans directed, by their response, a clear message to the upcoming EU summit: "*Find a European solution, based on solidarity, that brings stability and preserves freedom of travel.*"

### **President An Hermans visits Hungary and Slovenia**

Regional conferences on current issues are the main areas of work of the European Seniors' Union (ESU). In the 21<sup>st</sup> year of its existence, the ESU will be hosting regional conferences for the first time in Hungary (26/27 May) and Slovenia (in autumn). In the interest of solid preparation, President em. Prof. An Hermans (BE) travelled recently to both countries. She was accompanied by Secretary-General Guido Dumon (BE). In Budapest, they were invited by the Robert Schuman Institute located there, named after one of the "founding fathers" of a united Europe. In Budapest, currently two seniors' organizations are ESU members. In Ljubljana, discussions were held with the chairmen of the three members of the ESU associations: Anton Božatay, one of the ESU Vice-presidents, Jose Jurkovic and Zvonko Zinrajh. The Praesidium of the ESU will finalise the agenda of both meetings at its meeting on 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> March in Leuven (BE).



*An Hermans in Ljubljana with Anton Bogataj, Zvonko Zinrajh and Jose Jurkovic*

### **EVP/EPP: management committee confirms working groups**

The Political Assembly of the European People's Party appointed four working groups in the presence of An Hermans at the end of January:

- for European Policy (Chair: Joseph Daul (FR), EPP President, and David McAllister (DE));
- for Economic and Social Policy (Dara Murphy and Corien Wortmann-Kool);
- for membership (Paulo Rangel, Portugal);
- Ad Hock Group on Agriculture (Christian Schmidt (DE) and Michel Dantin (FR).

As auditors, ESU Honorary-president Leif Hallberg (CD Sweden) and Ingo Fridrichd (CSU Bavaria/DE) were elected.

### **Austria: “strengthening the power of assertiveness”**

This shall be the goal, according to the chairwoman of the Seniors' Association (ÖSB), Ingrid Korosec. In the magazine, “SIS“she pointed out that the ÖSB is the strongest seniors' organization in the country, which is a positive development (more than 305,000 members!) that she takes as a challenge. Three of the six sub-organizations of the People's Party (ÖVP) have now a woman at the top, for the ÖSB it is the first time in its more than 63 year-old history. Ms Korosec, up to now elected First Deputy, took over the management function of the ÖSB from Prof. Dr. Khol (74), who was nominated as a candidate of the People's Party for the election to the Federal Presidency in January. (SI reported recently.)

### **Czech Republic: education campaign and new action groups**

The Czech Christian Democratic Seniors/SKS launched an educational campaign at the beginning of this year. As Doz. Lidmila Nemcova, Vice-president of the ESU, announced from Prague, seniors and other interested parties – also from the Catholic parishes - meet every month in the Moravian town of Žďár

nad Sázavou (in German: Saar) for a four-hour seminar. Its motto is “Lifelong Learning - the active senior”. It covers: the papal encyclicals, business ethics and the social responsibility of entrepreneurs, world religions and their relationships, cooperation and solidarity between generations, the media and power, as well as “the message of the saints for today”. In parallel with these educational offers, the SKS-Seniors strive for the creation of action groups outside the capital in order to increase its influence. They want to host an ESU Regional Conference once again next year.

### **Signs of hope for religious boundaries**

That the leaders of the Catholic and the Russian-Orthodox Churches met officially for the first time since the schism of 1054 has received worldwide attention, and is encouraging for all those who advocate peace and reconciliation. Pope Francis and the Patriarch of the Russian Orthodox Church of Moscow and All Russia, Kirill I, conducted their talks in Cuba's capital Havana and exchanged a brotherly kiss. They expressed that Christian unity should be restored, and called on politicians to do more for the protection of Christians, especially in Syria and Iraq. In their closing declaration, the church leaders regretted that there had been “conflicts and wounds” between their churches. In sermons that the Pope held afterwards in Mexico, he called for greater efforts for a dignified life of the citizens. Mexico has – after Brazil - the second largest Catholic community.

### **Greece: EU parliamentarians received differentiated signals**

Three MEPs sent to Greece attested the Athens government after their return some success in the reforms, but also noted that different and sometimes contradictory signals were sent out from the economy of the country. For Esther de Lange, Vice-chairman of the EPP Group, reforms in the pension and tax system in the interest of higher public revenue are indispensable, as they are a condition for the grant of additional financial aid for the crisis-shaken country. Since several weeks, farmers in Athens and other Greek cities have taken to the streets against higher contributions for pension insurance.

### **Eastern Partnership: more recognition for young politicians!**

One of the main objectives of the European Partnership/EaP is the promotion of civil society. So the Youth Forum of the EaP, planned for September in Bratislava, will address the situation of young people between 18 and 35. The reason given: in the opinion of the organisers, young citizens who are involved in the democratic process of their countries, spontaneously or organised, deserve much more attention. Until now, priority attention was given to the organisers and participants in seminars, workshops and similar. This would concern not only the six EaP countries, but also other countries, it said in a statement. The forum should give the politically active young people the opportunity to bring their concerns closer to the political elites. They want no longer be seen as an object of care, but as active members of society.

With the preparation of the Youth Forum, an EaP subgroup, “Contacts Between the Elderly”, led by Tatjana Zelko from Minsk will participate, who also brought a parallel event involving the Seniors Forum into the discussion. Their seniors' organization, “Our Generation”, has observer status in the ESU.

### **Belarus: demand a stop to price increases**

The organization “Our Generation”, associated with the ESU, and the Seniors' Association of the Belarusian Christian Democrats, directed a common petition to the organs of state. In it, clarification about the rapidly rising cost of living – especially for water, gas and electricity – is demanded. This price increase makes it difficult for pensioners to cover their basic needs for existence. The Ministry of Social Affairs recently estimated the pension amounted to the equivalent of 48 EURO. There has been no Increase since a long time. Both organizations declared their support for “normal reforms” without turning the price spiral further.

Meanwhile, the EU has lifted some of the sanctions imposed on the Belarusian Lukashenko regime. The given explanation is the willingness of the government to co-operate in international affairs (example: the Minsk Protocol of 2015).

### **“Helping was routine”**

According to the former East German civil-rights campaigner and Defence Minister, Rainer Eppelmann (Berlin), the basic Christian belief is the basis for Angela Merkel's refugee policy. She came from a Protestant vicarage in Brandenburg (Templin in the Uckermark), in which responsibility for the residents of a neighbouring large diaconal institution was a way of life. “Helping belonged to everyday life.” Also, the classical, humanistic education given by her parents shaped her, according to Pastor Eppelmann.



*Dr. Angela Merkel is a welcome guest at the European Seniors' Union.*

*She values the voluntary commitment of the elderly, who like all others, grant help to asylum-seekers.*

*She was greeted by President Worms in Berlin in middle February 2013.*

*Next to the German Chancellor: Tatjana Zelko (Minsk); left: Vice-president Heinz K. Becker (Vienna).*

*Photo by U.W.*

## Welcome

As the Bible Society in Stuttgart (DE) announced, the demand for Bibles by Christian refugees is enormous. They are requested from parishes and church institutions, reception stations and helper groups. More than one third of the enquiries concerned the holy scriptures in Arabic, and 21 percent in English. More and more church communities are granting accommodation to the asylum-seekers. In Berlin-Kreuzberg, at the beginning of the year, a place of worship was made into a “refugee church”, in which those seeking help could receive advice about everyday life.

## “Young European 2015”

This award was presented in Berlin to the Ukrainian, Evgenija Lopata. The Schwarzkopf Stiftung based its decision on the commitment of the young woman as a bridge-builder between cultures and her commitment to overcome a political and social wall. Even as a student, Evgenija was a dedicated volunteer; in 2013, she was director of the International Poetry Festival Meridian Czernovitz. A poetry tour followed through Austria, Ukraine, Poland, the Czech Republic and Germany. The speech in her honour was delivered by the Ukrainian Ambassador on 21<sup>st</sup> January.

## “SI” in Austria

Everyone in Austria receiving the online edition the magazine of the Seniors' Association (SIS) will also receive the Newsletter to read regularly, the ÖSB Deputy Secretary-General, Sabine Walpitscheker, assured the editor. So far, 11,000 people have made use of the digital offer of the ÖSB head-office. Furthermore, “SI” will be published in the monthly print edition of the “Seniorenbund-Info-Service”. THANK YOU! The Newsletter can also be read on the ESU website: <http://esu-epp.eu>

## Obituary

With Armin/Dieter Ehrlichmann, who died unexpectedly on 26<sup>th</sup> January at 74, the German and the European Seniors' Union have lost an outstanding colleague. The reconciliation with Poland was especially dear to him. Since many years, he supported the “Peace Centre in Oświęcim” project and the Rajsco Children's Village. In the Cottbus Seniors' Union (DE), which he chaired, Ehrlichmann collected donations in December for Christmas parcels that have been handed over to the director of a human rights centre for Kurdish refugee children in northern Iraq. For Tatjana Zelko (Minsk), he was a moral support in taking care of political prisoners. The Editor loses in Armin a good friend, at whose funeral, alongside many companions taking part, ESU Vice- president Janusz Marszalek from Poland promised the continuation of friendly cooperation.

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