



EUROPEAN SENIORS' UNION (ESU)

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Building Europe's Future Together!

Report of the 7th Summer Academy in Vienna
by Claus Bernhold

At the invitation of the ESU, 50 leaders of seniors' organizations from 22 countries came together in Vienna. The topic of the traditional "Summer Academy" this year was: "Europe must not die." It already was decided several months ago, and now gained additional relevance because of the "Brexit" decision.

For the 7th time already, the Austrian Seniors' Union (ÖSB) has hosted this conference; it could be certain of receiving support from the Political Academy of the ÖVP and the Wilfried Martens Centre for European Studies (WMCES) once again.

Opening greetings came from: Dr. Werner Fasslabend, Honorary President of the Political Academy (PoIAk); Tomi Huhtanen, Director of WMCES and Ingrid Korosec, President of the ÖSB. Dr. Marilies Flemming, European Commissioner of the ÖSB, also spoke and is to be thanked for the organization of the Summer Academies in Vienna from the beginning. In the first part of the discussions, Prof. Dr. An Hermans, President of the European Seniors' Union, presented a video of the essential outcomes of the ESU.

The conference was united about the responsibility of European seniors to the community. It was emphasised repeatedly that, with their experience, they ought to help to shape the future of the continent. We published the "Resolution of Vienna", based on this determination and unanimously adopted, in issue No. 135 of 4th July.



The new Federal Chairman of the Austrian Seniors', Ingrid Korosec, during her speech

Ingrid Korosec, the new Chairman of the hosting Austrian Seniors' Union, emphasised the topic of the conference "Europe must not fail" and stressed, among other things: in an incredibly populist campaign, people in the UK were deceived into thinking they would be better off without the EU, and with Brexit they would save hundreds of millions of pounds a week (!) and this money would be put into the British health system (NHS). It is no wonder that the majority of the elderly, in particular, followed the battle cries of the Leave supporters. Already on the day after the vote it had to be recognised: this promise does not exist any more, it was described as an error. This populism must be opposed in countries! "We have to consider Brexit as an opportunity to restart the EU!"

Dr. Werner Fasslabend analysed the actual impact of the Brexit: "I see a "lose-lose-lose-lose-win" situation, that is, four losers and only one winner. The UK is among the losers because we now see internal conflicts with Scotland and Ireland, and because we will have to recognise a decoupling of the direct neighbours. Europe will lose its second largest economy from among its members, which will decrease Europe's weight in the world. The Community loses a critical member that has made many developments and decisions possible by its approval. The world loses, because the developments arising from Brexit do not improve further a fragile world economic situation with security. Putin and China belong to the winners, because the destabilization of Europe, and the Western world in general, is in their interest."

"Return to European roots! Federalistic, but not centralised and above all less technocratic" was the concise message of Tomi Huhtanen. He portrayed upheavals in society: "Since 1840, life expectancy has increased by three months every year. A child born today has a 50 percent chance of being more than 100 years old. This is not fiction, this is Europe! Lifelong learning is therefore a key point for the successful future of Europe and its citizens. The previously known three stages of life (note: education / working life / retirement) is

breaking down; in the future, we can expect four, five or even six life stages, alternating with each other, and thus completely new career directions!”

After analysing the current decisions around Brexit, Huhtanen noted: “In order to develop Europe further, we must go back to basics, to the founding principles of the EU. The European narrative today is perceived only as technocratic. We need to work harder together.” And this is what was meant initially.

In summary: the result of the British referendum is a consequence of an unprecedented disinformation campaign. The remaining 27 states have to make decisions soon. In particular, the refugee problem must be solved, because this preoccupies the older generation in particular.



Several participants of 7th ESU Summer Academy in Vienna

In her presentation the ESU President, Prof. Dr. An Hermans, summed up the topics and results of the previous six Summer Academies in Vienna. In this regard, she observed in particular the relationship of different generations to each other: “We started last year to collect life stories in Europe. Thus we can pass on experiences and the events we witnessed from the older to the younger ones and so we can learn from each other. With this work we want to bridge possible gaps between young and old!” With this, the ESU President presented a video that emphasised at the end: “we want a Europe that places people at the centre. A Europe that makes no distinction based on gender, age, religious belief or origin. A Europe that is able to maintain itself in a constantly changing world. Let us work on this together!”

In a comprehensive presentation, the causes and consequences of the British referendum on "Brexit" were examined by Prof. Steven Van Hecke, University of Leuven. He pointed out that Prime Minister Cameron had promised a referendum on EU membership at the beginning of 2013 as the price for the support of the Euro-sceptics in the then new elections.

The result of the current vote stands in contrast to that of 1975, when Margaret Thatcher led the supporters' camp.

Investigations into individual results showed that the UK as a whole is divided as regards approval or rejection, stressed Van Hecke.

"Those who think, want to remain" could be a headline, because evidently the highly educated segments of the population have voted unambiguously to remain in the EU.

Both turnout and rejection rise with increasing age.

In addition, further divergences were observed: geographical, and between Labour and Tories.

The application of Article 50 of the Lisbon Treaty will – according to the speaker - have far-reaching consequences in the United Kingdom, especially - but not only - in the areas of economic and trade relations.

The majority of the remaining 27 EU-Member States have rejected further concessions and favours for the UK.

Van Hecke considers that a second referendum to correct this result is unrealistic - unless an early parliamentary election makes new promises regarding this. Also, after the European elections in 2019, the speaker foresees the EPP being the strongest group in the European Parliament.

The repercussions and consequences for the EU and the UK were the topics of a lively discussion. Opinions differed about, for example, the statements of President Juncker regarding the completion of monetary union, or concerning CETA.

(A further conference report will follow.)

United Kingdom: Change at the head of government

Meanwhile, British Prime Minister David Cameron has given his official 10 Downing Street residence in London to his successor, Theresa May. The former Interior minister in Cameron's Cabinet was elected as Leader of the Conservative Party on 11th July, and eventually ran for the top position in the government. Queen Elizabeth II appointed her on 13th July as Prime Minister. Mrs. May had not voted in favour of Brexit but will maintain the result of the vote and work for a strong United Kingdom.

The ESU currently has no partner organization in the UK

Eastern Partnership: An Hermans' address /New groups

Two Seniors' groups from Azerbaijan and one from Moldova have affiliated themselves to the "Eastern Partnership"/EaP. They were warmly welcomed in Brussels, as Tatyana Zelko

reported from Minsk, at the conference of its sub-group “Contact between Seniors” in mid-June.

As a speaker at a meeting occurring at the same time as the “Civil Society Forum” of the EaP, ESU President Prof. Dr. An Hermans, described the aim of the European Seniors’ Union as to give a voice to the elderly and their organizations – at both the social as well as the political level, according to the Conference bulletin.

The preservation of human rights is equally important to both young and old. An Hermans called for seniors to live in dignity and as an active part of society. Although the EU is not responsible for retirement benefits, it probably could bring success by continuing discussions with governments.

A discussion of Erasmus+ as well as the situation and future of the EaP was moderated by Hovsep Khurhdyan, the chairman of the Armenian Seniors’ Association, which cooperates with the ESU. He is coordinator of the entire Working Group 4 “Contacts between Citizens” of the EaP Civil Society Forum. He considers the EU’s cooperation with countries belonging to the Eastern Partnership (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, Ukraine) as extremely important.

Georges Dassis: EU - “the greatest achievement of the century”

In an interview by Dr. Victoria Zined for “EZA aktuell” with the Greek Georges Dassis (pictured), the President of the European Economic and Social Committee made this noteworthy remark. Thus “Europe” did a lot of things “terribly badly” because it “lacks courage, vision and solidarity”.



Dassis, in office since 2015, sees shortcomings in economic and social areas, but also in foreign, defence and European policy. He regrets that the Lisbon Treaty is not a school subject and doubts that all politicians have read the fundamental Articles 2 and 3 that mention the term “social” five times. The rapid implementation of social objectives would help that “citizens have a connection to the project once again” (apparently EUROPE is

meant). The EU may be imperfect, "but it is the greatest achievement of the European people during the 20th century, and we must of course continue to work on improving it, because I see no better future for our children."

EZA stands for "European Centre for Workers' Questions," which has Observer status in the ESU. The Secretary-General is Sigrid Schraml. Contact: www.eza.org; email eza@eza.org, Tel.: +49 2223 - 2998 – 14.

Belarus: United against privatization stop

Six social organizations have protested against a government regulation, according to which the privatisation of owner-occupied apartments and houses would be stopped from 1st July. This measure is judged as anti-social. Privatisation will be allowed only for large sums (several thousand Euros), which excludes the majority of interested parties from the outset. Counted among the signatories to the appeal are the ESU partner-organization "Nasha Pakalenne/Our generation", human rights and war-veterans organisations, as well as trade union representatives.

EU / Latvia: Roswitha Gottbehüt with doctorate

The long-standing EZA General-Secretary, Roswitha Gottbehüt, was awarded an honorary doctorate by the Latvian Christian Academy. At the festive ceremony in Jurmala, the Academy Director, Skaidrite Gutmane, paid tribute to the contacts and cooperation maintained since 2004, which came about at the suggestion of Dr. Gottbehüt, and which have promoted social dialogue.

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