



EUROPEAN SENIORS' UNION

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ESU Congress in Leuven: on target !

On 4th and 5th November, more than 200 delegates met for the IX. ESU Congress in Leuven. They came from 30 member Associations in 23 countries to the Flanders-Brabant provincial and university town, which had endured considerable damage in both world wars by German troops. Now, thanks to many re-established sights, modern new buildings and places of cultural interest, Leuven presents itself as an attraction. The Congress participants were able to enjoy an accompanied tour of the town and a visit to the special exhibition "500 Years of "Utopia" by Thomas More." At a reception by the 1st Councillor, Dirk Vansina, the international guests gained a glimpse of the inside of the historic Town Hall, whose astonishing richly structured facade is admired world-wide.



President Prof. Dr. An Hermans with the guest speaker Herman Van Rompuy

The discussions held in the Provincial House of Flanders-Brabant focused on the main theme "Together for a safe and social Europe!" Lectures – above all by Hermann Van Rompuy, former President of the EU Council - presentations, panel contributions and discussion

rounds were marked by the conviction that this goal is irreplaceable and deserves the commitment of all democratic forces. This spirit is reflected also in a DECLARATION, to which the Congress participants gave their consent after intensive discussion. It has been shaped by adherence to the proven principles of the ESU since the “Magna Charta” of 2004, as well as by the current challenges to all democratic powers in our continent. To master them is a matter of old and young working in social solidarity and with mutual respect.

In the course of the Congress, the Praesidium of the ESU was re-elected. With a vote of 97 percent and no votes against, the delegates reaffirmed President Prof. Dr. An Hermans (BE) in her office, which she has held since 2013. By her side, Guido Dumon will serve as General Secretary and Etienne Vanderroost as Treasurer. All three of them perform their office – as do most of the delegates - as volunteers.



The new Praesidium (from left to right): Christine von Stefenelli, Guido Dumon, Gabriele Peus-Bispinck, Antonis Demetriades, Etienne Vanderroost, An Hermans, Nikolay Andreev, Ann Räämet, Herman Van Rompuy (guest), Elke Garczyk, Carmen Quintanilla Barba, Zvonko Zinrajh, Marjatta Nykänen, Heinz K. Becker, Lidmila Nemcova. Not in the picture: Janusz Marszalek

Elected as Vice-presidents were: (in alphabetical order) Prof. Nikolay Andreev (BG), Heinz K. Becker, MEP (AT), Antonis Demetriades (CY), Elke Garczyk (DE/Bavaria), Janusz Marszalek (PL), Doz. Lidmila Nemcova (CZ), Marjatta Nykänen – new – (FI), Dr. Gabriele Peus-Bispinck (DE), Carmen Quintanilla Barba (ES), Ann Räämet – who held this position until 2013 – (EE), Dr. Christine von Stefenelli (IT/South Tirol) and Zvonko Zinrajh – new – (SL).

Not standing for re-election were: Jouni Mykkänen (FI), Prof. Dr. Sture Eriksson (SE) and Anton Bogataj (SL). The auditors are: Clode Carbon-Frisch (LU) and Ingeborg Uhlenbrock (DE). To the delight of all the delegates, the ESU honorary presidents Maria Mantziafou-Kanelloupou (GR), Elisabeth Cornil-Dispoux (BE) and Leif Hallberg (SR), as well as Dr. Bernhard Worms (DE), previously ESU President from 2001 to 2013, have participated in the

Congress. A delegation of CDA-Seniors from the Netherlands, under the leadership of Jenny Geluk Poortvliet, was warmly welcomed, who only recently became full ESU members.



At the Congress for the first time: Jenny Geluk Poortvliet, Jos van Riet und Monique Vogelaar (from left to right) from the CDA-Seniors in the Netherlands

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The delegates stood up in memory of all those colleagues who died since 2013

The President's report, presented to the delegates as a brochure, is a very comprehensive presentation of the many different activities undertaken by the headquarters in Brussels and the member Associations over the last three years. With regional conferences and summer academies, position papers, networking with foundations, exploring life stories, and up-to-date information on the website, on Facebook and through this "SI" Newsletter, the European Seniors' Union has increased its political influence on opinion-forming and political action alongside the EPP. This was confirmed, in his greeting message, by the EPP chairman Joseph Daul, by the Belgian Minister of Justice Koen Geens, the CD&V party chairman Wouter Beke, and finally by Chris Taes, chairman of the Provincial Council of Flanders–Brabant, who is to be thanked for making the conference room available.

The second day of the Congress concluded with the European anthem, in which it states: "All people will be brothers." ("SI" will return to the speeches and contributions later).



Reception in Leuven Town Hall

“Secure a dignified life for everyone!”

THE LEUVEN DECLARATION

Decided by the IX. Congress of the ESU / The most important statements

The Declaration adopted by the delegates is reminiscent of earlier statements and position resolutions - especially on the occasion of the founding of the ESU in 1995, the “Magna Charta” (2004) and the 20th birthday of the previous year. Following on from the VIII (Election) Congress of 2013, which described the common path “to an age-friendly society”, it is now said

in Chapter 1: **“The ESU cares about the future of Europe**, and in particular about the well-being of present and future generations who will uphold the values that brought and will continue to bring peace and prosperity in Europe. They count on it that decision makers at all levels and in particular in the European People’s Party (EPP) will do everything possible, with effective and transparent European policy, to increase the trust that citizens have in the EU.”

In Chapter 2, the decision makers are asked to respond **to the needs and opportunities of demographic change**. Everyone should learn “that Europe is a safe place to live and work and that Europe protects them”.

In Chapter 3, it states that “with more than 120 million people at risk of poverty or social exclusion”, the **efforts must continue “to guarantee all citizens a dignified life”**. The EU, governments and all parties concerned are called “to develop initiatives in the areas of social inclusion, health care and (adequate) pensions. The civil society is ready to promote an inclusive society for all age groups.

In Chapter 4, “all decision-makers and responsible citizens” are urged to work together “to find sustainable solutions to the urgent problems of the refugees in order to protect and safeguard their rights and guarantee security to European citizens. The ESU and the Member States need to optimise, with responsibility and solidarity, a common migration and asylum policy, in which every Member State takes part.”

The ESU calls for (in Chapter 5) “an **effective European security and defence policy** including the right balance between preventive and repressive measures”. Particular attention is paid to the “stabilisation of our immediate neighbourhood.” The exercise of global responsibility must be accompanied by security measures and protection within Europe.

Chapter 6: “The ESU attaches great importance to good governance, based on the rule of law, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms and democracy.” The ESU calls to fight “corruption in all areas of society”.

It is emphasised that these principles in internal and external relations, “in particular in the European neighbourhood polices” have to be strengthened.

Ready for cooperation

Finally, the ESU emphasises: **“The participants of the IX. Congress in Leuven are convinced and aware of the importance of Europe for peace and freedom, for security and well-being, and for the fulfilment of all citizens. Also in the future, by means of cooperation and active political participation, they will keep conveying and defending the European values”**

Migrants to integrate - but how?

Why and how migrants are to be integrated into social life was the topic of workshops of the Konrad-Adenauer-Foundation (KAS) in St. Augustin (DE). There was a consensus that (political) parties should be open to them. Dr. Stefan Gehrold, from the KAS's European office, even spoke of a “obligation” to their reception. Their placement on candidate lists should allow a representation of minorities at the political level in the long-term. The ESU President, em. Prof. Dr. An Hermans (Brussels), moderator of the event, said that it was not just a matter of looking at the political level – rather, it was about giving the new citizens their own experiences in living together in a multinational society. In the discussion, the common interests of the “locals” and migrants were emphasised repeatedly, but also specific (election) campaigns were proposed for asylum seekers to help them to settle in more easily.

Slovenian Seniors' Associations: “Overcoming the demographic crisis”

The consequences of the demographic change for cooperation between the generations was discussed on 21st and 22nd October, at the first ESU regional conference in Slovenia. 100 people from six countries travelled to Ljubljana - invited by the presidents of the three ESU-affiliated Associations: Anton Bogataj (People's Party /SLS), Zvonko Zinrajh (Democratic Party /SDS) and Joze Jurkovic (New Slovenian Christian Democrats /NSi-KD), who alternated as chair of the discussions. Young Christian Democrats were always present. Warmly welcomed were the ESU President, An Hermans, five members of the Praesidium, the former Austrian Minister and ESU activist, Dr. Marilies Flemming, and four MEPs. As Anton Bogataj, at that time still an ESU Vice-president, said, the seniors’ politicians considered the presence of the party chairmen Marko Zidansek (SLS), Janez Jansa (SDS) and Joze Horvat (NSi-KD vice-chair) as an appreciation of their responsible voluntary activity.

Prof. Dr. Andrej Umek (SLS) gave a lecture entitled “Employment of Youth as the Basis of Solidarity Between the Generations”. In a PowerPoint presentation, Bogataj praised the honorary office as a service to the needy (“Volunteering as a service for those in need”) and stressed the indispensable dignity of all people. Based on official figures for 2015, he estimated the amount of pension provision per month to be 564 EURO and the salaries to be 1.013 EURO (average).

In a DECLARATION of the international meeting, in co-operation with ESU, states are called on to co-ordinate action to deal with refugee flows and the “demographic crisis in Europe”, which admittedly also includes an increase in the birth rate.

The Slovenian Seniors' Associations have been part of the ESU since 2007. It recalls a visit by Bernhard Worms and Dr. Marilies Flemming which has also paved the way to participate in a congress (2007).

Gert Pöttering: “My European Way”

Dr. Hans-Gert Pöttering (71), presented the second edition of his successful book “Fortunately, we are united - My European way”. Compared with the first edition, it has chapters on the difficult relationship with Turkey, the role of Great Britain in a united Europe and the future of Europe. Pöttering, President of the Konrad-Adenauer-Foundation, participated in discussions and decisions at a high European level as chairman of the EPP group and President of the European Parliament. His book is an autobiography. This was underlined by the Federal Minister, Wolfgang Schäuble, in his laudation. Both agreed that German unity would not have happened in 1990 without the EU. This

alone justifies the continued commitment to the integration of Europe - despite all the prophecies of doom. Pöttering is a member of the Seniors' Union. The sale proceeds from his book go to "Renovabis", an Eastern European charitable organization of the Catholic Church. (Book available from the Adenauer Foundation.)

On the occasion of the presentation of an anthology, "My Poland - My Poles" in Wrocław/Breslau, Pöttering discussed the current political situation in Europe and German-Polish relations. The book, published by Harassowitz-Verlag, contains contributions by Frank-Walter Steinmeier, Roman Herzog, Norbert Lammert and Bernhard Vogel and others. It was edited by Dieter Bingen (Darmstadt), Prof. Mathias Weber (Oldenburg) and Prof. Marek Holub (Breslau). The event was part of a Germanist congress in Wrocław, the "European Cultural Capital 2016".



Dr. Hans-Gert Pöttering - a European of heart and deed

Church leaders in Israel: To emphasise the common!

On the occasion of the "Feast of Tabernacles", the leading bishops of the Catholic and Protestant Churches in Germany were guests of the Israeli state president. President Reuven Rivlin, Cardinal Marx and Bishop Dr. Bedfort-Strom emphasised emphatically the common roots of Jewish and Christian faith. In dialogue, therefore, the common should have the upper hand against the divisive. The leading representatives of the German ecumenical movement were on a pilgrimage in the Holy Land. The purpose is the upcoming 2017 celebration of the 500th anniversary of the Reformation. In media reports it was criticised that both spiritual leaders have renounced to wear the Cross on their clothing on the Temple Mount and at the Wailing Wall in Jerusalem.

Lund and Berlin: signs of ecumenical solidarity

On the occasion of the opening of the Reformation commemorative year, Pope Francis met with President Bishop Munib Younan, a Palestinian, on 31st October in Lund, at a meeting of the Lutheran World Federation. They signed a declaration calling for a deeper theological dialogue on a common communion between Catholics and Protestants. An ecumenical service was celebrated in the evangelical cathedral. In Malmö, the Pope celebrated Mass. Observers speak of "historical encounters". The theme of the Papal journey was "From Conflict to Community - Together in Hope". Before his departure from Rome, Francis had prayed for the victims of the recent Italian earthquakes.

It is also noteworthy that the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD) has given the newly-endowed "Luther Medal" to the former Bishop of Mainz, Karl Cardinal Lehmann, who merited it for his

ecumenical work. It was handed over in the presence of the Federal President, Joachim Gauck, during the jubilee church service on Reformation Day by Bedfort-Strohm, president of the Council, in the Berlin Marienkirche (St Mary's Church). Orthodox priests were also present.

“A Safe Europe from the Estonian perspective”

... was the subject of a conference in Tallinn to which Ann Räämet, recently re-elected as an ESU Vice-president, had invited guests. She is President of the Seniors' Association of Pro Patria and Res Publica Union. Through her initiative, members of this Christian Democratic party came together from all over the country, including elderly citizens who belong to one of the six active groups of the Seniors' Association. Party Chairman and Social Affairs Minister Margus Tsahkna informed the participants about the current political situation and the development of the pension system. External security was dealt with by Marko Mihkelson, Chairman of the Defence Committee of the Riigikogu (Parliament). He noted that the capacity to defend the country has been increased recently to his satisfaction. Estonia borders the Baltic Sea and is a neighbour of Russia.

First steps of pension reform in Germany

On 21st October, the German Bundestag adopted the "Flexi-Retirement" law introduced by the government. This will meet the demand for a differentiated transition from working life to retirement, according to the CDU's Seniors' Union in their newsletter. With the entry into law of the Act on 1st July 2017, older workers can contribute their experience beyond their current retirement age at their own request. In addition, retirees will be able to earn more than in the past.

As the “Süddeutsche Zeitung” quotes from the government’s previously unpublished “Age Security Report 2016”, the document states that the pension level of future retirees “will go down significantly without additional pension provision in the coming years”. A lively discussion has begun in the country about the how and from where of the pension provision. The clarification needs to determine from which “pot” the increasing contributions are expected to be financed for pension provision.

BAGSO - a model for Poland

In the light of the successful work of BAGSO, Janusz Marszalek, Chairman of the Polish Seniors' Union (PUS), wants to initiate a similar institution, bringing together all seniors' organisations in his country. On the occasion of the presentation of the German Age Study by BAGSO and the German Centre for Age Questions (DZA), he met the BAGSO General Secretary in Berlin. Marszalek, who is also an ESU Vice-president, has already established with colleagues a country-wide Seniors' Council which is now under construction in the voivodships and municipalities. He appeared recently, together with the ESU Honorary-president Leif Hallberg from Stockholm, at a conference of the “Universities of the Third Age” in Krynica.

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