



EUROPEAN SENIORS' UNION (ESU)

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Last Congress Afterthoughts



At the IX. ESU Congress in Leuven (Belgium) at the beginning of November, em. Prof. Dr. An Hermans was elected as President for another three years. At her side again, Guido Dumon as Secretary-General. Both are leading figures in the Flemish Seniors' Association CD&V (Belgium).

A joker among the delegates commented about this picture: "Just married!"



"SI" offers a final little picture-show of the Congress in this last Issue of the year.

Here: views of the hall in the Provincial-House in Leuven



For the European Seniors' Union, the IX (Election) Congress in early November was the high-point of its activity at the end of its 21st year of existence. The conference theme was:

“Together for a safe and social Europe!”



From Spain, delegates from two organizations were represented:

Comision Nacional De Mayores (PP), with its chairman, the ESU Vice-president Carmen Quintanilla Barba (1st left), Carmen Gonzalez and Cristina Pons (picture left);

the Catalan Unio de la Ghent Gran (UDC), with its chairman, Jose M. Regas Graupera Maria Teresa Guanabeus Rodon, as well as once more Carmen Quintanilla Barba (picture right)



Picture left: Margit Hawkes in conversation with Vice-president Janusz Marszalek, Poland. Margit and her husband Sean (left), are to thank for the English translation of this Newsletter.

Picture right: ESU President An Hermans in conversation with Tatyana Zelko, chairman of the organisation "Nashe Pokalene / Our Generation" from Belarus, and her son and co-worker Alexander.

NEWS

High share of the vote for Prof. Otto Wulff

Prof. Dr. Wulff was elected as a member of the federal executive committee at the party conference of the CDU (DE) in Essen on 6th December with 89.6 percent of the valid votes. He thus achieved third place among the 29 applicants. The Seniors' Union judges this result as an appreciation of his work. In the discussion, Wulff assured the delegates that the elderly, as a rapidly-growing group of the population, will continue to play their part in shaping the future.

Angela Merkel: "We want to look at each other in the face"

Federal Chancellor Dr. Angela Merkel was confirmed as chairman of the party for the next parliamentary term with 89.5 percent. At the party conference in Essen, she focused the delegates towards the 2017 election campaign, the outcome of which the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) and its sister party CSU (Bavaria), seek governmental responsibility once more. Controversial discussions took place during the party conference, against the wish of the chairmen, about a barely decided reversal of dual citizenship. It was introduced only two years ago as a compromise towards its SPD coalition partner. The amendment was introduced by the Young Union. At present, children of foreign parents in Germany between the ages of 18 and 23, can receive German citizenship and that of their parents (dual passport).

There is general agreement about the intended prohibition of the full face-veil in public buildings. “We want to look at each other in the face,” Mrs. Merkel commented about the motion.

Relief ...

The electoral setback for the right-wing populist Hofer in the second ballot for the Austrian Federal Presidency was received with relief throughout Europe. There is confidence that Van den Bellen will continue to pursue his pro-European and liberal stance as President. However, the threats to democracy posed by the FPÖ from Stracke and Hofer do not seem to be banished, despite the second ballot of 3rd December.



Vice-president Dr. Christine von Stefenelli (South Tirol, centre in picture) with Dr. Edeltraud Paul, ESU Treasurer until 2013 (Vienna, left), and Erika Reinhardt, honorary chairman of the Seniors' Union of Baden-Württemberg and a former member of the Bundestag (Germany).

Photo from the reception in the Town Hall in Leuven on 5th November

... and disillusionment

The political withdrawal of the Italian head of government, Matthias Renzi, is often regretted. One sees in his European involvement the unwavering advocacy for European integration. Renzi was unsuccessful in attempting to make political decisions faster in Italy through a constitutional reform. Against the trend, in South Tirol, where ESU Vice-president Christine von Stefenelli is politically active, almost 64 percent voted **for** the reform proposals that, as highlighted, would also have strengthened the autonomy of South Tyrol. Meanwhile, with Paolo Gentiloni (62) at its head, a new government has taken office. The Social Democratic Prime Minister – until now a senior diplomat – will as a priority focus on the reconstruction of the earthquake zones. The programme for the containment of refugee flows from Africa comes from him. As far as Erdogan is concerned, in his opinion the doors should not be slammed shut.

Seniors' Union prevails

The Seniors' Union (GER) has prevailed with all its proposals to the CDU party-congress. It was decided to take up again the project “Freedom and Unity Monument in Berlin” and to finalise it. The CDU will pay more attention in the future to the freedom of religion as one of the “individual human rights” (Wulff), according to a further decision. This includes condemnation of the worldwide persecution of Christians. The importance of the initiative is proved by the devastating attack on Cairo's Coptic

Cathedral on 11th December, in which many believers fell as victims. The Seniors' Union of the CDU pushed through their demands to ban the full face-veil, the appointment of a Commissioner for Demography, the availability of post-professional activities, and to ensure uniform standards in nursing homes and retirement homes.

Berlin - Wrocław culture-train journeys continue

The gradual normalisation of railway traffic between Poland and Germany is progressing: since late April at weekends. the "cultural train" running between Berlin and the European cultural capital of Wrocław/Breslau will continue to run also in 2017, according to an announcement in Brandenburg and Berlin. They will take over the cost of EUR 300,000. These funds are well invested, because the rail link and the visit to the Silesian metropolis helps demonstrably to more mutual understanding between Polish and German citizens and promotes reconciliation between the nations.

With the timetable change on 11thDecember, the travel time from Berlin-Lichtenberg has been reduced by 22 min. as a result of first track renovations on Polish territory. So far, the "cultural train" has had 20,000 passengers, resulting in seating problems and occasionally additional buses had to make the journey. The hard work to achieve again a daily fast train link between the two metropolitan areas continues relentlessly. The same applies to improvements in rail transport between Berlin and Szczecin/Stettin.



Snapshot of the first journey on 30th April (Berlin-Ostkreuz Station)

Expenditure for Asylum-seekers

In the 2017 budget, 21,55 billion EURO is earmarked for refugees, asylum and integration in the Federal Republic of Germany (2016: 21,74 billion). Expenditure in the fight against the causes of fleeing has risen from 7.10 to 7.23 billion EURO compared to the previous year. For the reception, registration and accommodation of asylum seekers, 1.3 billion, about 10 percent less funds are estimated than in 2016. 3.44 billion is budgeted for "integration services" - compared with 2.16 billion in 2016. As "social transfers for asylum procedures", 2.7 billion is planned (2016: 1.73 billion). For the "immediate relief for Länder and municipalities", 6.88 billion has been allocated (2016: 9.34 billion).

Aleppo – and no end?

While this Newsletter is being prepared, the media reports the conquest of Aleppo by Syrian government forces and the Russian military. The compassion of the Editor at this time is once again with the civilian victims of this cruel war. May diplomatic skill, combined with the threat of further sanctions against the warmongers of all kinds, lead to a quick end of the cruel murder in all Syria! It was announced that a phone call between Foreign Minister Steinmeier (DE) and Lawrow (RU) was about bringing at least some immediate humanitarian aid to the population.

Editor (text and photos): ulrich.winz@web.de

Translated by Margit and Seán Hawkes

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ESU: Rue de Commerce/Handelsstraat 10, 1000 Brussels; Tel.: +32 2309 2866

Internet: esu-epp.eu; E-Mail: esu@epp.eu; Facebook.com/esu.eu

HOLY CHRISTMAS !