



EUROPEAN SENIORS' UNION (ESU)

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with special supplement "Christ and the World"

Antonio Tajani from Italy ...

... was elected President of the European Parliament (EP) on 17th January in Strasbourg. He succeeds Martin Schulz (DE, SPD). The ESU had supported the candidacy of the former Italian minister, who had recently declared: "we must change Europe, not kill it !" With his election, the largest group in the EP, the European People's Party (EPP) once again provides the President of the European Parliament. In the interests of a secure future for the EU, the EPP has decided to cooperate with the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE), calling on all other pro-European parties to work together on fundamental issues. The chairman of the ALDE is the Dutchman, Hans van Baalen.

Aarhus (DK) and Paphos (CY) ...

... are the European Capitals of Culture in 2017. Their common motto: "Cultures connect". **Aarhus** was founded around 770 by the Vikings and is a bishopric since 928. The metropolis of central Jutland has enjoyed a town charter since 1441. Under the choir of the Gothic Church of Our Lady, a small tuff-stone church, built in 1028, was discovered in 1955. Prominent premises and institutions include a seaport with the largest container terminal, the university, a music college, as well as schools of architecture and drama. One of the attractions of the next few months: the illumination of the Ringgadebroen Bridge at dusk - a tribute to the astronomer Ole Romer, who came from here. The third-largest city in Denmark has around 265,000 inhabitants. Partner cities are, among others, St. Petersburg (RU) and Harbin (China). The ESU has no presence in Denmark.



Cyprus: at the Pétra tou Romiou rocks, Aphrodite is said to have emerged from the foaming sea

Paphos also, in the south-west of Cyprus, is a city steeped in history. A sculpture park, recently built on its Mediterranean coast, recalls the goddess of love and beauty, Aphrodite, who was born from

the sea near Paphos (see photo above). In the archaeological park, which has been a UNESCO World Cultural Heritage site since 1980, and in underground graves (wrongly termed “royal tombs”), spectacular mosaic floors from Roman times are preserved and to be admired. “In the west of the Franconian church stands a damaged column, on which the apostle Paul ... was bound and whipped.” (According to BAEDEKER). - One of the highlights of this year will be the “European-concert” of the Berlin Philharmonic on 1st May. The region has about 60,000 inhabitants. Paphos has an international airport. The Seniors' Association of Cyprus (president: Antonis Demetriades), is one of the most active members of the ESU, and has repeatedly hosted regional meetings of the Mediterranean countries. The ESU regrets, with its Cypriot friends, that negotiations for the reunification of Cyprus have not yet led to this goal.

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Wrocław/Breslau (PL) and Donastia - San Sebastian (ES), the European Capitals of Culture in 2016, drew a positive result from the Festival Year in December. In Wrocław, 5 million visitors were counted, the festival director announced proudly.

Farewell to Roman Herzog



On the death of the former German President (time in office - 1994-1999), the Israeli ambassador in Berlin stated: “A special concern for him was always also reconciliation with the Jewish people and with the state of Israel.” One of his greatest accomplishments was “27th January, the day of the liberation of the Auschwitz extermination camp, to be an official day of remembrance for the victims of the Shoah.” Herzog, who passed away on 10th January, aged 82 years, will remain unforgotten with his “commitment to reconciliation and remembrance.”

Under his chairmanship, the 1st European Convention was assembled in 1999/2000 to draw up an EU Charter of Fundamental Rights. Roman Herzog was very attentive and sympathetic in his endeavours to promote “more reciprocal familiarisation, mutual understanding for one another and cooperation across former borders” within his reunited country (cited from a letter dated October 2008 to the Editor).

In honour of the victims of the attack...

... worship and devotions took place in the Gedächtniskirche (Memorial Church) on the Breitscheidplatz in Berlin and at the Nikolaikirche in Potsdam. In Berlin, thousands signed the books of condolence. At the neighbouring Christmas market, which was the scene of the attack on 19th December, the Editor, in addition to many other mourners, laid down a bouquet of yellow roses in his own name and for the ESU. Deeply moved, he also accepted declarations of sympathy which he received as a resident of Berlin after the terrorist attack from ESU President Prof. An Hermans and from Minsk. The Belarussian seniors' organization "Unser Generation" reported on the attack in their bulletin. It also contains a photo of the president, Tatyana Zelko, who laid a bouquet of flowers at the German Embassy.

After Berlin, terrorist attacks have shaken also Istanbul and Jerusalem, and resulted in the death of victims.

Dr. hc. Angela Merkel

At a ceremony for the award of an honorary doctorate by the universities of Leuven and Gent (BE), the Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany, Dr. Angela Merkel, has called on the young people of Europe to take an active part in the further development of Europe.

Forthcoming ESU event dates

7th / 8th February (Brussels): Presidium and Executive Committee

10th / 12th March (Prague): Regional Conference (East)

28th /30th March (Saint Julian's, Malta): EPP Congress as well as Presidium and ESU Conference

28th April (Budapest): "Round Table" ESU/ Robert-Schuman-Institute

30th June / 2nd July (Vienna): Summer Academy and Executive Committee

Editor: ulrich.winz@web.de

Translated by Margit & Seán Hawkes

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ESU: Rue de Commerce /Handelsstraat 10; 1000 Brussels; Tel. +32 23 09 28 66

Website: www.esu-epp.eu; E-Mail: esu@epp.eu; Twitter: esu_epp; Facebook:com/esu.eu

Attached please find the special edition "CHRIST AND THE WORLD" in English

Special supplement CHRIST and the WORLD

The “500 years of the Reformation” Jubilee will be celebrated worldwide in 2017, also ecumenically. An expression of this was the meeting of Pope Francis with the the Lutheran World Federation President, Bishop Munib Younan, in the cathedral at Lund (Sweden) on 31st October. In front of 10,000 guests in Malmö stadium, they reaffirmed their willingness to continue the path “from conflict to community”. This is preceded by such important positioning as the “Ecumenical Decree of the Second Vatican Council” (1965), and in the Catholic-Lutheran document “Martin Luther - Witness of Jesus Christ” (1983). Finally, the “Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification”, adopted in 1999 in Augsburg (DE), has had its effect on ecumenical cooperation, that has now become self-evident in many places irrespective of on-going theological differences. But even with all this, after Lund with a planned statement for the Eucharist and the Lord's Supper, a “horizon” is expected in the relevant media.



Papal visit to Sweden at the beginning of the Reformation Jubilee (photo: ZEIT online)

25,000 Christians live in Islamic Morocco. Of these, 3,000 are Protestant. The majority are immigrants from sub-Saharan Africa, among them numerous students. Some Christians are only passing through to Europe, “others move to different countries, or go back to their homeland after completing their studies or diplomatic service,” writes “die kirche”. The parishioners come from 16 countries - from Cameroon, the Congo, the Central African Republic, the Ivory Coast, as well as from Europe and Asia. There are churches in eleven large cities. 98 percent of Moroccans are Sunnis. “Minorities such as Christians, Jews, Baha'i or Shia Muslims are allowed to practice their religion, but everything that might appear to 'entice' Muslims to another belief is prohibited by law.” Seven years ago, 150 Christians were expelled for that. Those who want to settle in Morocco for a long time “often experience racism and harassment from the Moroccan population”, it said in a report in the above-named weekly newspaper. The support of refugees and would-be refugees makes up a large part of the work in Christian communities.

In the archive of the Friedenskirche (Church of Peace) in Świdnica/Schweidnitz (Silesia/Poland), the musicologist Stephan Aderhold discovered hand-written notes of a composition called “Nocturne”, attributed to Fritz Drohla, the last German cantor. He wrote it probably around 1945. The composition was premiered in Görlitz on 9th December by Ulrike Scheytt at the piano. The occasion was the opening of a touring exhibition about over 500 years of Protestantism in Silesia. From 1741 to 1945, Lower Silesia was Prussian, German, and predominantly Protestant.



The Church of Peace in Świdnica/Schweidnitz in Lower Silesia (Poland). Photos: UW

During their affiliation with Austria and the Counter-Reformation in the 17th century, the Protestants, urged by Sweden, were allowed finally under the Peace of Westphalia to build, within a year, three places of worship at their own expense and without steeples and bells, which later became the “Friedenskirchen” (Churches of Peace). Two have survived, and since 2001 are UNESCO World Cultural Heritage sites. These include the church in Świdnica/Schweidnitz (built in 1657), the largest church in Europe, on the altar of which a placard refers to this year's Reformation Jubilee. One tower was built in 1758. The other is in Jawor/Jauer. Both have several thousand seats and attract visitors from all over the world. The third Friedenskirche - in Głogowie/Glogau - was severely damaged at the end of the war.

The exhibition, consisting of fifteen panels, will be shown until 12th March at the Silesian Museum in Görlitz; after that, it travels to Königswinter (DE) and to the Polish cities of Wrocław, Świdnica, Katowice, Cieszyn, Opole and Zielona Góra (according to the newspaper “die Kirche” and my own research).

Most Orthodox Christians celebrate the Feast of the Nativity of Christ according to the ancient Julian calendar, and therefore on the 6th (Christmas Eve, with distribution of presents) and 7th January (Christmas Day). This is also the case in the six Russian-Orthodox churches in Berlin, in which Ukrainians are also welcome. Many Russians also celebrate the New Year festival in addition, as a “substitute Christmas” from the Soviet time, with “Father Frost” as the bringer of presents. For the Orthodox, a 40-day fasting period ends at Christmas. For the 38-year-old priest, Evgenij Murzin from Moscow, who holds the service for the most important at the Christian festival and celebrated it in Berlin-Marzahn, fasting means “cleansing of the body and soul” The Greek Orthodox - like the Catholic and Protestant churches - follow the Gregorian calendar, which was introduced in 1582.

Larger Orthodox communities, which bear the names of their respective countries, also exist on the European continent in Serbia (Christmas in January), Romania, Bulgaria, Poland, Cyprus and Albania.



*Resurrection of Christ Russian Orthodox Cathedral in Berlin-Wilmersdorf, built 1936 - 1938.
Its iconostasis originates from an ancient church near Warsaw. Photo: Tsp.*

In total, the Orthodox Church, with approximately 300 million members, is the third largest Christian community in the world after Catholics and Protestants (Evangelicals). Since 1964 (Pope Paul VI and Patriarch Athinagoras), tentative steps are recognizable towards a convergence of the “Eastern Churches” with the other churches. At that time, the mutual “church ban”, which existed since 1054, was abolished. In the meantime, further talks have taken place. Distinguished from the Roman Catholic Church, the Orthodox Churches, with a few exceptions, belong to the World Council of Churches (WCC).

It was “cautiousness”, that Cardinal Marx and Bishop Bedford-Strohm “suggested by a responsible authority” ... to be cautious during the most sensitive points of the journey (*in the Holy Land – editor’s note*), especially as our Muslim and Jewish hosts requested that.” These are the key phrases in a letter of reply from the Secretariat of the German Bishops’ Conference to the chairman to the CDU Seniors’ Union Baden-Württemberg (DE), Prof. Freiherr von Stetten. He had expressed his displeasure, and that of many citizens, to the spiritual leaders of both confessions over the temporary removal of their breast crosses in Jerusalem. (We reported about this at the time.) There was no wish that “in a tense security situation (*during the Jewish Sukkot/Feast of Tabernacles - editor*), there be violence against our delegation”. According to the ‘Katholischen Sonntagsblatt’ (Catholic Sunday magazine of the Rottenburg-Stuttgart diocese), the chairman of the bishops’ conference said on 18th December: “It was about not provoking”; perhaps, the Cardinal added, in view of the explosive situation, it would have been better to renounce going there. (*He meant the Western Wall/Wailing Wall, as well as the Dome of the Rock and the Al-Aqsa Mosque on the Temple Mount – editor’s note*). Today, he would say that it had not been well-prepared. According to Marx, as per the ‘Sonntagsblatt’, it is to be learned from the events how sensitive the way religions still deal with each other. “In the previous year, there had been deaths and injuries in the same place”, the letter to von Stetten said.