



EUROPEAN SENIORS' UNION (ESU)

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“From Knowledge to Social Action”

An Hermans in Prague: Every voice, every act for EUROPE counts!

Prague. In the Czech Republic, almost two million citizens have reached 65 years of age. They account for 18 per cent of the population of Bohemia and Moravia. The percentage of older people - as elsewhere in Europe - will continue to rise. The fact that life expectancy increases for most is a gift - for those “advanced in years”, as well as for society. Politics has wanted it so. Giving the “extra years gained” more quality is a matter for the individual and for society. Politicians speak of “challenges through demographic change”. If this is not accompanied by an outdated image of “old age”, this term is acceptable.



Dr. Vaclav Roubal in his welcome speech. Next to him (left): Prof. Dr. An Hermans, President of the European Seniors' Union, Jan Bartosek, Vice-President of the KDU/CSL and the Czech Chamber of Deputies, as well as Lidmila Nemcova, ESU Vice-President

The 9th International Conference of the ESU in the “East” region - already the third since 2011 - has met these challenges. In the Prague hotel “Krystal”, personalities from six countries met who put words to deeds. They follow - consciously or unconsciously - the demands of ESU President An Hermans. In 2014, in the same place, she said: “I wished and want to, as most of you do, not only to know, but also to do something, to act: in a social movement, in churches, in clubs and in parties, to work for a society in freedom, respect for every human being, peace and democracy, which are the

pillars for building prosperity and well-being". The people of all continents have this aspiration and it is prompting many citizens from war zones and crises to leave their homeland, at least temporarily with a feeling of hopelessness, to seek asylum and a better life.

With her stimulating speech on the 10th March this year in Prague, entitled "Improving the Quality of Life - Observations from a European Perspective", the President declared her commitment. She thanked the hosting Association of Christian Seniors, chaired by Dr. Jur. Vaclav Roubal, that she - presented by ESU Vice President Doz. Lidmila Nemcova - dedicated herself to this topic and invited the "movers and shakers" to follow.

In a historical reflection, the President recalled the "Roman Treaties", which established the European Economic Community (EEC) on 25rd March, 60 years ago. This was an important step to the European Union. Its signatures were provided by Belgium, France, Italy, Germany, Luxembourg and the Netherlands. Already in 1993, the "Year of the Elderly" started, although only 16 states belonged to the EU. The ESU was particularly inspired by the "Lisbon Treaty" of December 2013, which firmly established the fundamental rights. They are: human dignity, freedom, equality, solidarity, civil rights and judicial rights. An Hermans urged the ESU's associations to analyse the EU's current research findings for their country and to take the next step with their local politicians - analogous to the Prague conference theme "More quality of life for Seniors". The ESU - according to the President - will press the European People's Party (EPP) into concrete strategies. The motto is: "Growing old in a common world - to be jointly responsible!" This is about active ageing, to which belongs employment, social participation as well as an independent and healthy life in an agreeable environment.

In view of the spoken contributions and presentations of the participants, the ESU President noted to applause, at the end of the two-day discussion, that everyone can give themselves and their fellow-humans a purpose in life; such an exchange of experiences as these inspire new concepts for an age-friendly society, and they strengthen the position of leading seniors' policymakers in Europe. Our voice, our political and social work helps to overcome the problems of a united Europe. Democracy and prosperity for all generations - that is the primary task of local governments, regions, countries and the United Nations, and challenges them all, An Hermans concluded.



In a discussion, Dr. Marilies Flemming (Austria) spoke up for more attention to the Christian education of the youngest. She promoted this already when she was formerly a minister and an EU parliamentarian. During a break, she exchanged experiences about volunteer work with Leif Hallberg (Sweden), an ESU Honorary President, which has connected them both since many years.

“Growing old in dignity”

What moved the speakers of the Prague conference

Vaclav Roubal noted that the Czech seniors are well integrated into society. “They feel happy only when their family is also well” The Ten Commandments are as valid today as they were from the beginning.

Jan Bartosek, KDU/CSL, thanked the Seniors' Association and the ESU for their work. “Well-being” is a complex task. Anchored in the programme of his party is mutual assistance between the generations and security in old age. The KDU/CSL is the Christian and Democratic Union - Czechoslovak People's Party, with which the Association of Christian Seniors (SKS) is aligned.

Jozef Miklosko, President of the Association of Christian Seniors of Slovakia: to act with ethical responsibility! Use the opportunities of age! In Slovakia (3 million seniors), there are 5 seniors' associations; its organization has 5,000 members, making it the largest association linked to the ESU in a post-communist country. “It was founded in Nitra when the ESU did even exist.” 43% of marriages end in divorce. The Association has organized several pilgrimages, and invites to another one on 5th July.



Jozef Miklosko

Jiri Vanasek, deputy Minister for Labour and Social Affairs in the Czech Republic: after three years of discussion, a law on social services is about to be decided. The good economic situation increases the chances of a job for applicants over 50 years-old. The companies will be directed accordingly. A minimising of payments for medicines should follow a decrease in value-added tax (VAT).

Father Miloslav Fiala OPraem, representing the Archbishop of Prague, Cardinal Duka, said: “I am concerned about the dignity of people.” Despite good material provision, many feel themselves isolated. Of 15 students, only one child has a complete family, that is, mother and father! The Gospels provide guidance on how to live. “Start every day under the Word of God.”

Zdenek Permes, President of the Czech Seniors' Council (comprising 31 organizations with 300,000 members; a high social acceptance; Vice-President: Dr. Roubal) noted: nearly 2.4 million Czechs are pensioners. Their income has recently been increased to about 436 EURO (conversion rate on 10th March: 25-27 Koruna for 1 EURO). In the pension levels, the Czech Republic ranks 15th of 24

countries evaluated. The quality of life has been examined officially since 2014. Consumer prices have risen. Permes hoped for success for a parliamentary initiative to change the pension system (based on a levy scheme). A new law on social housing construction benefits single households.

Contact: www.rscr.cz

In the discussion, Dr. Milos Nemecek regretted the absence of a seniors' council in Slovakia and suggested that "the Western States should make them familiar with the situation in the East". Low pensions are the result of low wages. There is no "minimum pension"; in case of need, additional benefits such as housing allowances are granted, however the situation is unsatisfactory, poverty is high.

Karel Schwarz, President EAPN: widowed and divorced women need special support. Better coordination of the support measures is required. EAPN advocates the location of the elderly in their usual environment for "as long as possible". Apartments must be adapted in a timely, prophylactic way (accessibility). The quality of life includes seniors' taxis and transport services (for example, to Universities of the 3rd Age, or to reading in children's facilities). EAPN stands for "European Anti-Poverty Network".

Lidmila Nemcova (CZ) offered a resumption of cooperation with the Slovakian Association. The quality of life of the elderly is determined by social and ethical relations. Formed by memories of war and authoritarian regimes in their youth, the elderly (and all other generations) long for "stability in an unstable world". Concerns about democracy, the gap between rich and poor, the decline in values and the future of Europe dominate everyday life, explained Mrs. Nemcova. Politics must provide the answers.

Stimulated by these statements, Dr. Roubal quoted from the Christmas letter of Dr. Worms, who asked whether we want to summon up the courage for the restructuring of Europe or rather retreat into our shell.



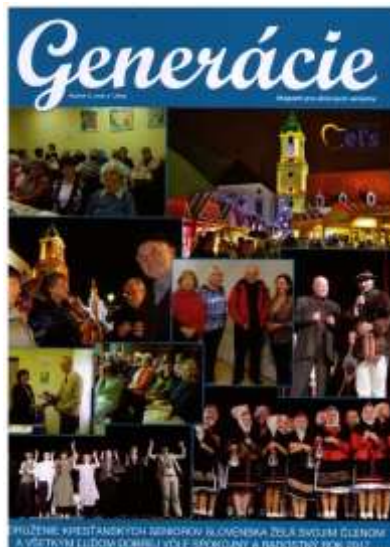
Dr. Edeltraud Paul

Dr. Edeltraud Paul (Austria) conveyed experiences with "assisted living", which in her country is replacing old people's homes more and more, and offers more than "warm, well-fed and clean". Six to eight people share an apartment and take care of themselves. Shops, a pharmacy, a cafe, transport and a doctor are available within a reasonable distance. Examples are given in Vienna, where the city is the largest apartment landlord, but also in Vorarlberg (e.g. in the town of Lustenau). For the organizations involved, such as Caritas, Hilfswerk and Sine Cura, the motivation is "to grow

old with dignity”. It is recommended to include politicians in the planning and implementation of such projects.

Milena Cerna, former chairman of the Olga Havlova Foundation (VDV), named after the wife of the State President and poet Vaclav Havel, who died in 1996: VDV supports at-home care and short-term care. Financed through charity concerts and donations, which amounted to more than 4 million Kronor in 2015. In that year alone, 1,288 persons were given help. In cooperation with Caritas, Diakonie and the Bohemian Brethren, residents of remote scattered settlements are taken during the winter to the nearest cities and thus also are able to maintain social contact.

Milos Nemecek, an entrepreneur and editor from Slovakia, presented the latest issue of “Magazín pre aktívnych seniorov” with the title “Generácie”. Inside in text and images, various social activities of the older generation and the coexistence of old and young are documented.



Cover picture of the latest edition

Ulrich Winz, author of this report, supplemented the topic of “Senior Citizens and the Media”: the CDU Seniors’ Union (DE) also publishes a quarterly title (“Souverän”) - with an ESU column since 2001 – in addition to a Newsletter. He is aware of Bulletins from the CSU Seniors’ Union (Bavaria) (title: “SenNetz”) and from Belarus (“Nashe Pokolenie”). “SENIOR INTERNATIONAL” is translated into English, Czech, Russian and Slovenian, and sporadically also into Spanish.

Claus Bernhold, Vice-Chairman of the Seniors' Union and a member of the Executive Committee, is also a press spokesman for up-to-date information from his Association. The Polish Seniors’ Union places this Newsletter on their website. The interest of the older generation in print and social media (for the ESU: Facebook and Twitter), is constantly strong - an expression of the intellectual freshness of the elderly and their desire to remain “up-to-date” in the ESU.

Thomas David from the National Fund of Experts (Prague), sees the qualification of over-50 year-olds as an important prerequisite in the workplace until the age of retirement. For this, the know-how of pensioners is used. Mail contact: tomas.david@czechtop100.cz

Janusz Marszalek, Oświęcim, President of the Polish Seniors’ Union (PUS) and an ESU Vice-President, maintains close contacts with the Association of “Universities of the 3rd Age”, which interests itself in a union of senior’s organizations and initiatives, following the example of BAGSO in Germany. Marszalek considers the project “on wheels to meals” (instead of “meals on wheels”), which was discussed on the previous day at BAGSO in Berlin, to be worth copying. Dining together at a

favourable location promotes social contacts and thus the joy of life. The Polish Parliament is currently preparing a nursing care law. In addition to the “Peace Center” in Oświęcim (formerly Auschwitz), “Assisted Living” is one of the preferred PUS projects. Marszalek’s proposal for seniors’ group excursions to Poland was met with approval by Czech and Slovak friends.

Leif Hallberg (Sweden), President of the Seniors’ Association of the Moderates and an ESU Vice-President, considered life-long learning to be indispensable. In agreement with the findings of the University of Gothenburg, he noted that the age of life is determined by healthy sleep, good food, high activity levels and social contacts but also, however, by genetic factors. In Sweden one must be “young, fresh and new”. The geriatric training of doctors and nurses is worthy of improvement and to complement the problematic area of “psychiatry”. Leif supported discussions between old and young, wished to take into consideration the differentiated needs between the generations and to deal more intensely with psychological concerns. From politicians, deputies and governments, alongside practical action, long-term strategies should also be demanded.

Claus Bernhold (Germany) called for respect for the age and dignity of the human being right up to the end of life. Accordingly, in Baden-Württemberg, seniors’ facilities with a maximum of 100 rooms (single rooms) are being built.



Visit to Jan Amos Comenius (Komensky)

At the end of the regional conference the foreign participants learned about the Prague Educational Museum with the name “Jan Amos Comenius” (Czech: Komensky). In the introductory lecture at the museum, it became clear that Comenius was far ahead of his time with his educational reforms, not only because of his changing places of residence but also because of his universal approaches, and is to be seen as a great European to whom the ESU also wished to pay tribute. Comenius was born in Vivnice (Moravia) on 28th March 1592, that is 425 years ago, and died on 15th November 1670 in Amsterdam. His grave is in Naarden (NL). He was a philosopher, theologian, educator, and bishop of the Bohemian-Moravian Brethren.

Final Report:

Marjatta Nykänen: “Happy about the Dutch voters”

That the voters decided, on 15th March at the parliamentary election, quite predominantly for the democratic parties is appreciated as a victory for political reason. Marjatta Nykänen, an ESU Vice-

President from Finland, told the editor: “I am happy that the Netherlands has voted for European unity and strengthening our common European future. We must stop the populist movements together. European seniors are more safe on a continent where politics is based on facts, and not on mere populist slogans.”

Editor: ulrich.winz@web.de; Tel.: +49 (0) 30 204 04 71

Translated by Margit and Seán Hawkes

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

Facebook: [com/esu.eu](https://www.facebook.com/esu.eu); Twitter: [esu_epp](https://twitter.com/esu_epp); Internet: www.esu-epp.eu; Mail: esu@epp.eu