



## **EUROPEAN SENIORS' UNION (ESU)**

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*Following a tradition cherished since 1998, the MEPs of the Austrian People's Party provided a real Christmas tree once again in the Parliament building. The almost 4 m high Nordmann fir comes from Maria Laach am Jauerling. It is decorated with hand-blown and hand-painted Jablonec tree-balls. Until 20 years ago, the elected representatives, staff and visitors had to make do with a plastic tree. 2<sup>nd</sup> from left: Heinz K. Becker, Secretary General of the Seniors' Federation in Austria and Vice President of the ESU.*

### **ESU heads for the European elections Meeting of the Presidium with prominent figures**

**LEUVEN.** The news of the recognition of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel by the United States had just become common knowledge when the Presidium of the ESU met in the Flemish university town of Leuven near Brussels for the last time this year. And it was to

**be expected that Trump's decision internationally would have a shared echo. Hardly anyone expected that the American decision would promote the peace process. The feared new dangers to life and limb in the Holy Land and in the neighbouring Arab countries are meanwhile a reality. The anti-Jewish and anti-Israeli slogans chanted in front of the Brandenburg Gate in Berlin are despicable.**

All this makes the strengthening of Europe all the more urgent. For decades, our continent has been synonymous with stability, freedom and human dignity and has set an example for other regions, and that is what it should be again according to the will of the European People's Party EPP. The ESU is committed to this concern. In its Declaration at the 2016 Congress, it called on politicians to do everything that would boost the trust of citizens in the European Union. It is important "to uphold the values that have brought us peace and prosperity in Europe," it said.



*After a long break, back again and warmly welcomed by Prof. An Hermans: her predecessor, Dr. Bernhard Worms. In the background, Janusz Marszalek (PL) is waiting for the opportunity to hand over a Christmas Angel from Oświęcim.*

Aware of its joint responsibility for this process, the European Seniors' Union, at its Presidium meeting from 8<sup>th</sup> to 10<sup>th</sup> December, took appropriate steps to reach this goal. The politicians invited by President Prof. An Hermans agreed that for a united Europe, in particular for the EU as a whole as well as for all of its member-states, the preservation of peace, freedom, democracy and human rights is a task of overriding importance.

So it is not a surprise that the lectures and discussions now revolve around the campaign for the European elections in 2019 - about 18 months before the date. It was agreed, that in order to win as many citizens as possible to vote - primarily for the candidates from EPP member parties - their concerns and wishes must be researched at an early stage, put into practice and thus win back their trust. With this view, the speakers followed the target stated by Prof. Dr. An Hermans and the motivation of our membership associations for the elections to the European Parliament and their thorough preparation.

## Leading candidate announcement in Helsinki

**Federico Ottavio Reho** of the Wilfried Martens Centre for European Studies has noted that after overcoming the serious crises, citizens “think more positively about the EU than before”, which makes him confident.

For **Siegfried Mureşan**, Member of the European Parliament, the “clear edge to Turkey” (notable criticism of human rights violations and a reduction of cash-flow in the run-up to EU accession negotiations) is one of the remarkable results of coordinated EU policies in this closing year. He noted with satisfaction that, with Jean-Claude Juncker, Antonio Tajani and Donald Tusk, the EU's most important leadership positions stem from the EPP family. He announced that an EPP Congress will take place in Helsinki in early November 2018, at which the top candidate for the presidency of the European Commission (currently Juncker) will be elected.

For **Steven Van Ackere**, it is important that the “EU keeps moving” and tackles its current tasks with a “new political inspiration”. It had repeatedly proven in 2017 that it can be successful, even though the lack of solidarity among some EU states in the planned reception of refugees is deplorable and unacceptable, the former Belgian Foreign Minister said. He pleaded for giving more weight to fighting local causes of migration.



*President An Hermans with the EPP Deputy-General Secretary Luc Vandeputte*

**Luc Vandeputte** believes that the election of the chairman of the Commission will be accompanied by proposals from EU member states. **Guido Dumon** made double use of the request by the Deputy-Secretary -General, to give him suggestions for the contents, form and participants in the election campaign: he wishes that the top candidates get in contact with as many citizens as possible and that the media of the EPP operates in clear, understandable language. In this, the ESU Secretary-General sees an important prerequisite for attracting voters to our cause. He also asked the question: “how do we get every ESU member-association to have a Facebook page?” From the regular use of social media by the elderly, **Matteo Albania** expects better contact between the EPP and its potential voters.

As the person in charge of communication and advertising in the EPP, he is prepared to help seniors in handling modern media. (contact addresses: e-mail: [ma@epp.eu](mailto:ma@epp.eu); twitter: @m\_albania). In this context, **Leif Hallberg**, ESU Honorary Chairman (Stockholm) noted: "Our mission is to inform and motivate others, including the younger ones." It is also important to convey to our new citizens before the elections to the national parliament in the coming months that: "Europe is important for all of us."



*Left: Carmen Quintanilla Barba (E) interested her audience with a situation report on Catalonia. Next to her was Antonis Demetriades, who brought to the Presidium the freshly printed edition of the Cypriot Seniors' Magazine, with a detailed report on the 8<sup>th</sup> Regional Conference of Mediterranean countries in Nicosia (CY).*

*Right picture: Etienne Vanderroost (BE), Leif Hallberg (S), Prof. Nikolai Andreev (BG) and Ann Räämet (EST)*

### Bringing together politicians and voters

Hallberg gave a good report about the AGE Platform. From his activities of many years at AGE on behalf of the ESU, he could say: "AGE is the most important trustee for the needs of the older generation in Europe." Its department head, **Maciej Kucharczyk** said that in the years since the European elections in 2014, more seniors in the labour market find now employment; there are also age-friendly tendencies in other areas of the economy. He is committed to measures that continue to adapt the Europe 2020 strategy to new challenges. As before **An Hermans** he pleaded for all seniors' associations to use 29<sup>th</sup> April of each year, the European Day of Solidarity between the Generations, for special activities. This and every other opportunity should be used - according to **Etienne Vanderroost** (B), ESU Treasurer - to bring politicians and, in the near future the mainly candidates for the European Parliament into contact with their voters of all generations. **Prof. Nikolai Andreev** (BG) considers as essential that the top candidate be accompanied on his campaign tours across Europe by the ESU leaders. These performances must have the expectations of the citizens of Europe as the main content, both emphasized. **Dr. Gabriele Peus-Bispinck** (D) expressed the expectation that many seniors also take this opportunity. Social issues, such as the low level of pensions in the Eastern European countries, should also be discussed, demanded **Elke Garczyk** (D/Bavaria). For **Carmen Quintanilla Barba** (E), a strong discrimination against older people is worth discussing with top politicians. **Andreev** (BG) and **Antonis Demetriades** (CY) want to address deficits in the integration of refugees in their countries. **Christine von Stefenelli** (I/South Tyrol) said on this



occasion that in her region, the “fear of refugees” prevails predominantly where there are none in the locality! **Guido Dumon** (B) also spoke of the differences between sensation and reality, using the example of the city of Antwerp: instead of a widely assumed immigrant proportion of 40%, in fact a total of 8% had been counted.



*Left: Dr. Christine von Stefenelli (I/South Tyrol) in conversation with the speaker, Federico Ottavio Reho.*

*Right: Dr. Gabriele Peus-Bispinck (D) with the hard-working ladies of the organisation: Yolande Vanderoogenbroek and Michelle Verraecke (from left to right)*

### Dara Murphy: “ESU - voice of older people”

In a video message commented on by **Nathan Shepura**, Political Advisor to the EPP, **Dara Murphy** gave the seniors a good report. They have their own ideas and goals, which are important for the election campaign. Older people would appreciate best what has been achieved by an integrated Europe over the past 60 years and what is at stake now. The EPP Vice President and campaign manager has high hopes for the participation of all ESU Associations, as they are “the voice of older people”. “What ESU member-Associations do is very important to us”, he stated emphatically.

### An Hermans: Take older people seriously

We should all make sure “that EUROPE becomes important to more people than before”, emphasised President **Prof. Dr. Hermans**, summarising the lectures and discussion. The elderly fellow citizens who have put their trust in us must make the experience that they are taken seriously. Our common goal is that, even in advanced age, they can count on social security, extensive social participation and “lifelong learning” opportunities. This is not least because of a concern that the **International Human Rights Day**, starting on 10<sup>th</sup> December, expects from all political actors. The ESU will continue to be involved in this sense. The preparation of the European elections will be discussed again in the Executive Committee and during the Summer Academy, emphasised An Hermans in conclusion. The Presidium has received a draft of a strategy paper.



*Elke Garczyk (D/Bayern) with the Editor*

### Bernhard WORMS: “EUROPE is worth the commitment”

The Honorary Chairman of the CDU Seniors’ Union and former President of the ESU, **Dr. Bernhard Worms** (D), expressed his satisfaction with the development of the ESU before the Presidium and acknowledged the leading personalities from Belgium as well as all other activists. From many years of political activity that goes back to Konrad Adenauer, he knew that the commitment to EUROPE is worthwhile - despite all obstacles and temporary disappointments. With a view to the European elections in 2019, Worms argued for an intellectual debate that considers people as the starting point and centre of all activity. It is important to take a clear position and thereby to specify “our next achievable goal”. From the realisation “that it is not intended for humans to become refugees, implications are to be drawn, and I see these in the fight against causes of migration,” he said to applause of his friends. In the selection of candidates for the European Parliament, it must hold true whether the person concerned is prepared to defend the values of our faith. He appealed to all decision makers to name also younger people. The “maintenance” of long-serving officials was rejected by Worms.

## ESU Diary 2018

19-20 April: Stockholm (SE): 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Christian-Democratic Seniors’ Association

23<sup>rd</sup> April: Brussels: Presidium

24<sup>th</sup> April: Brussels: Conference with the Youth EPP (YEPP) for the European Day of Solidarity between the Generations

24<sup>th</sup> April: Brussels: Executive Committee

27<sup>t</sup> - 28<sup>th</sup> April Aachen (DE): Regional Conference. Topic: “Growing Old in the Euro-region”

8<sup>th</sup> -9<sup>th</sup> May: Oslo (NO): Regional Conference. Topic: “Solidarity between the Generations”

17<sup>th</sup> -19<sup>th</sup> May: Vilnius (LT): Regional Conference. Topic: “Bridges to Solidarity and Cohesion in the Baltic States”

6<sup>th</sup> July: Vienna: Presidium  
Executive Committee  
Anniversary “10<sup>th</sup> Summer Academy for Leaders”

7<sup>th</sup> - 9<sup>th</sup> July: Vienna: Summer Academy

6<sup>th</sup> - 8<sup>th</sup> Sept.: Bozen (Italy/ South Tyrol): Regional Conference

7<sup>th</sup> - 8<sup>th</sup> Nov.: Helsinki (FIN): Regional Conference

23<sup>rd</sup> - 24<sup>th</sup> Nov.: Leuven (B): Presidium

#### **Additional Events of Member Associations**

20<sup>th</sup> April: Berlin (D): “30 Years of the CDU-Senioren-Union

May (?): Sofia (BG) “10 Years of SGERB” (Seniors’ Association of the GREB party)

## Slovenia: Congress of the SDS Seniors

**Ljubljana.** At their 6th Congress, delegates of the SDS-Seniors passed a resolution addressed to the government. This calls for a clear development strategy in family policy. It also calls for an analysis of “the relationship between pensions, social security and other forms of social benefits on the one hand and employment opportunities for older citizens on the other.”

In his keynote speech, the former president of Slovenia, Janez Jansen, stated that it was in the strategic interest of the country to increase the birth rate and to provide more jobs. He pointed out ways to cope with demographic change that must go hand in hand with an increase in pensions.



*Ljubljana: Congress of SDS senior (KSS SDS). View of the hall. 1st row, 5<sup>th</sup> from right: Zwone Zinrajh, who did not stand again as a candidate for the chair. Since 2016 he is President of the **main** Slovenian Seniors’ organisation ( like in German: “Dachverband”) KOSOS with approx 350.000 members from several associations. To KOSOS the ESU member associations N.Si (Nova Slovenia) and SLS belonging also.*







## Latest news: EPP states its position

At its last meeting in 2017, the EPP faction distanced itself from the anti-Jewish and anti-Israel riots in Berlin and Göteborg. On 13<sup>th</sup> December Its chairman, Manfred Weber, spoke about the abuse of the right to demonstrate and demanded the necessary consequences from the governments concerned. The EPP is critical of Trump's decision on Jerusalem. A pacification of the region in the long term can be achieved only by the two-state solution.

At its suggestion, and in agreement with the Liberals in the European Parliament, the opposition in Venezuela was awarded the Sakharov Prize. Thereby is the message to all associated democratic forces : “we stand by your side,” said Weber.

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