



## *EUROPÄISCHE SENIOREN UNION (ESU)*

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

*Newsletter SENIOR INTERNATIONAL (SI) No. 175 25<sup>th</sup> October 2019*

*With friends in the Konrad-Adenauer-Haus*

*Ways to more democracy discussed / diary planning for 2020*

**Berlin (18/19<sup>th</sup> October).** In Sandanski, immediately after the Congress at the end of September, the newly elected Presidium of the ESU was constituted. (See Issues No. 173 and 174.) In Berlin, the governing body was now considering strategic considerations and practical consequences for the coming months. This was followed by a two-day inspiring encounter with the CDU Seniors' Union in the Konrad-Adenauer-Haus.



*In the Konrad-Adenauer-Haus in Berlin-Tiergarten, members of the ESU Praesidium were united with the Federal Executive Board of the CDU Seniors' Union*

*photo: Michelle Vervaeke*

Looking back at the ESU Congress in Bulgaria, **An Hermans** told the Praesidium that the Sandanski Resolution was a good basis for the political work of all of its member associations. Under the title "Seniors are committed to Europe", the document analyses the political developments since 1989 and shows the way to more "unity in diversity", to a "united and democratic Union". The Congress delegates pledged to participate in the adoption of this Declaration in September.



*The first conference committee with Guido Dumon, An Hermans, Claus Bernhold and Jan Peter Luther (from left to right)*

With the adoption of a second document, they declared their willingness to best represent the positive positions of the future EU Commission on Demographic Change.

How right the ESU is with it, was made clear by the subsequent meeting with the Federal Executive Board of the CDU Seniors' Union. The meeting is thanks to the Honorary Chairman of the organization, **Dr. Bernhard Worms**, who was among the participants. ESU President **Prof. An Hermans** combined her thanks to him with an appreciation of **Helmut Kohl**. The determined action of the then German Chancellor and European honorary citizen moved her 30 years after the state unification of Germany to express her high respect.

### *“Make politics with the heart “*

For **Claus Bernhold**, a member of the ESU Executive Committee and vice-chairman of the hosting Seniors' Union, it is time to bring politics back to the heart. That in 1989, the Hungarian Prime Minister, **Miklos Nemeth**, responded to Kohl's question about a return for his courageous opening of the border: "Hungary does not sell people", still touches him deeply. This policy, characterised by humanity, was also marked by the celebration of the Seniors' Union in recognition of **Nemeth** and **Istvan Horvath** a few days ago and moved the participants to tears. (See *SI No. 174*).



*Dr. Gabriele Peus-Bispinck, Heide Exner, Rolf Berend, Heinz Soth, Helge Benda  
and the 1<sup>st</sup> conference committee*

With the documentation from Sandanski, the ESU strives towards the goal of a “united Europe” that has no internal borders, respects citizens' rights, defends peace and justice, advocates gender equality, and works towards a common foreign and security policy.

The high level of appreciation for the ESU by the hostess, **Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer**, was conveyed in a video message by the CDU chairwoman and German Defense Minister. She offered the “largest political senior organisation in Europe a close, trustworthy cooperation”.

**Rolf Berend**, who spoke after Claus Bernhold, remembered with gratitude that with the 3<sup>rd</sup> October 1990, citizens of the GDR automatically became EU-citizens also. He could not show solidarity with the “defeatists” among his fellow countrymen – incidentally, just as little as with those politicians who, after the European elections, prevented **Manfred Weber**, the declared “Spitzenkandidate”, becoming the Commission's chairman.

This point of criticism was also raised during the conference by other speakers. Eventually the view prevailed that similar things must be avoided and that in **Ursula Von der Leyen**, a personality was chosen finally who enjoys a high reputation throughout Europe and deserves full support.

For **Berend**, the turning point marked by the fall of the Berlin Wall opened the possibility for political mandates: in 1990 for six months in the freely-elected East German People's Chamber (“Volkskammer”), and later in the European Parliament. Now he is the successful chairman of the Seniors' Union in Thuringia, is a member of the Federal Executive Board and contributes his experience to the Executive Committee of the ESU.

**Jan Peter Luther**, Federal Manager (“Bundesgeschäftsführer”) of the Seniors' Union, allowed his audience a verbal participation in a long and democratically led process of working out the “basic principles” of his organization. “Now we have a programme that extends to eight pages,

who we are, what we want and how we envisage the future.” The programme was adopted in October 2018. It sees in an “understandable and tangible digitisation also for seniors” and in “adequate housing in old age”, two focal points for political action in society.

In panel discussions, **Prof. Dr. Merbach, Helge Benda** and **Heide Exner**, also Federal Vice Presidents, and also **Heinz Soth**, the treasurer and representative for International Relations of the Seniors’ Union, took the floor.



*Dr. Christine von Stefenelli, Elke Garczyk, Dr. Bernhard Worms*

## “Establishing a foothold everywhere”

Under the agenda item, “Presentation of the ESU”, its President **Prof. Dr. An Hermans**, spoke first. She referred to a brochure prepared for Sandanski, which documents the work done since 2016. Secretary-General **Guido Dumon** was committed to maintaining the wide range of events. “We bring people from different countries and different organizations together”, he emphasised. In response to enquiries about structural development (“why are seniors from Denmark, Ireland, United Kingdom, Portugal, France, the greater part of Italy and most Balkan countries not yet with us?” and “what about the members in Poland (PSL) and Croatia (HDZ), as well as the Observer-Association in Ukraine?”), Dumon provided detailed information. In addition, he also announced a written status report.

**Bernhard Worms** stated in the presentation round that the seed planted between 1990 and 1994 has grown. On 7<sup>th</sup> November, 1995, the founding of the ESU in Madrid was completed. (“Of course, we have not succeeded in everything we planned to do.”) A Vice-President from the beginning, Worms became President of the ESU (2001-2013), following **Stefan Knafel** from Austria, and **An Hermans** became his successor in 2013, whom he now sincerely congratulated on her re-election.

He sees the ESU as a community that provides security and a home, also because it is committed to the Jewish-Christian heritage of Europe. “Establishing a foothold everywhere” remains an urgent task, which concerns all associations and individuals.

## “Providing security and a home.....”

...should be the concern of all politicians, for the Christian Democrats above all. In this sense, **Prof. Dr. Steven Van Hecke** from Leuven (BE) expressed himself. With that, he opened the debate on new ways towards a democratic society based on mutual trust, taking all those willing with it and aiming for a strong, united and yet diverse EUROPA.



*The 2<sup>nd</sup> conference committee with Dr. Bernhard Worms, Prof. An Hermans, Heinz K. Becker, Prof. Dr. Steven Van Hecke and Bertil Wegner (from left to right.)*

Parties and associations are called upon to turn to all people, and in particular to those in social need. The continuing secularisation leads to the question, what role religion (still) plays in private and in public life. Political parties that – like the CDU / CSU – understand themselves as “people’s parties”, have to “bring different interests together”. It should be taken into account – also by the ESU – that not all parties belonging to the EPP family, be they in government or in opposition, have any “interest in associations for young people, women and/or seniors”. Out of the discussion came the proposal that the future EPP chairperson (election planned in Zagreb) should raise awareness of this problem and to ask him / her for an appropriate initiative. Their success would benefit the European People’s Party (EPP) and the European Seniors’ Union (ESU).

For Van Hecke, it was and is a surprise and a satisfaction that the 27 remaining EU member states continue to speak in a decisive voice on crucial issues in spite of all their national and historical peculiarities and characteristics (most recent example: the BREXIT deal)

Like Van Hecke, the political scientist, Bertil Wegner, the director for international relations in the CDU, also breaks a lance for the existence of People’s Parties, which are now and again prophesied to come to an imminent end. His party is in the process of reshaping the 19<sup>th</sup> century “model People’s Party” to one which is appropriate for post-industrial society. The basic programme process (already mentioned) with the basis, i.e. the members and other interested parties, is an example of this. The “basis” is just what distinguishes the People’s Parties from

loose movements such as the French “yellow vests” and their position in the political spectrum in the long run.

For Wegner, the political and human interaction with the Spitzenkandidate for the Commission's presidency, **Manfred Weber** (CSU), are worthy of criticism; he was relieved that the rejection campaign launched by France and Spain did not lead to an “institutional crisis in the EU”. The distinguished **Ursula Von der Leyen** deserved support, he declared to applause. That Weber was willing to do that, too, speaks for his integrity.

**Heinz K. Becker** sees in the documents of the ESU Congress in Bulgarian Sandanski a high level handbook. They justify our commitment to Europe, which is supported by a sense of belonging and promotes a European identity. The awareness of the real “European membership” of citizens should also be strengthened through our work – with young and old. He sees deficits in the political education of the population, which make them susceptible to extreme (e.g. right-wing) positions. He expects from the new EU Commission “people will be able to make their voices heard,” as Mrs Von der Leyen emphasised in her first speech. That will also help to secure her demand for “greater participation in our democracy”.



*Astrid Lulling, Manfred Hopfengärtner, Etienne Vanderroost, Lidmila Nemcova and guests (from right to left)*

In the discussion, **Claus Bernhold**, **Astrid Lulling** and **Elke Garczyk** asked what would become of the ESU documents. The President and the Secretary-General confirmed in their replies that they are being sent to all Member Associations and the EU institutions, and Sandanski has received initial positive reactions (from the EU Commission). There will be a “feedback control” to prove that our involvement is worthwhile.

**Etienne Vanderroost**, Treasurer of the ESU, advises the EU Commission to define “five to six major issues”, including climate change, as tasks for the whole of Europe, which would make many citizens more likely to commit themselves, rather than a multitude of problems that burden our everyday lives.

## The actions count

For **Elke Garczyk** from Bavaria, who was no longer a candidate for the ESU Praesidium, “clear words, how they are cultivated by Kurz and Söder” are a basis for “tackling and accessing” to achieve our political goals.

**Lidmila Nemcova**, a Vice-President from Prague, hopes that the open discussion maintained in the ESU and many other countries – the expression of a vibrant democracy – would also be self-evident in the “divided society of the Czech Republic”. Up to now there are at best, “emotional discussions rather than encouragement for political action”. She sees the Sandanski Resolutions as a signpost for herself and her ESU colleagues.

**Heide Exner** (DE) wants that the disappointments after the “Manfred Weber case” will be followed by a policy based on reliability. Mentioning Vanderroost, she argued that her party, the CDU, combines “climate protection and economics”. Mrs. Exner is a Deputy Federal Chairman of the Seniors’ Union.

Under the impression of the prevention of Manfred Weber, Vice-President **Dr. Gabriele Peus-Bispinck** (DE) asked whether the “Spitzenkandidate model” might not be in need of reform.

For **Antonis Demetriades**, a Vice-President from Cyprus, the recruitment of young people for a Christian Democratic policy has priority, and so a campaign just started is aimed at this goal. The loss of votes for the ruling Rally party has to be made good, he stressed

**Heinz K. Becker** will ensure that in Austria the Congress documents are sent to all of the over 300,000 members of the Seniors’ Association (“Österreichischer Seniorenbund /ÖSB). Surprising was his information that the People’s Party, led by Sebastian Kurz, is “now also the strongest pensioner and youth party”. The fact that the Seniors’ Association has participated in the positioning of the long-term care insurance before the national elections now pays off in the eyes of the ÖSB.

**Ulrich Winz** asked Bertil Wegner about his assessment of the Sejm elections in Poland. His answer: although the right-wing conservative PiS had increased significantly, but in the Senate, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Chamber of Parliament, the majority could not win. Worryingly, the new right-wing party gained 7 percent of the vote.



*President Prof. Dr. An Hermans with her closing address*

**President An Hermans** concluded by saying that she considered all the lectures and other contributions to be supportive of her activity. The first feedback about the Congress decisions was encouraging. All Member Associations are called upon to make the statements the basis of their work. She looks forward to reactions from our own ranks. To this includes statements that should find a place in further position determinations.

## What the ESU Presidium discussed

At the start, President An Hermans thanked her former deputy, Elke Garczyk, for her many years of service to our cause in Bavaria. Her successor, as suggested by the CSU Seniors' Union in Bavaria, is Manfred Hopfengärtner. The other members who retired from the Presidium, Roland Leek (SE), Zvonko Zinrajh (SLO) and Janusz Marszalek (PL), were prevented from attending.

Astrid Lulling (LU) and Manfred Hopfengärtner (DE / Bavaria) were involved in a working session for the first time and were welcomed by the President.

The Presidium agreed to subject the ESU Statutes to a thorough overhaul. Necessary changes are to be discussed and if possible decided on at a Congress.

### **Burden-sharing called for**

Coping with the growing political, programmatic, organisational, communicative and administrative work requires relief in the Brussels office, where **An Hermans** and **Guido Dumon** are volunteers. Currently, they are being supported for a year by the student, Michelle Vervaeke. An Hermans urged the Presidium members to undertake more tasks. This is a



prerequisite for “continuing”. For a binding burden-sharing / responsibility – content - related and based on the respective region of the Presidium member – the Presidium was unable to decide at this time.

The Secretary-General announced the topic of “communication and networking” for the next Presidium meeting. This reacts to new expectations of public relations work.

The Presidium confirmed the event dates for the next months (see overview in this issue.) The festive event "25 years ESU" in Madrid should be used for contacts with seniors on site.

## *Honoured for her Lifetime Achievement*



As it became known only now, in September Dr. Marilies Flemming, Vienna, received from the hands of Heinz K. Becker the glass trophy for her life's work intended for her 85<sup>th</sup> birthday by the ESU: “In Honour of a Lifetime Achievement”. Congratulations! - ESU Vice-President Becker has been appointed by the Austrian People's Party as the new Seniors' Representative, following in Marilies' footsteps.

# ESU Diary

2019

6-8<sup>th</sup> November **Bratislava**: Regional conference  
“30 years of freedom – from the viewpoint of seniors”

20 – 21<sup>st</sup> November **Zabreb**: participation from delegates and guests of the ESU at the  
Election Congress of the European People's Party (EPP)

2020

5 – 7<sup>th</sup> March 2020 **Prague**: Regional conference  
Executive Committee  
Presidium

2<sup>nd</sup> July 2020 **Vienna**: Presidium  
3 – 4<sup>th</sup> July 2000 **Vienna**: 11<sup>th</sup> Summer Academy for Leaders

6 -9<sup>th</sup> September 2020 **Cracow and Oświęcim**: Conference  
**Nowy Sadz and Bad Krynica**: participation and contribution to the Forum of the University  
of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Age (as part of the International Economic Forum in Poland)

November 2020 **Madrid**: celebratory event: “25 Years of the European Seniors’ Union”  
and a meeting of the Executive Committee

**X**

A Regional Conference of the Baltic Counties in Tallinn will take place in 2021

## A Word from the Editor

Dear recipient of the newsletter!

This present edition No. 175 is the last in my competence and responsibility. Health reasons dictate a reduction in commitments. Searching, travelling, drafting and editing texts, correspondence with users and informants, translation of position papers into German, corrections, formatting of texts and images, sending emails, editing feedbacks, updating the

address book – all of this takes more time than seems to me still appropriate and personally justifiable.

Admittedly, I have attributed part of the increased burden due to the expansion of the original size from one page to now mostly around ten pages. But it is also proof that there is a lot going on in our European Seniors' Union and that we are required more than ever.

Incidentally, in the first years of publication, there were, in addition to the free German edition, also professional but fee-based translations into English, French and Spanish. Margit and Seán Hawkes volunteered years ago to translate it into English. Several ESU friends have temporarily translated the Newsletter (at least in excerpts) into their own language (examples: Czech Republic, Slovenia) and sent it to their compatriots. The ÖSB magazine printed it verbatim for years (for its more than 300,000 members). Elke Garczyk from Bavaria assures that she has spread "SI" digitally in her state. Lidmila Nemcova publishes the German and English editions on the website of her association.

In a conversation in Berlin with the President and Secretary-General, we discussed the growing demands on ESU public relations. Whether there will be a Newsletter in the present form in the future is unlikely. Rather, more attention probably will be paid to the website.

SENIOR INTERNATIONAL" first appeared in April 2006 after a Presidium meeting on the sidelines of the EPP Congress in Rome. "Pate" was the (now discontinued) magazine of the Austrian Seniors' Association (ÖSB). My claim was to make "SI" an up-to-date informational publication, which in the opinion of many friends (despite their reluctance to submit entries) was largely successful. On the other hand, in my estimation, "SI" has not become a forum for the exchange of experiences, which I regret.

I said goodbye to my ESU family in Berlin today. I will miss the friendly attention of many confidants; with the heart I stay connected to the ESU and its activists.

Ulrich Winz, 18.October 2019

**As many of you will know: my internet account was the victim of a hacker attack on 18.10, causing most of e-mail addresses to be lost. It will take a few days for the new list to be almost complete again. As a result, a complete supply to all subscribers of the Issue No.175 cannot be guaranteed. UW.**

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#### IMPRESSUM

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