

European Seniors' Union: a network, a platform, a bridge

Dear Colleagues and Friends,

During the last few weeks we have experienced it: the ESU has been a valuable meeting point for us on a European level.

In three newsletters concerning seniors during the period of the Covid 19 pandemic we underlined the need to respect the rights of seniors.

Age should not be a reason to withhold the necessary care from seniors and/or to decide on isolation measures. In our newsletters several testimonies followed with information about 'the home situation' of all of you. The figures of infections, the patients, the mortality rates, the comparisons between countries, we could follow them through the media. But it sounded so different when we heard your voice apart from those figures. Many thanks to all of you who have contributed to making the ESU what we want to be during this period:

- **A network** of senior citizens' organisations, led by committed, active senior citizens who want to work for the well being of their fellow citizens and who know that Europe is the horizon of that well being;
- **A platform** where we exchange experiences, find inspiration and learn from each other;
- **A bridge** between the European policy level and the home situation, between politicians and citizens.

In this 'Newsletter May part 4', we are glad to present you, some information from:

- Seniorennunion CSU (Germany)
- Kristendemokraterna Seniorförbundet (Sweden)
- SKS (Czech Republic)
- ZKS - Association of Christian Seniors of Slovakia (Slovakia)

It is clear that the pandemic has struck very differently in our various countries. The 'economic recovery' and the return to social life, will take place differently in each country. We are counting on every government to take its responsibility and put people's well being first. We count on the EU, in particular the EPP leaders in the Commission, the European Parliament, to play a leading role. As ESU we remain connected with each other and hope to meet again soon.

An Hermans



COVID-19-PANDEMIC :

No one can get away! All in the name of duty!

The national board of the Senior Citizens' Union joins the challenge !

(Press release)

Manfred Hopfengärtner

CSU – Senioren-Union

ESU Vice-President

The national board of the Senior Citizens' Union SEN in the CSU, convened for the first digital conference in its history, dealt with the COVID 19 pandemic and its effects on everyday life. "The screen activists proved to be all-round communicators in their new profession and are competent in tablet handling: the concern that the troubled ones were possibly excluded, as soon as it concerns the 'other' way of discussion, proved to be incorrect", could summarize regional chairman Dr. Thomas Goppel, with a feeling of relieve.

The Senior Council of Christian Social Workers, with almost equal representation, was relieved to note that Prime Minister Markus Söders' approach to controlling the epidemic is based on solid proven pillars: a cautious stocktaking, a sensitively graduated response in the fight against consequences and a cautious return to everyday economic and social life. Particularly grateful are the representatives of the board and citizens for differentiated measures in the COVID counter-strategy, which are comprehensible, if possible also visible in their effect. This is especially true for those prohibitions of meetings that cannot yet be released.

Board members from all over Bavaria have called for the reduction of the clearly too large economically justified concentration processes, the redefinition of nationwide hospital structures, and the introduction of the return of indispensable production chains (masks, protective equipment, medicines, vaccines etc.) at least to Europe, better to Germany and the securing of health care and provision of GP services, etc

Pensioners are grateful that the Free State of Bavaria has already taken the first steps in this direction.

Dr. Thomas Goppel: "COVID 19 has made our health care systems open to rapid upgrade, also in the area of nursing care. In the opinion of the representatives of risk group No. 1, measures to improve the protection of those in need of long-term care, should be implemented quickly. We share the view of health policy-makers that a health fund is needed to financially secure the tasks

of the public health service, which creates the conditions for a swift response to new healthcare challenges.

The board members also underlined their support for initiatives of the Prime Minister to do more for health care professionals, especially in the nursing sector. The Corona bonus of Prime Minister Söder has revealed what this society has long repressed, perhaps even forgotten : the service to people, to others, is an indispensable requirement for the long-term viability of a society. All other things are to be made subordinated to services in the field of health and care."

The Executive Board members agreed : The corona shock is deep-seated and will be expensive. We will master it only together and without inconsiderate exclusion of any kind."

Goppel reminds of the old Roman basic demand "Prinzipiis obsta!" and he not only means *the Palmer proposal* on the 'profitability of the pandemic effort', but also social indifference towards increasing domestic violence, or fear of isolation, which can only be restrained if what distinguishes man in Creation: the ability to dialogue and an unquestionable co-responsibility for everyday issues are kept alive in the consciousness of every Individual.



Report from the Senior Union of the Christian Democrats in Sweden on the Corona situation.

Lars O. Molin
President KD Senior

Challenges and problems

The recommendation from the government is that people older than 70 years should stay at home and avoid contacts with other than those living in the household. However, they are allowed to take walks and be outside in the fresh air. Social distance is what is recommended.

A problem is that this recommendation concerns a big group. There are of course differences within the age range 70-100 years. Many elderly people are also very much missing the contacts with children and grandchildren.

There has been especially in the beginning of the crisis a discussion if it would be necessary to make priorities in the health care. Which age is of most value?

It seems as that covid-19 has gained a large spread in the elderly care sector.

Physical meetings cannot be held. We are in the Union encouraging our members to have digital meetings through video and telephone.

Positive experiences

We can see how people care of each other and show solidarity. The air is cleaner with less traffic. We have time to stop and reflect on our lives.

A political discussion has stated how the care of elderly can be of better quality in the future. The staff has to get a better training. All parties are willing to spend more money on that.

The political parties are working together in order to find solutions to strengthen the health sector and to give assistance to the business sector.



Statement of Sdružení křesťanských seniorů (SKS) on the coronavirus pandemic.

Lidmila Němcová,
President SKS
Vice-President ESU

Introduction

In the Czech Republic, the pandemic coronavirus has appeared in the second wave of its expansion in Europe after Italy, Spain and other countries. Therefore, some valuable experiences were disposable for taking first needed measures. In general the Czech government was not prepared as many other states (safety requisites, instruments, rooms and beds in hospitals, lack of testing and treatment experiences, not any proved vaccination against COVID-19 etc.).

On March 12, 2020 the emergency status has been proclaimed and a special crisis governmental commission established for controlling the fight against the coronavirus; very drastic limitations have been ordered (as closing certain shops, enterprises, offices and schools, meetings and outdoors move and state borders crossing restriction, introducing new home office application, forbidding cultural and sports events, obligatory drapes (masks) wearing, strong hygienic measures, special measures in hospitals as well as in houses for seniors etc. etc.). Increased danger of coronavirus infection has been identified for people between 20 – 70 years old with a growing seriousness with the age. The highest lethality appears for groups over 70 years (8 %) and over 80 years (14 %).

At present, the coronavirus in the Czech Republic seems to be on retreat. Since early May, a step-by-step liberalization process has been adopted for ending on May 25. At the moment (May 19, 2020) the total number of infected people reached 8586 whereas mortality 297 people (the total population in the Czech Republic is about 10.4 millions of inhabitants). It is necessary to highlight the disciplinary approach of the Czech population during the pandemic crisis and the immense work of all the people actively engaged in this period as well.

Questions

1 .What are/were some of the main challenges during this crisis, especially for seniors?

- Czech population has been surprised by a rapid start of the pandemic and by its consequences for which it had not been prepared.
- The COVID-19 has reached the special houses for seniors and health-handicapped people. The reason was that at the beginning of the pandemic crisis no controlling new clients, services providers and personnel was arranged.
- The media emitting uninterrupted flow of negative information what has lead to big depressions especially in case of elder seniors.
- Some of the seniors at the beginning of the crisis were deprived of any info because of a lack of access to TV or computers.
- Any health care has been focused on epidemic coronavirus and therefore care or prevention for any other health problem have to be delayed or neglected.
- Any predictability for the coronavirus infection development is very difficult for lack of any know-how including specific vaccinations.
- The importance of psychic consultative help cannot be neglected as well. An equilibrium of fear and hope is to be maintained. The seniors had to overcome the fear, depressions, isolation, and loneliness.
- A real constructive help and consultation have been needed to solve senior's problems like payment of services, housing, rents, special financial contributions income and social care.
- A great sensibility of personal freedom and human rights in decision-making is of paramount importance for seniors facing administrative regulations by state authorities.
- An appropriate criticism exists for maintaining the freedom and any vision of further hopeful development.
- Civic solidarity reached in the course of the crisis should continue.
- The interdisciplinary cooperation among competent scientists and politicians in the Czech Republic and Europe is necessary.
- Political representatives at any level should take the responsibility for common good.

2. Are there positive solutions that have been put forward that could lead us also in the future?

- Obviously, with any further development (inclusive an end to pandemic coronavirus) the situation will no more return to that before this disease. Many new problems will need a solution at various levels from individuals up to states and the whole human kind across the whole Planet. The government should prepare not only a positive scenario of the country development but also a negative one and it should also take the necessary measures (including needed reserves of food, water, sanitary materials).
- Especially seniors have arrived to aware their values outside exclusively material ones such as health, the sense of human life, family, inter-human relations, inter-generation co-operation and solidarity, public interest, responsibility at all levels, denounce of the indifference etc.

- Social networks integrating all interested segments of the population should be established. In our case, a co-operation and advocacy of seniors organizations at any level should be ensured with the government as well as its appropriate sectors of ministries, with both chambers of the Parliament as well as representatives of clubs of political parties and movements, with the Union of municipalities and villages, NGOs, with all public media to identify and solve special goals brought by seniors.
- Social enterprises are to be supported.
- European pillar of Social Right is needed for guaranty of any future putting into the practice the social goals and rights.
- As to the public informative level a higher and objective reflect of European initiatives in national media is needed.
- A large promotion of electronic communication possibilities for seniors (video conferences, video workshops, video lectures, virtual theater performances, concerts etc., personal communication by SKYPE, e-mails etc.).
- Information about health and its prevention for seniors should be largely promoted as one of the precaution principals.

3. Are there particular stories you would like to highlight?

- There are many examples of a spontaneous and voluntary initiative among the population (co-operation in the family, with neighbours and communities at various levels). The inter-generation solidarity has been realized in practical ways. Young people have been helping the seniors especially at the local level - shopping for them, helping with the care of little animals, visiting for discussions, distributing hygienic material and information etc.
- The members of the Czech SKS executive committee as well as of clubs bought the material, made a great number of the masks lacking in the market, and distributed them to those people unable to get them by other ways.
- Regularly actualized SKS web pages, phone calls as well as a virtual communication have served as important tools for information about the development of the crisis. ESU email contacts were appreciated.
- Consultation activities and the offers of various services have been proposed from local levels up to the central level. In addition local authorities or NGOs contacted seniors asking them about their needs.
- Daily emissions of the Pope Francis messes from Vatican transmitted by the TV NOE or disposable directly from the Holly See media and also the ecumenical messes from Czech churches transmitted by the Czech broadcast or TV have been highly appreciated when the attendance to the messes was impossible. Several messes were broadcasted from the new Catholic church in Prague 11 where is also the residence of the local SKS club. Our deacon had a sermon how to overcome fear.
- The media have been playing the important role; one of the Czech TV channels has been reserved for the seniors. A special edition of the KDU-ČSL party monthly Nový Hlas was dedicated to the coronavirus pandemic (see annex). The Council of the Czech Seniors has been publishing also in its monthly periodica IDoba senior articles about the life of seniors in the crisis and has made lobbying for some interests of seniors at the Czech government.

<https://www.kdu.cz/getattachment/862dddfb-900d-4642-893a-ae3073238f19/Novy-Hlas-kveten-2020.aspx>



We are the champions of Europe, the protective face masks have become fashionable

Peter Mach
Miloš Nemeček

Association of Christian Seniors of Slovakia

First the most important numbers. As 21 May, Slovakia had 1,502 infected persons and 28 deaths. In recent days the number of new infections has always been less than 10, and in some days even zero. For the orientation of readers - Slovakia has less than 5.5 million inhabitants. We are glad that these figures make us champions of Europe. Slovakia can gradually open everyday life and the economy, but we need to be cautious.

As we look at the context, let us add that for both authors who participated in the EXCO ESU meeting in Prague on March 5-7, it is also a personal matter. The first cases occurred in the Czech Republic on March 1. Our friends recommended us not to travel to Prague, but we did not want to miss great and important meetings with friends. When we came to Prague, we had no idea that on that day, on March 5, the first case of infection appeared in Slovakia. A few days later we would not be able to travel, the Slovak government closed the borders ...

We may have a different view of this but Slovakia's very strict approach, which some neighbours and part of the public described as drastic, was undoubtedly effective. The protection of health and lives is a very good result of this approach. The borders were closed in our country when 28 people were infected, no other country did it so fast. Earlier than in other countries, all mass events were banned and schools and shops except food shops and pharmacies were closed.

Many seniors were particularly affected by the prohibition of public worships, but this prohibition was also respected.

Wearing of protective masks became a phenomenon. At the same time when politicians like Trump and Johnson were questioning the wearing of them, Slovak politicians were leading the public by own example, and protection surprisingly quickly became commonplace. Especially



Slovak President Ms. Čaputová, aroused the interest of the world media. She harmonized the mask with her dress, so the wearing of masks has become fashion. Ladies in particular want to brag about the most original masks, with various, often folklore or other

motifs ...

As the masks were an absolute shortage during this period, their self-made production and giving to the needy people - including seniors in many cases - expanded incredibly in a very short time.

Now, however, more seriously about the context, sometimes contradictory, of the development of the pandemic in Slovakia. Slovak and foreign experts and journalists agree that Slovakia's good results are based mainly on two pillars, namely the very quick and drastic measures and the mass use of protective masks. It is fair to add that two other objective circumstances also affected this. Slovakia is one of the youngest European countries, the average age is just over 40 years, while Italy, for example, has the highest average age in Europe, 46 years. The share of citizens over the age of 65 is only 22 percent in our country, in Italy up to 35 percent and in most developed European countries it is between 32 and 34 percent. In terms of quality of life, it is not an honour for Slovakia at all, but in this case it has helped us a lot and is helping us still. Some experts also pointed to another difference compared to the neighbours. Vienna or Prague have very busy international airports, which, especially at the beginning of crisis, have undoubtedly been a gateway for the import of the disease, while Bratislava airport has only a very limited number of international flights and the operation was stopped very quickly.

So in addition to a very quick and drastic reaction, objective circumstances and/or a good deal of luck also helped us. Very strong discipline and respect to the authorities as a legacy from the totalitarian past had an impact too. Several measures have been on the brink of human rights restrictions, they would probably meet with reluctance or even resistance in other countries. The mandatory 14-day quarantine of returnees from abroad to Slovakia, met with strong criticism because of unsuitable conditions in some state facilities. The Constitutional Court has rejected the possibility of monitoring citizens with the help of mobile communication.

As far as seniors are concerned, they have been extremely disciplined and we could describe a number of examples of beautiful help. A major problem was that the new government, which was formed in mid-March after the parliamentary elections on February 29, did not consult their actions with organizations of seniors. In some cases, the seniors, even with the active participation of our Association of Christian Seniors of Slovakia, enforced the abolition of measures because of their discriminatory nature. It was, for example, a decision that seniors can shop only during

designated hours (9-11), which was not suitable for the working seniors, who were thus deprived of the opportunity to buy. This measure was cancelled after 2 days. The idea to cancel the possibility of free travel by rail for seniors, which was intended to restrict the movement of the population, was finally not introduced at all.

Of the total 28 deaths in our country, 11 were in nursing homes, 7 of them were in the town of Pezinok. A suspicion that this was due to negligence on the part of management and staff in this nursing home is under investigation.

We are writing these lines on 20 May, and the fourth, final phase of crisis easing is starting today. It is almost a return to a normal life - but with high vigilance. Masks are mandatory only in enclosed spaces, they are recommended in open spaces. Mass events can be held, cinemas, theatres and other events can begin with a maximum of one hundred participants and social distance has to be secured.

It is already possible to travel to 8 countries - 4 neighbouring: Czech Republic, Poland, Hungary and Austria, as well as to Germany, Switzerland, Croatia and Slovenia - for short trips that are not longer than 24 hours. It will not help us much yet, because these countries have not opened their borders. The next task is therefore, in particular, to open the borders within Schengen. And addressing the economic impact of the crisis is the most important thing now - but that is another chapter ...