



EUROPEAN SENIORS' UNION (ESU)

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EPP Jubilee urges unity

In Luxembourg, Manfred Weber, President of the European People's Party EPP, called for solidarity among European countries. On the occasion of a festive event for the 40th anniversary of the EPP, he stated on 30th May: "If we do not stand together now in Europe, we have no chance in the world of tomorrow." For the "European journey through life", cultural diversity and tradition and values such as democracy and human rights are "the best basis". Among the guests from many countries was the President of the European Seniors' Union, em. Prof. An Hermans (Belgium).

Over 70 parties from 40 countries are members of the EPP. Since 1999, it represents the largest political group in the European Parliament

Budapest Regional Conference with sporty supplement

General Topic: Active Ageing and the Participation of Seniors in Everyday Life

For the first regional conference of the European Seniors' Union (ESU) in Hungary, which together with the Robert-Schuman-Institute, took place on 26th and 27th May, prominent speakers from the host country were invited. These politicians and scientists determined large parts of the first day in the parliament building on the Danube. The "first-hand" contributions about the practical implementation of the policy for the elderly were informative. They bore witness to a wealth of steps and projects to give the life of the elderly a meaning, to keep their well-being as long as possible and to provide the necessary care in case of illness. In the discussion, part of their social measures were received with reservations.

What the State Secretary, **Katalin Novák**, **Prof. Dr. József Mészáros** (head of the Department for Pension Payments) and the Fidesz MP, **Mónika Dunai**, stated about the topic “active ageing and the participation of senior citizens in everyday life” commands respect.



Speakers from the first day of the conference

From left: Katalin Novák, Sarolta Monspart, Petra Aczel, Tamás János Schanda, Pétérne Santha, Erzsébet Blaskovich

For Mrs. Novák, who is also Vice-president of the Seniors' Council, the demographic trends mean “no burden, but rather a challenge” for the politicians and society. The common goal to pursue “becoming old healthily” serves among other things the cooperation between generations.

The real worth of the pension has risen in the last years, the “basic costs” (food, rent, electricity...) have gone down, and a “mother’s pension” allows women an earlier pension after 40 years of contributions if they want to care for their grandchildren. Employment possibilities for the over-55’s have been secured, and for the disabled it is now also easier.

Prof. Mészáros attaches importance to regular payment contributions from the employed to supplement the state pension. The age of retirement will be increased in steps from 63 to 65 years.

As the MP Dunai said, the pension has risen since 2011 by 21 percent (and amounts to an average of about 470 Euro). 1,500 of the most demanded medicines have dropped in price by one third. Recently, grandparents can also take a break from their employment after the birth of children in the family (grandchildren). Mrs. Dunai concluded with the belief that “Hungary wants to become a family-friendly society!”



A partial view of the Parliament building. It was built 1885-1904 by Imre Steindl in the neo-gothic style. The British Parliament in London stood as the “father” for the Hungarian architect. Under the dome, the Crown of St. Stephen, with the imperial Hungarian insignia, is guarded by members of the armed services.

In a second round of presentations, the results achieved by the three working groups of the Seniors’ Council were discussed.

What counts for the geriatric specialist, **Dr. Erzsébet Blaskovich** is that 160 geriatric beds have been established since 2010, but that the meanwhile 30 fully-trained specialist doctors are not enough.

Èva Body is concerned with the care of those with dementia. The local authorities are obliged to provide meals to those in care living at home. It is foreseen to provide local care for dementia patients living at home in order to avoid a hospital stay where possible.

With the appearance of **Sarolta Monspart**, movement came to the hall filled with 180 guests. After a rousing speech about recreational sport, the former president of the National Olympic Committee called for some soothing relaxation exercises, which nobody could or liked to resist.

She criticised the modern fashions. If they played with Smart-phones instead of kissing and making love, “where will the children come from?” she asked the audience. She advocated lifelong physical and mental fitness and warned women “to cook what is necessary and not what the husband or partner wants”.



A sports lady brought 180 people into movement (“The conference does gymnastics”)

For **Prof. Dr. Petra Aczél** from the Catholic University the neglect of children, young people and the elderly in the media is not acceptable. Thus they deny “what we do to prolong life”. Have the journalists forgotten, she asked, “that is was their grandmother, a senior, on whose lap they once sat?” In this connection, it is pleasing to learn that now every good journalistic work about families and - from 2017 – about the elderly, will be honoured with a high remuneration, about which **Imre Nyitrai** reported.

With a number of examples, the Deputy-Mayor of the 8th district of Budapest, **Pétérne Sántha**, illustrated how varied the offers can be for seniors in the community. These are used frequently, she was pleased to say. Often, these initiatives are thanks chiefly to the ubiquitous existing Seniors’ Councils.

Tamás János Schánda, deputy state secretary; as a young politician, he bridges a connection for a give and take between the generations; which are of advantage for both and which can be good also for the cohesion of the family.

This was followed up by **Marilies Flemming**, a member of the Executive Committee from Austria, who has demanded “the same rights for old and young.” She realized that in the announcements of the UNO, the concept of “Family” unfortunately is not often used.

The President of the Schuman-Institute, **Doris Pack** from Germany, suggested looking at a successfully managed project, the “multiple generation house” in her country, for its usefulness in Hungary and elsewhere (her explanation about the similarities and differences of European identity will be dealt with in the next issue). Presenter **Tünde Fürézs**, Deputy State Secretary, and ESU President **An Hermans**, gave a positive assessment of the speeches and debates.

In her introduction, **Prof. Dr. Hermans** has emphasised the function of the ESU as a “bridge between the generations,” which includes the exchange of experiences. The ESU feels responsible not only for the well-being of the elderly but for the whole of society. The basis for this is the preservation of peace and the strengthening of European integration in democracy, freedom and solidarity.



The ESU President An Hermans thanked the speakers on the 2nd day of the conference

From left: László Patyán, Katalin Ábrahám, László Medgyasszay, Gábor Berczelli (presenter)

On the second day of the conference delegates from numerous ESU member associations and guests from Hungary gathered in the Hotel Mercure Buda. After a closed session of the Executive Committee, topics were discussed that supplemented statements declared the day before. It began with a video presentation with thought-provoking statements by An Hermans (BE), Anne Velliste (EST), Elmar Brok and Bernhard Worms (both DE), as well as Heinz K. Becker (AT): here were biographical experiences of war and dictatorship (Velliste), connected with opinions about current affairs - a project for the ESU’s 20th anniversary in the autumn of 2015. The words of former ESU President **Dr. Worms**, spoken at the conclusion, “the struggle of everyone against everyone leads to the downfall of Europe “ still resounds....

The “**Youth and Seniors for Europe Foundation**”, launched by him at the end of April (as reported by SI), pursues the opposite goal: to reward scientific work that has the integration of our continent as its content, as Worms explained. Referring to historic decisions made by Adenauer, Bush senior, Kohl and Gorbachev, he put “personal authenticity” as an essential aspect of successful negotiations. When asked “how should it continue and what Europe do

we want?”, he is reminded repeatedly of the “Magna Carta” adopted by the ESU, the acceptance of which is binding for all member associations.

Prof. Steven Van Hecke, Leuven (BE), spoke in this context about short and long-term solutions. Despite all the concerns about the current picture of the EU, the fact is: “the advantages of the EU predominate”. In contrast to Russia and Turkey, where one person decides, we are committed to a democratic decision-making process. However, the elderly are under-represented in the European Parliament; the “Greens” have sent many young MPs “into the race”.

With **Csaba Farago**, another young participant, originally from Hungary, came to the lectern. He has been recently re-elected as Deputy Chairman of the EPP-youth organization, YEPP. Like the previous speaker, he sees “no future for the EU without stronger cooperation”.

In a discussion with **Józef Miklosko** (SK), who spoke about the average pension of 405 Euros for his countrymen, **Astrid Lulling** (LU), **Claus Bernhold** (DE), **Marilies Flemming** (AT), Vice-president **Dr. Gabriele Peus-Bispinck** (DE) **Lidmila Nemcova** (CZ), Vice-president **Dr. Christine von Stefenelli** (IT / South Tyrol) and **Dr. Bernhard Worms** (DE), concerns about the future of Europe were articulated and ways out of the crisis of confidence were discussed. Mrs von Stefenelli spoke out against the border fences at the Brenner and warned - as afterwards also did **a delegate from Vojvodina** (Hungarian Vajdaság), the most northern province of Serbia, that the politicians should pay more attention to minorities.

Prof. László Patyan from Debrecen, a geriatrician engaged with the AGE Platform among other things, put his finger on some wounds in his lecture, including the low chances of the elderly in the Hungarian labour market (third from last place, Poland is last). In his country, the Seniors’ Councils were indeed opinion-formers but without any decision-making power. For the participation of seniors, the doctor saw residential area (urban/rural), level of education, level of retirement benefits, health condition and others as essential. Experience about “active ageing” should be disseminated throughout Europe. His assessment: “in Eastern Europe, many seniors are alone because their children are looking after seniors in Western Europe” is thought-provoking.

Dr. Katalin Ábrahám, chairman of the National Seniors’ Association in an urban district of Budapest, is persuaded of the advantages of a municipally-funded “60 plus programme” in conjunction with a “discount card”, and to “lifelong learning” (at the Seniors’ Academy) with 2,000 participants. 100 volunteers enable the implementation. On request, she explained “the pensions are safe, not the work place!” Critically, she sees that Hungarian minorities in neighbouring countries have “a struggle for survival.”

In the discussion, criticism was expressed also by **Astrid Lulling** from Luxembourg, concerning reports about discounts for some food, the cost of medicine, rent, electricity and other so-called overhead expenses. In her opinion, a further increase of the still very low pensions should be placed at the centre of seniors’ policy. With this, state and/or municipal aid for the

financing of the daily lives of the elderly would become unnecessary. It is also a matter of dignity that seniors with adequate pension benefits can decide independently about the use of their resources.

Dr. László Medgyasszay, President of Zoltan-Seniors' Organization, among other things, addressed his hope for the future of the continent in the sentence: "may it remain a Christian Europe!" And he put the question "what we expect from a Europe that allows same-sex marriages?" Following on historical experience, the reformed Christian stated: "we always wanted to be part of Europe. I resent it when Western politicians speak harsh words (about his country); they want to exclude us."

The ESU President Prof. An Hermans said in her closing remarks: "we aspire to a Europe that maintains open contact with each other and provides support across countries, in which also the poor and disabled feel at home." The successful Regional Conference is primarily thanks to the collaboration of the ESU with the Robert-Schuman-Institute in Budapest, the Konrad-Adenauer-Foundation and the parliamentary group of FIDESZ.

With a video presentation about natural beauty and other attractions around Larnaca (Cyprus), the discussions came to a conclusion. The foreign guests had the opportunity to admire the splendours of Budapest from the Danube on a cruise.

ESU enlargement

The Seniors' Association of Armenia has a good chance to achieve observer status in the ESU. The Praesidium will decide about their application in early July in Vienna, explained Secretary Guido Dumon to the Executive Committee in Budapest in the presence of Hovsep Khiryshudyan from Yerevan. His organization, founded in 2014 is active in the "Eastern European Partnership", and are joined by political forces from the countries of Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine. As further reported, full membership of the Seniors of the Dutch Christian Democratic Alliance (CDA) is expected soon, who have been ESU Observers since years and have now decided to take the next step.

ESU further conferences

The topics for both the Summer Academy in Vienna (1-2 July), as well as the (first) regional conference in Slovenia (Ljubljana, 21-22 October) and certainly the election congress in Leuven (BE, 4-5th November) will be the future of Europe and the position of seniors in a changing society, said ESU President An Hermans on 27th May at the Executive Committee.

Also to be discussed will be the existing conflicts outside of Europe. According to a message from Marilies Flemming (AT), Elmar Brok (DE), the Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee in the European Parliament, is expected, as last year, to be speaker at the Summer Academy in Vienna.

In the annual plan for 2017, the ESU has included regional conferences in the Czech Republic and Norway. Vice-president Lidmila Nemcova (Prague) and Sverre Mauritzen (Oslo) want to address the “cooperation between generations”. The Norwegian conference will take place in the 2nd half of the year. Also, the Polish Seniors’ Union (PUS) has indicated its interest in a conference.

Budapest: Contribution by the German conference guests

“For us seniors, who have experienced war, flight and expulsion, the growing together of the European states to a community of values, currency and security is one of the most important experiences,” it states in a declaration by the German conference guests, who see these achievements and therefore declare in Budapest: “Europe's chance for peace lies in the unity of action.”

Instead of barriers and fences, joint efforts are needed to combat the causes of the current asylum flows, as well as for the equitable distribution of those seeking help. The ESU as a seniors' organization of the European People's Party should “challenge the politicians in the EU to feel even more strongly committed to Europe's cultural, religious and humanist inheritance of the inviolable and inalienable rights of man.”

C.B./U.W.

What moves Czech Seniors / by Doz. Lidmila Nemcová

The Czech Association of Christian Senior Citizens (SKS) has begun to think more deeply about the national and international face of the future and to bring basic ideas of Christian social teaching into the discussion. As is known, President Vaclav Roubal is also Vice-president of the Czech Seniors’ Council (RSCR); SKS and ESU Vice-president Lidmila Nemcová is involved in various advisory bodies of the Parliament, and Vaclav Nemeč, who advises Roubal, represents the Seniors’ Council in the government council for continuous development. By the way: only three further members of the Seniors’ Council are active in another council for the problems of ageing.

The above-mentioned persons of the SKS took the opportunity to stress Christian values at an internationally attended seniors’ conference at Prague Castle on 25th April, organized by the Council of Seniors. The meeting was held under the auspices of the President. As well as leaders of seniors’ organizations from Austria, Belgium, Germany, and Slovakia, the Czech government and Members of Parliament spoke. The discussion was about the draft of a new Czech Seniors Act, which was prepared by the Council of Seniors and modelled on the successful practice of a relevant law in Austria. The meeting led to new informal international contacts.

The SKS - a member of the ESU for well over 10 years - is also involved in discussions about the future of seniors’ quality of life, about cooperation between the generations and solidarity

as well as the position of the elderly in society. There is also an opportunity for round-table discussions with the government on the further development of the country until 2030. Persons with different backgrounds and positions participate in this. There are not only experts and intellectuals, but also representatives of various NGOs, from local authorities and from civil society.

Warmest congratulations

For the 90th birthday of SKS President Dr. jur. Vaclav Roubal on 14th June, the "SI" - Editor sends cordial greetings and best wishes to his Prague friend. With his decades of political activity, he has become a model for many of his compatriots and other personalities in Europe. He led his Seniors' Association in the ESU and was over a longer period at the ESU as Vice-president for Eastern ESU member states.



The birthday man celebrating his 88th birthday in Vienna (2014)

During the Vienna Summer Academy, he regularly takes the floor with valued domestic and foreign politicians and reminds them to give Christian values more importance in political action.

Cyprus after the parliamentary elections / info from Antonis Demetriades

With almost 31% of the vote on 22nd May, the Democratic Rally party achieved first place. The joy about the result was limited by the Chairman of the Rally-Seniors' Association Antonis Demetriades, because only around 67 percent of the voters had gone to the polls - so few as never before in parliamentary elections. Moreover, the Democratic Rally needed a coalition partner to form a government. The Communists (AKEEL) came in 2nd place with over 25% (a loss of 7%). Among the four newly drafted parties in Parliament is an ultra-right party with 2 seats (of 56). The number of women MPs has increased pleasingly from 7 to 11 emphasised Demetriades, who is also a Vice-president of the ESU.

Meanwhile, **State-President Anastasiades** has voiced cautious optimism in an interview about the negotiations on the reunification of his country. It is true that there has been progress, but a number of important issues are not yet clarified. The President, who had founded the Seniors' Association, expressed the belief that a unified Cyprus would bring benefits for his own country, for Turkey, and also for the relationship between the EU and NATO with Turkey.

Impressions of my Polish journey / by Margit Hawkes

As a member of the ESU Executive Committee, my visit to Poland was primarily to update the registration status of the Seniors' Union in Wrocław/Breslau. Additionally, I went to Łódź, Katowice and the Children's Village of Rajsko (on the outskirts of Oświęcim), where I met Janusz Marszałek, President of the PUS and an ESU Vice-president. As my school-colleague and lawyer W. Malicki has ensured, the long-drawn-out registration of the Wrocław seniors' group should now pass smoothly as the PUS statutes were amended to facilitate the procedure.

In Wrocław, I learned that a Centre for Seniors exists since 2009 as a part of the Wrocław "Centre for the Development of Society". Its most important task is promoting the profile of seniors in the media, in business and in NGOs, as well distributing relevant information to the elderly ([info: centrum.seniora@wcrs.wroclaw.pl](mailto:centrum.seniora@wcrs.wroclaw.pl)).

Furthermore, in 2014 a Seniors Council was established (www.seniorzy.wroclaw.pl). It publishes a free monthly magazine, "Biuletyn informacyjny" (www.seniorzy.wroclaw.pl/onas). In addition, the city has a "Forum Club Seniora", which is used frequently for giving out information and for diverse activities.

In the city of Łódź (central Poland), I witnessed also a variety of activities for seniors. The city president, Mrs. Hanna Zdanowska, promotes matters of concern to seniors and the city offers many events for seniors, as well as a magazine, "Lodzkie Senioralia" (www.seniorzy.uml.lodz.pl).

In Katowice, the already registered seniors' group had a meeting to discuss their programme.

40 years of Moderates' Seniors / by Bertil Persson

"Moderata Seniorer" in Sweden was created in 1976 by the merger of three seniors' clubs in the cities of Malmö, Uppsala and Gothenburg. They all belonged to Högepartie (Right Party) - now the "Moderate Party". The Moderates led the government from 2006 - 2014, and according to surveys, we are the strongest party in Sweden, under the chairmanship of Anna Kinberg Batra.

The Moderate Seniors have about 80 local clubs - spread all over the country, who work with their party organisations locally. We are present in the party's central committee. Currently, 46% of party members belong to our very active organisation. Because Sweden was not involved in the 2nd World War, many were born in the 1940s, with 25% more than other generations.

Our 40th anniversary was celebrated on 20th May as part of the traditional "Sweden Day" of the party with 1,300 delegates in the exhibition centre of Malmö. To our delight, the President of the ESU, Prof. An Hermans, personally congratulated us and reported on the work of the ESU. From our side, the former Chairman, Inger Koch, talked about the 40-year commitment to the elderly. *(Bertil Persson is Chairman of the Seniors' Association and a member of the ESU Executive Committee)*

Belarus seniors demand common action

In the Bulletin of the seniors' organization "Our Generation" / "Nashe Pokalene", the establishment of the Foundation "Youth and Seniors for Europe" is reported in Russian (see # 133). Its chairman, Tatjana Zelko, presented the "Eastern Partnership" (EaP) at the ceremony in Brauweiler (DE) on 29th April in a video presentation, and thereby supported a co-operation of the EaP with the ESU. In addition, they have called for joint action by European States to overcome the crisis situation; because only then could also "the dangers on our borders" be resisted, it says in the bulletin. *(Mrs. Zelko is a member of the Executive Committee of the ESU).*

Money...Money...Money

For the European "Youth and Seniors for Europe" Foundation, which was presented to the public on 29th April, the first shareholders were acquired; from them, an annual donation of 1,000 Euros is expected.

The ESU's Executive Committee has decided to maintain membership fees paid by the organizations at the level of the previous year, despite (exceptional) missing subscriptions. From the revenue planned for 2015, only 84 percent was achieved, because the

subscriptions from three associations and two observers - in part since 3 years – are still owing.

For the redesign of the website, a one-off payment of 7,000 Euros is provided from the ESU's budget.

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