



# *EUROPÄISCHE SENIOREN UNION (ESU)*

## *EUROPEAN SENIORS' UNION (ESU)*

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**“GROWING OLD WITH DIGNITY”**

### **The International Day of Older Persons**

**from Prof. Dr. An Hermans, ESU-President**

On 1<sup>st</sup> October every year we address – following a decision of the UN in 1990 – our attention to older persons, their capacities and potentials, the respect for their human rights, their needs and expectations. In an inclusive society

**to grow old in dignity and without discrimination**

are the central objectives here. We are aware that already since decades international declarations and principles have framed these objectives but... they need application and implementation in everyday life.



*An Hermans and Wiesława Borczyk at the X. “Forum of the University of the Third Age”  
(see the report below)*

In view of the **70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights on 10<sup>th</sup> December 2018**, the International Day of Older Persons celebrates the importance of this Declaration and reaffirms the commitment to promoting the full and equal enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms of older persons. To concentrate on the importance of human rights and to highlight the role of older persons in society, the International Day of Older Persons on 1 October 2018 focusses on:

**“Champions of Human Rights”**

The international community calls to thank and celebrate older persons who dedicated their lives to promote freedom, equality and democracy,

to fighting against discrimination,

to enable people to participate in society at grass-roots or community level, or to advocate for human rights at the international level.



*A folklore ensemble from Galicia welcomes guests In Nowy Sącz (PL)*

***As the European Seniors' Union (ESU)***

voicing the needs and expectations of older persons, we are glad to be part of this global movement of highlighting the role of older persons in society. We understand this UN-call also as a call for the promotion of more positive images of older persons, underlining universal human rights and the gains and strengths of older people in our societies. We are glad to celebrate seniors' contribution to societies, in the past and also today, and we underline that the recognition of this contribution must increase. Negative stereotypes, misconceptions about older persons and ageism must be eliminated to improve the participation of older persons in economic, social and cultural life.

**On the occasion of the International Day of Older Persons, we invite our members and partners in regions and member states to organise meetings with people of all ages:**

- to exchange experiences between younger and older persons,
- to listen to the life histories of older people, and
- the hopes and expectations of young people to create common perspectives for the future.

Our European societies have to cope with unforeseen and unexpected crises and challenges in the socio-economic, political and ethical fields. They have given new life to Eurosceptic and populist movements. This multitude of challenges needs a common engagement of youth and seniors. Only then we will find a way to empower new 'champions of human rights' for future societies.

**European seniors know and have experienced how important the EU was and is for the construction of peace, freedom and security.** From a United Europe they expected prosperity and well-being for themselves and for future generations. Also today, seniors expect that the EU will respond to new challenges. It is a responsibility of governments at international, regional and local level, but also of citizens.

On 1<sup>st</sup> October 2018, we celebrate our engagement in the global movement for the promotion of older persons' rights. We are grateful for what older generations have built in the field of human rights, prosperity and well-being. But we cannot take the future for granted. The creation of sustainable, democratic societies for all, where everyone can grow up and age in dignity needs our daily engagement.

Let's make it happen!"

**"Speak with **one** voice"**

Forum of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Age in Poland shows the way /  
ESU actively involved

**Bad Krynica / Krynica Zdrój and Nowy Sącz (PL).** Speaking with **one** voice when it comes to concerns of the older generation(s) is what BAGSO in Germany calls for. The abbreviation stands for the "Federal Association of Seniors' Organizations", based in Bonn. Their experiences are now being used by seniors politicians in Poland. From an initiative of the Polish Seniors' Union (PUS), which is a member of the ESU, five organizations/institutions have agreed to cooperate so far.

At the beginning of September, at the "X. Forum of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Age" in the south-east of their country, they expressed their rights and plans. The response of the middle and older generation was impressive.

ESU President **em. Prof. Dr. An Hermans** and **ESU General Secretary Guido Dumon** were present in Nowy Sącz. An Hermans as well as other members of the small ESU delegation spoke at lectures and panel discussions. **Dr. Renate Heinisch (DE)**, who is a member of the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) and the BAGSO board, was invited for the second time. With her speech about the topic “Implementation of vaccination protection”, the pharmacist and former MEP tried to make authorities aware about the importance of this issue at home as well as abroad.



*Bad Krynica/Krynica Zdrój is a traditional and popular health resort in Poland. In front of the health resort hotel in neo-renaissance style from 1869: (from right to left: Janusz Marszalek, Doz. Lidmila Nemcova, Władisław Kosiniak-Kamys, leader of the opposition Polish People's Party (PSL), Dr. Renate Heinisch, Margit and Seán Hawkes.*

*Krynica Zdrój is also famous for its annual opera and song festival “Jan Kiepura”, and as a venue for sports competitions*

Prof. Hermans held talks with the vice-marshal of Małopolska, **Wojciech Kozak** and the head of the Polish People's Party/Polskie Stronnictwo Ludowe (PSL), **Władysław Kosiniak-Kamysz**, whose association of former Sejm MP's, “Stowarzyszenie Parlamentarzystów”, also belongs to the European Seniors’

Union. Delegates from the ESU and BAGSO were received by the Mayor of Nowy Sącz, **Ryszard Nowak**, who presented the activities of his administration for the benefit of his older citizens.

The Forum of the Third Age 2018 was the responsibility of the University of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Age in the Galician city of Nowy Sącz and the Polish national association of these universities, which are widespread and are very popular in Poland.

The “Seniors’ Forum” is embedded in the well known international “Economic Forum/Forum Ekonomiczne” of Krynica Zdrój with hundreds of participants from near and far, which took place for the 28<sup>th</sup> time.

**The cooperation partners in matters of “seniors’ policy” in Poland are currently:**

- Seniors Union (PUS); president: Janusz Marszalek
- Association of Universities of the 3rd Age, whose president Wiesława Borczyk conducted the forum
- Commission for Seniors Policy in the Parliament (Sejm), chaired by the non-party deputy Małgorzata Zwiercan
- All-Polish Federation for the Advancement of Seniors' Councils (in the municipalities), chair: Barbara Szafraniec
- All-Polish Association of pensioners and invalids, under Dr. Elzbieta Ostrowska.

The speeches and discussions with representatives from civil society included both appreciative and critical voices about the current government’s policy. There is broad support for example, for the recent PIS financial funding for families with at least two children (500 zlotys = about 125 euros per child and per month). Criticized were, among others, deficiencies in the effectiveness of the government's “telephone helpline”

**An Hermans** took the floor in the opening event of the Forum concerning the situation of seniors in Europe. She said: “we are old, yes, but many of us have the opportunity to live longer.” That is an opportunity for the individual as well as for society. She appreciated the possibility of building a bridge between society and politics at the Forum.



Thanks to ESU vice-president **Janusz Marszalak**, who also appeared as a panellist, and to other important persons, a groundbreaking event has been staged in which the ESU was presented as an umbrella organization, which promotes the interests of the older and younger generation and strengthens civil society.

That the concerns of seniors in Poland will be coordinated in the future was welcomed by the President; it was in line with the ESU's wish to speak with one voice – despite all the differences that may exist between regions. There is a continuous learning process between the EU and its citizens, also in the host country.

Citizens need information, political training and opportunities to participate in politics. The ESU Regional Conference in Oświęcim in 2014 set an example for this. The experience gathered in Poland in the field of seniors' policy shall be conveyed to the European level, the President emphasised.



In a podium discussion, **Doz. Lidmila Nemcova** and **journalist Ulrich Winz** (3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> from the left in the picture) answered questions on the structure and functioning of seniors' organisations in other countries. The Chair of the Christian Seniors of the Czech Republic (SKS) favoured a greater weight of

political commemorative culture, focusing on the events of 1918 (also of importance to Poland), 1938, 1948, 1968 and the Peaceful Revolution of 1988/89. The Editor promoted more contacts and dialogue between the generations for their mutual benefit and gave examples of how ESU seniors' organizations influence political action.

### **From Margit Hawkes' notebook**

***Margit Hawkes** along with her husband Seán belong to the Executive Committee of the ESU for the Polish Seniors' Union (PUS). Both of them are also active as translators of this Newsletter into English. What Mrs. Hawkes found particularly important during the "Forum of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Age", she confided to her notebook. Here are some examples:*

The President of the University of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Age in the town of Nowy Sącz and chair of the Association, **Wiesława Borczyk**, opened the event in there city. In recognition of her ten years of activity for the benefit of inquisitive seniors and the preparation of this Forum, she received an award to applause from the many premier guests. In the course of her speech, she demanded a budget from the government for the seniors' organisations; the seniors' councils must have their own resources and be able to decide on their use.

**Marek Pawiak**, district administrator (Polish: Starost) of Nowy Sącz, noted that the host voivodeship of Małopolska/Lesser Poland with Kraków as its capital has been the leader of seniors' politics in Poland since 2009. The seniors' councils that exist since 2013 are "investments in ourselves". Seniors with life experience should no longer be seen as just clients and consumers, but have the right to be considered as "partners". For their sustained interest in a meaningful and fulfilling life, the number of about 650 Universities of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Age in the country speaks for itself; 60 of them are available in Małopolska. With only 5 to 10 percent of the participants, men are very under-represented.

State Secretary **Paweł Choraży** compared Poland to an archipelago of islands that needed to be coordinated. He supports the cooperation of the committees for age-related issues that have now begun, which, of course, need state support. This is essential in view of the demographic development. After all, at present 16 percent of citizens are elderly, and by 2020, the proportion of the population over 60 years old is expected to be one third.

Life expectancy has increased since 1990 by eight years for men and by 7 years for women, according to Choraży. A problem for seniors is the inadequate infrastructure; that makes it difficult or impossible for most people to have access to meetings and events. Poland is one of four EU countries where inadequate communication is particularly serious. Even information about existing seniors' clubs does not even reach many of the older citizens. The hardest hit is the rural population.

Other speakers pointed to deficits in the knowledge of seniors' rights. Many older people are not only insufficiently informed, but are also exploited by the fraudulent

practices of dubious companies (examples: product demonstrations, contracts completed by telephone). Banks are expected to terminate the financing of such companies.

Although the government has decided on a better integration of seniors, there remains, in the opinion of speakers, considerable need for action.

To change the current situation, the 9 million seniors should participate in voting in the coming election (at least every second one of them), it said.

Currently under discussion in the country is a tax exemption on pensions, following the example of Bulgaria and Belarus.

Fundamentally, the government is expected to:

- prioritise a dignified life for the elderly
- pay attention to the equal treatment of all age groups (**Józef Lassota**, MP) and promote the digital literacy of older people
- assist in the founding and establishing of additional seniors' councils
- promote a new image of seniors and a change in the “mentality and approach towards seniors”
- pay close attention to health and long-term care insurance (demanded by **Peter Nowak** (DE) among others. ([www.glosseniora.pl](http://www.glosseniora.pl)))

**Margit Hawkes** appreciated a speaker who expressed the need of passing on life experiences to the younger generation, when he said: “young hands and an experienced mind - that's a great combination, both in the family and in the workplace.” However, businesses run by family members are not yet well developed in Poland.

## *“Happy Birthday”*

*Dr. h.c. Edeltraud Paul, Mödling near Vienna, celebrated her 80<sup>th</sup> birthday on 24<sup>th</sup> September. As well as her family and friends from the Austrian Seniors' Association, congratulations are sent from colleagues in the ESU. Mrs. Paul as the successor of her husband, Dr. Walter Paul, was Treasurer of the ESU until 2013. She is a sought-after speaker at regional conferences. She conducts seniors through the Vienna Parliament building on a regular basis. She enriches the traditional Summer Academies of the ESU with culture events that remain unforgettable.*

*Prof. An Hermans wrote to her: “We are pleased to use your knowledge and experience in various fields.; you are “close to the people – with words, gestures and helping hands”. The ESU thanks her for her social commitment and wishes that she continue her varied work for the benefit of the elderly.*





*In the group picture from the 9<sup>th</sup> Summer Academy at the beginning of July, the “birthday lady” is 2<sup>nd</sup> from the left in the first standing row.*

## Anniversary in Minsk

"Nashe Pakalene" is ten years old / congratulations from Brussels

On the occasion of the tenth anniversary of the seniors' organization “Nashe Pakalene/Our Generation”, Prof. An Hermans congratulated its president, Tatjana Zelko, on behalf of the ESU. The organization has observer status in the ESU. She is actively involved in the “European Partnership”, of which Belarus, Moldova, Georgia, Azerbaijan and Ukraine are members. They are all former Soviet Republics. The members of Nashe Pakalene have repeatedly testified their solidarity with political prisoners in their country. They will not tire of advocating for better living conditions for older citizens, with special attention being given recently to low-income pensions and their taxation. In her reply to the greeting address from Brussels, Ms. Zelko gave an invitation to the President and expressed her wish for a regional conference in Minsk.

## Additional ESU diary dates

**6<sup>th</sup> November in Helsinki:** ESU Praesidium (17:00)

**7<sup>th</sup> November in Helsinki:** 2<sup>nd</sup> Round-table talk (9:00)

“Seniors in digital Europe”

in cooperation with Kansallinen senioriliitto ry

“A new social contract for Europe”

*The ESU will participate with eligible voting delegates and guests in the EPP Congress, which will take place in Helsinki at the same time, and which will elect a top candidate of the European People's Party for the European Parliament elections in May 2019.*

**22/23 November in Magdeburg:** Federal delegates' conference of the CDU-Senioren-Union, with new elections for the board.

**23/24 November in Leuven:** ESU Executive Committee, to prepare for the European elections

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