



# *EUROPÄISCHE SENIOREN UNION (ESU)*

## *EUROPEAN SENIORS' UNION (ESU)*

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### **“It's OUR Europe”**

Spirit of change at the EPP Congress / ESU actively involved

Helsinki. “Is it possible to hold a congress in gloomy November in Helsinki?” A delegate asked himself and gave the answer: “YES, ONE CAN!” Nothing of the mood outside penetrated the trade-fair centre, where the European People's Party was a guest for two days. It was as if everyone had sworn: a new chapter must be opened here and now, marked by courage and determination for a **BETTER EUROPE** – focused on people and accountable to them.



*Manfred Weber together with members of the ESU Presidium on 6<sup>th</sup> November in Helsinki. In the picture from left to right: Roland Leek (Sweden), Dr. Gabriele Peus-Bispinck (Germany), Lidmila Nemcova (Czech Republic), Manfred Weber and Elke Garczyk (both Germany/Bavaria), Prof. An Hermans (Belgium), Anneli Tania (Chair of the Finnish host Association, “Kansallinen senioriliitto ry”), Dr. Christine von Stefenelli (Italy/South Tyrol), Ann Räämet (Estonia) and Antonis Demetriades (Cyprus)*

And this requires a good atmosphere, supported by mutual respect, spreading confidence and inviting everyone to help shape the future. Consequently, all the speeches specifically named the big challenges and at the same time outlined ways to overcome them.

The leading personalities in the EPP, such as Jean-Claude Juncker, Joseph Daul, Donald Tusk, Antonio Lopez-Isturez, Antonio Tajani, Manfred Weber, Dara Murphy and – as current EU Council President – Sebastian Kurz (all of them men!) were in agreement that a lot is at stake. It requires good will and great effort to maintain the unity of our community of states. It was the order of the day to build on the successes since Adenauer, de Gasperi, Schuman, de Gaulle and Kohl and to bring solidarity back again to be the dominant topic of the EU member states, it was said. After all, it is OUR Europe that needs to be defended and strengthened!

As an Association of the EPP, the **European Seniors' Union** contributed actively to the preparation and conduct of the 25<sup>th</sup> EPP Congress with their experiences and aspirations. Its President, **Prof. Dr. An Hermans**, in her speech to the plenary session, called the ESU an advocate “for the rights of seniors inside and outside the EPP”. All decision-makers are called upon to give innovative, coordinated and integrated answers to the upcoming issues. This concerns the various policy areas such as the labour market, health care and the active participation of the older generation in social development. The so-called European Pillar of Social Rights, set up by the EU Commission in 2017, should be seen as the “guiding principle of the EU”, based on values such as dignity and solidarity.



*The ESU President during her speech at the plenary session*

**Vice-President Heinz K. Becker**, in a panel discussion about “Digital Europe” (moderator: **Prof. Steven Van Hecke**, Leuven), argued that all seniors’ associations take responsibility for the updated media literacy of their members and other older citizens. The Austrian Seniors’ Association, whose Secretary-General is Becker, invites its members to attend free training courses that are well received. As the ÖSB has more than 2,000 groups, the rural population also benefits from this. **Guido Dumon**, Secretary-General of the ESU, noted that people without internet access already suffer disadvantages today. It was agreed that the responsible use of social media brings benefits, but that it cannot replace people; they must remain the control of the situation. “They do not make the world any better,” summarised **Georg Männik**, with regard to the “machines.”

In a panel discussion about the “New Social Contract for Europe” (the “Pillar of Social Rights”) in the presence of Commissioner **Marianne Thyssen**, Vice-President **Lidmila Nemcova** from Prague warned against forgetting the poor and other disadvantaged groups in society. She “took up arms” for the preservation and observance of Christian values in political action, and called for more attention to the culture of remembrance. Therefore, the years 1918, 1938, 1948 and 1988/1989 were of immense importance for her country and other European states, which has to be conveyed to the younger generation.

## X

The Congress elected the EPP-group chairman, **Manfred Weber**, with almost 80 percent of the valid votes, as the leading candidate for the parliamentary elections on 26<sup>th</sup> May next year. Assuming that the Christian Democrats and Conservatives (EPP) remain the strongest group in the European Parliament, a politician from Bavaria where he is the deputy CSU chairman, it is likely that he will be the chairman of the European Commission and thus the successor to **Jean-Claude Juncker**.

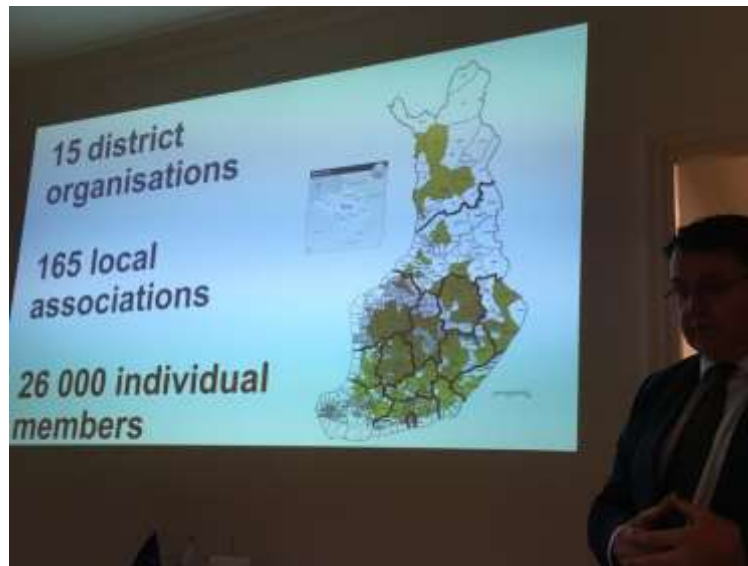
As Weber assured the ESU presidium and the leading politicians of the hosting Finnish Seniors’ Association “Kansallinen senioriliitto ry” under President **Anneli Taina** the day before, he wanted that everyone can feel comfortable in their homes and as EU citizens, maintain friendly contact with their neighbours and be protected against illegal migration.

It is important to use the good reputation of the EPP as a European party for a BETTER EUROPE, which can be experienced by everyone. For many citizens, the Christian church is a connecting link; in addition, solidarity should be added at all levels of political action and global accountability. Weber sees itself as a bridge- builder.

The ESU also gave the eventual losing candidate from Finland, **Alexander Stubb**, the opportunity to introduce himself. That the two candidates were friendly with each other during the election campaign was welcomed by the Congress participants. Weber and Stubb are very similar in many thoughts and goals.

The ranks of prominent guest speakers in the Congress plenum – party chairmen, heads of government and other leading figures – was completed by the German

Chancellor, **Angela Merkel**. At the announcement of her speech, hundreds of delegates and guests paid her tribute with a standing ovation. The chair of the CDU called for increased joint efforts between the EU states in foreign, security and defence policy, which meets the needs of citizens and wins their confidence.



**Matti Niiranen** presented the Finnish ESU member organization to the ESU presidium. It has a strong presence in the south of the country. Among the six organizations in Finland for older citizens, *Kansallinen senioriliitto ry* ranks fourth. The activity of the association extends into many areas of the lives of the elderly.

## Antonis Demetriades remains president

### Successful work of the Cyprus Seniors' Organization

**Nicosia/Lefkosia** "Our organization – in cooperation with our political party – will be firmly integrated into the next European elections", according to a bulletin from the Seniors' Association available to the editor. There will be specific activities for seniors, especially as they are known to be especially active voters. Even undecided young people should be won over to vote. "It's not advisable or reasonable to let others decide for them," it says in the latest Country Report from Cyprus. Valid for all generations: they should be better informed about the extensive activities of the EU and its institutions.

The Senior Citizens Organization of Cyprus is pleased to have a new government agency for the interests of older citizens. The Minister of Labour and Social Affairs participated in its first meeting. The Seniors' Association is benefiting from this positive development. The same applies to the establishment of a "National Gerontological Centre".

The fact that more than 600 people gathered for an event for the International Day of Older Persons can be seen as further proof of the multifaceted activities of the Seniors' organization.

During this event, an eighty-year-old who gave life to 17 children was honoured: Eleni Georgou. The party chair, **Aferof Neophyou** and **Antonis Demetriades** as president of the Seniors' Organization, handed her small gifts.

On the same day, a poster exhibition created by UNESCO opened, dedicated to the protection of human rights. The President of the Seniors' Organization was honoured to represent his country at this exhibition.

As stated in the present "Country Report", the regular new election of the Board of Directors took place on 19<sup>th</sup> October, when **Antonis Demetriades** and his deputy **Costas Matsoukaris** were re-elected for another three years. SI congratulates them.

### *Helsinki: Havis Amanda*



*This bronze statue by Ville Vallgren has stood at the edge of the Kauppala Square at the harbour since 1908, and the next photo shows the building of the President of the Republic (left) and the huge Russian Uspensky Cathedral in the background. Amanda, also called "Manta", is a mermaid who has left the sea. At her feet salmon wind, and four seals spout water. No Helsinki – visitors can escape the charm of this fountain statue in the city centre and within reach of the passenger port.*





*From here the excursion boats to the Suomenlinna fortress start*

## News

**Warsaw.** The Polish people celebrated the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the rebirth of their country on 11<sup>th</sup> November. Since 1795, it was divided between Germany, Russia and Austria. With the signing by Germany of the armistice terms of Great Britain and France at Compiegne on the same day, the hope for a separate democratic state was fulfilled. However, this perished again with the attack on Poland by German troops in September 1939. Events to commemorate the end of World War I in 1918 took place on this day also in Paris, London, Brussels, Berlin and other cities.

**Magdeburg.** The Seniors' Union of the CDU holds its Federal Delegates' Meeting (congress) on 21<sup>st</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup> November. Prof. Dr. Otto Wulff has put himself forward again as a candidate for chairman. According to reports, the President of the ESU, Prof. An Hermans, is invited and will give a speech. The Association has 54,000 paying members. In the elections to the German Bundestag in 2017, 37 percent of the 60 to 69-year-old citizens voted for the CDU; for the over 70-year-old voters, it was even 45 percent.

**Tallinn.** The ESU Seniors' Association is present in six locations in Estonia. As its chair, ESU Vice-President Ann Räämet, said, Tallinn and Tartu have most of the 600 members, as well as Viljanda, Pärnu, Voru and Jogera. In the next few months, political activity will be focused on the preparation of parliamentary elections, the Seimas, on 3<sup>rd</sup> March, and the elections to the European Parliament on 26 May 2019.

**Riga.** Doz. Lidmila Nemcova paid a visit to the Latvian capital. The President of the Christian Democratic Seniors of the Czech Republic and ESU Vice President also met together with members of the Latvian Senior Citizens' Association under Dr. Guna Putnina. (We'll return to this in the next issue.)

**Berlin.** Chancellor and CDU leader Angela Merkel took the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of women's suffrage as an opportunity to recall in a speech that in the German Bundestag only 30.9 percent of deputies are women. "The goal must be parity," she emphasised.

### *Helsinki: the Senate Square*



*In the centre of the square, at the right edge of which is the Senate building (not in the picture), stands the Evangelical Lutheran Cathedral. It is considered the most important landmark of the Finnish capital. The unique classical building ensemble was designed by the Berlin architect Carl Ludwig Engel. The monument to Tsar Alexander II was erected after the deadly assassination attempt (1881) by Walter Runeberg, inaugurated in 1894.*

**Last announcement:**

**European Parliament discusses Europe's future**

**Strasbourg.** In the European Parliament, **Angela Merkel** delivered a speech on the future of Europe on 13<sup>th</sup> November, which was followed by a lively discussion. Most European-friendly speakers agreed with the Chancellor that more tolerance, solidarity, unity and coherence is needed. This applies in particular to foreign and security policy,

which includes the formation of a strike force. Her statement that “one day” there may also be a European army found a shared response.

The Chancellor sees this army as a complement to NATO and argued in this connection for common weapons systems and a coordinated European arms-export policy. She considers a common European asylum procedure as desirable. Nationalism and egoism should never be given a chance again.

It is worthwhile “to strive for the described objectives,” said Merkel. Increased engagement in Africa is in the mutual interest. Commission President **Jean-Claude Juncker** expressly supported the Chancellor on this point, talking about mutual dependence and a “partnership of equals”.

Some speakers expressed the wish that the German government should be more involved in environmental protection, that Viktor Orban should be dissuaded from closing the European University in Budapest, should pay more attention to disarmament programmes instead of a European army, should allow a “European social union” and should do everything “to end the death of refugees in the Mediterranean”. Angela Merkel responded to some of these proposals in her reply; she did not comment about the university in Budapest.

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