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Congress of the European Senior Citizens' Union (ESCU)

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S E C R E T A R Y G E N E R A L ' S R E P O R T

Report for the period 18.10.2001 – 27.04.2004

1. The Secretary General was elected for a period of 3 years on 18 October 2001 by the Fourth Congress of the European Senior Citizens' Union in Brussels, on the proposal of the President of the ESCU, Dr Bernhard Worms.

In accordance with the statutes of the ESCU, the duties of the honorary Secretary General include in particular:

- Carrying out routine administrative duties,
- Leadership of the secretariat,
- Financial management – together with the treasurer,
- Preparation of meetings and implementation of resolutions passed by congress, the executive committee and the committee.

Following the election of Dr Bernhard Worms as President of the ESCU and the change from an Austrian presidency, in existence until 2001, to a German one, the headquarters of the general secretariat were transferred from Vienna to Berlin. The headquarters of the general secretariat of the ESCU have been in Konrad-Adenauer-Haus in Berlin ever since. This is the home of the federal office of Germany's Senior Citizens' Union. The physical proximity to the headquarters of Germany's Senior Citizens' Union makes the ESCU's work easier, from both an organisational and a personnel point of view. Yet the political and institutional independence of the ESCU's work is not affected by these circumstances.

The transfer of important documents, dating back to the founding of the ESCU in 1995, from the general secretariat in Vienna to Berlin went through with no problems, thanks to the invaluable co-operation of Austrian colleagues.

Routine administrative duties were dealt with by the Secretary General as a rule from his office in Freiburg im Breisgau, and co-ordinated with the general secretariat in Berlin. To this end, the Secretary General was in constant contact with Frau Ute Besmer in the general secretariat in Berlin. When necessary, personal talks took place at the headquarters of the general secretariat in Berlin. Many procedures were clarified by telephone.

Any decisions to be made regarding the extensive, detailed correspondence received at the general secretariat in Berlin were made by conferring with the Secretary General. Routine tasks were carried out promptly by Frau Ute Besmer and, where applicable, passed on to the Secretary General for information.

2. **During this period in office the work of the President and the vice-presidents has been supported by the Secretary General from a political and organisational point of view.** Care was taken to co-ordinate meetings and to accept, whenever possible, invitations to events organised by the ESCU and national senior citizens' organisations. If the President or vice-

presidents were unable to find the time, the ESCU was represented by the Secretary General at numerous conferences, congresses and events of every kind.

The representation and co-operation of the ESCU in political talks and, in particular, in working groups with the European People's Party was of great significance. Representation on the EPP's individual working groups for politics, security, social affairs, agriculture, expansion to the East and Mediterranean areas was shared out among the vice-presidents according to areas of interest. The Secretary General himself took on permanent representation of the ESCU on the politics and Mediterranean areas working groups.

The main priority in the politics working group was the drawing up of a programme of work for the European elections on 13 June 2004. The Secretary General is taking an active part in discussions on the whole spectrum of the programme of work. Besides the required pragmatic pronouncements on economic policy, the jobs market, security and the environment, the Secretary General also took care to ensure that the ESCU's basic moral standpoints on the family, social security for the elderly, prevention of violence and discrimination against the elderly found their way into the "European Carta". It seems indisputable that the "hand of the ESCU" in favour of senior citizens in Europe will appear in the EPP's election manifesto.

3. A further highlight of the work done during this period of office was **the preparation and implementation of the quarterly meetings of the committee and the twice-yearly meetings of the executive committee**. It was always particularly challenging for the general secretariat to have the papers for the meetings delivered on time, and to have vital resolutions translated into English and French, at the very least.

The prompt and accurate distribution of detailed ideas and amendments to resolutions for meetings of the committee and the executive committee, in English, French and Spanish as far as possible, proved to be not only helpful for further discussions, but also essential.

Involvement in **projects of Europe-wide significance** has turned out to be especially worthwhile for the ESCU's work. The **drawing up of the "Magna Charta"** of a senior citizens' policy as a foundational paper is just as worthy of mention here as further projects such as "Violence against the elderly", "Discrimination against the elderly", "Give not only years to life, but also life to years – and to the disabled", "Demographic change – in particular justice for the generations" and "Social security in Europe". It was the Secretary General's job to collate, examine and co-ordinate the many detailed and varied proposals, improvements and amendments to the chosen projects. Explanatory talks were held to help with the drawing up of project reports. Great differences of opinion frequently arose from the different national traditions and legislation, as well as linguistic realities, which necessitated a willingness to compromise.

4. It was also the Secretary General's duty to prepare and participate in the EPP Congress in October 2002 in Estoril (Portugal) and in February 2004 in Brussels. The participation of another six ESCU delegates also had to be co-ordinated. Voting on motions at Congress also had to be carried out. The future European constitution took centre stage at the Congress in Estoril. The Brussels Congress approved an action programme for the EPP for the European elections.
5. Regular sessions of a working committee led by the President in the Karl Arnold educational establishment in Königswinter really proved their worth and established programmes of work for the top leadership of the ESCU.

6. One of the Secretary General's particular duties was to **maintain contacts with the ESCU's national organisations**. Contact between the President and the vice-presidents had to be coordinated regionally, to ensure that work was shared out and that they worked well together. The Secretary General took particular care to ensure that national organisations of the ESCU had access to all essential ESCU documents. Friendly political parties, previously linked to the ESCU by observer status only, were given information by the Secretary General about the work of the ESCU and, at the same time, approached and encouraged with regard to a formal agreement or at least greater co-operation with the ESCU. In this way, there was particularly close contact with representatives of the French UMP and UDF, as well as the Swiss CVP. While ever there are no independent political senior citizens' organisations within friendly EPP parties, it will be especially difficult to reach an agreement safeguarded by statutes for the ESCU.

7. The Secretary General was asked to maintain contacts for the ESCU with the European senior citizens' union "**AGE**" (The European Older People's Platform), whose headquarters are in Brussels. The ESCU committee has decided to become a "trial" member of AGE. AGE is particularly involved in questions of "discrimination against the elderly" in Europe, the problems of violence against senior citizens and questions of a common social security in European states.

Numerous initiatives for senior citizens to work together are coming from AGE. The Secretary General considers it vital that the ESCU's moral stance on subjects and projects also undertaken by AGE gains entry into AGE's positions.

There was also contact with other senior citizens' organisations at European level and in national states. Of particular note here is the federal union of senior citizens' organisations (BAGSO). The Secretary General has represented, and made clear, the views of the ESCU both in writing and by personal participation at a BAGSO Congress.

8. **Publicity** followed on from press releases sent to the media. Particularly high emphasis was placed on regular reporting of the ESCU's work and views in the mother parties' media provision (Internet, documents, brochures).

The 2002 yearbook about the ESCU's work was distributed in brochure form in German, English and French. For 2003, the ESCU's work was documented on a CD.

9. The Secretary General worked with **the President on the setting up of a "Helmut Kohl foundation gold badge of honour for service to Europe"**, and took part in an initial committee meeting in January 2004.