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President of the European Senior Citizens' Union
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P R E S I D E N T ' S R E P O R T

Foreword

As it is the first time at this Congress for delegates from 30 member states in 19 European countries, I am attaching to my report that of my predecessor, LH-Stv. A. D. Stefan Knafl, so that each one of us may understand the journey of the European Senior Citizens' Union from its inauguration on 7 November 1995 until today.

President's Report

At our committees' constitutional meeting after my election on 17 / 18.10.2001 we agreed, because of the European elections in June 2004, to reduce our time in office to approx. 6 months. The time in office beginning then is extended by 6 months so that, in future, we can again hold the electoral congress required in accordance with our statutes every 3 years in October.

Our agreed goals in 2001 were:

- Recognition of the ESCU within the EPP and the EPP party in the European Parliament

Technical recognition of the ESCU by the EPP exists. We are recognised as an association in accordance with Austrian law. We are included in the register of associations with the relevant court in Vienna.

The dovetailing of our work with that of the party was achieved when the party made Minister of State Dr Marillies Flemming, Austria, its spokesperson for senior citizens' affairs in the European Parliament. Moreover, Frau Karin Glase MEP, Germany, as a member of the relevant parliamentary committee, was made directly available to us for any questions relevant to the Parliament. We have every reason to be grateful to both ladies.

- Joint co-operation with other senior citizens' organisations at grass-roots level.

The talks with Age were concluded. We are now a member.

Long-standing contacts with EURAG were also renewed, talks were held in Vienna and Graz and, in one case, a joint project was arranged.

- Evaluation of the declaration of Madrid, Vienna and Cologne as well as the Brussels Congress on honorary office for our practical daily work.

Work by senior citizens for senior citizens will only succeed if we all accept the foundation on which we stand.

The foundation paper described as the "Magna Charta" of a policy with senior citizens for senior citizens was thoroughly discussed and accepted.

We produced our own paper with the title "Against Age Discrimination", which we sent to the governments of our member associations. We also presented our ideas on this politically explosive question to the EPP. Our reflections can be found in the EPP's election document for the 2004 European elections.

"Senior Citizens in Honorary Posts", our Brussels resolution, is clearly at the forefront of political discussion, as demographic development would end in disaster if there were no workers in voluntary posts.

- Working towards a stable transition from historical tradition to a society in which four generations live together.

In our working committees, regional conferences, committee meetings and executive committee meetings we have brought out the various aspects of the new shift in the generations. We are adopting the outcomes of our work in order to introduce them everywhere in our dialogue with all social groups, particularly the younger generation. It is a very slow-moving dialogue, because it often means saying goodbye to social status. Regardless of this we want to, and will, achieve this task of Hercules; otherwise we will not achieve our goals without difficult conflicts.

We were very successful in our efforts to win new members. I am quite proud to note that 19 states with 30 membership associations are sending delegates to this year's election congress. We are making further efforts in Poland, but also in Portugal, Ireland, Great Britain, Switzerland, the Netherlands and Denmark. To ensure that everyone joins in settling outstanding questions of detail, we have introduced regional conferences, to be led wherever possible by a vice-president. This will ensure that our most important matter of concern, "Speaking with one voice", is satisfied.

During the last three years, our support for the soon to be passed first European constitution has been at the heart of our work. A constitution binds us to a picture of humanity, to a system of values, and cannot be altered at will.

For us it is, and always has been, true to say: "We bind ourselves to the Christian picture of humanity". Our first basic principle in political dealings is "The dignity of man is unassailable!"

Based on this premise, we have looked at the subject "Acceptance of Turkey into the EU". Our draft resolution, upon which there was no unanimous agreement, speaks against full membership of Turkey, but recommends privileged partnership, as it is now known. Prof. Pöttering, chair of the EPP party, thanked Frau Dr Flemming warmly for this paper.

- Outlook for the coming period of elections 2004 to 2007

Within the organisation we need to set up a representative presence in Brussels, the European centre for political opinion forming. An office for our Secretary General is imperative.

Talks on this – with the EPP too – have started.

"Aware of responsibility, bold and challenging" -, this year's slogan, is not just a reflection of our inner attitude, it is also a determined rejection of an all too prevalent attitude: "Thanks for everything, but join in? No thanks!"

Since we know that, as human beings, our time in this world is prescribed, we wish to be valued members of life's process, working together, deciding together and being answerable together. We

stand up for this, and we fight for it together with the weapons of democracy: "May only the weight of arguments win!"

- Determined we defend ourselves from any form of age discrimination, whether in the state, industry and commerce, society or even at home!

Yes to lifelong learning – but also to creating the conditions which make this possible.

What will be the status of the family in our European society in the future? How do we define family? How do we provide for it materially? Do we say yes to children – or, shrugging our shoulders, do we watch the process of "dying out" as seen in, for example, Germany, Poland and the Czech Republic?

How do we ensure – for all to rely on – the payment of pensions? How can we make sure that the reward for a lifetime's work is higher than a state welfare payment?

The elderly: – a cost – or a useful element of society? How do industry and commerce, and society, use the potential and abilities of older people?

- Successful ageing and quality of life

At this point we borrow a saying from a scientist: "It's not a matter of age, but how you age!"

For me our greatest challenge is

"The role of the elderly in an ageing society"

With all our might we must resist being labelled a "scapegoat of the nation" (the burden factor, burdens of age, pensions and care, and risk of longevity). It is essential for my work not to stir up any conflict between generations, but to present, in a resolute manner, factual arguments needed to overcome the situation into which our society has slid.

- With the help of circulars (to all members of the executive committee in future!), I have tried to intensify the exchange of ideas between us in the whole of Europe, to strengthen the sense of belonging which is so important to our work.
- In conclusion, I really must give thanks for so many good ideas and for all the evidence of heartfelt friendship.

My thanks go to you, the delegates and guests of the member organisations, the members of the executive committee, the vice-presidents, the treasurer, the Secretary General, who will be taking over other duties in the future, and the Berlin office, in particular Frau Ute Besmer.

Special thanks must also go to the circle which is so helpful in supporting me: Frau Prof. Dr. Dr. h. c. Ursula Lehr, Frau Ingeborg Uhlenbrock, whom I would like to propose for election as new Secretary General, and my former colleague in the Ministry for Work and Social Order, Herr Dr. Hermann Berié.

For me, the job of chairing the ESCU is a pleasure which I would like – with your agreement, of course – to continue.

May God bless our future work!