

I.

V. Congress of the European Senior Citizens' Union

27th to 29th April 2004 in Bonn/Bad Godesberg
and Königswinter

Report on the Congress proceedings and content of guest speeches

Most of the Congress delegates had already arrived in Königswinter on 27 April, where they were accommodated in the Adam-Stegerwald-Haus (Karl-Arnold-Stiftung) and in neighbouring hotels. A tour of Bonn was organised for those delegates not involved in the Committee meeting scheduled to start at 14.00 hrs.

At 18 hrs. all those present were invited on a boat trip on the Rhine and to an evening meal sponsored by the North Rhine-Wesphalian Senior Citizens' Union. After a word of welcome from the Mayor of Königswinter the boat sailed up the Rhine as far as Linz and back again. This trip proved a great experience for all those who partook, not least thanks to the beautiful warm weather.

On 28.04 at 8:15 hrs. a very well attended ecumenical service was held in the Protestant church in Königswinter, after which the delegates were bussed to the meeting in the Bad Godesberg civic centre, where registration began at 10 hrs.

At 10:30 hrs. precisely the President of the European Senior Citizens' Union, Dr Bernhard Worms, opened the Congress and welcomed those present (cf. II. Item 1 for more detail).

The Mayoress of Bonn, Frau Dr Pia Heckes, conveyed the greetings of the city. She gave an overview of the city's history, economy and population, culminating in the observation that, thanks to unique structural changes in the greater Bonn area, the city had managed to fully recover from the momentous collapse caused by the move of the parliament, the government and all the associated institutions, including the many diplomatic representations.

For more details on Congress proceedings until the lunch break, see II. Items 3 and 4.

The lunch break and press conference were followed by a rally under the motto "Future prospects for Europe". Filled with some 800 delegates, the hall echoed to speeches by former Chancellor Dr Helmut Kohl, the Chair of the German Senior Citizens' Union, Prof. Dr Otto Wulff, and the Party Leader of the German CDU, Frau Dr Angela Merkel.

In a rousing but also reflective speech lasting one hour, Dr Kohl made reference to the historical significance of the expansion and appealed to those present to do all in their power in the forthcoming European elections to make the European People's Party the strongest party in the parliament again. Only in this way was there any guarantee, he continued, that the "party of Europe" would be able to continue to shape destiny in Europe and to remain the guarantor of peace, a stable currency and a constitution couched in the spirit of Christian values. He closed with the confident words, "We'll do it again this time!"

Dr Kohl remained available for a further hour to answer the many questions put by the delegates, before finally taking his leave to prolonged standing ovations.

Frau Dr Merkel also alluded to the significance of the European elections and the historical expansion, an event which she sees as a "reunification of Europe". She thanked Dr Worms specifically for his exemplary dedication to the European Senior Citizens' Union, and professed belief in senior citizens, declaring that they must never be dismissed and regarded as a "burden". Germany and Europe had them to thank, she continued, not only for the successful reconstruction after the 2nd World War, but also for their vital role today as guardians of the voluntary office, indispensable to our remaining a civilised society. Finally she urged senior citizens to use their experience and knowledge to "encourage" young people who sadly all too often take a dim view as regards their future prospects.

In words heavy with emotion, the Luxembourgian Vice President of the ESCU, Prof. Dr Estgen, thanked both speakers, commenting that such was their impact that "800 hearts went out" to them. His only regret was that the first speaker was no longer in power and the second not yet in power in Germany. "Otherwise this country would be a lot better off and so would Europe".

After a substantial buffet, the Congress delegates ended the day in high spirits with a "Rhenish-Viennese" evening. Upholding the Rhenish part, the cheerleaders of 1st FC Cologne invited by Dr Worms gave a captivating performance and, representing the Viennese part, thanks to the introduction by Wilhelm Mohaupt and her piano accompaniment, a singer from Vienna expertly created an enchanting Viennese atmosphere, also added to by an Austrian delegate who gave an "amateur" revue performance. Finally a Cologne jazz band struck up, managing to entice a number of senior citizens onto the dance floor.

The speakers at the morning session on 29.4 were the leader of the North Rhine-Westphalia CDU, Dr Jürgen Rüttgers, and the leader of the EPP party in the European Parliament, Prof. Dr Hans-Gert Pöttering. They too succeeded admirably in elucidating to the Congress the situation in North Rhine-Westphalia, a key region of Europe, and the situation in Europe as a whole, and in stirring up courage and confidence for the approaching elections. Frau Ruth Hieronymi, present and probably also future CDU MP for the Middle Rhine district in the European Parliament, was last to speak and declared her willingness to stand in, at Dr Worms' request and in agreement with Prof. Dr Pöttering, as spokesperson on behalf of the ESCU in place of the MP leaving the parliament, Dr Marilies Flemming, and Anne-Karin Glase, and to accept the help of the EPP on the present scale.

Dr Worms closed the Congress on time around noon, thanking all delegates, assistants and interpreters and wishing everyone a good journey home.

Regarding the other issues dealt with in this morning session, especially the result of the votes, see II, Items 5 - 8.

Dr Bernhard Worms

President of the European Senior Citizens' Union

Dr Hermann Berié

Minutes Secretary