

VI Congress of the European Senior Citizens' Union
29/09/2007 – 02/10/2007 in Pulheim

Pulheim Declaration

“Old and young together – guaranteeing the future of Europe”

Looking back:

It's now 50 years ago in Rome, the cultural capital of our Western civilisation, that those responsible for steering their respective countries' fortunes met and had a vision - of a United Europe.

The sorrowful experience of the war, in which European countries fought and destroyed each other, which reduced the majority of our continent to ruins and drove women and men to their deaths: it was this which defined their actions.

“War never again! - Dictatorship never again!”

Whereupon they concluded the Treaty of Rome, whose aim – though still far off - was to make national frontiers permeable and later to dismantle them in our common struggle for a better future.

No longer in conflict but in solidarity and fellowship - in freedom and peace! It was truly visionary.

The foundations of the House of Europe were laid at that time in Rome, which - after 50 years of sometimes extremely painstaking groundwork demanding great diplomatic skill and flexibility from all involved - today accommodates 27 nations. 500 million citizens now share one market, many of them sharing one currency!

We know the story of this painstaking development. And we also know that the peoples of our Eastern European neighbours were prevented for decades from developing in a similar way to the rest of Europe; that any resistance was brutally crushed by the Communist dictatorship and any forward-looking vision perished in the face of reality.

However, as 20 years or so ago borders with countries in the east of Europe became more and more permeable and the "Iron Curtain" ultimately fell, the vision of a United Europe became a reality there as well. Heads of Government understood the need to seize and use the unique opportunities that now presented themselves and at the right moment to act in the interests of the future.

The strengthening of a United Europe:

A challenge to all generations

After the Second World War, we senior citizens of today were still young and marked by our experience of war and its disastrous consequences. Our appalling experiences gave strength to the idea of a United Europe and of shaping together a Europe without frontiers.

Even today we remain determined to take responsibility for making our Europe fit for the future for generations to come.

The future needs experience!

The future needs visions. It needs clear goals and values. It needs risks to be taken and the active contribution of all generations in all European countries, building on the foundation of our experience, for "United we are strong!".

We therefore need to rise above existing national rivalries; a single European Constitution - rooted in our Christian Western tradition and in particular the fundamental values of freedom, justice, solidarity, personal responsibility, equal opportunity and the principle of subsidiarity - must be and must remain our goal.

The future however requires a realistic analysis of the present, including the recognition of the **challenges of demographic change, which will have a major impact on intergenerational relationships.**

In all European countries by 2020, we can expect a **reversal in population growth**, for which we need to be prepared. At the end of the 21st century, there will be one European for 14 non-Europeans. If immigration in the EU increases further in the coming years, we must do everything in our power to work for positive outcomes.

In all countries of the world including Europe, we are experiencing **increased life expectancy** which we welcome but which also obliges us to act.

However, in all European countries - and much more so than in other regions of the world – we have a noticeably **lower birth rate**, which is regrettable. There are more and more elderly people in relation to fewer and fewer young people.

This situation requires a **social policy** for Europe to tackle the almost intractable task of **justice for all generations**. The social security provision for the elderly in all countries is facing huge challenges, which all generations have to overcome together. Intergenerational justice requires that those who have raised children receive particular consideration.

We senior citizens support a lengthening of the working life, as we appreciate that it would be wrong to overburden the generations that are currently in gainful employment.

We senior citizens are also ready to take an active role in society through voluntary work.

A cross-generational **family policy** is needed. It should be easier to say YES to starting a family and YES to children. We look here to a Christian image of the family, supported by the mutual responsibility that partners have towards each other, that parents have for their children and that children have for their parents. A family policy for these times must acknowledge the existence of grandparents and great-grandparents.

In order to achieve these goals, we want an **education policy**, central to which are values and virtues as well as purely imparting knowledge. We want an **education policy, which promotes mutual understanding between the generations and an understanding of the reality in other European countries.**

We want an education policy which strengthens personal responsibility and sense of responsibility towards others.

We want an education policy which promotes a sense of history, tradition and cultural roots.

Educational opportunity should not depend on the financial means of the individual. It should be available in all European countries for all generations: life-long learning has now become a basic necessity for survival.

We are conscious of the need for an active policy for language learning in a multi-cultural and multi-lingual Europe. In order to maintain our “diversity in unity”, the “mother tongue plus two languages” model already agreed by Education Ministers at the European level should be implemented in the education systems of all EU member states with all speed.

We are committed to

- an **economic and social order** which builds on the pillars of the Social Market Economy and where everyone who is willing and able to work is assured of a job which will provide them with a basic living
- an economic and social order which takes responsibility for in-service training and further education
- an economic and social order which promotes the compatibility of career and family for women and men.

We are committed to a society in which human rights are respected. We believe that “human dignity is inviolable” – from the start of existence (i.e. conception) to the last intake of breath.

We reject all forms of active euthanasia. We support an extension of palliative medicine and terminal (i.e. hospice) care.

We pledge to uphold
cross-border solidarity and fellowship!
We are ready to play our part.

We, the European Senior Citizens' Union, understand our task within society and within our parent party, the European People's Party, to be:

to strengthen on the one hand mutual understanding of the countries of Europe on the basis of our shared Christian heritage and our specific experience and on the other to foster and strengthen mutual understanding between the various generations as a precondition for genuine intergenerational justice.

We therefore call for:

- a realistic analysis of future developments and the opportunities for development of each and every generation in all countries of the EU
- a clear depiction of the challenges which confront each generation
- a review of the social security systems of all EU countries with regard to generational justice
- an extension of educational provision and the promotion of individual ability, regardless of financial means, to support life-long learning
- incentives for starting a family
- relief for the generation currently in gainful employment, which in future will no longer be able to raise children whilst supporting two generations in retirement
- consideration to be given to those who have raised children in social security provision for the elderly
- accommodation suitable for families, those with disabilities and senior citizens, which is designed to preserve independence and provide for a non-dependent lifestyle for residents for as long as possible.

We endorse the dialogue of the generations taking place in the public domain in all countries of the EU, which contributes to greater mutual understanding and which in turn allows mutual support to flourish.

We are optimists who see every task as a challenge which needs to be met, rather than pessimists who see every task as a problem which we are helpless to resolve.

We know the limitations that currently exist but are keen to discover what options remain - and to use them!

Not only with regard to greater mutual understanding of our various countries of origin assembled in the House of Europe but also with regard to a mutual understanding between young and old which encompasses all generations.

Once, we elderly folk were what young people are today, and one day the young will become what we the elderly are today.

It's therefore imperative that the youth of yesterday and before works closely with the senior citizens of tomorrow and beyond!