

The History of the Origins of the ESCU

Report by Prof. DI Walter Paul, Treasurer of the ESCU

In the *EPP / EUCD YEARBOOK 1995*¹, published in 1996 by the EPP group of the European Parliament notification is given of the **founding of the ESCU in the course of the XI. EPP Congress held on 7 November 1995 in Madrid** together with the elected Committee, the European programme and a reference to the significance of the elderly.

The address of the ESCU homepage on the *INTERNET*² is **www.eu-seniorunion.info** and visitors to the website can read the **"History of the ESCU"** as amended July 2004 with the following details:

Founded: 07.11.1995 in Madrid

Admitted to the EPP as a (recognised) association: 14 December 1995

The **programme of the ESCU** is established in the **"Declaration of Vienna 1996"**

The information contained in these brief statements conveys the major historical facts. After 10 years of existence, and given the organisation's successful and beneficent activity in the European Union, the European Parliament and here in the European People's Party (EPP) group of the European Parliament, one question often asked by the delegates of the member organisations of the ESCU, now numbering 33, is how and through which international and/or national figures the ESCU actually originated; indeed, what efforts and how much convincing were necessary to reach the point of its formation in 1995.

Since I have been involved with the ESCU from the beginning of the organisation and since I have always taken a personal interest in knowing about the origins and historical



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sequences leading up to its formation, I started to collect historical facts in the form of relevant literature but also by way of personal memos and reminiscences, in order to organise them into a sequential theme and to write them up in chronological order.

Since the political significance of the elderly has been manifestly related to the change in age distribution or the age pyramid in the last few decades, one can assume that national statisticians - mostly working in the public interest - in statistical offices in the European countries would be the first people in a position to notice the phenomenon of the changes. It would appear, however, that this alarming information had yet to reach the political echelons in such a way that the political consequences of these phenomena, especially for the social policy of the various countries, could be recognised, evaluated and taken account of in political work.

One particular phenomenon had also become discernable – for a long time there had been movements in Europe dedicated in an organised form to the many and diverse concerns of the elderly. These are very impressive organisations which are also involved in the work of the European Commission as NGOs (**Non Governmental Organisations**), but which want and are permitted to act in a purely advisory non-political capacity in this sphere. However, this principle tends to lead to gridlock in so many really important pan-European problems in the interest of senior citizens since the issues are ultimately of legistic character and can only be solved in party political debates and votes in the European Parliament.

For example, *Dr. Hermann Berié*³ (D) tells of a Congress in June 1991 of EURAG (European Federation of Older Persons), a very peaceful NGO, where he met the organisation's Secretary General, *Ing. Wilhelm Mohaupt* (A). Debates focus on the fact that the NGOs are not involved in politics and solutions to this problem are discussed. Ing. Wilhelm Mohaupt, who was at this time also Secretary General of the Austrian Senior Citizens' Union, the ÖVP, later became the first Secretary General of the ESCU in 1995 and is today Vice President of the ESCU, responsible for south-east Europe.

How should the political significance of elderly people come to be noticed in the routine work of the European Parliament?

In his book “The European People’s Party, Origins and Development”⁴ **Thomas Jansen** analyses the premiss upon which any association is integrated in the political work of the European People’s Party (EPP), namely that the party’s work should represent the full demographic spread, with members from all sections of the population working in the spirit of the party in their respective sphere of influence and representing these interests within the party.

This made it possible for the ever increasing percentage of elderly people in society to be politically active.

In the chapter entitled “European Senior Citizens’ Union” the point is made that only a few countries in Europe possess the political infrastructure for suitable associations, mentioning in this connection Belgium, Germany, Finland, Luxembourg, Austria and Spain.

In Belgium the significance of an ageing population has been recognised since 1975 by **Elisabeth Dispaux-Cornil**, a highly committed politician and member of the “Parti Social Chrétien (PSC)”, now the “Centre Démocrate Humaniste (CDH)”, also active at the time in the senior citizens’ organisation “Les Aînés du PSC (CDH)”, later co-founder of the ESCU and Vice President, today an indispensable fellow worker and adviser on the ESCU Committee.

In her memoirs “Deux visages, un regard”⁵ she vividly recounts how she was becoming increasingly aware of the fact that there are now so many “Golden Weddings” and that so many more people, particularly women, are reaching the age of 80 and beyond. She was also appointed by the government for some years on the Belgian Consultative Council for pensions.

As President of “Les Aînés du PSC” she already had regular contact with **Wilfried Martens**⁶ (B), the President of the EPP, and with the Secretary General **Thomas Jansen** (D) and, motivated primarily by social factors, mindful in particular at this time of the plight of many elderly women and widows, she very much endorsed the model of the European Women’s Lobby, which was already integrated in the EPP as a recognised organisation, in creating a European Senior Citizens’ Organisation, now the ESCU. She was also accomplished in her contact and work with the representatives of the senior citizens’ organisation of the Flemish CVP (Christian People’s Party) of Belgium (today the

CD&V: Christian, Democratic & Flemish). All this information can be gleaned from her book, mentioned above, as I have become party to it through personal conversations and records.

In the late nineteen-eighties the relevant government departments in Germany were very well informed about the changing picture of the age pyramid emerging from data being collected in surveys at that time and soon became well aware of the social implications of this trend. **Dr. Hermann Berié**⁷ (D) is able to report of an “International Conference” held in Bonn on 8 May 1990 under the motto “Senior citizens fighting for a Europe in peace and liberty” where representatives of the German Senior Citizens’ Union, and also the Austrian Senior Citizens’ Association (ÖSB), discussed the idea of founding a European Senior Citizens Union, only to conclude that the idea could not yet be realised at this time.

In 1991 Germany was the first country to witness very intensive efforts to found the “Third Age” in Europe in the political dimension. Initial talks were then held by the Undersecretary of State of the German Federal Government of the time, **Dr. Bernhard Worms** (D), later co-founder of the ESCU and today President of the European Senior Citizens’ Union, with leading figures from CDU associations, with the aim of birthing an international senior citizens’ association.

On 24 July 1991 and 11 February 1992 Brussels was the scene of meetings with the Secretary General of the EPP, **Dr. Thomas Jansen**, at which the EPP Committee was asked to endorse the efforts to found the ESCU.

Prompted by the “Preparation for the first senior citizens’ parliament in the EU Parliament” at a colloquium of the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung (KAS) and the EPP on 15/16 April 1993 in Brussels to fix the date of 22–24 November 1993 for this senior citizens’ parliament, an attempt was made in a meeting to effect the formation of the ESCU before the end of 1993 as well.

Yet not until 14 February 1995, during a conversation with the Secretary General of the EPP **Klaus Welle** (D) in Brussels, was a date fixed to form a working party to prepare for

the founding of a European Senior Citizens' Union. The first meeting of this working party was held on 5 May 1995 in Aachen (D), and attended by representatives from Christian Democrat senior citizens' organisations in Belgium, Germany, Finland, Luxembourg, Austria and Spain.

I quote from the EPP NEWS ⁸ No. 14/1995:

"The initiative leading to the formation of a European Senior Citizens' Union originates from **Elisabeth Dispaux-Cornil**, Chair of the PSC (B) Senior Citizens' Union, and from (retired Undersecretary of State) **Dr. Bernhard Worms**, Chair of the CDU Senior Citizens' Union (D).

During the first meeting of the working party in Aachen an Executive Committee was elected:

Voted Chair of the Committee was LH Stv. a.D. Bundesobmann des ÖSB (Austrian Senior Citizens' Union) **Stefan Knafel** (A). Other members are **Elisabeth Dispaux-Cornil** (B), **Dr. Hermann Beriè**, CDU (D), **Dr. Bollendorf**, CSV (L), **Francesc Miralles Mestre**, Unio Democratica de Catalunya (E): The newly formed Executive Committee has the task of preparing the founding congress of the Senior Citizens' Union, which will be held at the beginning of November in Madrid, parallel to the EPP Congress. This founding congress should provide the framework for adopting a committee, a constitution and a manifesto. Before the founding congress the "European Senior Citizens' Union Working Party" shall make every effort to involve other senior citizens' organisations of member parties of the EPP or EUCD (European Union of Christian Democrats). The aim of the "European Senior Citizens' Union" working party is to become a recognised association of the EPP."

On 20 June 1995 further detailed talks were held with the EPP in Brussels in order to prepare a meeting of the working party in the European Parliament in Strasbourg and the founding congress in Madrid. The meeting in the European Parliament in Strasbourg finalised organisational issues and personnel matters and was chaired by LH Stv. a. D. **Stefan Knafel** (A).

On 7 November 1995 the European Senior Citizens' Union (ESCU) was founded in Madrid.

[Footnotes]

¹ EPP / EUCD YEARBOOK 1995, EPP Information Service (European People's Party), Rue d'Arlon 67, B-1000 Brussels, Page 239 f. No. 38 - 1995

² Internet homepage: www.eu-seniorunion.info : "History of the ESCU" as amended: July 2004

³ Dr. Hermann Berié, reminiscences obtained on 1 January 2005

⁴ Dr. Thomas Jansen: "The European People's Party: Origins and Development" history, founding and development of the EPP 1996 Europa Union Verlag GmbH, Bonn, ISBN: 3-7713-0526-8, p.201 ff.

⁵ Elisabeth Dispaux-Cornil "Deux visages, un regard" 2004, Edition Clepsydre 1650 Beersel – Belgique, p.91 ff.

⁶ Memos with Elisabeth Dispaux-Cornil, recorded in March 2005

⁷ Reminiscences of Dr Hermann Berié, obtained on 1 January 2005

⁸ EPP NEWS No.14/1995 European Senior Citizens' Union working party founded

