



**Senioren in Europa –
Stütze in einer sich wandelnden Welt**

EUROPÄISCHE SENIOREN UNION (ESU)

**Senior Citizens in Europe –
Mainstays in a Changing World**

EUROPEAN SENIOR CITIZENS' UNION (ESCU)

**Seniors en Europe –
Piliers dans un monde en pleine mutation**

L'UNION EUROPÉENNE DES SENIORS (UES)

**La Tercera Edad en Europa –
Sostén de un mundo cambiante**

UNIÓN EUROPEA DE MAYORES (UEM)

Senior Citizens in Europe – Mainstays in a Changing World

Content and future emphases of the work of the European Senior Citizens' Union

Submitted and adopted on the occasion of
celebrating the 10th anniversary
of the founding of our association in Madrid

I. 10 years – review and preview

10 years' existence of the European Senior Citizens' Union – cause for celebration, retrospection and for examining future prospects. Seniority and futurity in one accord.

It was today's generation of senior citizens which, having endured the bitter experiences in the first half of the 20th century, and incited by Churchill's visionary speech in Zurich (1946), sensed the longing of many Europeans and acted on their perception by planning and then proceeding to build a common "House of Europe", in which each nation and each country on our continent was to have its own homeland – all united under one roof!

For 10 years we, the European Senior Citizens' Union, have been working together to this end.

Sometimes the paths have been stony, but they led to success! Our intensive efforts helped to create a Europe which is today taken for granted by our young people; a foundation on which they can build.

We want to join forces with the younger generation to campaign for this House of Europe to be upheld and extended; to be a place where all the nations of Europe can live together in peace.

II. Foundations of the path from the nation-state structure to the new value system and economic community of Europe.

The third millennium is characterised by the number, diversity and rapidity of developments taking place. Global changes in the economy and society, science and research, health care, culture and education, and in the coexistence of the major religious communities challenge us to adopt opinions and constitute enormous tasks with which we have to cope.

Again drawing on the bitter experiences of two war generations, we consider the following fundamental values to be essential to a positive future:

- Human dignity: It is inviolable - from the origin of life unto death
- Freedom and responsibility: Demonstrate responsibility in adopting the precepts by which the nations can live together in peace
- Tolerance based on human rights in the juxtaposition
 - of religions
 - of economic and social structures
 - of different political groups
- Social market economy to balance the interests of labour and capital
- Solidarity with those who are weaker and, as a practical response, the development and fostering of a willingness to go without
- Promotion of family life
 - to preserve and protect the family as an institution
 - to encourage people to have children
 - to support people in combining family and career *de facto* and *de jure*
- New guidelines for education and training courses
 - in allowing parents a say in the choice of school for their children
 - in applying new technologies
 - in creating skills and playing an effective part in coping with difficult circumstances in a changing world

- Equal participation of all generations in the developments in the 21st century with due regard for ecological issues (the earth is entrusted to us and we have to preserve it intact for future generations!)
- “A life calendar reform!” through a realistic image of old age

III. Senior citizens as mainstays in a changing world

The role of senior citizens in our society is multi-faceted:

- **Impartation of values to the next generation**

We live in a world of changing values and convictions. Not everything which is “modern” is good. We senior citizens feel under obligation to pass on established Christian values and to be a mainstay and reference point for the next generation. This is not to say, however, that we should not also look into new movements and trends; we have to analyse “modernity” - and sometimes accept it, as the case may be.

We need spirited dialogue between the generations! We must communicate with the younger generations in such a way that they understand us –

and we have to try to understand the younger generations. We have to convey the fundamental values of a free society, pass on our historical experience, put across and acknowledge the successes and failures of the past. We have to identify possibilities for the present and the future while pointing out boundaries. Having coped with difficult circumstances in life, we must spread hope, courage and confidence! We must point the way – and then put our trust in the next generations.

It is about affirming and defending in our society the basic underlying Christian values of freedom, justice, solidarity, neighbourliness, honesty and responsibility. We also feel committed to these values in the way we live our lives. It is about fighting for the fundamental value of democracy! –

President Wilfried MARTENS recently called us a “calming influence in the hectic world around us”. While we can take some pride in this description it does not mean that we can “calmly” focus on ourselves to the exclusion of others! It is down to us to radiate an energy and charisma which will help all generations to fulfil their duties for our society. Our strength lies solely in our partnership!

- **Honorary office – our obligation to society**

Today senior citizens are already very active in honorary positions in most European countries. Our senior citizens' associations in particular, which have come together in membership of the ESCU, regard voluntary work as the basis for all work within the inter-generation compact. We, the ESCU, want to conduct our own analysis, in collaboration with the EPP, to assess the experiences we have gained thereby in order to render them useful for the necessary exchange of ideas and experience with politics.

How many different jobs do senior citizens do in families? Helping their children with household tasks, looking after the grandchildren, in some cases to enable the mothers to work, and how many 60- and 70-year-olds still care for their elderly parents and over 80-year-olds their spouse?!

This includes the involvement required to achieve a certain quality of care in terms of basic care standards.

No country, no community in Europe can do without the contributions made by volunteers – whether in

the family, associations, churches or other social groups.

- **Death and dying in our time**

Death must not be pushed out of our life. “Dying is part of life” – this somewhat theological statement has been our guiding principle. We support the hospice movement, the notion of coming alongside the dying and their loved ones. We are against death in anonymity; we want to do everything possible – while strictly applying the principle of human dignity – to enable life to draw to a close, if at all possible, surrounded by family and friends.

We are against any form of euthanasia, but are very much in favour of palliative medicine, or relief from pain.

- **Technical and social change**

In politics we senior citizens are particularly stretched! We have frontiers to overcome! We have to stand by the history of our native peoples; we have to confess the guilt of the past and yet – looking to the future – shake hands with each other in the interests of reconciliation! Only in this way will we

solve integration problems, especially in central and eastern Europe. Given the specific experiences of the war generation, we of all generations are obliged and also predestined to achieve these goals.

We live in an era of rapid technical and social change; that which is extolled as the latest thing one day is already outmoded the next day. We have to “learn ageing and age learning” and more so than the generations which preceded us. Life-long learning has become an essential part of modern-day life.

Either we face up to the new demands of an information society and learn how to use a PC and the Internet, in both the work and home environment, or we lose touch – for ever.

Given our central claim “Collaboration – Cooperation – Co-responsibility” we show ourselves open to these new trends.

- **Demographic change and social security systems**

We are living in an ageing world, with ever more elderly people at one end of the spectrum and ever fewer young people at the other end. In conjunction with economic trends, this creates a challenge for

our social security systems. Late entry into working life, early retirement and increasing unemployment all contribute to the deficits in the pension and health insurance funds.

We are campaigning hard for a restructuring of the social security systems and are fighting for more employment opportunities – both for entrants and for older employees.

To this end we need:

- Openings in the employment market for older jobseekers
- Choices in relation to length of working life; transition to greater flexibility
- Review of rules and regulations in the world of work: deregulation
- Promotion and extension of contact points for arranging voluntary work
- Improved access to the many and diverse qualifications on offer
- Long-term organisation of the increasingly necessary private provision for old age, health and care insurance, retaining the mandatory guarantee of a joint statutory minimum provision

Personal accountability must be encouraged. We need a critical evaluation of the changing concept

of the state – moving away from the welfare state to a civil society where the focus is on personal responsibility.

IV. Senior citizens want a Europe shaped by our Western culture

Senior citizens advocate a Europe which affords our Western culture a keen profile and which perpetuates and fosters cultural values.

The future of Europe requires a circumspect pleasure in shaping politics, bound to unchanging values.

It is our very own and most basic task to communicate to the succeeding generations that the great idea of “Europe” will only fully unfold and become reality if the empirical values of its founding generation retain their precious formative value.

The history of nations and cultures teaches that there is a chance of survival only where youthful drive for reform goes hand in hand with the experience and values of the elderly.

For us this means that only together - young, middle-aged and old alike - will we succeed in continuing to

create the House of Europe. We have to discuss shared objectives and methods with each other, weigh up arguments, make joint decisions and then act together.

We need dialogue between the generations across all age brackets! Let us encourage the younger ones to dialogue and let us also listen to the older ones!

This generation of senior citizens has allowed Europe to become reality. We will continue to expand it as our strength allows. As such, we are campaigning for the conservation of our homeland, its customs and language, for the regional and also the national traditions of all peoples in Europe! We are striving together for a new civil society that fosters personal accountability!

We are prepared to speak up for these goals and to share in the work as our strength allows! We are convinced that, in terms of culture, politics and economics, our Europe is a treasure, and her path to a better future is one worth fighting for!

LONG LIVE EUROPE!