



**EUROPÄISCHE SENIOREN UNION
EUROPEAN SENIOR CITIZENS' UNION
L'UNION EUROPEENE DES SENIORS**



Generalsekretariat:

Hermann-Seger-Str. 23, D-50226 Frechen

Telefon: +49 (0)2234 188 419, Telefax: +49 (0)2234 188 410

E-Mail: esu@cdu.de Internet: www.eu-seniorunion.info

Shaping the future responsibly and with confidence!

New Year interview with the President of the European Senior Citizens' Union (ESCU), Dr. Bernhard Worms

Berlin. Approaching the threshold of 2009, Dr. Bernhard Worms, President of the European Senior Citizens' Union (ESCU), gave a New Year interview in Berlin to the ESCU's Press Officer, Ulrich Winz.

The ESCU is the biggest political senior citizens' organisation in Europe. It has more than half a million members, who are organised in 38 associations or parties in 28 countries - some initially as "observers". The General Secretariat is currently located in Frechen (Germany).

Question: President Worms, what first springs to mind when you look back on 2008?

Dr. Worms: The continued growth of the ESCU. SGERB, the Bulgarian senior citizens' association was founded in the capital city, Sofia, in May and immediately applied to be admitted. The Dutch party, Christen Democratisch Appèl (CDA), and "Our Generation" in Belarus both obtained observer status in June.

Question: How do you assess the Regional Conferences held in 2008?

Worms: These encounters are the "backbone" of our work. In Nicosia (CY), Vienna (A), Vilnius (LT) and Saarbrücken (D), issues were dealt with which are of significance for both the host country and for the whole of Europe. In Saarbrücken in October, for example, we tackled the hot topic of the financial and banking crisis and the challenges it presents. In November in front of the Board and Executive Committee, the Germany Chancellor and Chairwoman of the CDU took to task those who had taken financial decisions regardless of risk.

Question: What do you think will be the consequences?

Worms: The ESCU agrees with the Chancellor that the highest priority is to safeguard jobs. The economic situation in the German States varies enormously, and this calls for totally different ways of moving forward. The objectives cited by Dr. Merkel to the ESCU – coordinated action to tackle climate change offences, child poverty and intellectual theft - will continue to be pursued.

Question: Do you think the crisis has peaked with the EU Summit in December?

Worms: No-one can answer that with any confidence. At least more measures are now in place to pave the way to overcoming it, and it is European integration which has made this possible. The economic programme agreed on 12th December will certainly help with employment and take the edge off social need. I am confident that all governments and local authorities will continue to carry out their responsibilities towards the poorest in society to the same degree.

Question: What makes you optimistic?

Worms: First of all, the fact that the social market economy as introduced in Europe is now becoming accepted throughout the world due to the effects of the crisis. Secondly, that in most countries of Europe democratic structures exist or - as in Eastern Europe - are being developed. Government policy is being influenced through the increasing active involvement of citizens both young and old. The European Senior Citizens' Union - and its member organisations - offers the best platform for helping to shape the democratic landscape.

Question: But how does that apply to Belarus?

Worms: As of this year we've been in contact with the senior citizens' organisation, Our Generation. It has 1,800 members in almost all raions [districts]. They are not frightened by the persistent refusal to grant them state registration, and their involvement in a difficult political environment is commendable and an example to us all. That is also the case with our member in Ukraine, the Association of Retired Persons. Belarus and Ukraine need the solidarity of the whole of Europe! That's why the ESCU - in response to a request for help - is currently finding out whether it can facilitate the setting up of a website in Minsk, and any financial assistance from others would be most welcome.



Question: What is the situation with Ukraine?

Worms: We will be in discussions with the leadership of the EPP to clarify whether the Association of Retired Persons in Ukraine with its 26,000 members can be granted full membership, which would be of great interest to both sides. This would be in recognition of the social, legal and cultural work it has undertaken. According to statements the President of the Association has made in Kiev, of the many parties which exist in the country none is concerned with the older generation which makes the efforts of this organisation all the more commendable.

Question: Will the “Lisbon Treaty” become a reality?

Worms: What has been termed the European Union Reform Treaty has been agreed by almost all countries. I am concerned that the Czech Parliament has again postponed its final vote. From my discussions with senior citizens from Prague, Ceské Budejovice and other regions, I know that there is a desire in the Czech Republic as well to be part of a united Europe with no ifs and buts. This includes agreeing to the treaty, which will redefine relationships. The two ESCU member associations have been working towards this goal for years. It is this commitment on the part of our friends and having a process of clarification within the governing party, the ODS, that gives me hope. Much is now expected of the Czech Republic, which holds the presidency of the European Union in 2009.

Question: What do you think about Ireland?

Worms: After the disappointing and apparently manipulated vote of the Irish against the treaty, I expect that the second referendum that has been announced will be successful. I sensed that the recent EU summit went as far as it reasonably could in terms of concessions to Ireland.

Question: How is the ESCU supporting the European elections?

Worms: I agreed to our involvement some months ago. It ranges from publicity for the work of the European Parliament to support for candidates in all EU countries as well as contributing to the organisation of the EPP Congress in Warsaw at the end of April. The Regional Conferences taking place in Eupen (B), Dresden (D), Vienna (A) and Tallinn (EST) will devote a great deal of their business to the elections.

Question: And when you look out beyond Europe?

Worms: I am shocked by the bloody conflict in the Darfur region of Sudan, the cholera epidemic in oppression-ridden Zimbabwe, the attacks by pirates off the coast of East Africa reminiscent of the Middle Ages, and the never-ending tensions in the Middle East, Afghanistan and Iraq. Human dignity is being violated over and over again on a massive scale in these trouble spots. The innocent have to pay with their lives. Among them are soldiers on UN and EU missions. The ESCU has expectations here as well of decisive and coordinated action by the family of nations.

The US election campaign has spread hope that there will be more involvement among Europeans in voluntary social work. The ESCU is pinning high hopes on the election result to resolve controversial political, economic and environmental issues.

Question: What motivates you as you stand on the threshold of 2009?

Dr. Worms: All of us still have a lot to do “to give Europe a soul”, as has been the call from different quarters in 2008. I’d like to add to that: a soul which is fashioned and remains fashioned by the Judaeo-Christian tradition.

While thanking all those who have undertaken a wide variety of responsible political action in 2008, I send my best wishes to all citizens who in 2009 are committed to the welfare of people in their region, country, for Europe and all over the world.

The European Senior Citizens' Union and its more than half a million members and sympathisers stand by them. The ESCU has confidence not only in its political experience and wisdom, its wealth of ideas and willingness to act, but even and especially in the elderly among us who rightly want to give meaning to the third or even fourth stage of their lives.