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Warm Christmas greetings from ESCU President, Dr. Worms, and Secretary General, Mrs. Uhlenbrock, to all comrades-in-arms – on the Board and Executive Committee, in member organisations and observer groups as well as all the elected members of the EU, who are supported by our Union. The year has finished well with the addition to the ESCU family of groups in Bulgaria (SGERB), Belarus (NP) and the Netherlands (CDA); the Regional Conferences in Nicosia, Vienna, Vilnius and Saarbrücken, and meeting Dr. Angela Merkel in Berlin. Media interest in the ESCU has also increased in 2008.

Archbishop Alfons Nossol from Opole (Poland) was honoured on 28th November with the “Mérite Européen” for the decades of work he has dedicated to reconciling the Polish and German peoples. It was presented to him in Berlin by Dr. Ursula Braun-Moser. The President of the European Parliament, Dr. Hans-Gert Pöttering, referred in his commendation to the Apostle Paul’s letter to the Corinthians (I Corinthians, Chapter 13, Verse 13) and emphasised that faith, hope and love were the guiding principles of all action for Europe. “The hope for reconciliation between Poland and Germany fosters reconciliation in Europe as a whole,” he stated, amid applause from guests from several countries, including diplomats and clerics. For Dr. Nossol, the reconciliation of both peoples is the realisation of a dream to which figures such as Willy Brandt, Helmut Kohl and Angela Merkel on the part of the Germans had contributed. Others who have previously received the “Mérite Européen” include Hans-Dietrich Genscher (D), Avi Primor (Israel), Tadeusz Mazowiecki (PL), Benita Ferrero-Waldner (A), Hans-Gert Pöttering (D) and Vytautas Landsbergis (LT).

EPP President Wilfried Martens urged the CDU at its party conference on 2nd December in Stuttgart not to flinch as it carries forward its commitment to a united Europe under the chairmanship of Angela Merkel. He expected active participation from the strongest member of the European People’s Party at the EPP Congress on 29/30 April in Warsaw, which will focus on the elections to the European Parliament. Martens thanked Dr. Merkel for her international political involvement and congratulated her on her re-election as Chairwoman of the CDU with almost 95 per cent of the vote. The President of the Seniors’ Union, Dr. Wulff, was confirmed as a member of the Executive Committee with more than 84%.

More specialist doctors in homes was the call from Dr. Wulff (D) in a recent press statement. The health insurance companies needed to pay more for the services of eye specialists, dentists, orthopaedic specialists, psychiatrists and neurologists. Codetermination by residents needed to be regulated better everywhere by law, based on the North Rhine-Westphalia model.

Discussions in Hungary were held at the end of November with the President, Dr. Worms, and Vice President, Dr. Flemming (Austria). At the invitation of Dr. Pal Aszodí, they discussed the precarious situation of the country’s pensioners with “Fidesz” Party President and former head of government, Viktor Orban. Agreement was reached on the significance of senior citizens’ organisations, and the ESCU’s offer of support in the 2009 election campaign was gratefully accepted. In 2003, Orban failed to secure enough of the senior citizen vote and only just lost out against his socialist rivals. Worms spoke to the press of the concerns and work of the ESCU, and there was a surprising level of media coverage of the visit.

Congratulations sent to Poland. Dr. Worms congratulated Vice Premier, Waldemar Pawlak, on his re-election as Chairman of the PSL (Polish People’s Party) and offered support to the Parliamentary Association, which is a member of the ESCU. Prof. Wladyslaw Bartoszewski (86), an advisor to the Prime Minister, also received congratulations on being awarded the “Prize for German and European Understanding”.