



European Summer Academy for Leading Seniors 2015 Vienna, 3 – 5 July 2015

“Citizens’ Security in the European Union” *Citizens’ call for Security, Protection and Social Cohesion.*

Conclusions and recommendations

Introduction

The **Summer Academy** for leading seniors (3-5 July 2015) organised in Vienna by the **European Seniors’ Union (ESU)**, the *Österreichischer Seniorenbund* and the *Politische Akademie der ÖVP (Polak)* and supported by the Wilfried Martens Centre for European Studies and the European People’s Party (EPP), took place in one of the most eventful and dramatic periods in the history of the European Union.

Almost one year after the European elections, internal and external tensions and threats should not endanger the future of the European integration process and the realisation of European values.

Many of the 75 participants of the Summer Academy know very well the history of the European Union. Many have worked intensively on its construction and are prepared - even now - along with their fellow citizens, to make every effort to build the European society in peace, prosperity and democracy. They express their deep concern over recent developments, and ask the European People's Party (EPP), European leaders, political leaders and all stakeholders in the economic, social and cultural life, to secure the future of Europe by giving priority to the welfare and the protection of European citizens.

Some themes from the current European policy featured explicitly on the programme of the Summer Academy in Vienna (3-5 July). We draw a number of conclusions and make some recommendations:

1. Participation, involvement and opinions of European citizens in the European elections.

Starting from the Summer Academy 2014, a survey about “seniors and politics in Europe” has been set up by Professor Steven Van Hecke (KuLeuven) and a young research team. The results are published by the Wilfried Martens Centre for European Studies and will be discussed in seminars, particularly on 1 October on the occasion of the United Nations International Day of Older Persons. The aim is to make older persons more visible as much in their strength and contributions for the development of future societies, as in their needs as regards age, health, social position and life course. Related to these goals, the ESU has also started the project “Tell us your life story”. **The life histories of senior citizens in the ESU reflect senior citizens’ engagement and resilience in the historical context.** They allow the exploration of the effects of political and social circumstances and changes in the personal history of citizens. We hope to continue this life history project.

(See also: [SENIORS IN THE 2014 EUROPEAN ELECTIONS: TURNOUT, VOTING INTENTIONS AND REPRESENTATION](#), WMCES, JUNE 2015):

- The EU is facing a fundamental demographic change, with the proportion of seniors projected to increase from just over 18% of the population today to 28% by 2050; this trend of demographic ageing holds across the EU, despite large differences within and between the Member States;
- We welcome the large and increasing turnout among senior citizens in the European Parliament elections and stress that 51% of voters aged 55 and over participated in the 2014 European Parliament elections, whereas only 42.5% of citizens overall and 28% of young people turned out to vote; however, seniors’ participation does not always lead to proportionate representation of seniors’ interests;
- We stress that older people want the European Union to take a more proactive role in tackling the challenges of demographic ageing and promoting active ageing and active participation;
- We call on the European Parliament and the parliaments of the Member States to create openness to the call of senior citizens and to match senior citizens’ electoral participation with effective representation; we reiterate that active ageing policy is horizontal and should ensure social inclusion, active participation, and the well-being of all generations;
- We call on political parties and civil society organisations, in particular seniors’ organisations, to establish better communication and mutual trust between the European Parliament and senior citizens;
- We call on the political parties in the EU to engage with senior citizens, to establish political programmes in cooperation with seniors’ organisations, and to include a candidate proposed by the seniors’ organisation on electoral list; stresses that these measures enhance the participation of seniors and visibility of seniors’ issues in campaigns;
- We recognise the important contribution of older people to society in all fields and call on the EU and the Member States to improve capacity building for the active participation of senior citizens in society;

- We call for an inclusive intergenerational dialogue on the local, regional, national and European level; we note with concern the low participation of young people in civil society and politics;
- We stress that active ageing policy first and foremost benefits the young generation of today, which will be the senior generation of tomorrow;

2. Citizens' security and protection

Today, the European Union faces great challenges, coming from several directions: some emanate outside, while other emanate from within our own societies. We are confronted with threats, tensions and attacks emanating from the European Union's eastern and southern neighbours and, particularly, from the Russian government, developments that have direct consequences for - or are intrinsically linked to - the security situation in the EU Member States (terrorism, jihad, armed conflict, human trafficking, immigration, populist parties, influence of economic sanctions against Russia on market developments, etc...). We are also still challenged by the effects of the economic and financial crises – starting in 2008. In today's world, "internal" and "external" security in and around Europe are indivisible.

These developments have a strong influence on the decrease of confidence of citizens in some European countries.

To restore citizens' confidence we need a strong and united European Union, acting together and competent, to solve the common problems and protect our European values.

In this regard we welcome the EPP Congress in Madrid (21-22 October) on the subject of Security, Defence and the protection of European Values.

The participants in the Summer Academy call for the creation of an effective European security and defence policy including the right balance between preventive and repressive measures, with special attention for the stabilisation of our immediate neighbourhood. Achieving this goal presumes a closer cooperation between the EU and the United States and NATO. Europe and the Member States must assume their responsibility as global players by taking coordinated initiatives in security and defence but, at the same time, they create inside Europe, the sorely-needed security and protection that citizens call upon.

The participants in the Summer Academy are aware of the high migratory pressure at our external borders and make the observation that the EU framework we have in place is insufficient to control it. They underline the need for a common asylum and migration policy, emergency measures on relocation and resettlement and call upon the Member States to cooperate in constructive solutions. A more efficient border control policy, a more stringent fight against human traffickers and smugglers, as well as a fairer distribution of responsibility among the Member States, are indispensable in effectively tackling the challenges of migratory pressures, in full respect of migrants' fundamental rights.

The participants in the Summer Academy have also focused on the situation of repressed populations in Asia and Africa, who are forced to go into exile under pressure of dictatorial, anti-democratic regimes in full contradiction with humane politics. For this situation to be changed, it is indispensable for the EU to develop a strong and coherent foreign policy, in order to incite these regimes to develop humane policies respecting their populations; the EU should also finance such projects in these countries.

The participants in the Summer Academy have experienced Europe as a place of culture, rationality, progress, faith and knowledge, with the human person at the centre of political action. Christian Democracy, in addition to the traditions of Humanism and the Enlightenment, are the core of the political ideas that make up the political EPP family. Human dignity, peace, freedom and responsibility, democracy and the rule of law, fundamental equality, justice and solidarity, as well as subsidiarity are the fundamental values of our political thinking and behaviour. Each person must be able to achieve personal development and have the possibility to integrate and participate in societal life.

In this regard, we also call on the European Commission and the Member States to strengthen the social market economy in Europe. While Europe is gradually returning to sustainable economic growth, many European citizens do not yet feel the effects of the economic recovery. People expect the EU to be concerned not just about the economy and welfare but also about the social situation and wellbeing. The European social market economy provides the framework in which competitiveness contributes to social justice and social justice supports competitiveness.

Faith and religious practice are part of our society. Freedom of religion, including the right to change faith or to have none, must be fully implemented as one of the core values. We face the worrying fact that intolerance and violence against religious and ethnic communities, especially those that are Christian, is growing in many parts of the world. We call on the EU, the Member States and the EPP, to stimulate interreligious dialogues, openness in diversity of opinions and beliefs and authenticity in political practice, focusing on a value driven European Union.

To increase stability in the Balkan Region, the EU has to adapt the Eastern European Partnership programme to meet today's needs. The integration of the region into the EU will only take place in accordance to each country's programme in developing the necessary reforms, in implementing the standards of the rule of law, creating independent and efficient justice systems, stimulating the fight against corruption and promoting freedom, democracy and human rights. As civil society, churches and associations can play an important role in the development of a values-driven society, it is important that the EEP should support the development of EaP and promote the development of civil society organisations and exchanges between EU citizens and citizens from neighbouring countries - also for senior citizens. The ESU will be happy to participate.

Concerning Greece, we call upon European leaders to take into account the Greek people, who have already made enormous sacrifices. European leaders and the Institutions need, in responsibility and solidarity, to search for sustainable solutions for the Greek debt and the economic and financial future of Greece.

As christian-democrats and christian-socials, as political leaders, as stakeholders in the economic, social and cultural life we want to take our responsibility to secure the future of Europe. We cannot stand on the side-lines in the fight for security and a just ordering of society. It is one of the central responsibilities of politics. Therefore we want to encourage and strengthen the European Social Model more than ever. This is of central importance to avoid increasing poverty and social exclusion and thus ultimately also ensure political stability.

Agreed in Vienna, 5 July 2015.