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Together for a safe and social Europe

Declaration of the European Seniors' Union

ESU Congress 4-5 November 2016, Leuven

Since the foundation of the European Seniors' Union (ESU) in Madrid in 1995, the ESU has been a growing network of associations, which give voice to the seniors in Europe. Our values and goals are based on the European personalism, rooted in a Jewish Christian and humanist tradition, and they correspond with the vision on humanity and society of the European People's Party (EPP).¹ At the celebration of its 20th anniversary, the ESU reaffirmed its adherence to this basic vision and its determination to continue the road towards a value driven Europe.

In its previous Congress, Together towards an age-friendly society (2013), the ESU stressed that we are on the way to an age-friendly society, where there is no place for discrimination, nor isolation, and where citizens can expect social protection. The ESU called on the EU, member states and regions, to involve seniors in policy decisions, to recognize the different impacts of demographic change, and to create the conditions for active and healthy ageing and to allow every person to participate in society.

At the ESU Statutory Congress in Leuven in 2016, we represent the interests of the older generations and give voice to our vision on Europe. Today, the ESU reaffirms its choices, as expressed in its past declarations and, in the context of today's society, the ESU highlights the following.

1. The European Seniors' Union (ESU) cares about the future of Europe, and in particular about the well-being of present and future generations who will uphold the values that brought and will continue to bring peace and prosperity in Europe. They count on it that decision makers at all levels and in particular in the European People's Party (EPP) will do everything possible, with effective and transparent European policy, to increase the trust that citizens have in the EU.

¹ "We put the human being at the centre of our convictions. We human beings have an inherent natural dignity, which makes us unique. This is valid both for those of us who believe in God as the source of truth, justice, good and beauty, as well as those who do not share this faith but respect the same universal values as arising from other sources. We recognise Greek and Roman heritage, Judeo and Christian values, as well as the Enlightenment, as being the roots of our civilisation." (Manifesto EPP, 2012)

2. The ESU calls on the European Commission, the Parliament, the Member States and the European People's Party (EPP) to continue to implement the Europe 2020 Strategy for Smart, Sustainable and Inclusive Growth, and in particular the concept of the Social Market Economy to respond to the needs and opportunities arising from the demographic changes. All citizens must have the encouraging experience that Europe is a safe place to live and work in and that Europe protects them. The further development of the 'Silver Economy' has to make full use of the opportunities of an increased life expectancy.
3. The ESU wants to draw attention to the problems of millions of Europeans who are on the side-lines, both from the labour market and from social integration. With more than 120 million people at risk of poverty or social exclusion, it is crucial that the EU, governments at all levels and stakeholders continue their efforts to guarantee all citizens a dignified life. The ESU calls to develop initiatives in the areas of anti-ageism, social inclusion, health care and pensions. The ESU underlines that civil society organizations and citizens are ready to offer their experiences, and play a crucial role in the optimization of an inclusive society for all ages.
4. The ESU urges all decision-makers and responsible citizens to work together to find sustainable solutions to the urgent problems of the refugees in order to protect and to safeguard their rights and guarantee security to European citizens. The EU and the Member States need to optimise, with responsibility and solidarity, a common migration and asylum policy, in which every Member State takes part.
5. The ESU calls for the creation of an effective European security and defence policy including the right balance between preventive and repressive measures, giving strong emphasis to the use of diplomacy and with special attention to the stabilisation of our immediate neighbourhood. Europe and the Member States must assume their responsibility as global players by taking coordinated initiatives in security and defence, at the same time safeguarding the sovereignty and integrity of the States and providing for the sorely-needed security and protection that citizens need and call upon.
6. The EU attaches great importance to good governance, based on the rule of law, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms and democracy. The rule of law is a comprehensive condition for making safe, secure and fair societies possible. The ESU calls to stand against any violation of human rights, to fight corruption in all areas of society and to strengthen the rule of law in both internal and external relations, in particular in the European neighbourhood policies.

The participants at the IXth Congress in Leuven are convinced and aware of the importance of Europe for peace and freedom, for security and wellbeing, and for the fulfilment of all citizens. Also in the future, by means of cooperation and active political participation, they will keep conveying and defending the European values.

Adopted in Leuven, 5 November 2016.