

Dear Guests,  
Dear Colleagues,  
Dear Friends,

Already for the 9<sup>th</sup> time we are pleased to be welcomed here in Vienna with the ESU Summer Academy. At the beginning of this Summer Academy I would like to thank in particular the “Österreichische Seniorenbund”, POLAK and the Wilfried Martens Centre for European Studies. Without their competent, professional, administrative and financial support this Summer Academy should not be possible.

This Summer Academy is an annual meeting of leading persons in senior associations all over Europe. It creates opportunities for empowerment, for exchange of experiences and last but not least for informal encounters. The main topic of the speeches and discussions during this Summer Academy is “The future of Europe”. The last years the European Union, the member states and the whole society were confronted with unforeseen problems and challenges. But, as some European leaders said, “Every crisis can turn into an opportunity”. Today we have the feeling that we can look ahead with confidence. Recent election results and many opinion polls are pointing to a clear shift in public opinion on the European Union. It seems that there is new hope and confidence in the European project. One reason for this can certainly be found in the economic recovery Europe is experiencing, but is not the only reason. More and more citizens are aware that nationalism and populism don't bring the right answers and that we need to work together. Together we can find solutions to the problems of security, immigration, unemployment and climate change.... Several of these challenges will be developed in the course of this Summer Academy. Several competent speakers will guide us in the following days.

In the whole range of challenges there is one that concerns us in particular : the ageing of societies. Already since more than 30 years international institutions developed concepts and strategies to cope with demographic change. Also the EU, together with the Member States developed new perspectives and policies on the position of older persons, healthcare, pensions, solidarity between generations. In the recent general document of the EPP Congress in Malta (March 2017) demographic change had its place as one the challenges for the future. The EPP Congress called for a general European strategy on demographic change, even when most competences are in the hands of the Member States (health care, social protection,...) The question is which role Europe can and should play, and how we and our politicians must be involved in it.

I should say : let us start...But not without remembering one of the greatest European leaders of the 20<sup>th</sup> century: Helmut Kohl.

Some days ago, the EPP family learned of the passing away of former German chancellor Helmut Kohl, a great statesman and a great European leader, one of the co-founders of the EPP. We will remember him as one of the greatest European leaders of the past century. The strength of his belief and the determination of his actions gave him the courage to act and go forward for the reunification of Germany and the realization of the European peace project. We will remember him in continuing his work for the unity of Europe, for freedom and democracy.

Dear friends,

As Helmut Kohl said until the end of his life "Europe is our future". We believe in the future of Europe. Let us continue working for it and now start our activities. I thank you for coming to Vienna. We are glad to meet you here.