



Introduction

The brutalization of language — violence against people: a danger to society, peace, democracy and the rule of law

Respect for life and respect for one another are fundamental and important principles of Christian conviction and correspond to our European culture and our understanding of democracy. Language shapes culture, culture is shaped by knowledge, morality and the commonality of values, actions and views.

Today we have to complain about a brutalization of language, which culminates more and more in physical violence. Malicious, hateful verbal and physical attacks are part of everyday life for an increasing number of professional groups. Attacks are no longer just a professional risk for police officers, but also for rescue workers, doctors, nurses, teachers, public transport workers, administrative employees and politicians. In the so-called “social networks”, it is relatively easy to use anonymously offensive and disparaging terms and idioms to disparage other people, other opinions and lifestyles. This is made possible because one does not see the person opposite and does not observe his/her reaction.

As a result of this brutalization, trust in the community of solidarity and in supposedly safe rooms such as schools or hospitals is waning. Objective and respectful controversies become impossible, while the ground is prepared for discord, persecution and physical violence.

Hate, aggression and fear destroy communities, society, the rule of law and the peaceful coexistence of nations.

We can no longer stand by and do nothing!

In particular, we as seniors in the European Seniors' Union (ESU) need to take action.

We must denounce and call attention to the spread of hate speech, incitement to violence and falsehoods (“fake news”).

We must not ignore verbal attacks but must commit ourselves to mutual respect and appreciation and not allow people to be insulted or even attacked because of their views or characteristics.

All sections of society, families and schools must work on this task. But convincing work alone is not enough: our criminal laws must correspond to negative developments and growing threats and be rigorously adapted and applied.

Resolution

The European Seniors' Union (ESU) calls for a return to respect and culture in language and debate.

Because negligence and brutalization spread intolerably in public discourse, the European Seniors' Union calls for a return to respect and to the observance of appropriate behaviour when dealing with and communicating with one another. Verbal and physical attacks on more and more professional groups as part of their everyday life need to stop.

Firefighters, rescue workers, police, teachers, train personnel, politicians as well as doctors and nursing staff must be protected from such attacks when serving the community.

Brutalization begins with careless and irresponsible use of language and increases with the use of sayings and insults that have been inappropriate before. Digitization and communication in "social networks" are increasingly tempting to be able to insult in a simple and anonymous manner. The distance to violence is getting smaller. Hate, aggression and fear destroy communities, society, the rule of law and the peaceful coexistence of nations.

Dignity, respect and appreciation must find their expression in language and in the interaction with each other.

The Executive Committee of the European Seniors' Union calls for this part of our culture to be preserved and strengthened as a basis for social connection in our private and public dealings with each other.

We must not ignore verbal attacks but must commit ourselves to mutual respect and appreciation and not allow people to be insulted or even attacked because of their views or characteristics.

Every individual, home, family, school, club, association and the political parties are called upon to actively participate in this task and to set a good example. The criminal laws must correspond to the negative developments and growing threats and must be consistently adapted and applied.

The aim remains the preservation of an open-minded society of free and peaceful coexistence.