

Dear chairman,
Honourable guests,
Dear Friends,



It is a great pleasure for us, the European Seniors' Union, to be here at your National Assembly. Since 2013, when I started as ESU president, this is the fourth time you invited us and we were always happy to attend: in Bergen, in Trondheim then in Fredrikstad, and this year again in Bergen. Thank you for demonstrating in this way your partnership with the ESU, your friendship and solidarity with Europe.

Together with the meetings we had and will have with your delegates in congresses and conferences all over Europe, our participations were opportunities to learn more about your country, the political and social context, and the living conditions of seniors. Every time was also a joyful opportunity to meet colleagues and friends, and... to return home inspired, strengthened, and convinced that we will share your experiences in our associations and build together in European society a strong human rights approach to an age-friendly society. One of your societal keys to success is certainly the close cooperation between your association, as a civil society organisation, scientific researchers and politicians in parliament and government. That is the way to find the best perspectives for the future together.

The quality of life of seniors in Norway is measured as one of the best in the world, and ageing issues have been high on the political agenda for decades. You and your political leaders have understood that ageing policies are not just about healthcare or pensions, but all areas of society, and that it is a responsibility of the whole society. No wonder I saw your party leader and former Prime Minister Erna Solberg on the programme of this event. I hope and wish that under her leadership the seniors of Høyre will obtain the place they deserve.

Dear friends,

Being born at the end of World War II, I grew up in years of peace, increasing prosperity, security, and democratisation. In the nineties, it seemed we could achieve a democratic peaceful world. In recent years, that perspective has collapsed. We faced uncertain geopolitical relations and the fragility of our existence.

While countries and international organisations have been intent on achieving longstanding digital and green policy goals in recent years, the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak and associated emergency measures overshadowed and restructured all political goals in 2020 and 2021. The pandemic not only confronted our society with a host of health problems, but it were especially the older people in long-term care facilities (LTCF) who suffered more than other population groups, not only due to COVID-19 infection, but also due to isolation, lack of adequate care, etc. It was clear that there was an urgent need to optimize the organization of long-

term care in different countries.

In EU countries, there was a general call for more European support and coordination. After two years of discussion, the EU Commission and the EU Council launched a new "EU care strategy".

The COVID-19 pandemic, besides bringing an unprecedented period of challenges, also brought some unforeseen opportunities. The pandemic served as a catalyst for more collaboration, more information sharing, and it accelerated online communication. However, not everyone benefited from this accelerated development. We learned that media and information literacy are needed not only in schools and formal educational institutions, but "everywhere" where people need it. As ESU, we promoted the critical use of online communication, both for personal communication, contact with government services, banking, commercial activities and for social and political communication. **As active citizenship increasingly becomes digital citizenship, older people want to be part of it.** Human rights must be safeguarded both online and offline. ([See: The digital era? Also my era!](#))

Just as the pandemic subsided, the next crisis began when Russia invaded Ukraine on 24 February 2022. It caused the largest refugee crisis and the worst disruption of the European security structure since World War II. In the chaotic days that followed, sanctions were imposed on Russia and solidarity with Ukraine took various forms, including military assistance. On the geopolitical front, the balance of power changed in various ways: military, economic, cultural, moral and others.

After almost a year, the war is far from over and we will have to respond to ongoing challenges and act united. At the same time, we must not forget the challenges on the home front: How can we better protect our own people from real threats such as unemployment, climate change, terrorism, corruption, illegal migration, military invasion, pandemics, and rising inequality? This too is a task for all governments at all levels of power.

Citizens expect to be able to live and work in a safe environment, to live a fulfilling life and to be able to count on their governments and political representatives to build a reliable society that ensures peace and prosperity and strengthens its autonomy in the current threatening geopolitical situation. This is the great challenge and responsibility for all governments and for all active citizens involved in the development of fair and democratic societies.

However, we know that trust in politics has declined in recent years. We need to turn the tide. This is not only a task for governments, political decision-makers, the media, but for society, for all citizens across all generations

Dear friends,

I hope that through the accents I highlighted, and in the geo-political challenges we have to respond, you have seen ESU as

- A network of seniors' associations;
- A platform for the exchange of experiences and ideas;
- A starting point for new actions.

I can only hope that you see the ESU and all its committed members

- **On the bridge between government initiatives and citizens;**
- Voicing seniors' ideas and hopes;
- Taking responsibility for the community in which they live;
- Caring for each other ;
- And making sure no one is left behind.

I congratulate you all for standing on that bridge, wish you all the best and see you soon!

Thank you for your attention

An Hermans

ESU President