

2022

ANNUAL REPORT

A year that changed our world



Foreword

2022 was another tumultuous year, marked by several events that affected our societies. We will remember 2022 as the year of the return of territorial war in Europe. Its destruction, the flow of refugees, but also the courage and determination of countless Ukrainians, left its mark on European public opinion. Meanwhile, most Europeans support political and economic sanctions against Russia, welcome Ukrainian refugees into their country and have developed a positive attitude towards Ukraine's accession to the European Union.

The war has had a strong impact on Europeans' daily life situation. They are worried about security, their deteriorating financial situation, and the rising costs of daily life.

In this critical situation, we expect European policymakers to work together to provide transparent and adequate answers to the many challenges. As seniors, we are building common and sustainable perspectives, together with younger generations, to ensure a secure future for all and the development of all talents.

In this report, we look back at what 2022 meant for the European Seniors' Union (ESU), while we have already started planning and organising for the coming year. We thank you for your loyalty and look forward to meeting you in 2023. Thank you for following and supporting our activities in 2022.

Guido Dumon
ESU Secretary General

An Hermans
ESU President

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2022: A year that changed our world

For a unified, democratic region of solidarity

When Ursula von der Leyen took office as President of the European Commission for the current term (2019-2024), she presented a balanced programme of objectives and operational perspectives.¹ Outlining six political priorities and promising to lead a 'geopolitical Commission' that would strengthen the EU's role as a relevant international actor - 'A stronger Europe in the world' -, in addition she had five other key political priorities: 'A European Green Deal', 'A Europe fit for the digital age', 'An economy that works for people', 'A new push for European democracy', and 'Promoting the European way of life'. It seemed that a focus on digital and green policies would be the answer to long-standing goals in these fields for the EU. The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic and the development of a coordinated EU recovery plan, however, overshadowed and restructured all political objectives in 2020 and 2021.

And just as the pandemic subsided, the next crisis began, when Russia invaded Ukraine on 24 February 2022, violating its sovereignty and territorial integrity. Russia's large-scale military attack caused a major refugee crisis and the biggest disruption to Europe's 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. In the geopolitical field, the balance of power changed in various ways: military, economic, cultural, moral and others. Which role can the EU play in all these fields? What is the EU's position in this 'new world'? All political leaders have to cope with these new challenges. For the Czech Presidency of the EU Council (1 July-31 December 2022), it was a reason to include the new priorities in their motto: 'Europe as a task: rethink, rebuild, empower'. The issue of solidarity with Ukraine and the reconstruction of the country are important aspects of the Presidency period.²

The slogan 'Europe as a Task' was chosen in tribute to the title of a speech made by Václav Havel (1936-2011) at the awards ceremony of the [International Charlemagne Prize in Aachen in 1996](#).³ Mr. Havel highlighted the political need for European unity. He underscored the importance of a Common Foreign and Security Policy and considered the EU as an unprecedented attempt to make Europe into a unified, democratic region of solidarity. Today, all these years later, his words sound like a crystal-clear call for European unity, founded on the fundamental values of the European project.

¹ The von der Leyen Commission's priorities for 2019-2024 (europa.eu): [www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2020/646148/EPRS_BRI\(2020\)646148_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2020/646148/EPRS_BRI(2020)646148_EN.pdf)

² EU solidarity with Ukraine/European Commission (europa.eu): www.ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/stronger-europe-world/eu-solidarity-ukraine_en#eu-support-to-ukraine-practical-information

³ Havel, Vaclav: Europe as task (pro-europa.eu): www.pro-europa.eu/europe/havel-vaclav-europe-as-task/?print=pdfhttps://www.pro-europa.eu/europe/havel-vaclav-europe-as-task/?print=pdf

Together we can overcome the problems

At the same time, we must seize this major crisis to build true strategic autonomy. Without forgetting - as former President of the Council of the EU, Herman Van Rompuy recently said: *“but there is also an internal challenge. How to protect our own people better against real or perceived threats such as unemployment, precarious jobs, climate change, terrorism, corruption, illegal migration, military invasion, pandemics, and rising inequalities? It is a task for all governments at all levels of power. How to better ‘protect’ our people without lapsing into protectionism? That’s the question!”*⁴

This is also the horizon of political decision-making, seen from the human-centred point of view. Citizens expect to be able to live and work in a secure environment, to have a fulfilling life and to be able to count on their governments and political representatives to build a reliable European Union that guarantees peace and prosperity and strengthens its autonomy in today’s threatening geopolitical situation. This is the great challenge and responsibility for all governments, and for all active citizens involved in the development of European societies.

A prerequisite for European decisions in all these dimensions, for all aspects of geopolitical action, is unity. We Europeans, across borders, differences, and disparities, must stand together for our values, for the rule of law, for democracy. We must act together. Together we are stronger and only together can we overcome the problems. We know, however, that the trust in European politics has declined in recent years. We must turn the tide here. This is not only a task for governments, political decision-makers and the media, but for society, for all citizens and for all generations.

Building a common future, across the generations

The ageing of our societies is one of the ‘mega-trends’ of the 21st century, having a major impact

not only on older people, but also bringing opportunities and challenges to all generations. Today, almost 20% of the population is over 65; by 2070, that figure will be 30%. How do we organise our societies, based on respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, so that everyone can live and grow old without discrimination? The European Commission’s Report on the Impact of Demographic Change (2020) presents an overview of the general European data about the differences between countries and regions and the challenges that lie ahead.⁵

This ‘demographic change’, due to low birth rates and an increase in life expectancy, has been observed for many decades. Yet it is only in recent years that societies have responded to it and demographic change has moved higher up the political agenda. The way forward depends on several strategic questions, including: how to stimulate innovation and productivity? How to bring more people into employment? How to modernise healthcare systems, social protection, and social services and how to address regional disparities? How to respond to the new geopolitical situation due to the invasion of Ukraine by Russia? A policy response to most of these questions falls within the competence of Member States and local governments. Senior citizens’ associations, which articulate the needs and aspirations of older people, have been active since several decades to promote age-friendly policies and to involve older people in their own decision-making. They called for comprehensive political strategies based on a human rights approach, respecting older people and considering age and ageing as a gift and an opportunity. Governments at all levels have a common interest in responding to the impact of demographic change for the benefit of all generations.

The ESU are particularly pleased with recent developments at EU level. Together with the Member States, the regions and all its stakeholders, the EU has recently made a resolute choice for a ‘general strategy’ to cope with the opportunities and burdens of ageing societies and to integrate age-related policies as a core topic in all policy areas. The new EU Commission’s decisions and

⁴ Herman Van Rompuy calls for European unity over fragmentation at final (epc.eu): <https://www.epc.eu/en/publications/Herman-Van-Rompuy-calls-for-European-unity-over-fragmentation-at-final-47da88>

⁵ Demography_report_2020_n.pdf (europa.eu): www.ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/demography_report_2020_n.pdf

the recent initiatives of the EU Council are a response to the many challenges of demographic change, while considering the differences and problems between and within regions.

The implementation of universal human rights standards and/or frameworks for policy strate-

gies is of the utmost importance for the enjoyment of equal opportunities throughout life. Member States, local governments, and stakeholders in several parts of society, civil society and academics were recently called to join forces to create these opportunities, without leaving anyone behind.⁶

Dubravka Šuica, Vice-President for Democracy and Demography in the EU Commission (2019-2024)

The appointment of Dubravka Šuica as Vice-President of the Commission in charge of demography and democracy is an important building block for a common policy to address the many challenges of demographic change, taking into account the differences and difficulties between and within regions.

“From the moment we are born, we are ageing. It is essential that we foster understanding, solidarity and responsibility, but also knowledge sharing between generations. By building a constructive narrative around demographic change, and ageing, we are reinforcing our communities and our democracy, making them fit for the



future...In my role, I focus on the whole life cycle, from the rights of children to those of older people. Ageing is not just a matter for older people. Everyone is impacted directly by the prospect of living a longer life, including the young. Ageing creates both challenges and opportunities for our economies, our society and our democracy.”

⁶ Rome Ministerial Conference on Ageing closes with commitment to policy action for solidarity and equal opportunities throughout life, (UNECE.org) unece.org/media/press/368521

ESU and its Associations

The Presidium

This is composed of our motivated Presidium members, who were elected at our Congress in Sandanski (2019).

President	Secretary General
An Hermans (BE)	Guido Dumon (BE)
Vice-Presidents	Treasurer
Nikolay Andreev (BG)	Etienne Vanderroost (BE)
Heinz K. Becker (AT)	Honorary Presidents
Antonios Demetriades (CY)	Leif Hallberg (SE)
Manfred Hopfengärtner (GE)	Maria Kanellopoulou (GR)
Jozé Jurkovic (SL)	Elisabeth Dispaux (BE)
Astrid Lulling (LU)	Former President
Leena Jääskeläinen (FI)	Bernhard Worms (DE) 2001-2013
Lidmila Nemcova (CZ)	
Gabriele Peus-Bispinck (DE)	
Carmen Quintanilla Barba (ES)	
Georg Männik (EE)*	
Christine von Stefenelli-Gostner (IT/Südtirol)	

* As **Ann Räämet** stepped down as Vice-President, the current members of the presidency provisionally include a new Vice-President (as per the ESU statutes). **Georg Männik** accepted the invitation. He is the chairman of the Seniors' Assembly of the Estonian conservative party ISAMAA. He has a PhD in theoretical and practical medicine, an MSc in industrial electronics and a diploma in philosophy and public health. The main field of his activity was the strategic management of the social sector and the development of national social programs.

We wish to emphasise our gratitude to Ann Räämet for the role she played over so many years as a member of the Presidium.



ESU Associations

Since its creation in 1995, the ESU has been the recognised seniors' association and member of the EPP. The ESU is a network of Member Associations from 27 countries:

Member Associations:

Austria
Österreichischer Seniorenbund
Belgium
CD&V-senioren
Les Aînés du mouvement 'Les engagés'
Bulgaria
Seniors of GERB
Cyprus
Senior Citizens Organisation of Cyprus
Czech Republic
Sdružení křesťanských seniorů
Estonia
Seniors' Association of pro Patria and Res Publica
Finland
Kansallinen Senioriliitto ry
Germany
Senioren-Union der CDU Deutschlands
Senioren-Union der CSU
Greece
Seniors of Nea Demokratia
Hungary
Országos Nyugdíjas Polgári Egyesület
Italy
SVP-Seniorenbewegung (Südtirol)
Lithuania
HU-LCD Senior Citizens Club
Luxembourg
CSV-Senioren
Malta
Assoċjazzjoni Penjonanti Anzjani Nazzjonalisti
The Netherlands
CDA Senioren

Norway
Senior Høyres Landsforbund
Poland
Polska Unia Seniorów (PUS)
Parlamentarzystow Ruchu Ludowego
Slovakia
Združenie kresťanských seniorov Slovenska
Slovenia
Klub seniorjev in seniork pri SDS
Zveza seniorjev Nova Slovenija
Zveza upokojencev pri SLS
Spain
Comisión Nacional del Mayor del Partido Popular
Sweden
Moderata Seniorer
Kristendemokraterna Seniorförbundet

Observer Associations:

Armenia
Union of Senior Generation
Belarus
PUBP 'Nasha Pakalenne'
Hungary
Kovács K. Zoltán Seniors' Club Association
Serbia
Vajdasági Magyar Szövetség Nyugdíjas
Spain
Unio de la Gent Gran
Ukraine
Ukrainian Association of Retired Persons
Europe
Europäische Zentrum für Arbeitnehmerfragen

ESU representation within the EPP

31.05 – 01.06 — EPP Congress in Rotterdam



During the European People's Party Congress Manfred Weber was elected as EPP President, succeeding Donald Tusk.

"I am extremely proud to be elected President of the biggest political party in Europe and I am humbled to be able to continue in the footsteps of EPP leaders like Donald Tusk. Together we say no to a Europe of mistrust of the populists, that polarises people and destroys our future. We say no to a Europe of the elites and their top down approach. We are the party that is closest to the day-to-day realities of citizens. More than ever we will work to unite our societies and we will never stop fighting for a better and stronger EU for the people of Europe." – President Weber

We wish Mr Weber and the entire EPP leadership every success. We thank former President Tusk, Secretary General López and the whole EPP Secretariat for their help, support and cooperation over the past years.

Further details of the EPP leadership elected at the Congress can be found on the [EPP website](https://www.epp.eu/who-we-are#leadership).⁷

⁷ EPP Website: www.epp.eu/who-we-are#leadership

The ESU Bodies

The Congress

The Congress meets every five years. During the Congress, the general direction and political programme of the organisation is determined and statutory changes can be made. It also elects the President, the Vice-Presidents and, at the recommendation of the President, it also appoints a Secretary-General for a duration of five years. Delegates at the Congress are members of the Executive Committee, together with delegates from the national organisations, or in case there is no seniors' organisation, the EPP member party representative responsible for seniors' policy. The Rules of Procedure of the EPP are usually adopted for use at the Congress.

During the Extraordinary Congress in Madrid last year there was a discussion about the changes to the ESU Statutes. One of the changes affecting the functioning of the ESU is the shift in the timing of the election of the Presidency. Until now, this was done every 3 years. It was decided unanimously to hold the elections every 5 years from now on. This means that the current presidency will continue until 2024. Any changes to the statutes have been incorporated into the current statutes and posted to the website.

The Presidium

The Presidium works for the welfare of European seniors. The tasks of the Presidium are to decide over urgent measures, lead the current business, plan the work and terms and decide over new membership. The President represents the ESU externally. The Secretary General is responsible for the management of the daily tasks, the General Secretariat, the financial administration and the preparation of meetings and follow-up of decisions taken by the three organs: the Congress, Presidium and Executive Committee.

Presidium meetings in 2022:

25/01/2022 — Online

- Annual Report of 2022
- Agenda for 2022
- Finances
- ESU Networking

01/06/2022 — Rotterdam

- The EPP Congress
- Composition of the ESU Presidency
- Summer Academy Vienna (30 June –2 July 2022)
- Upcoming events: ESU and national associations
- Information on 'CDA Senioren' by our Dutch colleagues

30/06/2022 — Vienna

- Report of the President and General Secretariat:
 - EPP-Congress and side event with CDA-seniors (see also Executive Committee on 2 July)
 - Regional Conference in Tallinn
- Summer Academy
- New leadership in the EPP
- Composition of the Presidium
- Request for involvement in contacts with associations/strengthen the links between national and European level

16-19/11/2022 — Strasbourg

- Presentation of the report 'EU and its Eastern Neighbourhood Policy – achievements, challenges and prospects' by Teona Lavrelashvili
- Presentation of the draft structure to analyse the state of play of the seniors' organizations in the EU and beyond. Comments and feedback
- The Council of Europe: guardian and promoter of human rights
- Looking ahead to 2023-2024

The Executive Committee

The Executive Committee is the political organ of the ESU, which decides over the tasks and work of the organization and its politics (within the 'lines' set out by the Congress). It is composed of the members of the Board, two representatives of each member organization and one representative responsible for seniors' policy of a member party of the EPP in which there is no seniors' organization.

Executive Committee meetings in 2022:

19/04/2022 — Online

- Report of the Secretary General and President
- Financial issues
- Upcoming events
- News from our partner association (observer) from Ukraine

02/07/2022 — Vienna

- Country Reports from our Member Associations



Our priority topics in 2022

Highlights within the operation of the ESU

17.03.2022

ESU video meeting: 'War, tensions and threats at European borders'

On 17 March, we had our video conference on 'War, tensions and threats at the European borders – How can the EU react? / What can citizens expect?' During the preparation for this meeting, we were confronted with the news about the advancing Russian army into Ukraine. The lasting peace that had been built up in Europe since the Second World War and strengthened in the 1990s is brutally upset by a decision of an autocratic head of state, with incalculable consequences for Ukraine, for Europe and for the rest of the world.

"Our thoughts go first and foremost to what this war means for the people of Ukraine. People who are our friends. Men and women we met and worked with. They dreamed of and worked for democracy, a solid civil society and political parties. How will they respond to aggression? How will they continue their lives? We continue to stand in solidarity. More than ever, we realise again: freedom, solidarity and democracy cannot be taken for granted. With this video conference, we want to express our solidarity with Ukraine and consolidate and defend our European values against Putin's war."

– Our President An Hermans' statement during the opening words of the conference

The geopolitical tensions pose a particularly great challenge to the EU's security and defence architecture, and Russia's aggressive policy means that the situation in Eastern Europe remains extremely tense. Several EU countries have called for deeper cooperation between the EU and NATO to ensure an effective deterrence,

to strengthen NATO's eastern flank and to help increase the resilience of the eastern neighbours and their societies to external threats. The video meeting was about these security threats, how people in the Eastern European countries perceive them and what can be done to ensure security on the continent. We tried to explain the situation between Russia and Ukraine via the video conference with the help of three speakers.

For more information, please check out [our website](#).⁸

19.05.2022

Tallinn: ESU Northern and Baltic Countries Regional Conference: Life with COVID-19

On the initiative of Georg Männik and Ann Räämet from the senior citizens' association Isamaa and the ESU, an ESU regional conference for the northern and Baltic countries was organised in Tallinn that took place from 19-21 May. The central theme was: 'Life with COVID-19. New tasks and challenges for senior members of society. Possible solutions and social adaptation to the new situation.' The event was recorded and could be followed live on Facebook and Zoom.

Our president, An Hermans, stressed that: "it is crucial to maintain contacts, this was partly hampered by the pandemic, but especially in the Baltic states with its rich geopolitical history, people must be able to tell their story. We have to be here physically to have contact and to exchange experiences."

We were happy to see many familiar faces from our ESU family: Lars O. Molin, Jackūnas Žibartas,

⁸ ESU Website- Events: www.esu-epp.eu/events/17-03-2022-esu-video-meeting-on-war-tensions-and-threats-at-european-borders

Leena Jääskeläinen, Heinz Becker (video message) and Lidmila Nemcova. They gave us information about the impact of COVID-19 in their Member States through figures and numbers, concrete examples and compelling testimonies. We listened to the story of Татьяна Зелко from Belarus; in addition to their COVID-19 challenges, people in Belarus are facing a lot of political tensions. It was eye-opening to listen to her story, which is the voice of the seniors in Belarus. With peaceful protests they try to be heard in their country. According to Dr Georg Männik, President of the Isamaa Seniors' Council and organiser of the conference, the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic have brought fundamental changes in the organisation of our social life.

"These changes are especially observed by senior citizens of the society, who belong to the highest risk group. The aim of the conference was to look at the practices of other countries and the lessons of the healthcare system in controlling the pandemic" said Mr. Männik.

For more information, please check out [our website](#).⁹

31.05.2022

Rotterdam: ESU & CDA Side Event – 'What does the Green Deal mean for our way of life?'

On 31 May until the 1st of June, the European People's Party (EPP) held its [27th Congress](#),¹⁰ which took place in Rotterdam Ahoy. On the opening day of the Congress, 31 May, we organised a side event between the ESU and the seniors of the Christian Democratic Appeal (CDAS). This side event, entitled 'What does the

Green Deal mean for our way of life?' addressed the challenges of a greener and more sustainable society and what impact this will have on our lifestyle.

We welcomed Margaritis Schinas, Vice-President and EU Commissioner for 'Promoting our European Way of Life', who made the introductory speech. We were also given a presentation by two passionate professors who have each made a difference in the field of sustainability in their own area of expertise (Green Deal and Sustainability Assessment)

For more information, please check out [our website](#).¹¹

30.06.2022

Vienna: Summer Academy - 'Generations master the future of a changing Europe together'

After three years, nearly 60 people from all over Europe met at the Politische Akademie in Vienna. The programme included meetings about the administration and management of the Association, and throughout the day a list of expert speakers shared their knowledge and experiences. It was a joyful 'reunion' to learn, discuss, be involved, and stand up for a sustainable society in solidarity with the younger generations.

The ESU Vice-President Heinz Becker, former Member of the European Parliament and former Secretary General of the Österreichische Seniorenbund (ÖSB), took the lead in the preparation, supported by professionals and volunteers from the Political Academy and the ÖSB. The ESU handled drafts and changes in close cooperation with the WMCES until finally the whole programme was aligned and ready to start and then... Heinz Becker himself had to stay home due to a COVID-19 infection. Once again, we put our skills of flexibility to use and we were ready for the long-awaited 'meet again' and the organisers could warmly welcome the participants.

⁹ ESU Website- Events: esu-epp.eu/events/esu-northern-and-baltic-countries-regional-conference-life-with-covid-19

¹⁰ EPP Congress website: rotterdam2022.epp.eu

¹¹ ESU Website- Events: esu-epp.eu/events/what-does-the-green-deal-mean-for-our-way-of-life-esu-cda-side-event

Ms. Bettina Rausch, President of the Political Academy of the Austrian People's Party, proudly welcomed the European Seniors; Mr Tomi Huhtanen, Executive Director of the Wilfried Martens Centre for European Studies (WMCES) underlined the need for European cooperation; Ms Ingrid Korosec, President of the Austrian Seniors' Association (ÖSB), called on seniors to believe in their ability to help shape the society of the future and An Hermans, President of the European Seniors' Union called for active participation and to "take inspiration and good practices home."

Via a video message, Sebastian Sposito, Public Affairs Manager Europe, Government Affairs & Public Policy, Google presented: "Online safety for seniors". He explained the importance of online safety measures and the control of it for all age groups, but in particular for seniors. And we welcomed Federico Cavallo, Manager Public Affairs & Media Relations, Altroconsumo, Milano. He engaged the participants in an interactive presentation entitled "Consumer organizations and digital empowerment: Altroconsumo's experience in Italy". He underlined the importance of the empowerment of consumers, through dialogue between producers and consumers and the protection of their rights through cooperation with [Euroconsumers](https://www.euroconsumers.org).¹² We were able to call on both speakers, for which we are very grateful.

For more information, please check out [our website](https://www.esu-epp.eu).¹³

14.09.2022

Prague: The European house must be built in solidarity

On 14th of September, the ESU participated in an event organised by Sdružení křesťanských seniorů (SKS) and supported by the Hanns Seidel Foundation and the European Academy for Democracy on the occasion of the Czech Presidency of the EU Council, from 1 July to 31 December

2022. The motto of the Czech presidency was 'Europe as a task'. Together, we underlined the importance of defending Europe's fundamental values and how to face the many challenges ahead. Several speakers developed aspects of the general theme of the event "The European Union – house on the rock or house on the sand?". Among others, An Hermans underlined the importance of solidarity.

For more information, please check out [our website](https://www.esu-epp.eu).¹⁴

24.11.2022

Krakow: "Senior citizens in contemporary Europe, issues and challenges"

From 23 to 25 September we co-organized the International European Educational and Scientific Conference on health care, social care, and new technologies for lifelong learning. The event was organised by the National Federation of Third Age University Associations in Poland; the Polish Seniors' Union and the Jagiellonian Third Age University.

The aim of the conference was to organise an open dialogue and to exchange ideas about the goals of sustainable development and discuss how to build a future for all ages, how to strengthen solidarity between generations and across borders, responding to demographic changes. The conference was divided into three major thematic blocks, where experts were given the floor through panel discussions. This provided participants with information on the topics from different perspectives. There was also time to answer questions from the audience:

- Issues of Healthcare and General Senior Care – Situation in European Union Member States during the COVID-19 Pandemic
- State-of-the-art Technologies in the Context of Senior Citizen's Needs
- Education for Senior Citizens – Lifelong Learning: Challenges Faced by Seniors' Organisations and their Leaders.

¹² Euroconsumers website: www.euroconsumers.org

¹³ ESU Website- Events: [esu-epp.eu/events/summer-academy-2022-generations-master-the-future-of-a-changing-europe-together](https://www.esu-epp.eu/events/summer-academy-2022-generations-master-the-future-of-a-changing-europe-together)

¹⁴ ESU Website- Events: [esu-epp.eu/events/the-european-house-must-be-built-in-solidarity](https://www.esu-epp.eu/events/the-european-house-must-be-built-in-solidarity)

¹⁵ ESU Website- Events: [esu-epp.eu/events/senior-citizens-in-contemporary-europe-issues-and-challenges](https://www.esu-epp.eu/events/senior-citizens-in-contemporary-europe-issues-and-challenges)

¹⁶ ESU Website- Events: www.esu-epp.eu/events/strasbourg-historic-city-and-one-of-the-centres-of-european-policy-making

For more information, please check out [our website](#).¹⁵

16-19.10.2022

European Seniors' Union's visit to Strasbourg, and in particular to the Council of Europe

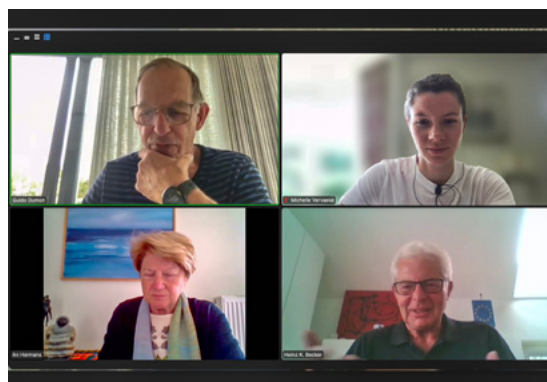
The history of Europe and the history of Strasbourg: intertwined.

From 16 to 19 November, members of the ESU Presidium were able to discover this in a unique way. We could discover the city's history, but also get to know the Council of Europe and European Court of Human Rights. Although there was no session of the European Parliament, we got a clear picture of its functioning.

The Council of Europe: guardian of human rights.

On 18 November 2022, a delegation of the European Seniors' Union undertook a study visit to the Council of Europe in Strasbourg. Mr Patrick Penninckx, Head of the Information Society Department, welcomed our delegates. Mr Penninckx introduced the institutional structure, decision-making processes and relations with other institutions of the Council of Europe. The agenda further included an exchange on the role of the European Court of Human Rights in monitoring respect for human and civil rights and freedom, the role of the Secretariat of the Steering Committee for Human Rights on the promotion of the human rights of older persons, the activities of the Media and Internet Division on freedom of expression and information in the digital age and related challenges, and the activities of the Division of Cooperation on Freedom of Expression on the impact of the war in Ukraine on the Council of Europe.

For more information, please check out [our website](#).¹⁶



Seniors, active citizens in a changing world

As our societies are changing, governments at all levels need to cope with challenges in several sectors. Demographic change is one of them, resulting in a growing demand for care for older people. Looking at the increasing life expectancy, we must first of all look at the opportunities: how can we organise our societies into being age friendly, into societies in which every generation feels at home, without discrimination. Older persons, and in particular seniors' associations like the ESU, are ready to take up responsibility and co-create the changes we need. That is how we want to be part of the changing societies of our time. Let's illustrate how this can happen.

The digital era? Also my era!

The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted unequal access to digital technologies among and within population groups, the digital age gap was increasing. It was clear that media literacy is not just a part of formal education processes in schools, but that everyone must be empowered to participate in the digital age. As the European Seniors' Union, we shed light on the opportunities and challenges of digital communication, we called on governments and stakeholders to take the necessary measures to engage everyone, including seniors, in an inclusive way in the digital age. By participating in all these initiatives, civil society and in particular seniors' associations have an important role to play as change promoters.¹⁷

In line with previous initiatives of the Council of Europe to promote and implement a human rights approach in all age-related policymaking, the Department of Media and Information commissioned em. prof. dr. An Hermans to prepare a report addressing age-related challenges in digitalisation and exploring answers to pressing concerns. This work resulted in a report titled: "The digital era? Also my era! – Media and information literacy: a key to ensure seniors' rights to participate in the digital era". It is available in several languages, digital and/or printed. All references can be found on the Council of Europe's website.

"As senior citizens' associations, we can act as a strong voice for the needs and aspirations of seniors. We hope the report will inspire seniors' associations and all stakeholders in the field of MIL to take initiatives to ensure the protection of the human rights of seniors in the digital age, by ensuring dignity, autonomy, privacy and free and informed consent for the use of digital technology. In this sense, MIL is not just a useful skill, an ability that can be used by anyone. It is -coupled with freedom of expression- a building block for democracy." – An Hermans



¹⁷ The digital era? Also my era! - Media and information literacy: a key to ensure seniors' rights to participate in the digital era (2022): https://rm.coe.int/digital-literacy-for-seniors-print/1680a6ce9e?fbclid=IwAR08_7P2x2mA0F1MRpaA_rADDhEmh8ySxwhDecH7jdMRpQf-c6dOy8ItZdk

¹⁸ Council of Europe Website: https://www.coe.int/en/web/freedom-expression/reports?fbclid=IwAR1k2fp13pGBLE11wYW2N_rsHnyPMLmU-qPikyHX2D1-kAoxNOdkc4kX0n9k#%7B

The brochure text is already available in several translations, which can be found on the [Council of Europe's website](#).¹⁸ Here is an overview:

In English:

The digital era? Also my era! – Media and information literacy: a key to ensure seniors' rights to participate in the digital era

In French:

L'ère du numérique? C'est aussi mon époque! – L'éducation aux médias et à l'information: une clé pour garantir le droit des personnes âgées à participer à l'ère numérique

In German:

Das Digitale Zeitalter? Auch Ich Gehöre Dazu! Medien- und Informationskompetenz: der Schlüssel zur Gewährleistung der Rechte Älterer auf Teilhabe im digitalen Zeitalter

In Greek:

Η ΨΗΦΙΑΚΗ ΕΠΟΧΗ; ΚΑΙ Η ΔΙΚΗ ΜΟΥ ΕΠΟΧΗ! Γραμματισμός στα μέσα ενημέρωσης και στην πληροφόρηση: ένα κλειδί για τη διασφάλιση των δικαιωμάτων των ηλικιωμένων να συμμετέχουν στην ψηφιακή εποχή

In Polish:

ERA CYFROWA? TO TAKŻE MOJA ERA! Umiejętność korzystania z mediów i informacji: klucz do zapewnienia seniorom prawa do aktywnego uczestnictwa w erze cyfrowej

In Czech:

DIGITÁLNÍ ÉRA? I JÁ JSEM JEJÍ SOUČÁSTÍ! Mediální a informační gramotnost: klíč k zajištění práva seniorů podílet se na dění v digitální éře

In Ukrainian:

ЦИФРОВА ЕПОХА? ВОНА І МОЯ ТЕЖ! Медійна та інформаційна грамотність: ключ до забезпечення прав людей старшого віку на участь у цифровій епосі



The role of civil society as a change actor

ESU President An Hermans and Secretary General Guido Dumon participated in the commemoration of 40 years of AFAMMER (Association of Families and Women in Rural Areas), founded in Spain in 1982 as a pioneering organisation with a clear and primary objective: that rural women should cease to be invisible and that their voices should be heard in all national and international forums to achieve the challenge of real equality of opportunities. The celebration took place on 2 dates, October 18 and December 14, respectively in Ciudad Real and Madrid. This non-governmental association unites 200,000 women in Spain, and all speakers agreed that the AFFAMER President (and ESU Vice-President), Carmen Quintanilla, inspired and led the organisation with great talent and brilliant results.

"Today this organisation is more necessary than ever" was said several times, and numerous speakers from Spain and international organisations underlined that "women are the impetus of the countryside, we thank them for their resilience, their creativity and entrepreneurship!"



An Hermans underlined the powerful influence of civil society as an actor for change: *"As a representative of the older generations in this event, I am happy to see how older women are present in the Association and willing to look forward, together with younger people, with different opportunities, different difficulties, but always with a common hope and inspiration to improve the living conditions and well-being of all generations."*

ESU President An Hermans' intervention was about 'ageing' as a megatrend in our 21st century. She argued that we need to look at ageing and the older generation with 'new eyes'. Starting from the principle that the human rights of all should be guaranteed and that ageing is a dimension of the life course, we need to create equal opportunities for all, men, and women, young and old. "Do we want to ensure that older women are not forgotten?" she asked, "that they can enjoy life and play an active role in society? Yes, let's ensure that for the older generations of today and the future. So, let's take care of young girls, make sure they can go to school, that they live a healthy life, learn a good job instead of suffering from poverty...."

Please find her intervention [here](#).¹⁹

Good relations and common values with neighbourhood partners

In line with the EU and in close cooperation with the EPP, the ESU has maintained constructive relations with partners in neighbourhood countries since many years. In particular, the socio-political situation in countries from the Eastern Partnership (EaP - Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine) was regularly on the agenda of our meetings and their delegations were welcomed. We are convinced that we must intensify our cooperation, building on a mutual commitment to common values (democracy and human rights, the rule of law, good governance, market economy principles and sustainable development). Starting from and focusing on the challenges for senior generations, this cooperation will benefit everyone. Dr. Teona Lavrelashvili will investigate how to optimise our cooperation with the neighbourhood partners in the short term.

More specifically, the aim of this inquiry is to analyse how the political parties include and represent seniors' interests within their party structures and policies. The report intends to outline the challenges and obstacles that hinder the establishment and striving of seniors' organizations within the parties. Based on the findings of the ESU report, the policy recommendations will be developed to encourage actions

¹⁹ ESU Website- Events: esu-epp.eu/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/speech-AN-AFAMMAR.pdf

to improve seniors' participation in civil society and in the EPP family.

For more information, check out [our website](#).²⁰

European support for better Long Term Care (LTC)

Since several years, seniors' associations have been calling for European support for better Long Term Care (LTC). The European Pillar for Social Rights recognizes in Principle 18 the importance of LTC. During the first waves of the COVID-19 pandemic it was obvious that in many countries older persons in Long Term Care Facilities (LTCF) suffered more than their fellow citizens living at home and that LTC needed a new vision and a new organisation. The President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, raised the priority level given to a new care strategy in her 2021 State of the Union speech. After a year of consultations and discussions, a new vision for long term care was presented.

The European Care Strategy, launched on 7th September 2022, contains a Communication and two Proposals for Council Recommendations aiming to create a sustainable and fair care system covering the topic of care from birth to old age.

Member States should put care at the centre of their policies and take full advantage of the EU funding opportunities for recovery after the COVID-19 pandemic, guaranteeing timely and equal access to quality care services for people of all generations in line with a rights-based and life course approach. Quality early childhood care, care for older persons, prevention and rehabilitation services, long-term care and other forms of support to persons with disabilities and vulnerable groups mean care that is provided in a comprehensive and integrated manner, with high standards for services responding to both individuals' physical and psychological needs and with better coordination between health-care, social and other support services. The ESU welcomes the role that the EU will play in promoting and optimising care throughout the life cycle. As the EU does not have legislative

power in this domain, it is up to the Member States to take the necessary initiatives.

The ESU welcomes the stimulating role that several MEPs played in direct contact with representatives of care institutions in civil society and in particular in developing a broad analysis and a practical bundle of proposals for the further elaboration of the Care strategy

[\(Report - A90189/2022 towards a common European action on care, Committee on Employment and Social Affairs, Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality; Rapporteurs: Milan Brlež, Sirpa Pietikäinen\)](#).²¹

The ESU calls for immediate action to encourage the EU Council to bring a recommendation on LTC on the agenda, with special attention to care provision in rural areas.

Solidarity with Ukraine

Volodymyr Dzobak is Chairman of the Council of the [Ukrainian Association of Retired Persons](#)²² (UARP), which has 'observer' status within the ESU. Currently, he is very passionate about the charity organisation: «Благодійний фонд громад «Добрі справи» operating locally in Ukraine helping the displaced war refugees. In early April, Volodymyr Dzobak contacted ESU President An Hermans. The interest grew to get to know Mr. Dzobak and his organisation and so we took the opportunity to have him speak to our Executive Committee about the current situation in Ukraine and his warm appeal for solidarity.

ESU Vice-President Georg Männik participated in a working group recently created by the EPP called 'Winter of solidarity with Ukraine'.

The ESU highlights three priorities:

1. to stimulate our governments to develop a common European solidarity towards Ukraine;
2. to participate in a welcoming culture towards refugees in our countries;
3. to provide trustworthy information about the geopolitical situation and to ensure the necessary socio-economic support.

²⁰ ESU Website- Events: esu-epp.eu/events/international-conference-to-commemorate-the-40th-anniversary-of-a-fammer

²¹ European Parliament website: www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/A-9-2022-0189_EN.html

²² The Ukrainian Association of Retired Persons website: www.uarp.org/en

Some events to highlight

29/04/2022

European Day of Solidarity between generations

Solidarity between generations starts with warm relationships in families and neighbourhoods where parents and children, grandparents and grandchildren, young and old meet and care for each other. But solidarity is a cornerstone not only in direct interpersonal relationships. We also need this solidarity to create common political perspectives in order to tackle social problems and find sustainable solutions for the future.

Ageism and negative attitudes towards certain age groups divide people of different generations and create barriers to their full participation in society. These stereotypes, which are learned at a very young age, usually stem from a lack of understanding of the reality in which other age groups live. Promoting regular interaction between people of different age groups can help to break down stereotypes and increase awareness of the diversity of situations within an age group and of the common challenges faced.

17/04/2022

50th anniversary of Kansallinen Senioriillito



President An Hermans was invited to participate in the festive cruise from Helsinki to Tallinn to celebrate the 50th anniversary of Kansallinen Senioriillito, our Finnish member association.

About 1,700 members of Kansallinen Senioriillito from all over the country came together on the boat to participate in this extraordinary event. An Hermans was welcomed by Anneli Taina (former Minister of Defence and Minister of Housing of the Government of Finland, and then Governor of the Province of Southern Finland), Leena Jääskeläinen (ESU Vice-President) and Maarit Kuikka (Executive Director of Kansallinen Senioriillito).

01.10.2022

United Nations International Day of Older Persons

On 1 October 2022, we celebrated the United Nations International Day of Older Persons (UNIDOP). This year the overall theme is "Resilience of Older Persons in a Changing World." As every year, we as the European Seniors' Union took part in this annual celebration and this year we are highlighting especially "The Resilience and Contributions of Older Women". On this occasion, ESU President An Hermans wrote a letter which can be found on [our website](#).²³

24.10 – 31.10.2022

Message from our President on the occasion of Global Media and Information Literacy Week 2022

The ESU took the opportunity of this event to highlight the importance of MIL, a key to participation in the digital age, a building block for strengthening democracy and digital citizenship. We invited our members to celebrate the progress our societies have made in digital literacy and to underline the need to continue promoting initiatives that ensure digital equality for all. The full message of our President is available on [our website](#).²⁴

²³ ESU Website- Events: esu-epp.eu/events/letter-of-esu-president-an-hermans-on-the-united-nations-international-day-of-older-persons

²⁴ ESU Website- Events: esu-epp.eu/events/message-from-our-president-on-the-occasion-of-global-media-and-information-literacy-week-2022

Looking ahead

We look forward to 2023 with hope and solidarity, emphasising the rights of older persons, and their ambition to play an active role in society. Let us make the voice of senior citizens heard, and let us ensure that older persons' participation is experienced as a gift and an opportunity.

Several subjects developed in the report need more reflection and discussion (the EU Care strategy, cooperation with civil society associations from the EaP, MIL, freedom of expression and democracy...). As the war in Ukraine continues and causes destruction, fear, hunger, we need to support people fleeing and seeking shelter elsewhere. And in the meanwhile, we hope that this terrible war will end soon and that people will have the courage to restart their lives.

We are convinced that in the coming year we will continue to intensify the relationship between our local and national associations, to act together as a network of seniors' associations and build bridges between European politics and active senior citizens, voicing their needs and aspirations. We will also continue and renew our cooperation with other organisations and institutions: the EPP Women, the WMCES, the Robert Schuman Institute and, last but not least, the Council of Europe. We are proud that in all these institutions we can demonstrate the vision of European seniors and their experiences based on a diversity of life histories. Together we stand for Europe and the values it is built on.

Europe can count on its older generations.

Information services and communication channels

The growing importance of digital literacy has become more tangible than ever in the COVID-19 period. With our small core team, we have therefore done everything possible to keep our organisation together by informing it of what is happening in front of and behind the (computer) screens. This not only concerns the workings of our organisation, but also what is going on in the international arena.

We are active on **Facebook** where we frequently inform our followers about our events, those of our partner associations and European news. We also provide a **newsletter** with space for personal stories and information about our planning.

Do you want to share some news about your association? Contact us: esu@epp.eu.



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