



ESU CONFERENCE

9 February 2024

Hotel Saffron - Radlinského 27, Bratislava

Program of the conference

9:00 Opening of the Conference and greetings:

- An Hermans, president ESU
Peter Mach, president of Association of Christian seniors of Slovakia
- Milan Majerský, MP, President of the Prešov Self-Governing Region, president of KDH: *The political situation in Slovakia and reflections on challenges faced by the EU today*
- Peter Mach, president of Association of Christian seniors of Slovakia: *Slovak Christian Seniors before the EP elections*

9:30 The European elections: building together: freedom, democracy, solidarity

- An Hermans, president ESU: *introduction*
- Ivan Štefanec, MEP (EPP-KDH): *European challenges and involvement of citizens*
- Miriam Lexmann, MEP (EPP-KDH): *The European Union serving its citizens*
- Heinz Becker, vice-president ESU: *Top priorities for the EPP*

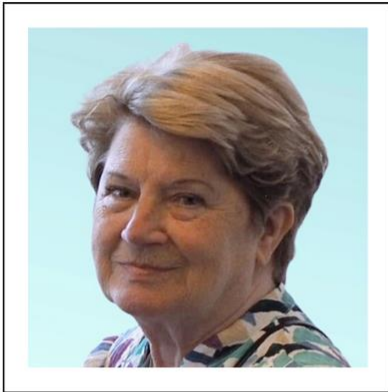
10:30 Coffee break

11:00 Slovakia's 20 years in the EU and citizens expectations to Europe

- Ján Figel', first Slovak member of the European Commission: *Slovakia's road to the EU*
- Vladimír Šucha, head of Representation of the European Commission in Slovakia: *Slovakia 20 years in the EU and the EP elections,*
- Marek Mračka, research organization MEMO 98: *Central European seniors, information and misinformation in the context of the EP elections.*
- Martina Holečková, MP, vice-president of the Nitra Self-Governing Region, member of the KDH presidium: *Social situation of seniors in Slovakia*

Q&A

13:00 Lunch



An Hermans

An Hermans is Emerita Professor at the KU Leuven (Belgium). She has a PhD in Educational Sciences, was a professor in the Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences (History of education) and in the inter-university postgraduate programs on 'Women studies'

She was a Member of the European Parliament (1989-1994), Member of the Belgian House of Representatives (1995-1999), Member of the Provincial Council of Flemish Brabant (2000-2019). In recent years, both in Flanders and at European level she had a leading role in senior citizens' movements. Since 2013 An Hermans is the President of the European Seniors' Union (ESU).

2024: An election year. Europe: Our home always in the making.

2024 is an 'election year' worldwide; from India to the USA, from Mexico to Pakistan... and in the EU. This means that in all those elections people will redefine the identity of the society they want, and the values they stand for. We, the European Seniors' Union (ESU), as active participants in civil society, will play our part responsibly in this process. Together with the European People's Party (EPP) and its affiliated parties in the member states we will stand for a strong Europe, where people come first. Europe is our home, it is not perfect, and it needs reform, but it is our home, the best home we have been able to build so far. We will continue to improve it, guided by the European values of democracy, dignity, solidarity, and equality.

Hosted by our Slovakian colleagues we are glad to have the opportunity to celebrate and learn about the 20th anniversary of the Slovakian membership of the EU. Indeed, 2024 marks the 20th anniversary of the most important 'enlargement'- that we also like to call reunification - in the history of the EU. On 1 May 2004, ten new countries with a combined population of almost 75 million joined the EU: three former Soviet republics (Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania), four former satellites of the USSR (Poland, the Czech Republic, Hungary and Slovakia), a former Yugoslav republic (Slovenia) and two Mediterranean islands (Cyprus and Malta). This historic enlargement from 15 to 25 members was the culmination of a long accession process leading to the reunification of a Europe that had been divided for half a century by the Iron Curtain and the Cold War. It was followed by two further enlargements in 2007 (Bulgaria, Rumania) and 2013 (Croatia). Today, new countries are negotiating to join the EU. Most recently, Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine and the EU's decision of June 2022 to grant candidate country status to Ukraine and Moldova have also triggered an ongoing debate about the acceleration of the EU integration process of the Western Balkan candidate and potential candidate countries.

The unification, so important for peace and prosperity, for solidarity and freedom is not only the result of negotiations by heads of state and governments, but also from citizens. We are sure that we, as senior citizens, have a role to play.

And, last but not least, this year 2024 is also very important for our association, the ESU, as we will elect a new president and a new board. We are invited to look at the previous years and highlight what was good and what can be done better. And together we will celebrate the loyalty and friendship of colleagues and of so many people we could count on.



Milan Majerský

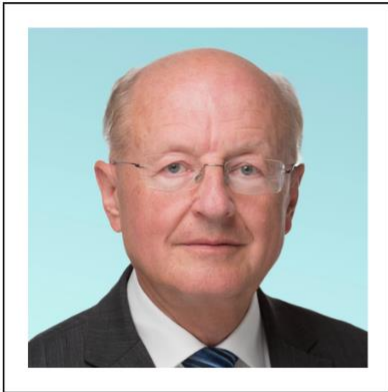
During his studies Milan Majerský was an organiser of many youth camps and meetings. He graduated from the University of Prešov as a teacher, and after graduation he worked as a teacher at the Grammar School of St. Francis of Assisi in Levoča. From 2014 to 2017 he was the mayor of Levoča, where he was a member of the town council for three terms before his election. Since 2017 he has been the President of the Prešov Self-governing Region.

In 2016 he was elected deputy chairman of the KDH and in 2020 chairman of the KDH. Under his leadership, the KDH returned to parliament in 2023 after two terms and Milan Majerský became a member of the National Assembly. He is a member of the Parliament's Foreign Affairs Committee.

He is an active sportsman - he used to play basketball and also enjoys handball, ice hockey, cycling and ski mountaineering.

The political situation in Slovakia and reflections on challenges faced by the EU today

The KDH President will assess the current political situation as the KDH returns to parliament after two terms and fights for the rule of law as an opposition party.



Peter Mach

Peter Mach is a graduate in Mathematical Statistics from Comenius University in Bratislava and a postgraduate in Mathematical Computer Science. He has worked as a programmer and analyst in the field of mass data processing. From 1994 to 1995 he was Director of the National Centre for Informatics, and from 1999 to 2007 he was President of the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic and Vice-Chairman of the Government Council for Informatics. He led the successful transformation of Slovak statistics according to the pre-accession requirements of the European Union. From 2010 to 2012, he was Secretary General of the Ministry of Transport, Construction and Regional Development of the Slovak Republic. In 2011 he was elected a full member of the International Statistical Institute (ISI). Since his retirement in 2013, he has been working as an expert in statistics and informatics.

From 1998 to 2002 he was a member of the City council of the capital city of Bratislava. From 2009 to 2017, he was a member of the Regional council of the Bratislava self-governing region for two terms.

From 2016 to 2019 he was a member of the presidency of the Forum of Christian Institutions, where he represented the Association of Christian Seniors of Slovakia. Since 2019 he has been the President of the Association of Christian Seniors of Slovakia and a member of the Government Council of the Slovak Republic for the Rights of the Elderly and the Adaptation of Public Policies to the Process of Population Aging. He is also a member of the Executive Committee of the ESU.

Slovak Christian Seniors before the EP elections

The Association of Christian Seniors of Slovakia is the second largest organisation of senior citizens. It was founded 29 years ago and is actively involved in the ESU. It develops a rich activity on local and national level. The Christian Seniors also played a role in the electoral success of the KDH and are ready to support it intensively in the upcoming European Parliament elections.



Ivan Štefanec

Ivan Štefanec joined the European Parliament in 2014 where, to this day, he is an active member of the Committee on Internal Market and Consumer Protection (IMCO), Committee for the Industry, Research and Energy (ITRE), Subcommittee on Human Rights (DROI), Delegation for Relations with Japan and Delegation to the EU-Ukraine Parliamentary Assembly Committee. As the President of SME Europe, he focuses on family businesses, Silver economy, employment, entrepreneurship, and single market.

Prior to joining the European Parliament, he was member of Slovak parliament (National Council of the Slovak Republic 2006 - 2014). As the Chairman and the Vice-Chairman of the Committee on European Affairs, he supported the pro-European orientation of Slovakia and its greater inclusion into European affairs and EU decision-making process.

In 2004, when Slovakia joined the EU, he was appointed Government plenipotentiary for the introduction of the euro currency in Slovakia and he held the post for two years.

Before entering politics, Mr Štefanec worked in Coca-Cola Beverages Slovakia, first as a Financial Director and then as Managing Director. Later on, he became Director for European Integration for Coca-Cola HBC in Vienna. He was the first Slovak person to be awarded a Dale Carnegie Leadership Award, regarded as the most significant management award.

European challenges and involvement of citizens

The European Union is going through a difficult period, with many challenges that confront us on a daily basis. Above all, in these times, we need to reinforce the conviction that Ukraine is entitled to defend its own freedom and that we, as Europe, must support it in doing so. Ukrainians are also fighting for our values and democracy.

With this come challenges such as strengthening our security, energy independence, environmental and digital transformation and many more. Seniors are affected by these issues in the same way as all citizens. There are many ways in which older people can also stay involved and support us, the Members who represent them. I am glad that many seniors are doing this and are setting an example in their families.



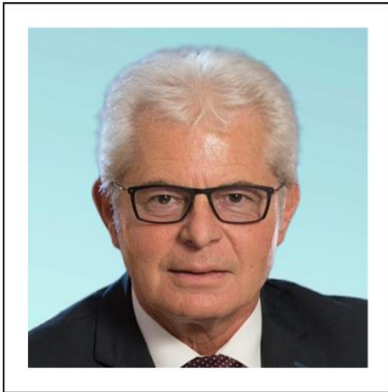
Miriam Lexmann

Miriam Lexmann is a Member of the European Parliament for Slovakia and sits within the Group of the European People's Party (EPP). The core focus of her work is defending freedom, democracy and human dignity both within the European Union and abroad. She is a member of the EP's Foreign Affairs Committee (AFET), sub-Committee on Security and Defence (SEDE), Committee on Employment and Social Affairs (EMPL), Delegation for Relations with Belarus and Delegation to the Euronest Parliamentary Assembly.

Miriam is one of the founding members and co-chairs of the Inter-Parliamentary Alliance on China (IPAC) as well as the European Parliament's informal Hong Kong Watch Group and United For Ukraine Working Group. Miriam is also a board member of the Tunega, Púčik and Tesár Foundation. Prior to being elected as a Member of the European Parliament, Miriam worked in international democracy support as the International Republican Institute EU Office Director and in diplomacy as Permanent Representative of the Slovak National Council to the EU. She also worked in advisory roles within the European Parliament and the Council of Europe.

The European Union serving its citizens

During her intervention, Mrs Miriam Lexmann MEP will discuss how the European Union is serving its citizens, especially seniors, and ways it can serve them more effectively. In particular, she will focus on how the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality should guide the EU's policies related to the protection of human dignity, health, or economic security in order to ensure dignified life for European citizens of all ages.



Heinz K. Becker

He graduated from the humanistic High School and entered a Japanese Trading company in 1970, for whom he primarily worked in the export/import-business in the Comecon countries.

In 1974 he started his career as in the communication field at the US-agency Grey advertising, he continued as advertising director at Philips Austria leading the audio electronics division. Again he joined Grey advertising group in 1985, was co-founder of the MediaCom media agency in 1988 and became agency's general manager at BZW agency in the same year. From 1992 onwards he launched his own Becker. communication agency until later he handed over the lead to his wife Anna in 2002. The reason was that in his parallel activities at Austrian Seniors Association (Seniorenbund) he took over the position of General Secretary in 2001 which he fulfilled until his retirement in 2019. He was member of the Executive Committee of the European Seniors' Union and became Vice President from 2013 on.

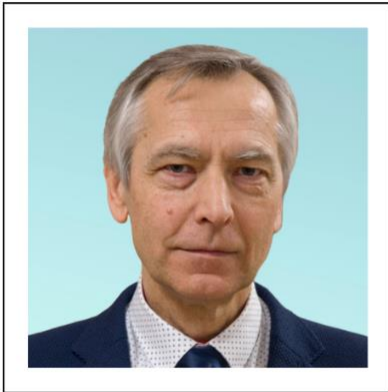
From 2011 onwards Austrian Peoples' Party (ÖVP) had sent him to the European Parliament which he left in 2019. During two legislative periods he was responsible for the Social Committee including seniors' policies, the Cultural Committee, the Interior Committee including all matters on migration, asylum, terror combatting and fighting anti-semitism and anti-racism.

Top priorities for the EPP

The EPP Manifesto for the 2024 elections presents a homogenic programmatic source of key messages which our party wants to bring over to the European voters under the title „Our Europe, a safe and good home for the people“ offering most effective orientation in difficult times:

EPP aims for the protection of Europe's borders, fight terrorism and crime, stops violence against women, protects citizens online and offline, strengthens the social market economy by creating prosperity and jobs, focuses on smart energy solutions and reaches for the lead in future's human-centred digital developments, proceeds in our European social model, takes care of our families and those most need in our societies and aims for improving people's lives through innovation in health - shortly: EPP wants to make Europe fit for the 21st century!

Initiated by our President special chapters were included in the EPP Manifesto, dealing with the important roll of families in our epoche and the fundamental principle of a Europe for citizens of all ages.



Ján Figel'

Ján Figel' is former EU Commissioner (2004-9) and Deputy Prime Minister of Slovakia (2010-12). Prior these responsibilities he successfully acted as Chief Negotiator for Accession of Slovakia to the EU and State Secretary at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In “annus mirabilis” 1989 he engaged in founding Christian Democratic Movement (KDH) in Slovakia and in 2009-16 he was the party President. He served four years as a Vicepresident of the Slovak Parliament (2012-16).

In 2016-19 he was the first ever Special Envoy for the promotion of freedom of religion or belief (FoRB) outside the EU. This successful pioneering role was followed by several EU countries that established similar diplomatic positions since 2016. Figel' has got strongly involved in FoRB advocacy, promotion of interreligious dialogue, religious literacy and religious social responsibility. He was active in release of FoRB prisoners in Cuba, Iran, Pakistan and Sudan. Currently he is member of the International Council of Experts of the Int'l Religious Freedom and Belief Alliance (Intergovernmental network) and also member of the IRF Summit Global Leadership Council (Civil society led initiative).

Under his responsibility international higher education mobility program Erasmus Mundus has been launched (2004) and the European Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT) has been founded in 2008 as the EU body. Since 2021 he is a member of the EIT Governing Board (www.eit.europa.eu). In Slovakia Ján Figel' works on innovative program of Regional Development Centers (modern, green and digitalized infrastructure for SMEs).

Slovakia's road to the EU

Historical enlargement of the European Union in 2004 represented europeization of the Union, and one of the most successful periods of its development. For Slovakia it was seen as a confirmation of its equal position among other free and independent countries.

While on one side of the EU membership we expected financial support and economic growth, on the other Slovakia contributed by its culture, people and values to make Community stronger and more cohesive. Joint accession of Slovakia together with Czech Republic, Poland and Hungary was the most optimal scenario. The same followed by joint accession to the Schengen system. So far only Slovakia is a successful member of the Eurozone (EMU). KDH was a key actor in making EU integration an historical success.



Vladimír Šucha

Vladimír Šucha is a Head of the European Commission Representation in the Slovak Republic since 2022. Before he was a senior policy adviser at UNESCO, detached from the European Commission. He was in the leading positions of the Joint Research Centre – a scientific and knowledge service of the European Commission since 2012. Before he spent 6 years in the position of director for culture and media in the Directorate-General for Education and Culture of the European Commission.

Before joining the European Commission, he held various positions in the area of European and international affairs. Between 2005 and 2006, he was director of the Slovak Research and Development Agency, national body responsible for funding research. He worked at the Slovak Representation to the EU in Brussels as research, education and culture counselor (2000-2004). In parallel, he has followed a long-term academic and research career, being a full professor in Slovakia and visiting professor/scientist at different academic institutions in many countries. He published more than 100 scientific papers in peer-reviewed journals.

Slovakia 20 years in the EU and the EP elections

In 2024, Slovakia will celebrate the 20th anniversary of its accession to the European Union and NATO, which has had a significant positive impact on the country's direction not only internationally, but also locally. EU membership has brought many benefits and opportunities, including an increase in living standards. At the same time, we are also facing elections to the European Parliament, where Slovak citizens will be able to choose their representatives.



Marek Mračka

Marek Mračka graduated in social sciences and since 1998 he has been the project coordinator of the Slovak civic association MEMO 98, which promotes citizens' access to impartial information, especially during elections. Marek has been observing elections internationally since 2001.

He has participated in more than 40 EU or OSCE/ODHR election observation missions, serving as a media analyst, social media analyst, public relations officer and deputy head of mission. Marek has also been involved in technical assistance to elections on issues related to media freedom and media regulation/campaign reporting. He has provided election technical assistance in Georgia (2009), Moldova (2010, 2011, 2014), Afghanistan (2014) and most recently in Nauru (2019).

Central European seniors, information and misinformation in the context of the EP elections

MEMO98 and its partners in the V4 countries implement media education for seniors and older adults. MEMO98 also monitors social media, actors and topics targeting seniors. In addition to traditional and online media, politicians are also central actors in this senior-focused social media communication. Who is most active, what topics and how do they tend to communicate within Central European countries and what trends have emerged recently? What to expect in social media communication in the context of the EP elections, but also in the long term in an information environment marred by false content?