



For
a **better**
tomorrow

2024 annual
report



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For a better tomorrow

2024. It was a worldwide election year. 'A historic election year', we felt. From South Africa to the South Pacific, over Europe and the Americas, voters had their say in local, national and European elections and were invited to determine the political, social and economic landscape of their countries and regions for years to come. They were looking for a peaceful, secure and sustainable environment to enjoy wellbeing and 'a better tomorrow'. However in the meantime the risk of violence, conflicts, volatility, uncertainty and poverty didn't disappear. Resilient Democracies and peace are not created overnight. Resilient Democracies need day-to-day efforts from accountable governments and active civil society.

Between 6 and 9 June 2024, 720 Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) were elected to represent 450 million people from 27 European Union member states. We are proud that the European People's party (EPP) won the most seats. It took several weeks before the new EU Commission President, Ursula von der Leyen could install the new Commission at the end of November. We will closely monitor the initiatives the new commission will take on the cooperation between generations, and in particular towards older persons. Even though ageing policy remains the competence of the member states, the EU can play an important role in stimulating and supporting initiatives in several policy areas, as there are: health, housing, transport, accessibility of public spaces, digital literacy and so many others to improve the well-being and active citizenship for older persons a reality. We count on the EU support for 'a better tomorrow' for all generations.

2024. It was also an important year for the ESU. On a political level, we gave follow-up to the European elections with a number of initiatives. At the internal ESU level, the Congress held elections that renewed the leadership of our organization.

After eleven years of dynamic and very highly appreciated leadership by An Hermans (president) and Guido Dumon (secretary general) the Congress bid them a grateful farewell on April 8-9, 2024. A new leadership, composed of the President, Secretary General and Vice Presidents was elected.

No one could have expected at the time that we would suddenly have to say a final goodbye to Guido Dumon who passed away at Pentecost, May 19, 2024. The ESU and EPP deeply mourn the loss of Guido Dumon. He was a tireless and dedicated advocate for the rights of senior citizens. He will be deeply missed.

As newly elected President and Secretary General, we took charge without delay, and 2024 already saw a number of new initiatives, such as strengthening our relations with the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe and the European Parliament. The Presidency adopted reports that will guide us in our further endeavours to protect and to promote the rights of the seniors and active European citizens. Ready for the years to come.

With this in mind, we are honored to present you the annual report 2024 and we invite you to cooperate with us over the coming years. We express our appreciation for your loyalty and continued commitment.

Stefaan Vercamer — ESU President
Patrick Penninckx — Secretary General

Contents

Foreword	3
In Memoriam	5
Memberships and Cooperations	6
2024 Elections	12
A diversity of ESU activities in 2024 - Some highlights	16
Information services and communication channels	19
Meet the President: Stefaan Vercamer	20
Meet the Secretary General: Patrick Penninckx	21
Looking Ahead	22

In Memoriam

Cécile Goor-Eyben

(°11.02.1923 †28.10.2024)

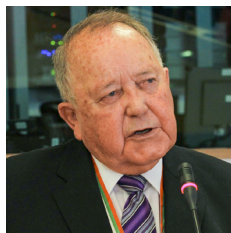
Former Minister Cécile Goor-Eyben was a pioneering politician and dedicated advocate for seniors. As a loyal and active representative of her party's senior members, she enriched ESU meetings with her critical insight and unwavering commitment. We honour her legacy and remember her with deep gratitude.



Dr Bernard Worms

(°14.03.1930 †21.12.2024)

Farewell to Dr Bernhard Worms: a founding father of the ESU; in its early years, Dr Worms, then President of the Senioren Union of the CDU, served as Vice-President of the ESU. In 2001, following the resignation of the first President, Stefan Knafli, Dr Bernard Worms was elected President of the ESU, a position he held until 2013. During his presidency, he worked tirelessly to secure the recognition of the ESU within the EPP and to highlight the role of seniors in society. A hallmark of his tenure was the significant expansion of the ESU following the accession of new EU member states in 2004. He travelled extensively across Europe, promoting his vision, encouraging seniors and political parties to establish civil society movements, and advocating for seniors' rights in society. Even after An Hermans succeeded him as President in 2013, Dr Worms remained closely involved with the ESU, continuing to inspire its members with his unwavering belief: "We must build the European house together!"



Elisabeth Dispaux-Cornil

(°29.05.1936 †10.01.2024)

Elisabeth was a founding member of the ESU, dedicating her life to advocating for seniors and vulnerable groups with unwavering passion. As vice-president and long-time member of the presidency, she played a crucial role in shaping the ESU's mission and legacy.



Guido Dumon

(°30.12.1949 †19.05.2024)

It is with heavy hearts that we remember Guido Dumon, our former Secretary General, who passed away suddenly on Pentecost 2024. Since 2013, Guido served the European Seniors' Union with tireless dedication, leading our organisation with passion and integrity. His commitment to justice and social inclusion, cultivated from his youth, was evident throughout his life. From his involvement in the KSA and Christian workers' movement (KWB) to his roles in international solidarity actions and senior citizen movements, Guido consistently fought for a society where no one was left behind. His influence extended across Europe, where he held leadership positions in regional politics and development cooperation, always advocating for those in need. Guido's passing leaves a profound void, especially for his family, who feel his absence most deeply. His funeral, held on May 24th, was attended by many via livestream, with a touching tribute delivered by Luc Van den Brande. Messages of sympathy have poured in from across Europe, reflecting the lasting impact Guido had on our community and beyond. Though he is no longer with us, Guido's legacy will continue to inspire. We will honour his memory by carrying forward his work with the same dedication and compassion that defined his life.



The Congress

Our ESU Congress is held every five years, serving as a cornerstone event where the organisation sets its core principles and defines its political agenda. This Congress also acts as a forum for statutory revisions, providing an opportunity for structural updates that reflect the evolving needs of our organisation. Key leadership roles, including the President and Vice-Presidents, are elected during the Congress. Additionally, based on the President's recommendation, a Secretary-General is appointed to serve a five-year term.

This year, the Election Congress took place in Leuven from 8 to 10 April 2024. It marked an important transition in leadership as both President An Hermans and Secretary-General Guido Dumon were not eligible for re-election. Stefaan Vercamer was elected as the new President, ushering in a new chapter for the ESU.

For a comprehensive report on the Election Congress, please refer to the '2024 Elections' section in this year's annual report.

The Presidium

Hereby the composition of our motivated Praesidium, as elected during and following our Leuven Congress:

President

Stefaan Vercamer (BE)

Secretary General

Patrick Penninckx (BE)

Vice-Presidents

Heinz K. Becker (AT)

Antonios Demetriades (CY)

Guido Dumon (BE) (†19 May 2024)

Manfred Hopfengärtner (GE)

Peter Mach (SK)

Georg Männik (EE)

Gabriele Peus-Bispinck (DE)

Carmen Quintanilla Barba (ES)

Mojca Skrinjar (SI)

Cor Spreeuwenberg (NL)

Christine von Stefenelli-Gostner (IT/Südtirol)

Treasurer

Etienne Vanderroost (BE)

Former President

Bernhard Worms (DE)

An Hermans (BE)

A word of thanks

We extend our heartfelt gratitude to our Vice-Presidents Nikolay Andreev (BG), Jože Jurkovič (SI), Astrid Lulling (Luxembourg), Leena Jääskeläinen (FI), and Lidmila Němcová (CZ) for their invaluable contributions over the past five years as members of the ESU Presidium.

Their dedication, insight, and steadfast representation of their respective organisations have played a vital role in shaping and strengthening the European Seniors' Union. Through their work, they have upheld our shared values and advanced the interests of seniors across Europe.

We thank them for their service and commitment and wish them all the best in their future endeavours, trusting they will continue to champion the causes that unite us.

We would also like to express our sincere thanks to Etienne Vanderroost, who diligently served as our Treasurer until December 2024. Together with An and Guido, he formed an indefatigable team, managing the ESU's financial matters with great care and precision.

Etienne's unwavering commitment and tireless efforts have been essential to the smooth functioning of our organisation. We are deeply grateful for his dedication and the lasting impact of his work.

Tribute to An Hermans: A Legacy of Dedication and Friendship

For over a decade, An Hermans has served as the President of the European Seniors' Union, alongside the Secretary General Guido Dumon. As she said farewell to her role during the Congress in Leuven, she reflected on her 11-year tenure with profound gratitude for the warm connections and friendships forged throughout the years.

During the Election Congress, An Hermans was honored for her remarkable service. The delegates, recognizing her exceptional leadership, thanked her with the title of 'Honorary President', a fitting tribute to her years of tireless advocacy on behalf of seniors across Europe. This honor, initiated by the Finnish delegation, underscores the profound impact An has had on the ESU and its members. This prestigious title acknowledges her significant contributions and enduring commitment to the organization.

As we honor An Hermans for her unwavering dedication and commitment, let us also reaffirm our pledge to uphold the values she has championed and to continue advancing the mission of the European Seniors' Union. An's legacy of warmth, leadership, and advocacy will continue to inspire us as we navigate the challenges and opportunities ahead.



ESU Associations

Since its creation in 1995, the ESU has been the recognised senior's association and member of the EPP.

Member Associations:

Austria	Österreichischer Seniorenbund	The Netherlands	CDA Senioren
Belgium	CD&V-senioren Les Aînés du cdH (until 1.10.2024)	Norway	Senior Høyres Landsforbund
Bulgaria	Seniors of GERB	Poland	Polska Unia Seniorów (PUS)
Cyprus	Senior Citizens Organisation of Cyprus – OPREPO	Slovakia	Zdruzenie kresťanských seniorov Slovenska
Czech Republic	Sdružení křesťanských seniorů	Slovenia	Klub seniorjev in seniork pri SDS Zveza seniorjev Nova Slovenija Zveza upokojenecv pri SLS
Estonia	Seniors' association ISAMAA	Spain	Comision Nacional del Mayor del Partido Popular
Finland	Kansallinen Senioriliitto ry	Sweden	Moderata Seniorer Kristendemokraterna Seniorförbundet
Germany	Senioren-Union der CDU Deutschlands Senioren-Union der CSU		
Greece	Seniors of Nea Demokratia		
Italy	SVP Generation 60+ (Südtirol)	Observer Associations:	
Lithuania	Vaterlandsunion	Armenia	Union of Senior Generation
Luxembourg	CSV-Senioren	Belarus	PUBP 'Nasha Pakalenne'
Malta	Assocjazzjoni Penjsonanti Anzjani Nazzjonalisti	Europe	Europäische Zentrum für Arbeitnehmerfragen
		Ukraine	Ukrainian Association of Retired Persons

Representation and cooperation

Strengthening ESU Representation in European Institutions

One of the key priorities set by the ESU Congress is to enhance the organisation's representation at the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) and the European Parliament. To achieve this, Secretary General Patrick Penninckx has been actively engaging with these institutions.

Patrick attended the EPP Group meetings during the third and fourth plenary sessions of PACE on 24-28 June and 30 September-4 October 2024 in Strasbourg. During these sessions, he held bilateral talks with the newly elected Chairperson of the EPP Group, Mr Pablo Hispán (Spain, EPP/CD). At the October session, ESU Vice-President Carmen Quintanilla joined him, reinforcing the ESU's presence.

In Brussels, Patrick participated in EPP Group meetings at the European Parliament. He engaged in bilateral discussions with EPP President Manfred Weber and the newly elected President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen. These meetings underscored the ESU's commitment to staying connected with key decision-makers in European politics.

As the ESU's representative to the Conference of INGOs, Patrick also works to ensure civil society's voice is heard and international standards are upheld. This platform strengthens the ESU's role in advocating for seniors' rights and priorities.

Beyond political institutions, Patrick contributed to initiatives like the AGE Platform's consultation on 'St@ndbyMe: Education and Support for

Older Adults in the Digital Society.' He also attended the General Meeting of the Robert Schuman Institute on 19 November, participated in sessions at the Wilfried Martens Centre for European Studies, and supported the mid-term evaluation of the Erasmus+ project, which explores exchange programmes for older adults in university education.

Through his active involvement, Patrick Penninckx is ensuring that the ESU remains a dynamic and influential player in European policymaking and civil society initiatives.



The ESU Bodies

The Presidium

Overview Presidium meetings in 2024.

08.02.2024 — Bratislava (Slovakia)

- EPP Congress (6-7 March/ Bucharest)
- ESU Congress (9-10 April/ Leuven)
- Annual Report 2023
- Request for membership

06.03.2024 — Bucharest (Romania)

- EPP Congress (6-7 March/ Bucharest)
- ESU Congress (9-10 April/ Leuven)
- Looking ahead : ESU participation in the broader 'civil society environment'

08.04.2024 — Leuven (Belgium)

- Looking back to the EPP congress in Bucharest
- Xle ESU Congress Leuven
- Accounts 2023
- Membership fee 2024
- Budget 2024
- Conferences and events 2024

16-17.05.2024 — Enghien (Belgium)

- State of play in search of a Secretary General & proposal is to appoint Patrick Penninckx as Secretary General
- In search for a new treasurer
- Follow-up on the Congress in Leuven
- Agreements on ESU representation in Age Platform Europe/ Robert Schuman Institute/ Martens Centre/ Representation within EPP/ Council of Europe (CoE)/ Cabinet of Commissioner Dubravka Suica/ 'Friends of ESU'/ Konrad Adenauer Stiftung
- Follow-up on the Summer Academy
- Conference in Helsinki, November 14th-15th
- Proposal to gain insight into the functioning and organization of our member organizations
- Plan of action for 2024 an the upcoming years
- Zoom meeting with Patrick Penninckx

12.09.2024 — Online

- In memoriam Guido Dumon
- Confirmation of the new Secretary General and treasurer
- Political Assembly EPP
- Preparation of the conference in Finland: 13-14 November 2024
- Withdrawal of Belgian association 'les engagés' of EPP
- Meeting with European Forum VZW - Mr. Dirk Uyttenhove
- Proposal Summer Academy 2025 & draft ideas for celebration of 30 years of ESU
- Exchange of ideas on the cooperation with members of PACE and MEP's in Strasbourg
- Financial and Statutory reporting
- New EU priorities for 2024-2029 - A ESU look at Ursula von der Leyen's priorities for 2024-2029
- International Day of Older People - 1 October 2024
- Follow up to the Report on Seniors' representation in EPP Partner Parties
- Looking ahead
- Proposal on cooperation of the Vice-Presidents in ESU initiatives



The Executive Committee

Overview Executive Committee meetings in 2024.



09.02.2024 — Bratislava (Slovakia)

- Candidates for the ESU presidency
- EPP Congress (6-7 March – Bucharest)
- The ESU Congress (9-10 April – Leuven)
- ESU Annual Report 2023
- Senior associations and the European election campaign
- Membership: information
- Meeting calendar 2024

13.11.2024 — Helsinki (Finland)

- In memoriam Guido Dumon
- Withdrawal of Belgian association 'les engagés' of EPP
- Confirmation of the new Secretary General and Treasurer
- Political Assembly EPP, 30 September- 1 October 2024 – 'EPP party reform' keynote
- Statutory 'EPP Membership' working group
- Contacts with Martens Centre, Konrad Adenauer Foundation
- Celebration 20 years Nova Slovenia, Ljubljana
- Preparation of the Spring Conference, 19-20 March, Bratislava, Slovakia
- Proposal Summer Academy 2025, 27-29 June, Koningshof, Veldhoven, The Netherlands
- Celebration of 30 years ESU 2025
- Reporting on the cooperation with members of PACE and MEPs in Strasbourg
- Financial and Statutory reporting
- Financial contributions 2025
- ESU letter on the New EU priorities for 2024-2029 – Letter to Ursula von der Leyen regarding mandate of the European Commission
- International Day of Older People – 1 October 2024 – follow up given by national organisations
- Follow up to the Report on Seniors' representation in EPP Partner Parties
- Cooperation with EZA

Reflecting on the 2024 European Elections: A Critical Moment for Seniors and Our Future

The European elections of June 2024 marked a pivotal event for the ESU and the broader European community. As an organisation dedicated to advocating for seniors across Europe, we recognize the significance of these elections in shaping the future of our continent. With our foundational principles of unity, democracy, and intergenerational solidarity, the ESU worked tirelessly to highlight the importance of these elections for all citizens, especially seniors.

At our Congress in April 2024, the ESU adopted the resolution 'For a Better Tomorrow – Let Us Make the Difference', a document that strongly emphasised the need for societal engagement, especially in the face of rising extremism. This message resonated deeply throughout our organisation, and the elections provided a concrete opportunity to stand up for the values upon which Europe was built: peace, democracy, and respect for human rights.

Throughout the election campaign, the ESU, in collaboration with the EPP, played a crucial role in ensuring that the concerns of senior citizens were front and centre. We were proud to contribute to the development of the EPP 2024 Manifesto, which laid out a vision for a stronger, more cohesive Europe that prioritises the needs of its citizens, especially seniors. Thanks to the input from our Vice-President, Heinz Becker, and many of our members, the manifesto included key provisions addressing the challenges and opportunities facing older generations.

Our initiatives for the EU elections

The 2024 European Elections were a crucial opportunity to amplify seniors' voices in shaping Europe's future. To mobilise our members and their networks, we launched several initiatives, including a special letter from our Presidency and an active social media campaign. After the elections, we continued our efforts by organising a reflection session to evaluate the outcomes and plan ahead.

06.07.2024 ESU Online Conference: 'The European Elections: Results & Reflections'

Our online conference was attended by nearly 50 participants, offering reflections on the recent European elections. Key speakers included Peter Mach, who presented statistical insights from the elections, and Herman Van Rompuy, who discussed the challenges Europe faces, such as economic stagnation, the rise of far-right movements, and climate change. Dra. Lien Jansen analysed the EPP's sixth consecutive victory and the decline of a 'progressive' majority in the European Parliament. Heinz Becker highlighted the EPP's dominance and the increase in protest votes.



17.09.2024

Addressing the Needs of Seniors: The ESU's Open Letter to the New EU Commission (2024-2029)

In September 2024, as Ursula von der Leyen presented the proposed composition of the new EU Commission to the European Parliament, the European Seniors' Union seized the moment to address an open letter to the President.¹ This letter underscored the pressing concerns of seniors in European policymaking, including demographic change, intergenerational fairness, media literacy, and protection against online abuse and fraud.

In response, President von der Leyen reaffirmed her commitment to addressing these challenges in the next Commission.² She outlined plans to continue implementing the Demography Toolbox, focus on long-term care workforce challenges, promote healthy longevity, and tackle age discrimination. Additionally, she highlighted upcoming strategies to strengthen intergenerational fairness and ensure the interests of all generations are respected.

This exchange reflects the ESU's proactive role in advocating for the well-being and active participation of Europe's senior citizens.



¹ <https://esu-epp.eu/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/ESU-PP-Open-Letter-September-2024.pdf>

² <https://esu-epp.eu/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/Re-Ares20246804136-GCalacean.pdf>

“Seniors deserve more attention, both in terms of their active participation in society and ensuring the necessary care, especially long-term care.”

“The policies related to ‘demographic change’ and ‘intergenerational fairness’, require a more ‘explicit’ mention of seniors.”

“We would also like to see the development of new areas of work, such as the improvement of seniors’ media literacy, the protection of seniors in the online environment against abuse and fraud, the attention for the physical and psychological well-being of the older generation through incentives for sports and active citizenship.”

Selected passages from our open letter

8-10.04.2024

Leuven/ESU Election Congress: A Transformative Journey Towards 'a Better Tomorrow'

The ESU Election Congress 2024, held from 8 to 10 April in the historic city of Leuven, marked a significant moment for our organisation. Delegates from across Europe gathered to reflect on past achievements, elect new leadership, and shape the future of the ESU and senior citizens' role in Europe.

A key focus of the Congress was the election of a new President and Presidium. After inspiring speeches from the three candidates, Stefaan Vercamer was elected as the new President of the ESU, ready to lead the organisation into a new era of growth and innovation. His competitors, Constantinos Phellas from Cyprus and Rainer Wieland from Germany, showcased the breadth of talent and vision within the ESU community. Alongside Vercamer, a new Presidium was chosen, comprising dedicated individuals committed to advancing the ESU's mission. This dynamic leadership team brings renewed energy and focus to address the challenges and opportunities of the coming years.

The Congress also featured vibrant discussions and meaningful debates on critical topics such as the future of Europe and the transformative power of citizen engagement. In the round-table debate 'Europe We Vote For,' moderated by Prof. Steven van Hecke, speakers such as Peter Hefele, Liesbet Sommen, and Bram van Hecke explored the challenges facing Europe, from climate change to security. Their contributions provided valuable insights and actionable pathways to navigate these complex issues.

Similarly, the discussion 'Citizens Make the Difference,' moderated by Heinz K. Becker, underscored the vital role of grassroots activism and collective action. Panelists Claus Bernhold, Mojca Škrinjar, Eija Alakangas, and Carmen Quintanilla shared inspiring stories of community engagement, highlighting the power of individual efforts to drive societal change and strengthen democracy.

The Congress welcomed distinguished guest speakers, including Dubravka Šuica, European Commissioner for Democracy & Demography, and Koen Geens, former Belgian Minister of Justice. Commissioner Šuica delivered a compelling address on the importance of democratic participation and understanding demographic shifts to build a more inclusive Europe. Her insights emphasised the critical role of active citizenship in shaping a better future. Koen Geens inspired attendees with his optimistic perspective, reminding everyone of the importance of hope and resilience in striving for progress.

Beyond the formal sessions, the Congress fostered a strong sense of camaraderie and collaboration. Delegates had ample opportunities to exchange ideas, network, and strengthen connections with like-minded individuals from across the continent. The atmosphere was one of shared purpose and unity, with all participants committed to building a brighter future for the ESU and Europe.

As the ESU moves forward under Stefaan Vercamer's presidency, it remains steadfast in its mission to promote intergenerational solidarity, active senior citizenship, and a Europe that values peace and care. Together, we continue to strive for a better tomorrow.



A diversity of ESU activities in 2024 – Some highlights

8-9.02.2024 Bratislava/ Empowering Seniors: Celebrating Slovakia's EU Anniversary and Shaping Europe's Future



Nearly 50 participants gathered in Bratislava on February 8-9 for a series of well-organised meetings by ZKS (Združenie kresťanských seniorov Slovenska) and ESU. The event emphasised seniors' active participation in society, with special thanks to Peter Mach for seamless coordination. The conference featured high-level speakers discussing Slovakia's 20th anniversary in the EU and the upcoming European elections.

Notable speakers included ESU President An Hermans, Vice President Heinz Becker, and European Parliament members Miriam Lexmann and Ivan Štefanec. Key topics included Slovakia's role in the EU, challenges facing Europe, and the importance of seniors' involvement in societal issues like security, energy independence, and digital transformation. A highlight was Ján Figel's reflection on Slovakia's journey to EU membership, emphasising its cultural and social contributions.

The event also focused on the future of ESU, with discussions on the upcoming ESU presidential elections in 2024 and the EPP's Memorandum for the June 2024 elections. The conference not only deepened participants' understanding of Slovakia but also strengthened their commitment to shaping the future of seniors in Europe.

06.09.2024 Ljubljana/ Celebrating 20 Years of Zveza Seniorjev Nova Slovenija (N.Si)

Our President, Stefaan Vercamer, represented the ESU at the 20th anniversary celebration of N.Si's Seniors Organisation, a member of the EPP family in Slovenia. This event marked Stefaan's first regional appearance since his election in April, and he delivered a strong message on the future of senior care.

The celebration was attended by prominent figures such as MEP Matej Tonin, who is also President of N.Si, and Janez Cigler Kralj, leader of N.Si's parliamentary group in Slovenia.



The President of the Seniors Organisation, Mag. Zdravko Luketič expressed sharp criticism of the current government, voicing concerns about media manipulation, weak migration policies, and unmet pension promises.

President Vercamer addressed the gathering, reaffirming ESU's full support for the European Care Strategy and highlighting some key priorities:

- Protecting the rights and well-being of care recipients and caregivers.
- Promoting innovative solutions like co-housing and community services for older persons.
- Addressing underinvestment and workforce shortages in long-term care.
- Improving access to care in rural and depopulated areas.

29.09.2024 Foini/ March of Love

On September 29, 2024, the fourth annual March of Love took place in Foini, Cyprus, an inspiring event dedicated to supporting the Regional House of Older Persons. Organised by the Senior Citizens of Cyprus OPREPO, in collaboration with the Community Welfare Council of Foini, the march has evolved into an international event, symbolising solidarity and care for older persons.

This year's march brought together a broad coalition of supporters, including the Cyprus Third Age Observatory, the University of Nicosia, the Cyprus Voluntary Council, and the Cyprus Police. Among the distinguished participants were the Deputy Minister of Welfare, Marilena Evangelou, and ESU Secretary-General Patrick Penninckx, who joined local leaders and participants of all ages in a meaningful demonstration of community spirit.

The march began at the Regional House of Older Persons and concluded at a historic 16th-century monastery, where participants held a prayer for the health and dignity of older citizens.

The event also featured speeches, a musical performance, and a community breakfast with traditional Cypriot sweets.



We extend our gratitude to Antonios Demetriades for his warm welcome and efforts in organising this initiative. The March of Love continues to grow, raising awareness of the challenges facing older persons and encouraging active engagement in their welfare.

01.10.2024 United Nations International Day Of Older Persons

Since 1990, the United Nations has designated October 1st as the 'International Day of Older Persons' (UNIDOP), a day to bring global attention to the rights, contributions, and needs of older individuals. Every year, the European Seniors' Union proudly joins this global movement, encouraging its Member Associations to promote age-friendly societies in this era of longevity. Across Europe, various Member Associations of ESU have marked this day with inspiring initiatives:

- In Austria, our Vice President Heinz Becker emphasised the importance of supportive environments for older people.
- In Spain, Vice President Carmen Quintanilla led awareness-raising campaigns to highlight the value of older persons in society.
- In Germany, Claus Bernhold distributed our official letter in German to draw attention to the significance of UNIDOP and the need to honour the contributions of older persons.
- In Cyprus our Vice President Antonios Demetriades organised the March of Love (see above)
- At the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, Vice-President Carmen Quintanilla, President of the EPP Group, Pablo Hispan and Patrick Penninckx shared their views with the EPP Group in the PACE.

We hope that in the coming years, more of our member associations will join in these efforts, underscoring the importance of creating inclusive communities for seniors across Europe.

14.11.2024 Helsinki/ ESU Regional Conference: 'Joy of Life and Strength from Senior Activities'

The ESU Regional Conference in Helsinki, organised in collaboration with Kansallinen Senioriliitto ry, brought together senior organisations, policymakers, and experts to explore the theme 'Joy of Life and Strength from Senior Activities'.

The event provided a platform for knowledge-sharing on key topics, including well-being, social inclusion, and the societal roles of seniors in Europe. Discussions highlighted innovative approaches to senior services, the importance of resilience, and the need to address age-related discrimination. A roundtable exchange further examined ways to enhance the involvement and value of seniors in society.

The conference concluded with inspiring insights into Finland's approach to social policy and its rich cultural history, leaving participants motivated to continue advancing the well-being and inclusion of seniors across Europe.



11-13.12.2024 Toledo/ Promoting Equal Opportunities in the Labour Market

Ms Carmen Quintanilla Barba, ESU Vice-President and President of AFAMMER, welcomed ESU Secretary General Patrick Penninckx to the European Seminar on Equal Opportunities in the Labour Market, held in Toledo. The seminar, organised by EZA, FEMP, and AFAMMER with EU support, aimed to foster social dialogue and advance equal rights in employment.

During a round table discussion, Mr Penninckx highlighted the vital role of social partners in addressing life course changes and combatting ageism, both in the workplace and beyond. He also stressed the importance of active citizenship and the contributions of seniors' associations in promoting equality and inclusion.



Information services and communication channels

The ESU uses a variety of communication channels to keep members informed and engaged with our activities, initiatives, and priorities. Our primary platform is the ESU website (esu-epp.eu), which provides access to event reports, updates, and messages from our leadership in English and German. The newsletter features highlights of past activities, news from our member organisations, relevant European policy updates, and a preview of upcoming events. Members can subscribe via our website to ensure they receive each edition directly by email.

Our social media channels further enhance our outreach, with Facebook (facebook.com/esu.eu) being our most active platform. Here, we share live updates from events, senior-related topics, and EPP news.

Through these communication channels, ESU strives to keep members connected and well-informed, while encouraging them to engage, share news, and promote our work within their networks. For further details or to access these resources, please visit our website or contact us directly.



Meet the President: Stefaan Vercamer

What was your motivation to take up a commitment as ESU President?

At 63 years old, I quietly find myself part of the senior generation, and I've observed a widespread misconception about people over 60. There's no such thing as a singular 'retired man or woman.' The over-60 demographic is incredibly diverse but, above all, brimming with commitment and vitality. It's a missed opportunity not to tap into their experience and engagement to strengthen the socio-economic fabric of our society. Actively ageing individuals are eager to fully participate in society and contribute meaningfully. That's why I believe the ESU aligns so well with my values and aspirations.

My commitment to the ESU is deeply rooted in my belief in free initiative guided by Christian values. This vision, shaped by my upbringing, education, and professional experiences, defines how I view people and society. Growing up in a family of 10 children in a small village, two principles stood out: 'take care of each other and the community' and 'think in terms of solutions, not problems.' These values stayed with me as I pursued higher education, earning a Bachelor's degree in Social Work and later a Master's in Economic and Social Policy.

Throughout my career, the drive to serve the community and assist those in need has only grown stronger. As secretary for a regional Christian umbrella organization for socially focused nonprofits, I became acutely aware of the challenges of enacting real change without addressing policy at the national level. This realization propelled me to become a member of the federal Chamber of Representatives, where I believed I could create a lasting impact.

Within the EPP and especially the ESU, I see a shared vision and values: serving the community, ensuring human dignity for the most vulnerable, promoting intergenerational solidarity, and championing active ageing. In a rapidly evolving world, where non-digital natives often risk exclusion, organizations like the ESU are essential to delivering long-lasting value. These principles deeply resonate with me, and I am honoured to contribute to advancing them as ESU President.



Meet the Secretary General: Patrick Penninckx

As I entered a new phase in life, retiring after 35 years in senior positions in the Council of Europe and over 40 years of being professionally, I contemplated on how to sensibly fill this new phase. Given my previous contacts and cooperation with the European Seniors' Union, as well as my early career in organisations close to the EPP, led me to accept the proposal of the President to join him as the Secretary General of the ESU. I started my career defending the rights of young people, particularly those with lower educational opportunities, young people from a migrant background, young unemployed and youngsters in vocational training. I think I can bring an added value to the ESU bringing the rights of older adults in the limelight, combat ageism, and ensuring that older persons' rights are defended as human rights without discrimination.

My knowledge of the European Institutions and the labyrinth of decision making this sometimes implies, requires concerted action and looking into the best possible ways to influence policy. Given my background, I want to pursue active digital citizenship and education for older citizens. They can bring their narratives, the values they have grown up with, to the new generations in an intergenerational dialogue. Ageism is unfortunately still the most tolerated form of

discrimination in society, even with a growing number of older adults in our European societies, the rights of senior citizens are still not fully taken seriously. They are too often dismissed as the spare parts of society. I want to contribute to change that perception, to change that attitude in society and ensure the rightful role of senior citizens and respect of their conditions, in all aspects of life. I want to foster a new concept of 'age'. Not as a special 'condition', but as a natural part of our lifecycle, with its own constraints and opportunities'.



Looking Ahead

Looking Ahead: ESU's Vision for 2025 and Beyond

As we bring 2024 to a close and reflect on another year of milestones and progress, the ESU reaffirms its dedication to championing the rights, dignity, and active participation of seniors across Europe. The challenges of an ageing population, rapid demographic changes, and evolving societal needs underscore the urgency for innovative, collaborative, and human-centred approaches. As we move forward, we remain steadfast in our advocacy for a truly inclusive Europe. The European elections have ushered in a new European Commission, and we look forward to engaging constructively to ensure that the voices of seniors are not only heard but prioritised.

The upcoming year, 2025, holds special significance for the ESU as we celebrate 30 years of impactful work. This milestone will be the central theme of our activities, guiding us through a year of reflection, celebration, and renewed commitment. Our events will focus on themes that underline the importance of active citizenship, intergenerational dialogue, and addressing demographic change. From Bratislava to Valencia and Veldhoven to Spain again, we will collaborate with stakeholders to highlight the essential role seniors play in society and to foster intergenerational understanding. These activities will not only honour our past achievements but also set the stage for future progress.

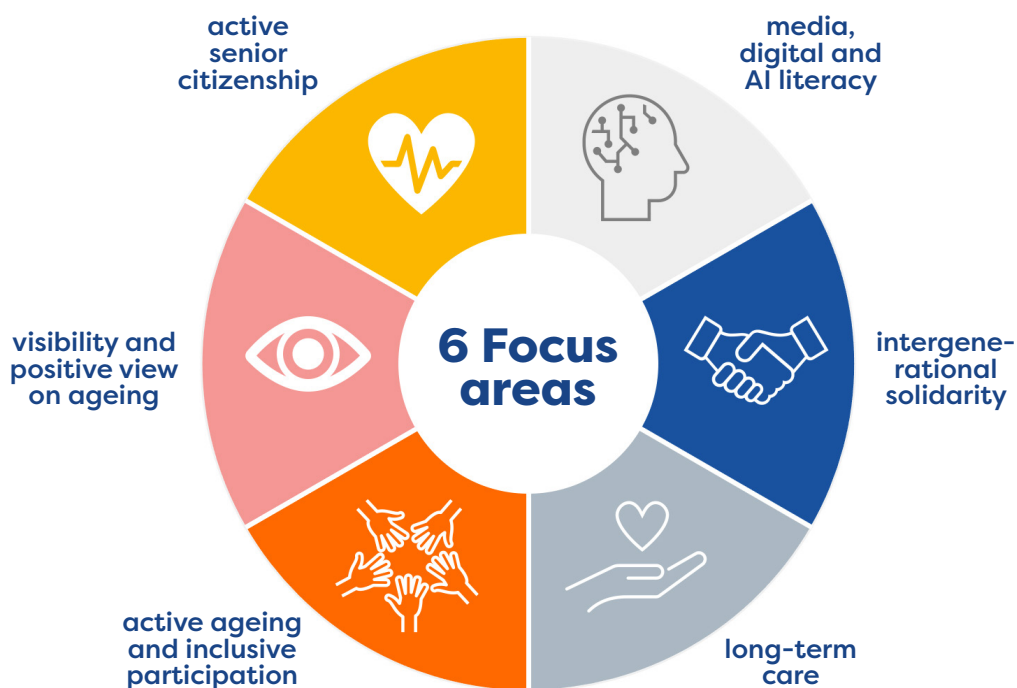
The ESU's work in 2025 will centre on promoting active senior citizenship as a pillar of democratic participation and fostering a positive view on ageing to combat stereotypes and ageism. We will continue to support active ageing and

inclusion, ensuring seniors thrive in their communities, while enhancing media, digital, and AI literacy to empower them in the digital age. Strengthening intergenerational solidarity will remain a priority, as we work to bridge generational divides and foster mutual respect. At the same time, we will advocate for comprehensive solutions to long-term care challenges that respect dignity and ensure access for all.

As we celebrate this important anniversary, the ESU aspires to be a leading force in building broad support for a robust European seniors' policy. This ambition will be achieved through close collaboration with our affiliated organisations, the European People's Party, the Martens Centre, Members of the European Parliament, the European Commission, the Council of Europe, and many other partners. Additionally, we aim to expand the ESU's reach by initiating activities in countries with elected EPP representatives but no active ESU presence.

Looking ahead, the ESU envisions a Europe where ageing is celebrated as a natural and enriching course of life. By combining the wisdom of older generations with the creativity of the young, we can build a society that values every individual's contributions. Together, we can ensure that no one is left behind, creating a future that honours the achievements of today while preparing for the challenges of tomorrow. Let 2025 be a year not only of celebration but of inspiration and action, as we commemorate 30 years of the ESU and look forward to many more years of impact and progress.

ESU Vision and Focus areas



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2024

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