

Memorandum in view of the 2019 European Elections

Demographic change, due to the increase of life expectancy and low birth rates, has affected our societies and lifestyle. Subsequently, our Union is facing complex challenges regarding intergenerational solidarity, human dignity, age-friendliness and active ageing. Recalling the values on which the EU is founded and the aim of the Union to promote the wellbeing of its people¹, the ESU remains a vibrant protector of those universal rights and principles. It therefore strives for a comprehensive strategy in order to fully implement those values concerning older adults.

In view of the upcoming European elections in May 2019, we would like to highlight four issues, which express the attitudes and expectations of seniors towards Europe. We firmly appeal to the newly elected MEPs ahead, the new Commission, the EPP and all decision-makers to take these expectations on board.

1. The European Union is a project of hope. We Europeans want to live in freedom, prosperity and peace. During decennia of European integration and by great efforts of the past and current generations, we have achieved these goals. However, challenges remain, and we will have to work together stronger, to build a better future for all generations. European decision-makers have to regain people's trust by showing that the EU brings real added value to their daily lives and responds to their needs and expectations, which are not only material but also cultural and spiritual. We want Europe to become a safer place, where citizens feel protected and economic growth, social equality and solidarity between the generations are safeguarding the wellbeing of its people, leading to a life in dignity for all.

We believe that the European Union has to remain one of the most prosperous, solidary, peaceful and free places in the world. It therefore shall have to cope with several global issues such as security, climate change and the preservation of the rule of law. We stress that the European level is best placed to address those challenges in a united manner. We urge the EU to be at the forefront to provide these solutions with adequate instruments, while taking into account our fundamental values older generations fought for: peace, freedom, solidarity and human dignity.

¹ Cf. Art. 3 (ex-Article. 2) TEU: 'The Union's aim is to promote peace, its values and the well-being of its peoples. [...]'

2. The share of older adults is growing at a faster pace than any other age segment of the EU's population. This represents a success, but indicates also subsequent challenges concerning this demographic change. Therefore, we call for an innovative, coordinated and integrated response, which encompasses all government levels and all policies, such as employment, health, innovation, etc. We need a truthful strategy for an age-friendly society.

Social inclusion and participation is one of the main elements to combat age-discrimination and to raise more awareness of the magnitude and gravity of ageism. Empowering older adults to participate constructively in civil society enhances their connection with other people, while eliminating loneliness. Life-long learning with attention to digital skills and the two-way transmission of knowledge are key developments to raise ambitions in that regard.

Determined action plans have to be taken in the field of adequate person-centered health and long-term care, both by ambitious flanking measures as recommendations. The right to live in dignity has to be the cornerstone for care-dependent people, both in the public as private sector. In this light, the EU should step up its engagement in the European Innovation Partnership on Active and Health Ageing as the key initiative in this sector.

A decent income and a sufficient degree of autonomy for older adults have to be safeguarded by a reinforced integration of the principles of the European Pillar of Social Rights. Meanwhile, the strengthening of the social dimension of the European Semester has to be effectuated.

An inclusive labour market should be established with respect for the needs and expectations of older employees. While ensuring a life-course perspective on work, older adults have to be valued and facilitated to prolong working life by adapted measures. In the meantime, the development of innovations and technologies regarding silver economy should be fully supported in the respect of seniors' values and needs.

All in all, this boils down to a full and comprehensive implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights on every competent level. This guideline should be taken into account during all policy considerations as a leading principle of a Union based on values such as dignity and solidarity.

3. Intergenerational solidarity is an indispensable cornerstone in the European house of solidarity and prosperity, with structural, formal and informal relations on the level of families, friends and neighborhoods at the forefront thereof. No model of democratic governance can be inclusive and sustainable without ensuring dialogue and solidarity between generations. The Union should encourage local authorities to stimulate the role of older adults in local communities in order to boost the civil dialogue throughout all generations. It is vital to underline the necessity and importance of a genuine dialogue between generations to learn from each other and to appreciate each other's capacities. Through these occasions, local communities can also act better informed on different measures concerning the wellbeing of older adults. It should also create opportunities to bound people in cross-border and intergenerational meetings in order to enhance the social cohesion all over Europe.

4. It was already acknowledged by the EPP during its congress in Malta² that the European Union is facing unprecedented demographic changes and subsequent challenges. EPP called in this congress for an inclusive and coordinated response with regard to family-friendly environments, active and healthy ageing, intergenerational solidarity and the disparities between and within Member States, both in terms of life expectancy as well as in living and working conditions³. Due to the scattered competences of the Union in several domains, it is however a demanding task to answer with one voice to those issues. We therefore strongly urge for one Commissioner in charge with the competency of coordinating this broad range of necessary measures dealing with the demographic change and older adults. This visibility will not only enhance the effectiveness of the solutions given, but also the connectivity and proximity with the older persons will be reinforced.

² 29 and 30 March 2017

³ See: Secure Europe's Future: <https://www.epp.eu/files/uploads/2017/04/Congress-document-%E2%80%98Europe-secures-our-Future%E2%80%99.pdf>