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EURAG-EUROPE



Federazione Europea
delle Persone Anziane

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“Senior Organisations and Their Effectiveness and Impact in Society”**

**Summary of the final remarks
made by Dirk Jarré, President of EURAG**

Excellencies, dear Colleagues and friends,

At the end of this remarkable conference I would like to share with you all some personal reflections.

First of all, and once again, a cordial “Happy birthday – and many happy returns!” to the Slovenian Federation of Pensioners’ Associations. Seventy years of committed and successful work for older persons is quite an admirable performance. We are happy and proud to have you as a member of the “European Federation of Older Persons”!

I was very impressed indeed by the high-level attendance of this event and by the remarkable contributions made, in particular, by the Slovenian Minister for Foreign Affairs, by the representative of the Ministry for Labour, Family, Social Affairs and Equality, by the Ombudsman for Human Rights and by the Mayor of this beautiful City of Ljubljana. These contributions have shown that the leaders of the Republic of Slovenia are very much aware of the issues connected with its ageing society and how much they are determined to address them adequately.

I was equally most interested in and impressed by all the contributions of the other speakers – from Slovenia as well as from the other countries represented – that provided a broad view of the great diversity of the realities of ageing and the problems associated, not only for the older persons themselves but also for society at large. On the other hand the reports and cases presented made us understand that we have so much in common and that we can – and certainly should – learn from each other’s experiences and from the solutions we have developed.

An ageing society and the transformation that it triggers off definitely require courageous new concepts, policies and strategies that involve all components of society. The European Federation of Older Persons has been involved – for three and a half years, and in a rather central role – in a big research project of the European Union named “Social Innovation for



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Active and Healthy Ageing”. The project is drawing to its end this year and will present its main findings and conclusions in an international conference in Barcelona in October 2016 with the promising title “Envisioning a New World”.

But it is not enough to simply communicate convolute scientific results, resolutions of high-level conferences, complex political and ideological declarations and sophisticated strategic papers. We have the Political Declaration and the International Plan of Action of the Madrid World Assembly on Ageing in 2002, we have more or less advanced national legislations on the protection of older persons and plans for the promotion of their participation and integration into society. What still lags tremendously behind is the concrete and effective implementation of all the good and promising intentions and statements.

We definitely need to address this gap in a more practical manner and, in particular, in a form and language that everybody can understand and use for further reflection and discussion. The NGO Committee on Ageing at the United Nations in Vienna has recently published a brochure – with the close cooperation of the European Federation of Older Persons and based on results of the project “Social Innovation for Active and Healthy Ageing” – that offers a total of 31 “Recommendations for Decision Makers to Promote Active Ageing” regrouped in seven areas of major concerns. These recommendations flow from the description of particular problems that older persons are facing and provide ideas on very concrete and practical solutions. They are addressed in a comprehensive approach not only to politicians, but to a broad range of decision makers in various sectors and at all levels.

The new buzzword of those dealing politically with ageing issues is, as we know, “A Society for All Ages”. But, frankly, I cannot really agree with this concept because it suggests an approach by which society is sliced into age brackets and thus may, and often does distinguish too much between generations or even unfairly opposes them to each other on grounds of age – like young, middle-aged, after retirement, the very old, etc. – and thus rather favours tensions inside society than overcoming them. I clearly prefer and suggest a “life-course-approach” that is based on the connotation and the view of situations “as we age” – what we all very naturally do ever since we are born. We should rather keep in mind and pay better attention to the fact that the greatest problems – also in the ageing process – are directly or indirectly caused by the discriminating socio-economic conditions in which individuals or groups of the population have to live and age.

Allow me three further important reflections.

The first point that I would like to make is that society – and in fact we all – need to reconsider what is the value and the “treasure” that resides in older persons. Not only that society has invested in them, in their education, etc. but, more importantly, that these persons as individuals and as a group have developed and shaped, over all their lifetime, the world that we are living in today. They are not just our mothers and fathers, grandmothers and grandfathers in the biological sense but the co-creators of the quality of our society. Without them we would live in totally different situations. Let them be honoured for this achievement and let’s fully recognise their successes. They definitely merit this as they are part of the society’s identity and quality.

On the other side older persons should not succumb to the temptation to predominantly put their needs, their sorrows, their wishes, and their fears into the forefront of the discussion, and to complain so often about today’s conditions and the attitudes of the young. Older persons should remember very carefully their own youth and adolescence – with all the difficulties



and the barriers one has to face when young and inexperienced. They should develop a deep understanding for those who come after them, they should appreciate their new lifestyle that offers new opportunities for all, they should praise the dynamism and the innovative drive of the young – and remember how they themselves have once looked at the world and at society.

Finally it is of paramount importance for our living together and for shaping successfully the future of our society that only with a strong willingness to promote dialogue, understanding and mutual recognition, the necessary trust and solidarity can be developed that create and maintain societal cohesion. We need to fully recognise that we all together, without the distinction of particular age groups, have to live up to the great responsibility to ensure and protect not only human dignity throughout the life course but also to maintain and constantly live solidarity and social cohesion in a very practical sense – day after day. Without this our society is, or would be, unable to conceive and build a meaningful future for us all and, in particular, for all those still to come after us – the generations not yet born.

To end with, I would just like to say that we, from the European Federation of Older Persons, are so grateful that you have invited us to the beautiful city of Ljubljana in this beautiful Slovenia with all its generous hospitality to celebrate this day and to reaffirm our strong cooperation in view of “A Society for All”.

Dirk Jarré, President of EURAG

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