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Message of the President of EURAG

“On the value of European integration for a society for all”

Dear Members and Friends of the European Federation of Older Persons!

Today I would like to share some personal views about Europe with you.

The European integration process was initiated by great persons like Robert Schumann, Jean Monnet and other inspired, responsible personalities with the central objective of ending the frequent, bloody and disastrous wars between neighbours, which culminated in the horrifying Second World War. Based on a visionary concept, the European Coal and Steel Community began already in 1950 to unite European countries economically and politically in order to secure lasting peace. On 25 March 1957, the project of European unification was substantiated on Rome's Capitol Hill, when the high representatives of six committed European countries signed the Treaty of Rome “to establish the foundations of an ever closer union among the European peoples”.

This year, that great project - now called the European Union - turns sixty and it is time to remember that this extraordinary political initiative has so far reached its main goal: to establish solid peace and relations of mutual trust among its members that have grown, over time, from six to twenty-eight countries. The European Union has been instrumental to overcome the terrible material, moral and political damages of the two World Wars, it has enormously improved the

living conditions of people, it has considerably strengthened fundamental rights in our society and it has provided new perspectives for the development of our continent. As an important global negotiator it has also helped to limit international conflicts and has thus served as a stabiliser globally.

Considering that the European Union is a unique experiment - with no precedent in history of mankind - we should not be too surprised that not every step in its development went smoothly or immediately brought about the envisaged positive results. It is still a political, economic and cultural adventure with many phases of trial-and-error - and even setbacks and deceptions.

But despite all the imperfections that we can see and all the internal criticism that we may have we also must be aware of the fact that most of the external observers in Africa, Asia and the Americas admire the Europeans' political courage and achievements and are longing to benefit from similar developments in their respective region. Others global players, however, ardently hope that the European integration project will fall apart so that they can better exercise their power worldwide.

Unfortunately the felt crisis of the European Union and the questioning of the values and advantages of the European integration process are fuelled by crude populist slogans and irresponsible promises of many politicians that enliven individual egoism as well as group interests against the necessary common good and collective responsibility.

The celebration of the 60th anniversary of the Treaty of Rome, the UK decision to go for "Brexit" and the growing nationalism as well as the trends for discrimination and exclusion in Europe should strongly motivate us all to imagine how our society might look like in the future without the European

integrations process. Do we really want to go back to the situation of the beginning of last century? Will it really be better to promote aggressive competition instead of peaceful cooperation between the peoples in Europe - and globally? What do we wish for our children and grandchildren - and what are we ready to invest in order to insure for them a society based on liberty, justice, equality, security, solidarity and mutual understanding?

If it is true that older persons are particularly experienced and wise they should take a critical view on today's political, social, economic, cultural as well as moral developments and feel the responsibility to fully engage in the dialogue about the future of Europe and the shaping of a promising society for all. This means not to shy away but discuss pertinent issues with family, neighbours, friends and the community at large. It also means to argue and defend one's own convictions about honesty, veracity, humanity and solidarity as the foundation of human society and its humanistic future.

Thanks for having given your attention to these considerations!

I wish you a very pleasant and optimistic springtime!

Kronberg, 26 February 2017

Dirk Jarré, President of EURAG