



European Senior Organisation – PES seniors

Activity report 2023

As an **umbrella organization of socialist and social-democratic senior-organizations in Europe**, ESO – PES seniors brings together representatives coming from Austria, Belgium, Czech Republic, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Malta, Netherlands, Romania, Slovenia, Spain and Switzerland.

ESO aims to improve the position of senior citizens in Europe, their access to fundamental rights and their participation in political decision processes. ESO is promoting intergenerational solidarity and will represent the interests of senior citizens and their organizations in the European governing bodies.

More concretely, we take aware the wellbeing of each individual regardless of age. The needs and rights of older people have to be on the European agenda: building towards an age friendly society, decent income for seniors, addressing the problem of housing and adapted housing, accessible and face to face services in the era of digitalization, the cost and quality of care and healthcare, the problem of ageism and discrimination and the disrespect of human rights of older people.

To this end, ESO contributes to the public debate on ageing, inter-generational solidarity, consumer protection, social security and economic protection (pensions and annual allowances), housing, health-care, care and long term-care and communicates its position in the most effective way possible, e.g. by participating actively in the consultation-initiatives from the European Commission, participation in AGE-Platform and in several working groups in the PES. Lastly, we promote and safeguard the social, cultural and economic interests of senior citizens in Europe and strengthen senior citizens' participation and active involvement in society.

Since a few years we experience in the PES an increasing interest in seniors and their specific needs. From the PES Policy-unit in the Staff we already experience more recognition, this has probably to do with our active participation in the working groups of our European party, and also with the increased involvement of the PES staff and their cooperation in our thinking process. We are also very happy with the fact that ESO is now mentioned explicitly as the Senior-network of the PES in its statutes. This is another positive step to full recognition after our common statement PES – ESO “Together for European citizens” adopted by the PES Presidium in February 2022.

As we have asked for several years, we now want **be recognized as a full member of PES**, to have the right to participate in the PES Presidium, in the same way as other sectorial organizations: PES-women, YES, Rainbow-rose and our Foundation for European Progressive Studies (FEPS). Apparently, our status as Observatory member doesn't allow us to attend presidium-meetings, in contrary to other full-member or sectorial organizations. **We reiterate asking to reinforce our cooperation**

towards a full recognized sectorial organization of the PES and to have access to the PES-presidium on the same foot as other sectorial organizations.

The biggest obstacle to full membership seems to be the fact that ESO – PES seniors only covers twelve member states and that we need more member organizations from unrepresented countries. **The problem here is that a number of national parties do not, or no longer, have special departments, branches, organizations or working groups for their older members.** ESO – PES Seniors wants to reverse this trend. Therefore, **we have asked the parties from member-states, which are not yet active in ESO, to participate in our organization. Practically, parties could engage in our organization in the following ways: by appointing a party's seniors' organization, by appointing a working group of the party on seniors/senior policy, by appointing an observer nominated by the party.**

We turn to them, because older militants should be more involved in politics; they are **also committed citizens and militants, who count as active participants in decision-making and policy-making processes.** Another important aim is to keep seniors – as their number steadily increases - active as voters for the socialist and social democratic movement.

On the other hand, ESO-PES seniors is asking to pay more attention to activists and sector-organizations in PES. We are glad to cooperate within our common PES family with YES, PES-women, Rainbow-rose and the FEPS. Therefore, we are asking explicitly for more coordination and deliberation and regular contacts.

2023, where we stand as an organization

Since 2018 we have strengthened our contacts with the European Party of Socialists and Social Democrats, in developing a new dynamic of consultation and exchange on PES positions and discussion papers. We stay active in the PES social network and the economic and financial network and also in the coordination-team. We participate actively in the work of the AGE-Europe platform for seniors, the most representative overall organization for older persons. We continue to organize our proper activities, more specific with our half-yearly seminars and we increase the number of general assemblies and board meetings thanks to the digital tools.

Since 2021, as S-plus had to withdraw its support (bookkeeping, administration, management of social media, secretary support), **we run completely on a voluntary basis.** Thanks to an additional financial support from the PES, we could outsource certain tasks. We did this for the bookkeeping and have engaged an external consultant for our Internet communication. We are also **glad to work together with the PES secretariat after reinforcement with a new staff member who, among other things, would also focus on intergenerational solidarity.** We do appreciate this involvement and working together.

However, there are new challenges we must meet. **For several years now we have been confronted with the so-called depoliticization of civil society organizations, this applies in particular to the Scandinavian countries, the Flanders region in Belgium and now also Austria.** In these countries, social-democratic and socialist-oriented organizations were depoliticized, either to meet new government funding requirements or in an effort to attract new members. Although there is little to argue against opening up our grassroots organizations, this will have consequences for the link between these organizations and their party and with the social-democratic family. We must

therefore look for new forms of cooperation, representation structures in the light of a growing gap between civil society and politics and the needs of seniors to participate from their ideological point of view in the preparation and implementation of policies that concern them.

Actions to tackle our challenges

ESO contribution in policy-making activities

To strengthen our relationship with PES, ESO president Jos Bertrand participated in the **PES coordination team meetings, the Social Europe Network meetings and the PES working group meetings on economy and finances.**

We actively contributed to PES discussion papers, action plans and working documents. For 2023 the focus lied on the preparation of the resolution and memorandum for the 2024 European elections which was approved at the Malaga Congress in November 2023. **Contributions, several proposals and feedback were prepared by our member-organizations representatives.**

Our ESO contribution refers to our 18-point action-program for the next years. We defined these points in our contribution to the Commission Green Paper in 2021. These points can also be used in the 2024 European election campaign and by member-organizations, PES and member-parties as a contribution to their positions. This action-program will also be the basis for the ESO Memorandum for the European elections, which we will present at the beginning of 2024. We have actively participated in debates in the framework of the Congress in Malaga and organized our own **fringe – meeting “Seniors define our future!? How to involve them in our work and campaigns”**. We were pleased to collaborate with the S&D fraction in the European Parliament and the presence of Iratxe García Pérez. We welcome the creation of a special service for relations with civil society in the group.

ESO participated with a large delegation in the **MIPAA – Conference in June 2022 in Rome**. In the civil-society event before the Conference, we concretized our engagement for national and regional instruments guaranteeing seniors ‘access to fundamental rights. We took it up as main topic in our **spring-seminar in Malta, where we met the Maltese commissioner on seniors’ rights.**

Through the AGE-Europe platform, we were also involved, through our chairman, in a hearing of the **ECB's working group on digital euro and financial inclusion on February 23** and in the preparation of the meeting. We argued for more attention to non-digital citizens, by requiring personal services at non-discriminatory rates and making counters and ATMs widely available. With regard to digitalization and financial services, we also had extensive contacts with the Belgian Minister of Economy, Pierre Ives Dermagne (PS), in the preparation of the Belgian EU presidency. **This led to the issue of digitalization and financial services being put on the agenda at the Consumers Summit that will be organized under the Belgian presidency.**

ESO participated also in the **seminar on the present and future of EU policies for older people, organized by the EESC and Age Europa platform on November 29 in Madrid.**

There was a plea for important changes in thinking and actions about seniors. The first change concerns the vision on seniors: Seniors are a very diverse group, what unites them is the need for recognition, as active citizens, as full participants and as actors in policy. **As older people, we want to help shaping the future:** yes, we are the witnesses of the past, but also the actors in the present and the co-builders of the future with our children and grandchildren and for the generations that will come after them. Older persons are resilient, self-confident citizens able to make decisions that affect them. Older persons are not a disappearing generation even if some may be in need of care and support.

A second equally important change in approach that is emerging concerns thinking about Europe. Instead of discussing powers and policy areas, **a problem-solving approach is needed. In other words, how can the international and European levels contribute to solving problems that older people are facing:** adapted and affordable housing, access to care, age-friendly cities and communities, full participation in all aspects of society? In other words: How can Europe, cities and municipalities, regions and states help improve their senior policy? More investments in social services and adapted housing, criteria for age-friendly cities, villages and communities, promotion of good public transport in rural areas.

We had – before and in the margin of this conference - a very interesting and inspiring meeting with **Milan Brglez**, MEP S&D from Slovenia and co-president from the EP interest group on intergenerational solidarity.

At the end of the year, we were confronted with a proposal from the European Commission for a **revised directive for European driving licenses**. The Commission's proposal envisaged a mandatory test of the driving abilities of seniors in all member states. The senior organizations assess this as an unlawful discrimination on the basis of age. In this context, we had extensive contacts in the S&D group of the European Parliament. Together with AGE, we were ultimately able to convince the majority of the parliamentary transport committee of our arguments. We look forward to the vote in the plenary session.

Activities and conferences

Unlike previous years, we did not organize a central activity around **April 29, the European Day of Intergenerational Solidarity**. In contrast, our member organizations organized activities e.g. in Madrid, Malta, Basel and Brussels.

On **June 2 and 3**, the ESO **semestrial seminar took place in Malta**, organized thanks to our vice president **Anthony Degiovanni**. We met **Jo Etienne Abela**, minister for active Ageing and Dr. **Marvin Formosa**, Director UN Institute on Ageing and discussed on ageing policies. We informed us on the work of the **Maltese Commissioner for older persons**, we reflected together with Dr. **Mary Vella**, first Commissioner, how we could promote such initiatives in our member states.

We also discussed a proposal for an **EU Commissioner for older persons** in the next European Commission with MEP **Cyrus Engerer** and thought about a possible **European initiative on digitalization in banking and services sector** with MEP **Alex Agius Saliba**, vice president of the S&D group in the European Parliament.

On the PES-Congress in Malaga ESO organized a **fringe – meeting “Seniors define our future!? How to involve them in our work and campaigns on November 11**. We exchanged good practices and ideas on the involvement of seniors in politics and in campaigning. Seniors are not only symbols and witnesses of the past; just as young people are more than a symbol of the future. Seniors, almost 30% of the voters, want to be recognized as full members of society, as actors of the present and as co-creators of the future. Nothing about us without us! We had an interesting exchange of views with **Mariqueta Vasques** and **Juan Gabriel Martínez Arcas** from PSOE Mayores and with **Bernardo Ramos** from the PSOE PES Activist in Madrid, about their work with seniors and with party members in their party. We were happy that **Alicia Homs and Iratxe García**, chair of our group in the EP, gave their input into the discussion. **Nothing about us, without us!**

On **December 1**, we organized, facilitated by our PSOE-Mayores representants Mariqueta Vasques and Juan Gabriel Martinez Arcas, our **Autumn seminar in Madrid on Adapted housing and care for seniors**. In preparation for this seminar, we launched a “participatory project on adapted housing for seniors” asking member organizations and national parties to inform us about good practices, challenges on this item and to look how on European level, policies could be helpful to reach better conditions for national, regional and local initiatives concerning adapted housing and care for seniors.

We discussed about the added value that the European Union can provide to local, regional and national authorities in the realization of their policy for more and better adapted housing and care for seniors. A very inspiring exchange of views at our ESO seminar was with the former Minister of the Baskan Country, **Sergio Murillo Corzo**, together with architect **Elena Morena Garcia**, with our members of the General Assembly.

Representations outside

ESO remained a full member in **AGE European Platform**. Here, we also endeavour to defend the rights of older people in Europe. We were active in the AGE Board and general assembly. We also placed our own priorities on the AGE agenda: decent income and adapted housing and care, age friendly cities and communities and solidarity between generations, monitoring the access to fundamental and human rights, dualization provoked by digitalization from services.

We worked with AGE Europe on a memorandum for the European elections and established contacts to key actors in our PES family. We had an interesting exchange of views with the team from the S&D group responsible for relations with civil society and introduced AGE-Europe to our own PES staff.

We supported the efforts to achieve an EU age-equality strategy and welcomed the fact that AGE has reached a joint statement together with the European Youth Forum.

Management activities

ESO organized **5 board meetings and 4 general assemblies in 2023** in order to manage the operation of ESO. There were also several on-line consultations and contacts on the organization from the secretary between President and Secretary general. All these meetings were organized by on-line tools.

Overview interventions and meetings

Name of meeting	Date	Location
PES social network	26 January	Brussels
Contact with PES staff	31 January	Brussels
Contact Kabinet Minister Vandenbroucke (Belgian Presidency)	31 January	Brussels
PES Coordination	2 February	On-line
Preparation Meeting from OEWG13 (AGE)	9 February	On-line
Preparatory meeting ECB working group digital inclusion (AGE)	22 February	On-line
ECB Working group digital euro and digital inclusion	23 February	On-line
<i>PES economical and financial network</i>	27 February	Brussel
ESO Board followed by General assembly	30 March	On-Line
AGE Debriefing OEWG13	18 April	On-line
PES social network	25 April	Brussels
ESO Board meeting	28 April	On-line
Intergenerational dialogue on housing in Brussels	29 April	Brussel
Meeting with PES staff (Saar Vanbueren)	23 Mai	Brussel
ESO General assembly	1 June	Malta
ESO seminar on ageing policy	2 June	Malta
PES coordination team	22 June	Online
Meeting with PES staff preparation congress	4 Jule	Brussel
Meeting cabinet Dermagne (EU presidency digitalisation)	6 Jule	On-line
Meeting cabinet Dermagne (EU presidency digitalisation)	1 august	On-line
Meeting cabinet Dermagne (EU presidency digitalisation)	23 August	Brussel
ESO Board Meeting	1 September	On-line
AGE working group on digitalization	9 Oktober	On-line
PES Social network	10 Oktober	Brussel
S&D staff on driver's license	11 Oktober	Brussel

ESO Board Meeting	17 October	On-line
ESO General Assembly	24 October	On-line
S&D meeting staff civil society	25 October	Brussel
ESO – AGE meeting	30 October	Brussel
Meeting with Milan Brglez (MEP-S&D)	7 November	Brussel
YES fringe meeting – Adelante Europe	9 November	Malaga
ESO Fringe meeting – seniors define the future!?! -	10 November	Malaga
ESO Board meeting	21 November	Internet
S&D staff meeting with AGE and ESO	27 November	Brussel
EESC – AGE Conference on present and future EU senior policy	29 November	Madrid
AGE General Assembly (representation ESO)	30 November	Madrid
ESO General Assembly	30 November	Madrid
ESO Seminar on adapted housing and care for seniors	1 December	Madrid
PES Coordination team	7 December	On-line
FEPS meeting with President	12 December	Brussel

Brussel, January 2024

Jos Bertrand / ESO president