

Dear esteemed guests, dear Rosemarie Kurz, dear former mayor Alfred Stingl,

We, as the city of Graz, are very delighted to welcome you and **your team** and this wonderful conference in our City Hall today for **EURAGs 60th anniversary**. We know very well how much work it takes to organize a conference and how difficult it is to sustain an organization for such a long period. For 60 years you have been an important voice for older persons and I want to congratulate you and thank you for that.

We live in trying times. Our society has been sliding from one crisis to the next for years now. Starting with the economic crisis since 2007 to the pandemic; from the ecological crisis which is worsening, to wars around the world, which have now culminated in the attack of the Russian regime on Ukraine.

In recent months, social and economic problems have mounted also in our country and in our city. Almost everyone is severely affected by inflation and rising prices on energy, electricity, rent, and basic goods. Some social groups are particularly affected, among them seniors with a minimum pension. Particularly women, having worked only part-time or doing unpaid housework for long periods in their lives, who are now suffering from old-age poverty. **By the same time**, we should not forget, that seniors with different countries of birth, different cultures living in Graz and Austria may have special needs and interests that have to be addressed.

Yet, not all serious issues affecting the elderly are due to the rising prices as of late. The care crisis, the fact that there are **not enough** workers **getting** too little pay **who are** caring for the elderly and the sick, has been long in the making – particularly in Styria. There just aren't enough care workers and nurses in order to tend to the need in our hospitals and foster homes.

Another huge problem for many seniors is loneliness and social isolation. When people lose their loved ones, they need support and the opportunity to further participate in social life. Unfortunately, the economic possibilities for such participation are often lacking, leading to a vicious cycle of further loneliness and social isolation.

All of this means that there is a great responsibility for us in a leading political function. We urgently need to find answers or otherwise many people will be left behind. The City of Graz and its Office for Seniors will seek to prevent that from happening, even though our means are limited.

The Office for Seniors **organizing** the “Summer for Seniors” and the “Café Graz” has reopened after the COVID-Pandemic. These are great opportunities for seniors to get together and socialize. Our “Senior Card” enables all seniors from age 55 onward to participate in many aspects of social life, in cultural and educational activities, for a very decent price or for free. Needless to say that other social contributions of our city help those in most dire need, among them many seniors. Our Social Card **and** our „Graz-Helps“ fund, benefits housing. Many other instruments that we have created, assist people in living a decent life. We will and we have to work even more on sustaining these benefits in worsening times.

To conclude, I want to thank you again for all the work that you do for a long period of time, for your important contributions **for our societies worldwide**. I want to wish you a successful and enriching conference and a pleasant stay in our city.