

Contribution at the EURAG 60th Anniversary Conference
"60 years of EURAG in changing Europe. EURAG's origins, achievements, current concerns and the necessary mission for the future"
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»EURAG - Value in Diversity, Investment for the Future«

Dear colleagues, dear guests, ladies and gentlemen!

Allow me first to congratulate the EURAG management and all the loyal membership on the great jubilee. Congratulating the management, on behalf of my organization and on my own behalf, I thank you for all the efforts and successes achieved so far, and I wish you successful work in the coming years as well. Congratulations also for the excellent organization of this celebratory event. Thanks to the creators of historical records, valuable for us who joined EURAG later.

I am using today's opportunity to convey to you some personal findings and views on the functioning and role of EURAG - unlike my contributions at our other meetings, which were mostly based on the functioning of my Slovenian organization. .

INTRODUCTION

I started working as a volunteer in the Slovenian Federation of the Elderly in 2010 and was asked to improve international cooperation and intensify the involvement of Slovenian pensioners, the 200,000 members of our organization, in the international environment. We were a member of EURAG and I found interesting information in the records that this European association held a congress in Ljubljana in 2005. The first concrete experience of the association and its membership was the meeting of the General Council in Luxembourg in 2013. For me, despite many years of practice in international meetings, this was a completely new experience -the diversity of participants, from experts to practitioners in various fields, an informal approach, warmth in relationships, electronic communication (I myself also had a contribution on paper that was not recorded), bearers of research results, good practices... The very first meeting was therefore a specific learning experience. an hour.

Although the aging of society is one of humanity's greatest achievements, it is accompanied by a host of social changes and the interests of rapid globalized economic growth, a new era of restated industrialization, which in practice often means pushing certain social groups to its edge. Discrimination, neglect, isolation, violence, abuse, poverty are circumstances for an unenviable situation for many older people. **Ageism is present everywhere. But I am sure that the majority of us older**

people are in good shape, very active, that we manage stereotypes and prejudices about us and our aging, and we successfully deal with discrimination. EURAG's activities make an important contribution to the prevention of this social deviation.

OPERATION OF EURAG

In the years since I have been participating in the meetings, the **General Council and accompanying professional conferences have touched upon the most pressing challenges accompanying aging and the situation of older people.** I will mention only a few of the most highlighted ones: the operation of our Memory Training Center in the European area and beyond, also in overseas countries; lifelong education and training; seniors as training providers; issues of adequate pensions: access to health services; poverty; how from isolation and solitude; how we nurture; homes for the elderly; prevention of social isolation; intergenerational cooperation and solidarity; forms of participation; how to help with abuse and domestic violence; silver economy; non-pharmaceutical measures in healthcare; improving and changing living conditions; silver tourism; the influence of organizations of the elderly on decision-making in society; Ukraine and the situation of older people...

The **Covid epidemic** limited us somewhat in the possibilities of meeting, but did not stop it. At the monthly online meetings, **we followed the events and the situation** and the experiences of older people in current situations and procedures from different perspectives.

Despite the strong voluntary engagement, **we have launched some projects and created Internet networks** with programs that work.

We **published Statements to the public** and defined ourselves in them regarding certain phenomena. We reacted to the military intervention in Ukraine, which strongly affected older population, and we helped there with concrete forms of assistance. **Learning from each other** has been and still is.

In short: We have achieved the goals set out in the EURAG mission statement from 2009, pointing out the need for effective policies and measures for:

- independent living of older people in a safe environment with access to health and social services and care,
- financial security, especially with an adequate income and protection of their savings,
- access to lifelong learning, and to culture and
- for self-help and ensuring adequate representation of the interests of older generations in society.

We have **achieved recognition** at the EU level and beyond, we even reach across the Atlantic by training memory. We mark **the progress in our local organizations** that the connection in the wider political and geographical space means strengthening of power and greater success in enforcing demands in each individual member and

globally.

EURAG CHARACTERISTICS

What is the extraordinary value of EURAG for me? I say to colleagues or readers of our informative materials:

- EURAG is an independent association, independent of all influential social factors,
- Brings together older people and those who work for the older population,
- Justifies the diversity of individuals in the age group, which in practical use is most often referred to as 65+
- Works with volunteers, without a professional support structure,
- Is also financially independent (only membership fee and eventual donations, consulting, training...)
- Respects the personal and interest diversity of the participants
- Respects individuality and collective efforts and experiences
- Crosses the boundaries between generations - different age groups
- In joint efforts for a better tomorrow, brings together experts of various profiles, researchers, lecturers, practitioners...
- Respects gender equality
- Informs, encourages and empowers its membership to defend the rights and opportunities of the elderly
- Is free to take positions on certain phenomena and challenges important for older residents and to submit requests to politics and government structures at all levels,
- Goes beyond the limitations of political formations and systems with the cooperation of older persons and their organizations
- By connecting organizations and individuals, it crosses the borders of the EU and thus opens the door to closer cooperation in a wider political and geographical area.
- Reduces the differences between Western and Eastern cultural patterns and models of democracy.
- Has counseling and training options
- EURAG has his own website and manages electronic communication
- Along with the joint organizational efforts of the members, EURAG enables familiarization with the concrete environments in which they operate and thus contributes to the personal experiences and enrichment of the members who attend the meetings.

THE FUTURE

Our characteristic and way of working are a valuable base for future work, which will take place in uncertain and less stable circumstances than the current period. We can expect turbulence in international politics and thus disruptions in the economy. We will be happy if armed conflicts do not spread. We are in for a worsening of climate and weather conditions. It will be necessary to adapt to the various extremes/catastrophes caused by these changes. The volume of migration will increase. In their greed for profit, multinational economic corporations will expand

their influence and exploit various situations to their advantage (for example, the energy crisis). The possibilities of populations and entities at the national level will shrink.

Adapted liberal concepts will further, albeit covertly, limit social approaches. Social differences will increase, even though we all talk about the fact that they should decrease. Inequality will become an even greater social challenge than it is today. Poverty will persist in some areas and in certain social groups. We are not yet done with the possibility of health epidemics and pandemics. Digitization, which appears as a certain solution in progress, will eventually also become a block for some groups, among whom there is a high probability of older people. The introduction of robots and artificial intelligence will force us to search for new forms of action and realization of our human creative identity.

Extensions of the current activity within the framework of EURAG provide us with the potential to manage possible crises, because we are, and even now, we are proving that we can.

I summarize from the 2016 Strategy that we have the opportunity "by combining information about the real needs, values, interests, abilities, wishes, opinions of older people, to offer such information to the actors involved in decision-making, that policies, strategies, as well as procedures in the field of goods and service are more inclusive and for the benefit of the older population, which also represents the consumers during creation".

And also: "EURAG will always keep its independent position, which is a "sine qua non" for the reasonableness of its policy and the effectiveness of its interventions in the interest of older people", as our president Dirk Jareé says in one of his works.

SOME CONSIDERATIONS FOR FUTURE ACTION

We can work in two directions:

- 1. strengthening and training of the membership and**
- 2. enforcement of the organization and representation of the interests of the elderly in society.**

Ad 1.

- **Expansion and enrichment of membership.** We have some important and influential members from countries outside the EU. aspirations for inclusion still exist in other countries/organizations in the eastern part of Europe, if I mention only Armenia, Georgia, Moldova. Even the area of Mediterranean Europe and the Western Balkans is not yet covered. We have an exceptional opportunity to connect people and organizations with different mindsets and attitudes, which we bring together through cooperation. We are on the right track with the cooperation of many experts who enrich the content of our activities and the accumulation of new knowledge. We also need to include older migrants, who are a treasure trove of experiences that we do not have ourselves.

- **Expansion of the Center for Memory Training** and its promotion in the world.
- **Strengthening the power of the membership** / with knowledge, support, information.../ and thereby asserting the rights of the elderly and increasing the possibility of inclusion.
- **Promoting lifelong education**, learning and skill retention, both by influencing the bearers of this in society and among its own membership. We must support **individualization** of approaches where possible. The results of new approaches and **research results in this field must reach the widest possible circle of the population.**
- **Participation in digitization processes.** We must encourage the training of the membership and the olders in general in the use of digital tools and programs, and in this garbage continue with the already started concrete courses.
- **Maintaining classic forms of communication where necessary.** We must not allow the introduction of new technologies to abandon all classic access to things that are necessary for older people to exercise their rights and cover their daily needs. Even those who do not master digital skills must have access to all information and services.
- **Projects and networking** are already present in EURAG (our gratitude and support to the holders) with an increase in knowledge, with more membership and influential areas, we could expand this even further.

Ad 2.

- **Participation** We must insist on the participation of the elderly in decision-making at all levels / elections, formation of councils at the local and national level, serving in administrative and supervisory committees of various institutions and funds, insurance companies...
- **International documents** We must be involved in the creation and consideration of international documents that are created in the institutions of the EU and international organizations, especially the UN and its specialized organizations.
- **Consideration of the entire life course** in the aging process and the situation of the elderly. We must encourage the cooperation of social groups of **different ages** in solving current challenges and influence the strengthening of **solidarity.**
- **Connect more with other non-governmental organizations/** ecological, youth organizations, other senior organizations.../ and strengthen the power of civil society (The authority operates on the principle of divide and rule.)
- **Preservation and accessibility of public services.** Let's not agree to the fact that the introduction of new technologies and digitization, as well as the privatization of public services - healthcare and care, would cause new stratification and discrimination. That is why we must make a special effort to preserve the public sector. Let's support efforts to make healthcare services and care accessible to all seniors under conditions they can afford.
- **Financial situation of retired generations** We must not abandon the possibility of preventing the increase in poverty. Social and economic dynamics and globalization push the elderly more and more to the margins of society and into poverty. Let's work together to set minimum wages in Europe.

- **Statistics** We must strengthen the pressure on Eurostat and statistical offices in the countries for better, more differentiated statistic for the 65+. Features, if we consider for example. only the five-year groups from 65 to 90 differ significantly. Even individually, we are still active personalities and not an unformed mass. Our writer, psychologist Vid Pečjak wrote: "The only similarity between seniors is that everyone is different."

- **Artificial intelligence** We are aware that the development of society will be based on the introduction of artificial intelligence, robotics, but at the same time we must not agree to technology that interferes with our privacy without consent

- **Website** Let's maintain it and enrich it. What about various social networks?

- We must intensify **cooperation with the media** and utilize the power of media promotion.

- **Volunteerism** We work voluntarily and we support the form of activity. However, we cannot allow volunteering to take over the tasks it has to perform or provided by the state.

- **Non-material recognition** We must study the possibilities of expressing some thanks and social recognition to the most active member organizations and individuals. Let's participate in processes that study and support such practice.

All of the above will surely increase the awareness of the elderly in countries/member organizations about greater social power when it is based on the wider international involvement of actors.

My thoughts came to WHAT. Our task will be to define HOW, WHO and so on.

Thank you for your attention!