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Opening Speech at the EURAG Conference on
**“National Policies on Ageing 2024 and New Approaches in Albania!
Issues, Concepts and Positions in EU Countries”**
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Honourable hosts and participants, dear colleagues, and dear friends!

It is a great honour for me - as president of the European Federation of Older Persons, EURAG - to open this conference on **“National Policies on Ageing 2024 and New Approaches in Albania! Issues, Concepts and Positions in EU Countries”**. This important event has been organised so well by the former Mayor of a Tirana district, Prof. Shpetim Cami, now a member of our association. It is supported very generously by the Albanian Ministry of Health and Social Protection, by the United Nations Population Fund, UNFPA, by the University College of Business of Tirana, and by the Municipality of Tirana which offer us such great hospitality.

Many thanks to all of you who made the conference in Albania possible – and a very warm welcome to our participating EURAG members from so many European countries as well as to colleagues and friends from Albania.

I am particularly happy to be today with you all in beautiful Tirana because I remember so well that, exactly 10 years ago, I had the great pleasure to speak here at a similar conference. The conference in 2014 concentrated on **“Burning Problems and Needs of Ageing in Albanian Society”**.

What a great pleasure that after 10 years we can continue our dialogue and examine in common what has changed in ageing policies since 2014 and where strong progress and qualitative improvement are urgently needed.

Dear colleagues and friends!

The European Federation of older Persons was founded in 1962 – that means 62 years ago - by pioneers of so-called “work with the aged” from various European countries. It was the very first European organisation for and of senior citizens. The objective at that time was to provide senior

citizens with a common platform for cooperation, for the promotion of their self-identity, and for mutual exchange. It was meant to create an opportunity to express the concerns of older persons on the political scene and in society with a single voice, particularly at European level.

Today, our mission is to promote the conditions of older persons' life in societal, social, and political terms by advocating, among others, for the maintenance of an independent life, for the strengthening of older persons' participation in decision-making processes concerning their living conditions, for the improvement of their situation and integration in society, and for the prevention of any kind of discrimination on grounds of age.

Dear colleagues and friends!

Allow me to reiterate some essential aspects of what I have already argued ten years ago.

In the "Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union" we find an article on the rights of the elderly that says "*The Union recognises and respects the rights of the elderly to lead a life of dignity and independence and to participate in social and cultural life*".

We generally recognise as basic needs of a person: sufficient financial means, good food, appropriate health care, adequate education, decent housing, personal security, etcetera. However, it is also very important to fully recognise the dignity of older persons, their need for respect, their longing for independence and self-determination, as well as their desire to be involved in and contribute to the community. These aspirations are an integral part of human existence at all ages and constitute key elements of our European societal concept and value system.

The State must actively endeavour that the conditions for a life in dignity be created for all citizens, independently of their age or other personal characteristics. Full implementation of this commitment is required and constitutes one of the most important and noble responsibilities of State. But the State is not alone in performing this task. The advantages of close cooperation between public authorities and civil society in this domain is absolutely evident and should be fully understood and actively exercised by both parties.

A fundamental ethical obligation of society at large is to fully recognise and value the life-long contributions of the older generation to the achievements, the richness, and the opportunities of the nation. Consequently, society must offer to the elderly the best possible living conditions and opportunities for their later years - without the fear of being put aside or ignored by society.

This also means that we must carefully consider in our deliberations the actual position of older persons in society, their very often precarious living conditions, the needs of good services for them, their respective capacities and strength, but also their weaknesses and limitations. We must never forget but grant the highest attention to the dignity of older persons, their need for respect, their longing for independence and self-determination, as well as their desire to be involved in and contribute to the community. Older persons must not be considered as dependent objects of policies, programs, and services but as rather as full political subjects who need to be taken very seriously and must be involved in decision-making processes concerning their living conditions – according to the saying “nothing on us without us!”.

I have just received the “*National Action Plan on Ageing, 2020 – 2024*” of Albania and, after having quickly examined it, I am very impressed by its content in terms of concepts and implementation strategies. Also, I have been informed that you are presently already working intensely on a further 5-years Action Plan on Ageing.

Now, I have the honour to give to the Minister of Health and Social Protection, to the representative of the United Nations Population Fund, and to the Rector of the University College of Business a publication with the title “*Making Choices for a Society for All Ages*” – “*A White Paper with about 135 recommendations for decision makers*”.

This publication summarises the results of a 5-years research project, financed by the European Union, in which EURAG has played a major role – and which has been translated into thirteen European languages. I hope that you will find in this publication ideas and proposals which are useful for your further work concerning the older population of Albania.

Dear colleagues and friends!

I cordially wish you a lot of success in your efforts to make politicians, administrators and also the market forces understand that they must honour their obligations towards the older population, that they have a high moral and material responsibility towards them – and that, by the way, they will be the next generation to enjoy – or perhaps even to suffer – the conditions they are creating or maintaining for older persons today and tomorrow.

Good luck to you all and thanks for having listened to me so patiently.

Dirk Jarré – President of EURAG

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