

Extra-ordinary meeting on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of the European Association of former Members of Parliament of the Member States of the Council of Europe

*Thursday 28th February 2019, Paris
Résidence de l'Assemblée Nationale, room Victor Hugo*

Speech of Mr. Uwe Holtz, honorary President:

« 25 years of the European Association of former Members of Parliament of the Member States of the Council of Europe: a success story? »

Happy 25th anniversary, European Association of former Members of Parliament!

Dear President Rune Rydén! Madame Carole Bureau-Bonnard, Vice-President of the National Assembly! Dear colleagues, ladies and gentlemen!

I would like to begin my speech in French and to continue later on in English. *[This version is only in English.]*

1. 25 years ago, the group of five former parliamentarians associations from Belgium, France, Germany, Italy and Turkey officially created the “European Association of former Members of Parliament of the Member States of the Council of Europe” – shortly FP-AP.
2. FP-AP’s *raison d’être* consists of contributing to the European construction and a better knowledge of the European institutions, of being attached to common values, true democracy, human rights and consolidation of peace, of favouring social and economic progress, of supporting sustainable development and a human globalization – and of encouraging mutual understanding and relations of friendship.
3. FP-AP’s enlargement, today numbering 23 member associations, is a success history.
4. The “Five” were followed (in the order of their accession) by: Cyprus, Netherlands, Spain, Greece, Ireland, Luxembourg, Austria, Switzerland, Malta,

Portugal, European Parliament, Sweden, Andorra, Poland, Lithuania, United Kingdom, Finland and Norway.

5. In the future, this enlargement success should be prolonged.
6. Other success pages were written by different FP-AP activities, above all by colloquies, seminars and meetings.
7. Regarding the colloquies and in particular the relevant declarations, I just give some examples: in Rome (2002) on “European Values”, in Berlin (2004) on “European Political Integration”, in Malta (2012) on “Democratic Transition in the southern Mediterranean and in the Middle East”, in Brussels (2014) on “The Challenges of Democracy”, in Lyon (2016) on “Immigration”, and in Strasbourg (2018) on “The Future of Europe”.
8. The elaboration and the adoption of all the declarations (until today ten) are highlights of our reflections and proposed actions. The member associations are asked to contribute to the “birth” of the declarations. Each declaration is also very important for the reassurance of our European Association and for us; this also applies to the European Charter of Former Parliamentarians (2011). Sometimes, the Declarations facilitated certain activities in our own countries, in various European institutions and in young democracies; however, they deserve/d a higher regard by the active policy-makers and the interested public.
9. Member associations organized inspiring seminars on different subjects. Just a few examples:
 - In 2003, Turkey on “Turkey - a European country”,
 - In 2004, Ireland on the occasion of the Irish EU presidency,
 - In 2009, Portugal on the role and status of former parliamentarians and their associations,
 - In 2015, Austria on "Seventy Years of United Nations",
 - In 2016, Sweden on "the Arctic, a hot topic",
 - In 2018, Belgium on "Europa Quo Vadis".

10. Besides the general political aims, our Association of former Parliamentarians aims to develop friendly contacts and to share information with other associations. All personal contacts between our countries are important.
11. FP-AP members invited from time to time representatives to special events, in particular to associations' birthdays, e.g. Belgium, Italy and Germany. Thanks to FP-AP, Polish and German former MPs met for joint consultations.
12. Exciting meetings and lessons learned enriched the participants:
 - Many of us could discover European institutions in Strasbourg, Brussels and Luxembourg.
 - It was fascinating to learn something about the specific political systems in Andorra and Switzerland.
 - Participants met presidents, ministers, experts, new colleagues; visited Parliaments, government buildings, town halls, institutes, museums and monuments in all the host countries of FP-AP events: in Ankara, Athens, Berlin, Bern, Kiev, Lisbon and Madeira, Lyon, Madrid and Toledo, Nicosia and Limassol, Paris, Rome, Stockholm, Valetta and Gozo, Vienna and the UN City, The Hague and Delft as well as in Warsaw, where we commemorated in June 2014 the beginning of the two World Wars.
 - Colleagues could smell the flavor of united Germany in Berlin and feel the sadness about the still divided island of Cyprus.
13. All these resounding FP-AP activities could not have been realized
 - without the help of the member associations – in cooperation with the FP-AP secretariat;
 - not without the manifold efforts as well as political and thematic inputs by members of the Bureau and the General Assembly, by the thirteen presidents in the past 25 years and the many more vice-presidents of our Association, and by the different rapporteurs of the colloquies;
 - not without the assistance of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, our official cooperation partner since 2009.

Mega-thanks are going to all of them!

14. Two points where there is space for improvement

- So far, women are underrepresented in the two organs of our Association. According to the FP-AP website¹, only 9 of the 23 member associations include women and just 12 of the 59 delegates nominated for the Bureau and the General Assembly by the respective associations are women. I am sure that this will change in the future. Women are *en marche*!
 - The relevance of the EU is widely known and of the Council of Europe widely unknown. FP-AP helped to narrow the knowledge gap – at least among our own ranks. Walter Schwimmer, rapporteur for Europe’s future, was a great facilitator in this respect, too. The pan-European house, constituted by the Council of Europe, is based on the three pillars of democracy, human rights and the rule of law and accommodates rooms with many, many conventions and treaties. Because of its potential and the contributions to European unity, the Council of Europe deserves more attention and cooperation with other entities.
15. There would be no functioning of the FP-AP without the magnificent support provided by the French National Assembly in Paris (FP-AP’s social seat) and the Belgian Senate in Brussels (the administrative seat).
16. We are very grateful to the French National Assembly for all the facilities provided to us. We are very grateful for the restless support given by the French former members association and by the various first FP-AP vice-presidents appointed by the French association (during the last years Jean Pierre Fourré). Un très grand merci!
17. Since the very beginning of the European Association, Mr. Roland Roblain, the then administrative director of the Belgian Senate, has been and still is the *spiritus rector* and the highly competent FP-AP Secretary General. Madame Lisette Hermans-Nelissen is our highly valuable secretary, always stepping in where and when needed as well as our good human relations officer.

¹ <https://www.fpap-europe.org>

As our treasurers vice-presidents and our auditors testify, our accountant Mr. Krist Decannière is managing *comme il faut* our annual budget. Furthermore, he is our very competent webmaster and photographer.

Due to their experiences in the Belgian Senate, all the three long standing personalities form a good, professional team. They, you contributed to a very high degree to the European Association's success. Our heartfelt thanks to you! We are lucky to have you.

18. Congratulation to the European Association on its silver jubilee!

The European Association knows that mutual understanding, cooperation and solidarity for the common good and the wellbeing of all Europeans will have to prevail over still existing disagreements, tensions and conflicts.

Let us strengthen our efforts in order to help overcome autocratic, nationalistic, racist movements and temptations. Inspired by our overarching leitmotif :

The future of Europe: never again war – never again dictatorship,
living together in peace and democracy!

All the best for the next 25 years!

See also U. Holtz: History, objectives, organization and activities of the European association of former members of parliament of the member states of the Council of Europe (www.fpap-europe.org/history-en) –

Historique, objectifs, organisation et activités de l'Association européenne des anciens parlementaires des pays membres du Conseil de l'Europe (www.fpap-europe.org/historique-fr).