

A message from
H.E. Mr Karl Erjavec, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs
of the Republic of Slovenia

In February this year, when Slovenia officially launched the 2012 European Year on Active Ageing and Solidarity between Generations, I welcomed the initiative as an important opportunity. It enables us to draw attention to the great contributions that the elderly have made to their communities; to challenge the persistent negative stereotypes of ageing and to promote greater solidarity between generations. This is an important chance for us to work together to build a society for all ages.

Currently, 14% of Slovenia's population is below the age of 15, compared to 17% of people above 65. In 2060, the percentage of the population under 15 will be the same, whereas the percentage of those over 65 will be almost double, making up one third of the country's population. The social, economic and political consequences of this demographic change are immense. However, we must look outside our borders as well as within. Slovenia is not alone in dealing with the implications of growing older; all the countries in the world, both rich and poor, are ageing. Older people constitute the fastest-growing age group in many developing countries, and these countries will experience ageing at accelerated rates over the next 30 years. By 2050, 80% of those over retirement age will be living in developing countries.

Four out of five older people do not receive a pension. In developing countries, many people continue working into their old age, usually because they have no choice. Family structures are changing, and traditional forms of support for older people are in decline. Older people must manage their incomes in order to provide for themselves and increasingly for young children in their care. They do this with very little support or recognition. Households headed by older people are poorer than average. However, older people are sadly all too often invisible in development frameworks that fail to effectively integrate ageing issues. The EU should take the opportunity to start promoting age-friendly approaches to aid programming at the national level that strive to remove the barriers preventing older people from accessing essential support and services. This would also help tackle the intergenerational transmission of poverty and accelerate progress towards EU poverty reduction targets and the Millennium Development Goals. As the world's biggest aid donor, the European Union (EU) is uniquely placed to show global leadership on this issue.

I was delighted to see Slovenia participating alongside other EU member states in the new intergenerational campaign 'Make it Ageless' which was launched recently to mark the European Day of Solidarity Between the Generations. The campaign brings an international flavour to efforts to build intergenerational solidarity. Make it Ageless is raising awareness among younger Europeans about what it means to grow older in Europe and other countries around the world. It calls for younger and older Europeans to stand together and urge the EU to show greater recognition of the needs and contributions of older people in EU development aid.

It is important to bear in mind that we need to start addressing the problems of ageing beyond the borders of the EU. In this respect, the EU should take this issue into account in the process of negotiating aid programming for the 2014–2020 budget period and start promoting age-friendly aid that protects the rights of older people. I will do my best to promote this idea and I also invite Slovenians of all ages to join forces in support of the Make It Ageless campaign.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'K. Erjavec', with a large, stylized initial 'K'.

Karl ERJAVEC

Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs
of the Republic of Slovenia