

# **United Nations Economic Committee on Europe (UNECE) Ministerial Conference on Ageing**

Vienna 18 – 20 September 2012

## **EFOS participants:**

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The UNECE conference was an excellent opportunity for EFOS to present itself as a stakeholder for the education of older persons in a wide framework of NGO's and political institutions and to influence the policies on ageing. Rather surprisingly the UNECE also includes Canada, the USA and the countries of the former Soviet Union,.

The Vienna conference was a checkpoint for the progress of the programme that was issued by the previous ministerial conference in Madrid in 2007.

The conference consisted of three parts:

- NGO Forum on 18 September
- Expert Panels on 19 September
- Ministerial Panels on 20 September

Thanks to our membership of the UN Committee on Ageing and the advisory status at the UN that goes with it, EFOS was entitled to participate at all three parts. But it was unclear for quite a while, how many delegates we could send. Till the end of July we thought it was just one. Then our delegates in the UN Committee on Ageing were invited too.

## **Preparation**

Early this year the NGO's got the opportunity to submit amendments for the draft of the Ministerial Declaration. All these amendments, together with the amendments from the various governments were reviewed by the editorial commission and partly included in a next draft of the declaration. This draft too was sent to the NGO's for comment.

On behalf of EFOS I made use of both opportunities to submit amendments about the importance of education for the well-being and the health of older persons. But I must admit that I was positively surprised that education for older persons was already mentioned in the first draft, though with, in my opinion, insufficient emphasis on the positive effects on the life of the elderly.

The NGO's were also invited to submit proposals for a political declaration that was to be formulated by the NGO Forum and then presented to the Ministerial conference. I made use of this opportunity too, pointing out that Lifelong Learning is still considered by many Governments to stop with retirement. I also added the appeals to the policymakers of our EFOS Manifesto.

For all my contributions I consulted the board beforehand.

## **NGO Forum**

At the NGO-Forum delegates of national and international organisations from approx. 50 countries discussed the content of the „NGO Political Declaration“ that was to be presented to the Ministerial conference two days later. A draft based on the written contributions of the NGO's formed the starting point of the discussions. This draft already contained a paragraph on Lifelong Learning that corresponded more or less with our ideas. The final version of this paragraph is

UNECE member states are asked to:

*(11.f) Guarantee access to lifelong learning across the life course, recognising that access to affordable high-quality education, informal and non-formal learning for people of all ages is necessary for strengthening older persons' participation in society, increasing social inclusion and reducing discrimination.*

It was good to notice that our contribution was supported by other organisations that also consider Lifelong Learning as an important part of active ageing.

### **Expert Panels und Ministerial Panels**

On the second and third day experts and government delegates took the floor. We were pleased to notice that Lifelong Learning was quite often mentioned as an important element of active ageing. At the ministerial panels the University of the Third Age was mentioned several times as a good example. This was also highlighted by the rapporteur. .

The NGO Political Declaration was presented to the ministers. The ministers also issued their own declaration that mentions lifelong learning in various paragraphs. As an example a paragraph under the heading *II. Participation, non-discrimination and social inclusion of older persons are promoted by*

*(d) Ensuring lifelong access to various forms of high quality education and training, including in advanced technologies*

Overall we can be content that education for older persons has drawn so much attention amongst all the other issues of social security, health, migration, discrimination etc. that of course dominated the major part of the discussions.

24 September 2012

Peter Hug