



EFECW

ECUMENICAL FORUM OF EUROPEAN CHRISTIAN WOMEN

ANNUAL REPORT 2019

In this report, we are happy to inform you about the following events and meetings that enriched, inspired and challenged us during the year of 2019, and that we hold in dear memory especially during the times of confinement and “lock-down” that we are living now:

EFECW Coordinating Committee (CC) meetings: In March 2019, we took the opportunity to have our spring meeting in Corfu alongside the French-speaking Mediterranean neighbourhood meeting. Together with our sisters, we published a statement and call to action in support of the Istanbul Convention against violence against women, which was the topic of the neighbourhood meeting. In October 2019, the CC met again in Uppsala, Sweden, for its autumn meeting, and had the honour of meeting many Swedish women ecumenists.

The **Jackie Stuyt Legacy Fund** supported the following events this year: The neighbourhood meeting in Corfu (March 2019); the Baltic neighbourhood meeting in Tallin, Estonia (May/June 2019); the Russian-speaking neighbourhood meeting in Yerevan, Armenia (September 2019); the conference of the European Society of Women in Theology and Religion (ESWTR) in Louvain, Belgium (September 2019), and finally the two-year

project on interreligious learning in Serbia, which had its second encounter in June 2019.

EFECW was represented at the following **international conferences and assemblies:** Andante (April, in Romania); 10th Assembly of Religions for Peace (August, in Germany); International Committee of the Fellowship of the Least Coin (ICFLC) (Ghana, October); Global Program on Prevention of Son Preference and the Undervaluation of Girls (October, in Armenia).

The **Financial Report 2019** closes our annual report.

Although the last year is only a few months behind us, it already seems very far away. The COVID-19 pandemic has changed our world completely, and we do not yet know of all the consequences that it will bring us. Let us hope that this common experience helps sharpen our view even more for the burning issues of our times, that it nourishes our passion to build solidarity among women in Europe and beyond, that it encourages us to advocate even more fervently for those who have to live in particularly fragile situations and face violence and persecution.

Evelyne Zinsstag, EFECW CC member

Spring Coordinating Committee meeting

27th February – 3rd March 2019, Corfu, Greece

The second meeting of the Coordinating Committee (CC) of EFECW was held in Corfu, Greece. This meeting was a good opportunity to the CC to continue to work together and to develop activities on different areas, as well as to join the neighbourhood meeting for Mediterranean countries organised by the Greek Forum and to share the CC message on the topic of violence against women.



During these three very busy and enriching days, the new CC members, after sharing news from local forums and other activities undertaken by the CC since the last meeting in Vienna and being presented of different aspects of the work of the CC (including a session on finances with the presence of Treasurer Gabi Kienesberger) shared the duties and responsibilities among group members, after setting and deciding on the future activities, as follows:

1. Communication among and with the member Forum organisations of EFECW:
 - a. Next CC and National Coordinators (NC) meetings and General Assembly (GA) preparation (when and where);
 - b. New effective ways to develop “inter-forums” relations and to be well informed about each other;
 - c. Renew and re-establish contacts with all national Forum members, especially those with less contacts, through neighborhood meetings and visits;
2. The empowerment of young and active women in EFECW, by continuing to commit ourselves to the young women’s strategy;
3. Larger visibility and presence of EFECW especially in churches, religious, and civil organisations both at national and European level.
4. Develop spiritual guidelines for EFECW.

Marianna Apresyan, EFECW Co-President

Message of the EFECW Coordinating Committee at the Mediterranean Neighbourhood Meeting

The Coordinating Committee and members of the Mediterranean countries of EFECW gathered in Corfu, Greece to engage with the topic of violence against women. We reflected firstly on the theme in the Bible, with presentations by Myrto Theocharus (Professor, Greek Bible College, Athens) and Despoina Michalaga (Faculty Member, University of Athens). We then considered the current reality of women across Europe as reflected in the Istanbul Convention, presented by Maria Koutatzi (Head of Social Policy and Advocacy, Caritas Greece).

The Istanbul Convention is the first legally-binding instrument to create a comprehensive legal framework and approach to combatting violence against women.

Our call to action

The World Council of Churches released a Statement on Sexual and Gender-Based Violence in November 2018 in Uppsala, which was a call for new commitments and contributions to stop, prevent and respond to sexual and gender-based violence. Reflecting on this and the presentations during our meeting:

1. We urge our members to condemn sexual and gender-based violence and any form of violence against women, children and vulnerable people; to declare such violence a sin;
2. We urge our churches and ecumenical partners to continue working with local organizations and groups in opposition to all forms of sexual and gender-based violence;

3. We support the creation of new and more effective ways for communication and collaboration among churches, and local advocacy groups on gender justice issues, for example the Thursdays in Black Campaign;
4. We urge all remaining European countries to ratify the Istanbul Convention, which focuses on preventing domestic violence, protecting victims and prosecuting accused offenders;
5. We urge all European governments to move quickly to implement the policies and practices that will enable states to enact the Convention;
6. We call for EFECW members to engage nationally on advocacy for the implementation of the Convention.

As the Ecumenical Forum of European Christian Women, we seek to be voices for peace and reconciliation within our churches, communities and the wider world, and we continue to pray for wisdom, peace, justice and compassion to prevail.

Autumn Coordinating Committee meeting

24th-27th October 2019, Uppsala, Sweden

The third meeting of the Coordinating Committee of EFECW was held in Uppsala. During these four days, the CC members shared news from local forums and other activities undertaken by the CC since the last meeting in Corfu and being presented of different aspects of the work of the CC (including results of two neighborhood meetings (in Estonia

and Armenia), representations in ANDANTE, European Society of Women in Theological Research (ESWTR), Conference of European Churches, World Council of Churches, and the International Committee of Fellowship of the Least Coin, results of two working groups within the CC (Forum strategy and Safe space), discussed the planned Young women's seminar, as well as effective communication within the Forum (incl. website, social media, newsletters).

A session on finances was held by the Treasurer Gabi Kienesberger and the NC meeting 2020 in Armenia was discussed in details and tasks shared among the CC members.

The highlight of the meeting was the participation of the reputable Swedish ecumenists: Inger Lise Olsen, Adviser on gender issues for the Church of Sweden, (Nordic Ecumenical Council of Women); Joanna Lilja, Policy Advisor, Church of Sweden; Annika Lindé, Thematic Advisor, the



Church of Sweden; Esther Kazen, General Secretary of the Swedish Ecumenical Women's Council; Cecilia Ralfe-Stelander, National Coordinator; Nausikaa Haupt, the Roman Catholic coordinator in the Christian Council of Sweden; Kajsa Berg and Maria Stjerndorff, Forum for ordained Women in the Church of Sweden; Maria Rengård Sivertsson, Ecumenical work in the University Church in Uppsala; Anne-Christine Lindvall, the Serbian Orthodox

Church in Sweden. Anna-Tora Martin, chair of the Uppsala Ecumenical Women's Council/Forum, Inger Jonasson, Chair for the Swedish WDP, Amanda Björksell and Hanna Lindh, Swedish Change makers. They provided a profound insight into ecumenical work in Sweden.

Natalia Horbal and Carin Gardbring, EFECW CC members

Jacqueline Stuyt Legacy (JSL) Fund Projects

French-speaking Mediterranean neighbourhood meeting

"Damaris the Athenian", Corfu, Greece

Russian-speaking neighbourhood meeting

Ecumenical Forum of Women in Armenia, Yerevan, Armenia

"Gender, Race, Religion: De/Constructing regimes of In/Visibility"

European Society for Theological Research of Women (ESWTR), Louvain, Belgium

"Butterflies for peace"

Baltic neighbourhood meeting, Tallinn, Estonia

"When two or three are together"

Serbian Forum interreligious dialogue project (completed in 2019)

French-speaking Mediterranean neighbourhood meeting

28th February – 3rd March 2019, Corfu, Greece

The 2019 Neighbourhood Meeting was held from February 28 to March 1, 2019 on the Greek island of Corfu. Hosted by the Greek Forum 32 representatives from Armenia, Austria, Cyprus, Greece, France, Serbia, Sweden, Switzerland, Spain, Ukraine together with the EFECW Coordinating Committee, we all enjoyed the meeting in a beautiful surrounding and glorious weather. The Greek Evangelical Church of Corfu as well as the Catholic Archdiocese of Corfu collaborated in this project. The meeting's theme was from John 8:10-11 "Has no one condemned you? ...Neither do I condemn you". The keynote speakers were from the Orthodox, the Roman Catholic and Evangelical Church and their speeches were about violence against women and the prevention and protection described in the law of the Bible and modern secular law.



During the neighbourhood meeting, participants had the unique opportunity to attend two other very important and special meetings:

- a. The world day of prayer joining in prayer Corfu women from all denominations, and
- b. The 200th anniversary celebration of the Hellenic Bible Society, with speeches about the founding of the Ionian Bible Society in Corfu and a concert with music based on the Bible by Corfiot musicians. Corfu is very well known for the numerous excellent bands, orchestras and choirs as well as the great musical tradition they have.

Ersie Antoniadou, Treasurer of Greek EFCW "Damaris the Athenian"

"Butterflies for peace"

Tallinn, Estonia 29th May – 3rd June 2019

The neighbourhood meeting "Round the Baltic sea" took place for the 9th time and was organised by Pille Mägila and Lii Lilleoja. As the wonderful meeting venue, they chose the convent Piritä, one of the convents of the Swedish Brigidine Sisters.

22 women from 8 different nations (Estonia, Lithuania, Poland, Belarus, Finland, Sweden, Scotland and Germany) took part in the meeting. Just as multi-cultural were the denominations (Methodist, Baptist, Finnish Orthodox, Russian Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Evangelical Reformed, Evangelical Lutheran and Presbyterian).

The Neighbourhood meeting took place under the biblical saying from Romans 14:19: *"So then let us follow after things which make for peace, and things whereby we may edify one another."*

Participants prepared the morning and evening prayers. Therefore hearing the texts and prayers in different languages was very impressive.

The program was exceptionally diversified:

On the first day the topic of the bible study was introduced by Helina-Diana Helmdorf, after that we learned something about the history of the monastery and went on an excursion to the old ruins.

In the afternoon we worked with Dr. Einike Pilli on the issue “How do we find peace?” In the evening a workshop organised by the German women on the topic of peace in Europe took place, which inspired many discussions and showcased very divergent views and experiences.

On the second day, we were surprised by Holger Oidjävrv’s task, which really required craftsmanship. Butterflies using thread tension techniques should be designed. It was a lot of fun and inspired conversations and laughter. The colourful butterflies should symbolise networking on long and intertwined roads. Butterflies don’t recognize borders and are symbols of freedom!



Ruins of the old convent

In the afternoon Mari-Ann Kelam talked about peace on our continent. We learned something about her background and history from her birth in a German refugee camp to growing up in the USA.



In the evening we visited the Baptist community nearby, where we held the evening prayer.

On the third day Pia Ruotsala presented the peace process in the context to family life.

Afterwards an excursion to the Estonian Open-Air-Museum took place, where we learned a lot about the early history and life in this country.

Later on, Co-President Fiona Buchanan gave an overview on the European Coordinating Committee. She reported on the latest CC meeting of the Forum on the Greek Island Corfu.

On the fourth day (Sunday) we attended church service in a big Methodist church and enjoyed lunch together. In the afternoon we had the chance to visit the Ukrainian Centre of culture and its creative writing workshop.

Afterwards we visited the old town festival in wonderful summer weather, before there was a cultural "farewell evening". The women from Belarus taught us the technique of traditional straw weaving. The people there are still suffering from the consequences of the Chernobyl catastrophe and are using art as a coping strategy.

On Monday it was time to say goodbye!

Our differences enrich us

These were touching days for all of us. Especially in the lectures of the Estonian speakers we came across our different approaches, faith practices, experiences, images of women etc. Exactly this is the precious particularity about these meetings: Our differences enrich us and this treasure has grown steadily in the course of the ongoing Neighbourhood meetings (since 1995!) and has become an important fundament for intercultural and interreligious dialogue in Europe.

Europe as a peace project is not yet an issue in the countries, not even in Sweden or Finland, but all events have sparked and stirred up discussions, a truly ecumenical fellowship was felt, we prayed together and enjoyed singing together.

The goal of getting women talking, learning about the realities of each other's lives in their contexts, taking suggestions, and working on them has been achieved, and the desire for another meeting was clearly felt. A special goal which was reached was that the Estonian women whisper translated for the Belarusian women. Russian is a language, but not equal with Russia. It is the single woman in the foreground.



The Swedish pastor Evelina Hermansson returned highly motivated, with the idea of founding an EFECW group in northern Sweden.

From Bonhoeffer's "Letters and Papers from Prison", which Pia Ruotsala presented to us, we took the following message of reflection back home: "We must learn to regard people less in the light of what they do or do not do, and more in the light of what they suffer".

Acknowledgements: We would like to sincerely thank particularly Waltraud Liekefett for the private donation and the many donors, the Gustav-Adolf-Werk, the Landeskirchen Braunschweig and Hannover as well as the Jaqueline-Stuyt-Legacy-Fund of EFECW, who steadily supports and encourages our organisation and its endeavours.

***The report was created jointly by women of the German group -
Mechthild Böcher***

Translation from German: Agnes Kienesberger

Russian-speaking neighbourhood meeting

20th-22nd September 2019, Yerevan, Armenia

Armenia welcomed us with sunny, warm, real summer weather. Equally warm was the neighbourhood meeting of EFECW in Yerevan. I liked



everything: interesting, informative speeches of the participants about the role of women in the formation and development of Christianity, the role of women in the church and society of Armenia, Moldova, Georgia; productive discussions; trips to monasteries; a master class on Armenian folk dolls; walk through the city; singing fountains you can watch for hours; Armenian sweets... A special impression was made by the visit to the Hor Virap monastery at the foot of the majestic Mount Ararat, where for 13 years the founder of the Armenian Church – St. Gregory – was kept. It was extremely interesting to meet and talk with the Armenian bishop!

Amazing Armenian hospitality, a cosy atmosphere in which thousands of kilometres from your home, you feel at home, were stunning. To tell the truth, I had the feeling that I lived here once; in a past life. I *discovered* Armenia as a high-spirited, religious country inhabited by hospitable people.

For the first time participating in EFECW's neighbourhood meeting in Armenia, me and the Forum's CC from Ukraine Natalia Horbal presented Ukrainian traditions and customs, religious practices, denominations in modern Ukraine, existing temples and monasteries, as well as the role of Ukrainian women in the development of Christianity and in the struggle of Ukrainians for independence; contemporary problems of Ukrainian women in society, in particular in the conditions of the ongoing war with Russia.

We are extremely grateful to Marianna Apresyan and the participants of the Forum for the warm, inspiring meeting, unforgettable impressions and memories of sunny Armenia!

Uliana Kohut, EFECW Armenia



The Union of Armenian Women of Georgia "Shushanik" took part for the first time at the neighboring meeting of the Russian-speaking Forums of the Ecumenical Forum of Christian Women, hosted by the Armenian Forum of Christian Women.

The event was attended by the coordinators of the ecumenical forum from Moldova, Ukraine and Armenia. The theme of the meeting was "Woman and good news." The Union of Armenian Women of Georgia "Shushanik" of the Diocese of the Armenian Apostolic Church in Georgia in the Ecumenical Forum of Christian Women participated for the first time, so the interest in the Neighbouring Meeting of Russian-speaking forums was huge. Georgian representatives of the Catholic (Noem Tharzian) and Lutheran churches (Pastor Irina Solej) also took part in the meeting.



Yes, the Soviet Union collapsed, where all the above countries were together, created together, but after the acquisition of independence by all republics, everything went in a different way. After that, unfortunately, we do not know much about each other, except that these are Christian countries, and that people of other faiths also live here. How do they live, how do they cope with their problems, what are they happy about?

Taking in consideration the fact that it was a meeting of Christian women, the interest in everything was twice as strong, because in addition to the topic of our meeting "Woman and good news", at the forum we became participants and good messengers of each other, following the words of John the Baptist "Go to my brothers and say...".

Coordinators of Armenian, Ukrainian, Moldovan forums, as well as Georgian representatives talked not only about their church traditions, culture, role and activities of women in society and in the church, but also discussed the issues that women in all Christian countries face – these are some national traditions, a huge burden of women in preserving the family hearth, which they carry on their fragile shoulders, many problems not only in their families, but also in the society as a whole.

Personally for me, this meeting was fruitful, interesting and a great discovery, and I learned a lot about Moldovan Christian women, the pain that Ukrainian mothers carry within, how they struggle with the various challenges of the modern world, what their achievements are, what they rejoice, where is that universal gap that we all have to fight (contend) with, uniting around the universal Christian faith and the commandments, we have tried to understand how to help each other, so that not only our prayers, but also the demands were heard by the all-powerful men of all countries and stopped fighting each other, not accepting weapons, not dividing humanity, but uniting against various artificial and natural destructive disasters.

On the second day of our meeting there was a discussion, and all the above mentioned issues, which we discussed together, brought us all

Russian-speaking Christian women (Armenian, Moldovan, Ukrainian, Assyrian) from Orthodox, Catholic, Apostolic, Lutheran and other churches, to one thought: we women should unite again around one goal, in the prism of the Christian faith and commandments, in order to preserve peace on earth, so that all can create and live in friendship and brotherhood, so that our children do not cry because of war, cold, famine, persecution and natural disasters. It is necessary to help each other, and not to divide the land, to unite around one idea – to preserve our long-suffering land, for having created it God said: "Love each other", and by creating the woman, He laid upon her a great responsibility, as a woman, a mother, creator and the beautiful half of humanity in order to save our planet by all means.

P. S. That's what actually the "Neighboring Meeting of Russian-speaking Forums" ecumenical forum of Christian women in Yerevan gave me.

It was also proposed to establish an ecumenical women's coordinating council in Georgia, which was welcomed by representatives from Georgia. At the end of the meeting, several topics were proposed for the following meetings. I would suggest words from the prayer that was heard at our meeting in Yerevan: "Oh God, open our hearts to love each other as You are able to love us..." And finally, I will say the wonderful words of the poet Marina Tsvetaeva from "Requiem": "I address with a demand for faith and a request for love..." People of our planet, love each other!

Gohar Mkhitarian-Mazmanian, participant from Georgia

European Society for Theological Research of Women

12th-15th September 2019, Louvain, Belgium



About 110 women participants attended the 2019 conference in Louvain which dealt with the ambiguity of visibility and invisibility of women and the functionalisation of representative of particular groups that are often unseen.

On the first day, the question addressed was: Which interests are behind the mechanism of power and suppression? And how does this relate to gender roles and privileges and how does hypervisibility relate to the invisibility of power and how does visibility sometimes a way of concealing other aspects? The key note lecture was given by Kristine Suna Koro and a response was given by Silvia Martinez Cano. This interaction set the tone for the conference. We could not have selected a better team!

After this good start, we had a series of committee meetings which were open to all the members so that all the members could participate in the making of the decision of our society. That is very important to us!

The next day we touched on issues in political philosophy, racism and gender, and we had a particular focus on the Jewish perspective, with Anya Topolski given the key note address and Teresa Forcades given an absolute brilliant response.

Following the key note address and response, we had created time for four parallel short paper sessions—short paper sessions are important

for members to inform others what sort of research they are doing, what kind of findings they had and what issues are still in need of further investigations. People from all sort of backgrounds, nationalities, ethnicities and religions gave papers.

In the afternoon, we loaded everyone on two busses and went to the Africa-museum, in which we had a seminar on post-colonial thinking, led by Bambi Ceuppens and Judith Gruber. We of course also visited the museum which has over the past years dealt with its colonial history and has reinvented itself.

In the evening, we were welcomed by the Peeters family in their lovely back-garden and celebrated the 2019 issue of our journal!

The third day we turned to our Muslim sisters and their perspective on race and racism. We also addressed the processes of sexualisation, gendering, and 'religionization' that shape our social regimes of in/visibility. It was Shirin Amir-Moazami who offered the key note lecture with Nadia Fadil formulating her response.

The last day was dedicated to Christian theology and we sought to address questions related to the ways it has shaped regimes of in/visibility through gender and race narratives. The key note lecture was given by Eske Wollrad with Elzbieta Adamiak formulating a response.

Importantly, all mornings there was a morning ritual, led by Bess Brooks, Jane McBride and Susan K. Roll. With creativity they poured out their wisdom and invited the participants to pray-fully engage with the complex issues that were ahead of us.

To give an idea of what sort of issues were addressed in the short papers sessions, I can only give a couple of titles: Aleksandra F. Michalska talked about Reverend Stoyne – the blind seeing with (de)constructive power; Trees van Montfoort talking about The Invisibility of the non-human world; Teresa Toldy on the Myth of the caravels and the invisibility of a feminist post-colonial theology in Portugal; Olga Ruiz Morell on Presences and Absences of Women in the Didactic Texts of Classical Judaism; Silvia Lilian Ferro on Hacia una Teologia del Cuidado como etica cristiana absoluta; Zilya Khabibullina on The image of a Muslim woman in the Russian information space: Stereotypes and attempts to overcome them in Islamic media; Maria Andrea Gonzales Benassini on La In/visibilidad de las mujeres a 50 años de la II Conferencia Latinoamericana de Medellín.

The conference had many wonderful moments: powerful rituals, challenging lectures, intense discussions, loud out laughing, and emotional super moments: I recall one Belgian nun who participated in the conference and who had lived her entire life in South America. She started talking to Maria Andrea Gonzales Benassini who had given her insights about Medellín. The two women grabbed each other's hands, tears in their eyes, recognizing each other and recognizing the importance and the value of each other's work. Then these two ladies set down and pulled out their calendar to jot down each other's email address. Just brilliant. And we all stood there and enjoyed the moment.

Univ.-Prof. Dr. Kristin De Troyer

“When two or three are together”

2-year interreligious project in Serbia

The project goal was to gather Christian and Muslim women to learn about traditions, religions, fears, expectations and hope.



The **first meeting** was organised at a Serbian spa (Banja Vrujci) from 14th to 16th December 2018, with 30 women from Zemun, Belgrade, Novi Sad, Novi Pazar, Ljubovija and Osjek, Croatia. Our group spent nice time discussing and learning about and from each other. A Muslim (covered) business woman shared her experience. It was an interesting experience swimming together (We had to reserve the swimming pool only for our group). The 3-day discussions concluded with the following message which was published in Christian and Muslim media:

“Christian and Muslim women after a 3-day workshop, sharing knowledge, skills, experiences, and hopes have shown that learning, respecting and understanding of otherness could be a safer road that leads to prosperity and peace not only in the community to which they belong but also to the world in general.

At the conference, we specifically discussed the fact that in these modern times and globalising challenges, special attention should be paid to getting to know, respect and accept the diversity with the clear message to the faithful women, regardless of the religion they belong to, that they should be aware being the agents of change in society. Recognising motherhood as a common determinant of the identity of women, not necessarily biological, it was concluded that the training and care of society depends on the woman. Therefore, we are aware that our value-system based on empathy and prioritising peace and love among people, could be achieved by introducing interreligious dialogue and learning, which contributes to fostering a culture of peace. Active need for faith in God, opposing any form of discrimination and violence contributes to the normal coexistence, will be implemented through a series of conferences and meetings both in Christian and in Muslim communities in the Balkans, organising traditional events and workshops that will engage young people in order to spreading awareness of the ecumenical and interreligious unity as an imperative of our time.”

At the **second phase**, our Christian-Muslim group spent three marvelous days in a Jesuit monastery in Sarajevo. 25 women from

Zemun, Belgrade, Novi Sad, Novi Pazar, Tutin, Sarajevo, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Osjek, Croatia met from 21st to 23rd June 2019.



It was very interesting, for the Muslim members of our interreligious group, being in a Muslim country but meeting in a Christian monastery. So, it was sort of double learning. As a group we met people from different communities that support peace initiatives. We had promotion of the book “Path to Peace” written by Amra Pandzo, and a very challenging discussion about Islam and Feminism. Free time we spent visiting the main

Mosque, the Orthodox Church and the national park Vrelo Bosne.

We concluded our 3-day meeting with the following message which was again published in Christian and Muslim media:

In Sarajevo, in the Jesuit monastery (21-23 June 2019), was held an international women regional interfaith conference with the title: ***Where are two or three together...*** which was the 2nd part of the conference which started in December 2018, held in Banja Vrujci. The organiser of the conference is MAH – Time Admirer Club (Belgrade) in cooperation with the Association of Women from Islamic Community in Serbia (Novi Pazar). With the presence of representatives from the EFEK (Ecumenical Forum of European Christian, Croatia), TPO Foundation (Sarajevo, BiH), IOC (Muslim youth club, Novi Pazar) and Karuna - center

for peacebuilding (Sarajevo, BiH). This meeting is just a step in our work nurturing peace and learning about different traditions, fears and hopes in the region. The meeting was a JSL-funded project.

Participants, Christian and Muslim women, through discussions, presentations on various topics and exchange of knowledge and experience once again testified that true beauty is the beauty of the diversity of the contemporary society in this region still represents big challenge. Participants said that women should strive to preserve the dignity and through a series of such activities contribute to peaceful coexistence in the region. We will work on building bridges of lasting friendship, understanding and respect for each other. We expand our awareness, first in our local communities, and then beyond. Traces of these encounters are a testimony to the contribution to building peace.



Marijana Ajzenkol, EFECW Co-President

EFE CW representation work

ANDANTE, Study Days and General Assembly

“Women in the Church make the difference”

24th – 28th April 2019, Snagov, Romania

Andante includes 19 associations from 12 different countries. The mission of the European Alliance of Catholic Women's Organisations is to be a Catholic women's voice and be an actor in building a living Europe that works for the common good and gives a more human face to Europe and the world. Andante works, through its networks in Europe and through local initiatives, for the just participation of women in society and in the church, and for the common good of all people. Andante encourages and empowers Catholic women in Europe to reach their full potential, both in society and in spiritual life. It brings strength and inspiration to Catholic women in their daily lives and encourages them to be active in their communities and in the church. Andante wants to be a platform for Catholic women to express their ideas, to discuss them frankly and with trust, even if they arrive at different conclusions. *“We need to establish common values across our different cultures; we should be able to respond to current and emerging issues in a way that reflects Gospel values and our experience as women. We can offer the female vision of the Common Good.”*

The theme of the Study Days of Andante, held in April 2019 in the Carmelite monastery in Snagov, Romania, was "Women in the Church make the difference".

60 Catholic women from 13 different European countries met for five days to discuss this subject.



Since the beginning and through the centuries women have been making a difference in the Church and in the spread of the Gospel. They have been disciples, saints, scholars and educators. Women today want the Catholic Church to become a home where all are welcome and all can flourish. A Church which looks outward and

which uses the gifts of the Spirit in all its members. But many women do not feel at home in the Church. They often feel silenced, marginalised and excluded from decision-making. Women are able to use their special gifts in service in many respects, but often find themselves unable to use their expertise and experience in leadership roles within the church. Here the contribution of religious women could be most profitably employed. The appointment of a token number of women to decision-making posts is not sufficient. There needs to be a change to a more inclusive culture at all levels. We can learn from experiences in other Christian churches.

In order to impose changes in the Church, the participants of the Andante Study Days exchanged ideas for current and future activities. The diversity of cultures and spiritual traditions inside the Andante

network empowers and encourages women in working together in Europe.

The mission of Andante is to work for the common good and a human-oriented Europe. The importance of women taking part in the forthcoming European elections was emphasised.

The speakers

Tina Beattie, professor of Catholic Studies and writer at the University



of Roehampton in London, spoke on “the Church of the Future - a home of Hope”.

Boroka Béké, pastor of the Reformed Church of Romania, her lecture was on: Female Disciples - The Need and Possibility of Training Women in the Church.

Zuzannes Flisowska, general director of the "Voice of Faith", developed the theme: New Strategies for the Inclusion of Women in the Church.

The different **workshops** focused on spirituality and the practical engagement of women in the Church:

For the first workshop a ‘strong’ film "Habemus Feminas: for a Church with women" was screened. In 2016, Catholic believers from German-speaking Switzerland made their way to Rome to make their voices heard. They walked 1,200 km from St. Gallen to Rome to demand greater equality of women and men in the Church. They wanted to express the hope that in the future, men will no longer think and make decisions without women. They hoped to be received by Pope Francis but were only able to hand in a letter.

The 2nd workshop moderated by theologian Dr. Angela Büchel Sladkovic was a Bible study: Lydia, an important woman in the first Church.

3rd workshop facilitated by Joanne Seldenrath: How to make a homily?

The Statutory Assembly and the elections concluded the time of the conference and reflection. Sabine Slawik was elected to form with Vroni Peterhans the new presidency. Mary McHugh was warmly thanked for her nine years of presidency.

These five days were rich in sharing and exchange, the Eastern countries still have many ways to go in terms of social assistance and education.

The stay ended with the cultural visit of Brasov, a city in the center of Romania.

More information and reports on Andante [website](#).

Anne Marie Schott, EFECW CC member

Religions for Peace (RfP), 10th Assembly

19th-23rd August 2019, Lindau/Bodensee, Germany

Women share leadership at Religions for Peace. At the 10th Assembly of Religions for Peace (RfP), the world's largest and oldest interfaith network, in Lindau/Bodensee Germany from 19 to 23 August 2019 women became more visible than ever. In the new board they represent 37%. And the next Secretary General is a woman. This is for the first time in the history of this global peace movement which started in 1970 and grew from 39 to 125 member countries. 900 to 1000 men and women took part in the assembly titled "Caring for Our Common Future – Advancing Shared Well-Being".



Dr. Azza Karam was born in Egypt, lives in the USA, is a Dutch citizen and researcher at the Free University of Amsterdam besides several other tasks as an adviser to the UN. Her main issues are religion, development, population, women's rights.

RfP has a global and some regional Women of Faith Networks which lobbied for these results during preparatory conferences in their own region and during the women's pre-assembly which was held one day before. About 150 women from all over the world and different religious backgrounds came together. From a women's perspective they worked on the five main issues of the assembly: positive peace, preventing and transforming conflicts, promoting just and harmonious societies, working for sustainable and integral human development,

protecting the earth. They emphasized the important role of women in the peace building process. Many women are activists in the urgent struggle to protect our Mother Earth, shoulder to shoulder with indigenous people. Just in the days of the assembly the rainforests in



Brasil were heavily burning. The European women met on Thursday and closed their meeting by a photo in black clothes, thus connecting to the campaign to end all violence against women "[Thursdays in Black](#)".

Important female speaker and longstanding board member of Religions for Peace is Ela Gandhi, 81 year old granddaughter of Mahatma Gandhi. She grew up in South Africa and was as social worker very much involved in actions to overcome violence against women. She held a strong plea to change the beliefs around the role of women



depending on her husband. “We have to deal with the patriarchal nature of all our societies. Men and women should be partners.”

A delegation of women from the MENA region – Middle East and North Africa – had undertaken an impressive trip to Jordan to meet with Syrian and Iraqi refugee women and those who help them find a better life. They showed an impressive video report of this encounter – supported by RfP - in solidarity with those women, inspiring by the hopeful projects which are set up in this region.

Among the lightning talks showing concrete and practical narratives of peace making among religions was Leila Hasandedic, a young Muslim woman from post war Bosnia. Having grown up in Mostar and having lost several family members including her grandmother, she never had crossed the famous rebuilt bridge to the other part of the town. A project “Two schools under one roof” was set up after the war to overcome prejudices among Muslim and Catholic youth. A Catholic young man of this group is now one of the leading peacebuilders in Bosnia. He is the son of a colonel who is most probably responsible for the murder of Leila’s grandmother. He asked for forgiveness. They started a network and became peacebuilders together.

The assembly emphasised time and again that we should not stay with beautiful words. They have to be followed by actions on different levels. Every plenary was closed with a concrete action point to which the assembly members committed themselves: reduce or stop eating meat, stop or reduce the use of plastics and paper. Don’t waste water. Struggle against the injustice of the huge richness of some two thousand

billionaires in the world over against the big crowd which has not enough even to survive. Talk to your governments to encourage them in creating just and fair structures. So that we can leave a sustainable world to our children and the generations to come.

You can read the entire final declaration [here](#).

The Ecumenical Forum of European Christian Women EFECW is member of the RfP European Women of Faith Network. From 2013 to 2019 Martina Heinrichs (EFECW Co President 2006 – 2014) was Co President in the RfP World Council. She attended the 10th RfP Assembly together with Fiona Buchanan, currently one of the EFECW Co Presidents.

Martina Heinrichs, former Co-President EFECW



International Committee of the Fellowship of the Least Coin (ICFLC)

14th – 19th October 2019, Ghana

The International Committee of the Fellowship of the Least Coin (ICFLC) met in Ghana, from 14th to 19th October 2019.

‘Where I live, I share the land with a coco tree, a cinnamon tree and other plants. I water them. I feed the birds in my garden. Taking care of nature keeps me calm and disciplined.’ These are the words of Mama Mercy Amba Oduyoye (born in 1934 when Ghana was still under colonial rule), as they call her respectfully here in Ghana. She gave the sermon during the opening ceremony of the 39th ICFLC Annual Conference, October 14th 2019 at the Abokobi Women’s Training

Center, Accra. Mercy was the first woman president of the ecumenical



Martina Heinrichs and Mercy Amba Oduyoye before the opening ceremony, Abkobi Women's Training Center

association of third world theologians EATWOT. Also she had worked at the World Council of Churches for many years. She is called one of the mothers of African feminist theologies. Today she speaks about the difference between husbanding and dominion of Mother Earth. 'Husbanding is equal, dominion is exploitive. Thanks to colonial behaviours based on the translation of Genesis 1, 26 by 'dominion', peoples and nature have been exploited and ruled over in Africa. Most African countries have forest

reserves, which are no go areas. The ancestors and elders were buried there. But now the tropical forests are burning in Brazil and some other places in the world. We should all care for them. If not, one day God will kick us out. When I was young I had to walk from Accra to Cape Coast to fetch water. The hills were green, but now they are dark and full of houses. Ghanaians depend on fish, we love it. But fishers are not interested in little fishes and leave them traumatized in the net. They will not become part of the food chain. When you are dying to give life you are part of god's plan. But when you are dying for nothing, it is a shame and a sin.' We are losing our integrity and the integrity of creation. And God depends on us to keep the integrity of creation.

What is FLC?

The Fellowship of the Least Coin is a worldwide women's prayer movement which started in 1957. Shanti Salomon, a woman from India, was on a peace mission together with American Presbyterian women in post war Asia. According to the biblical story of the widow who gave her least coin which was much more in the eyes of Jesus than the rich young men had given, each woman can participate by setting aside the least coin of her country every time she prays. Quickly the movement spread out through all the other continents. From the collections projects throughout the world as well as scholarships for young women and emergency grants can be given out.

The place

Our Annual Meeting is hosted at an important place of Ghana's Women's Her-Story, the Abokobi Presby Women's Training Centre which was established in 1992 by Rev. Rose Akua Ampofo (1948 – 2003). She was the first woman to be ordained in the Presbyterian Church of Ghana. Later she moved to Switzerland to become the director of Mission 21 in Basel. The Abokobi centre is for women in particular and has the vision to foster women's fellowship and empowerment. It facilitates guest groups like us, the ICFLC, but has also an own program, targeting at women, youth, agents of the church and elderly people.

Women's studies and education in Ghana

Another highlight of the stay in Ghana was the visit to the Institute of Women in Religion and Culture at the Trinity Theological Seminary in Legon, one of the oldest in West Africa and the oldest in Ghana. In 1999

Mercy Amba Oduyoye and other women, including a Muslim, founded the Centre with the name “Thalita Qumi” coming from the biblical story of the little girl rising up. ‘We women empower ourselves by telling our own stories and by learning to speak up. Normally we are trained not to



do so, this behaviour would be considered as disrespectful.’ The center is a baby of the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians which has meant a lot to women. Some members got a high position in society or became a professor. It aims at doing research as well as integrating the grassroots through education. Women

from all religions and cultural backgrounds, also Muslims come to visit the courses. The work is mainly done by volunteers. Items are: migration and girl child trafficking; violence against women through language; domestic violence; women’s health; HIV/aids and women; violence against women and girls connected to traditional practices; Female Genital Mutilation; Trokosi (an African traditional slave system which is still present in some rural areas and in the Volta region: girls are taken for the sins of an elderly family member, an uncle for example; cross generational marriages: a young girl of ten years old has to marry an elderly man); widowhood rights (traditionally the heritage

goes to the man’s family, so widows are poor. In some traditions they suspect her to have killed her husband. They leave her in the room with the dead body until she confesses); comprehensive sex education to prevent teenage pregnancies (when a child is hungry, she gives her body for something to eat); raising awareness trainings for the parents and the children (the elderly generation was brought up with many taboos not to discuss these things at home)... Rape and incest are important issues to tackle. Girls don’t want to report because it brings shame to the family. The centre encourages them to speak out about what has happened to them. This project received an FLC grant in 2011 which helped to publish a book about Gender Based Violence.

Bible studies from the perspective of African women



Lydia Mwaniki, the African representative round the ICFLC table, led a bible study based on her PhD research “Gender and Imago Dei – a postcolonial African reading Corinthian 11:1-16.” Which is a Pauline text about Christ being the head of everyone and man being the head of a woman. She should cover her head, a man ought not. This is one of the most difficult passages in the bible: Paul and women, a very complicated and controversial relationship. The context of Lydia herself: her grandparents were among the first Christians when the missionaries came. Her grandfather became an evangelist. Women had no leadership roles. The bible was used as reason why women cannot be leaders. As women they were only allowed to become deaconess, a lay ministry, not ordained. After her PhD Lydia offered

herself for the position of bishop. But she did not even get at the point of the interviews. The elected one was a man and a student of hers. Nowadays there are three women bishops in Africa. In the constitution of the Anglican Church of Kenya there is no discrimination, nor a gender difference. In theory! Lydia researched how these difficult Pauline texts were taken up by Church Fathers and later on in the colonial Church history. When the missionaries came in 1844 to Kenya, they kept the rules of the church of England: no ordination of women. But they also did good things, e.g. acting against cruel traditional practices like the killing of twins who were seen as a bad omen and thrown in the forest to be eaten by the hyenas. The missionaries worked with men. They realised only late that women should participate. Now women rise up in Africa claiming that they are also pastors. In 1978 women could be ordained in Kenya, in 1992 in Lydia's diocese. It is a slow process. There are still less women than men. There is no woman Archbishop. There is still quite some resistance. A moratorium of five years was installed not to discuss the issue anymore. There is a postcolonial feminist approach saying that the Pauline texts have also potential. Paul has a struggle because of his culture. He was confronted with a context where women could not be equal to men.

The second issue tackled by Lydia is about widows most of them living in poverty and bad conditions. In 2 Kings, 4:1-7 there is the powerful story about a woman whose husband was a scholar of the prophet Elisha and had died. A creditor wanted to take her two sons as slaves. Elisha gives her the advice to fill jars with oil. A miracle happens, she has enough oil to start a business and become economically independent.

The AACC started an empowerment campaign for widows to support them with shelters and safe spaces in their vulnerable situation. The 23rd of June was proclaimed as International Widows' Day. In some African countries widows are not treated well. When a husband dies, they assume that the wife has killed her husband. She has to prove that she did not.

African women and slavery

Being a country of the West African coast Ghana had to suffer enormously from slavery. The excursion of ICFLC to Cape Coast and Fort Elmina – places where captured men and women were brought to be shipped to the receiving countries - shows how this big injustice effected people's lives deprived from any dignity, becoming a number as their names have been wiped out, having to walk in chains all the way from the inner land to the coast, starving from hunger, thirst and complete exhaustion or dying in the dungeons or on the ships during the long transatlantic journey to the America's. Especially women's lives have been effected by sexual violence, by rape and forced sex slavery to the colonial white masters.



Like many other faith based organisations, FLC has to struggle with declining donations coming from the collections. In 2019 fewer applications were granted compared to former years. The maximum amount for a grant had to be reduced. Because of high shipping costs the bi-annually sent 'Circle of Prayer' will be only available for download on the website. Probably from next year Annual Meetings may change into Bi-Annual Conferences. And more measures were decided.

But the commitment will go on: to pray and be in solidarity with women and children around the world for the cause of Justice, Peace and Reconciliation with human beings and the whole creation!

***Martina Heinrichs, ICFLC Regional Coordinator for Europe
on behalf of EFECW Ecumenical Forum of European Christian Women***

Global program on prevention of son-preference and the undervaluing of girls

17th October, Etchmiadzin, Armenia

On October 17, in Gevorg Chorenkian Hall of Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin, the WCO Armenia Round Table (ART) Foundation and the UNFPA Armenia Country Office held a workshop on "Son Preference and the Undervaluing of Girls in Armenia and the Church". The event was funded by the European Union in the framework of the Global Program on Prevention of Son Preference and the Undervaluing of Girls, implemented by UNFPA. Marianna Apresyan, EFECW Co-President presented a project implemented by Armenian EFECW.

"The Ecumenical Forum of Christian Women of Armenia five years ago started its social activity by a project 'Give Me Life' which was against sex selective abortions in Armenia. This project was financed and supported by JSL fund of EFECW and the World Council of Churches' Round Table Foundation. During our eight months project activities in different villages situated at the Armenian borders, we understood that this problem is part of our national mentality and that instead of healing the results of this problem, we should start from its origin.

In Armenian reality, the sex selective abortion has deep roots and is related with national mentality. Marriage is the foundation of family and social life which serves to ensure the reproduction of humanity. For



us Armenians, marriage is one of the most significant events that are mandatory, prestigious, and respectful, as marriage is the foundation of a new family that implies generation. The entire Armenian wedding ritual is filled with numerous religious-magical rituals dedicated to the bridegroom's reproduction.

In the past, maybe even today, in the village at the time of the boy's birth, his bed was surrounded by elderly women who used all their

magical knowledge to keep the mother and baby's lives from evil and so on. When the boy was born, all celebrated and congratulated each other, but when a girl was born, people wished patience and comfort to family members. They even wished them the next baby to be a boy.

This mentality has usually been linked to the hard and preoccupied life of Armenian women. In the past girls got married at an early age and took the whole care of family on their shoulders patiently and silently. Women could speak out and express their opinions only later in their life (50+) as mothers of a big family. This was also the reason for not wanting a baby girl. In the big Armenian family, every new girl's birth was undesirable, so in order to suspend or limit the birth of a baby girl, they gave her special names which has special meaning.

This mentality was due to the following factors:

- The boy or son considered as Armenian family keeper, he is continuing the family name; his birth is considered as happiness.
- In case of girl-birth the heritage of the family will be transferred to the husband of daughter, which is undesirable.
- The son is a working hand and supporter of the family, so stability and prosperity of the family economy are expected from son.
- The Armenian nation and families had been permanently endangered and targeted by attacks by Turkish rule, so they have seen their protection and security under the patronage of a man, meaning from the family man and son. Therefore, giving sons an advantage in our environment was also conditioned by a sense of self-protection.

In the context of sex selective abortion, I would like to draw the attention of our priests to enhancing the role of women in relying on the Bible. In the Old Testament we have numerous examples of women who, regardless of their age or social status, were chosen by God to serve His divine plan: Sarah, Deborah, Anna, Esther, Ruth, Judith, etc., as well as prophesying in the name of the Lord, Moses' sister Mary, Huldah, the wife of the prophet Isaiah. A remarkable argument for honouring a woman and raising her role is found in A Ezra 4,13-29, where Zerubbabel had spoken of women and truth: "...Gentlemen, is not the king great, and are not men many, and is not wine strong? Who is it, then, that rules them, or has the mastery over them? Is it not women? Women gave birth to the king and to every people that rules over sea and land..."

I would like to appeal our attention to the fact that when Jesus first gave his hand to Mary Magdalene and delivered her from a life of total bondage. She was an outcast in society. Jesus treated women in a manner far beyond the cultural expectation and traditions of the day, respecting them fully as persons and considering them a necessary part of his ministry.

Now, following Jesus' example, we should estimate the role of women, mothers, and daughters in the family, encourage their born, because they give birth to future heroes, intellectuals, clergy and they up bring and educate them to be a human in the society. So let increase the value of life and let change the mentality of sex discrimination and accept everyone as a creature who has the image of God.

Marianna Apresyan, EFECW Co-President

FINANCIAL REPORT 2019

		<i>Budget 2019</i>	Reality 2019			<i>Budget 2019</i>	Reality 2019
EXPENSES				INCOME			
General				General			
	CC/Working groups	€ 12.000,00	€ 7.332,05		Membership Fees	€ 7.500,00	€ 6.048,00
	Accounting & Auditing	€ 2.600,00	€ 2.600,00		FLC block grant	€ 8.600,00	
	Office costs	€ 400,00	€ 3,75		Ref.Ch.Bern-Jura	€ 5.400,00	€ 5.199,40
	Representations	€ 2.000,00	€ 2.177,77		Donations	€ 300,00	€ 400,00
	Website	€ 300,00	€ 338,00		Other income	€ 7.300,00	€ 125,25
	Printings	€ 300,00					
	Assistant to CC	€ 6.000,00	€ 4.500,00				
	Bank charges	€ 200,00	€ 280,11				
	Other costs	€ 300,00	€ 34,00				
	Reservation GA 2022	€ 5.000,00					
	Total expenses	€ 29.100,00	€ 17.265,68		Total income	€ 29.100,00	€ 11.772,65

Financial Report 2019 – overview

SHORT OVERVIEW		Budget 2019	Reality 2019
General	income	€ 29.100,00	€ 11.772,65
	expenses	€ 29.100,00	€ 17.265,68
	balance	€ -	€ 5.493,03-

Auditors' Report

The Financial Report 2019 was prepared by EFECW ex-treasurer Hannah Golda and treasurer Gabriele Kienesberger.

Excerpt of the external auditor's report (KOBRE Wirtschaftsprüfung GmbH):

"We have conducted the audit in accordance with Austrian Standards on Auditing. In our opinion, the accounting records and financial statements comply with Austrian law and the Forum's articles of incorporation."

The Financial Report was approved by the Co-Presidents and the Co-ordinating Committee members.

PLEASE REMEMBER to support the:

Ruth Epting Fund (REF)



Every time you think of the members of EFECW, remember that with your donation to REF encourage all women to participate in the life of the Forum.

Details in: <http://www.efecw.net/Epting-Fund/>

Fellowship of the Least Coin (FLC)



When you pray, have the little box ready for the least. FLC relates us European women to our sisters around the globe. Details in: www.flc.net.ph

EFECW anniversary book



You can order at: gabriele.kienesberger@gmx.net

Minimum price: 8 Euro (+postage) - Solidarity price: 12 Euro

Contact

Ecumenical Forum of European Christian Women

Website: www.efecw.net

Email: info@efecw.net

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