



The Link

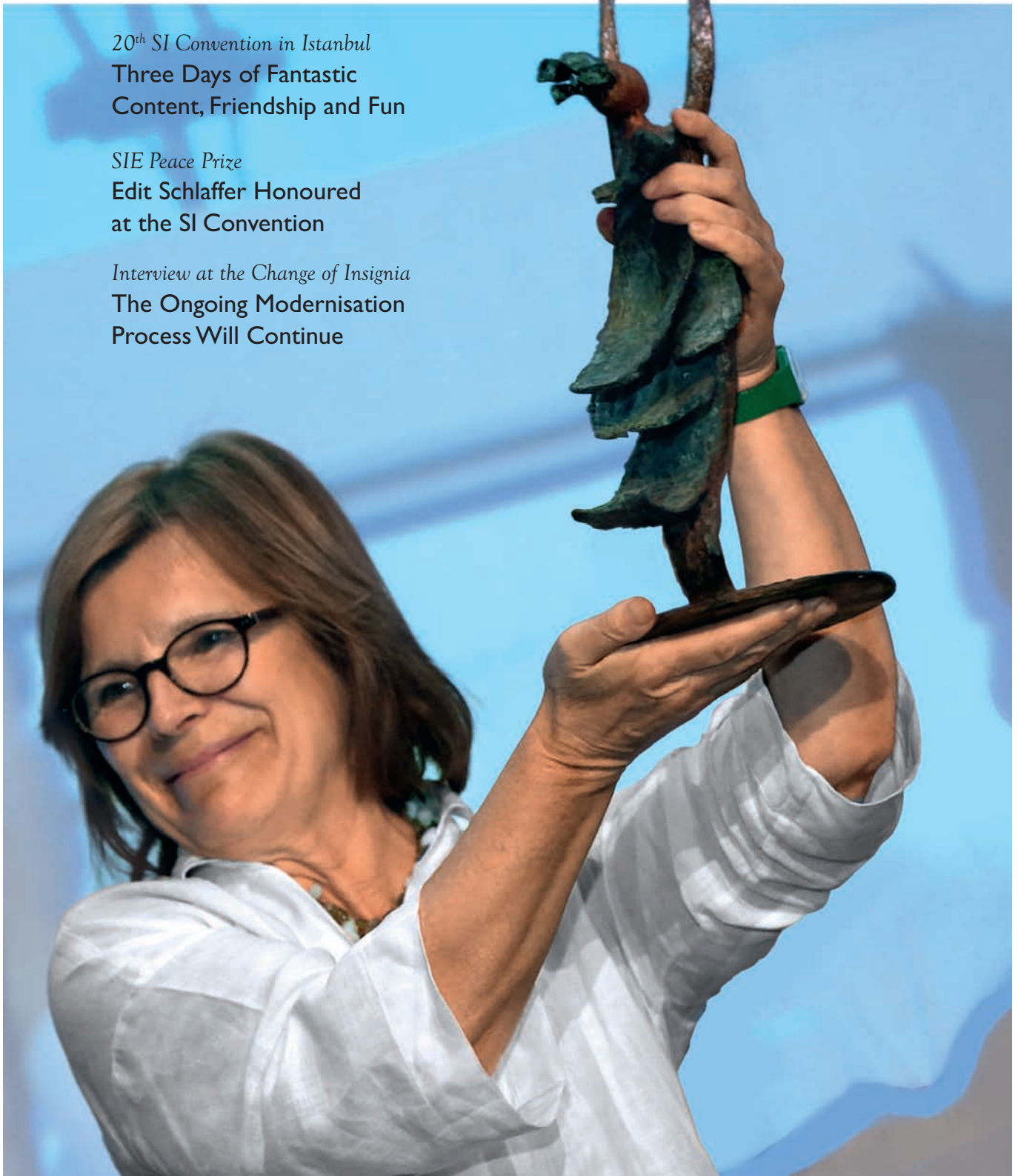
A global voice for women

4/2014-2015 N° 239

20th SI Convention in Istanbul
Three Days of Fantastic
Content, Friendship and Fun

SIE Peace Prize
Edit Schläffer Honoured
at the SI Convention

Interview at the Change of Insignia
The Ongoing Modernisation
Process Will Continue



Soroptimist International (SI) is a worldwide organisation for women in management and professions, working through service projects to build a better world for women and children. There are currently some 80,000 members in more than 3,000 clubs in 130 countries. Soroptimist International of Europe (SIE) is one of four SI Federations. It has some 35,000 members in over 1,250 clubs in 60 countries. Soroptimists inspire action and create opportunities to transform the lives of women and girls through a global network of members and international partnerships. For more information about the aims, activities and projects that characterise our organisation, please visit our SIE website at www.soroptimisteurope.org.



Note from the Editor

IT IS TIME FOR CHANGE

After seven years at the helm of the Federation magazine, I am stepping down as Editor of *The Link*. There have been many highs and some lows over the years, but on the whole, it has been a pleasure to serve four SIE Presidents and you, the readers.

Every editor will add her own personal touch to a magazine, but it has always been my aim to have a good mix of news from the Federation officers along with contributions from Unions and Clubs. The biggest disappointment is the fact that *The Link* only reached a fraction of our members. The survey we conducted years ago confirmed that language was the main

barrier to more subscriptions. However, when we asked if Unions would be willing to fund the magazine in their own language, the response was negative.

I would like to stress that we would have welcomed adding an online version, but it would not have been fair to those who paid for subscriptions. And somehow one has to fund the production costs! I am sure that the new Board will look for a solution to this dilemma, and I wish my successors the best of luck.

Although it was a lot of work, the greatest joy of my job was being able to see all the amazing things our organisation does. The activities and projects covered in *The Link* were only a small cross section of what is happening in our Federation. I take my hat off to you for all your work and dedication. If I managed to document a small part of these accomplishments, it was well worth the effort!

Christine Cromwell-Ahrens, Editor, *The Link*

Cover page



Dr Edit Schlaffer was awarded the 2015 SIE Peace Prize at the SI Convention in Istanbul.

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Dear Soroptimist Friends

The final SI Board Meeting (BM) of the biennium and the first BM in the biennium 2015-2017 took place in Istanbul just before the SI Convention in July. I have drawn attention to some important changes in my article on page 18, but I would like to take this opportunity to thank Ann Garvie for her efforts as SI President and welcome Yvonne Simpson from SISWP to this position.

A high-calibre Convention

Under the theme 'Fresh Ideas Empowering Women', the 20th SI Convention in the fascinating city of Istanbul was a tremendous success. SI President Ann Garvie, Chair of the Convention Emine Erdem, Programme and Planning Director Anne Simon and the Local Committee put together a spectacular and high-quality event. Anne was instrumental in organising the programme with more than 90 speakers and panellists on the overall theme 'Educate to Lead'. Local Programme Director Inci Erdem Artan also engaged excellent Turkish speakers. Well done to everyone involved! One of the highlights for SIE was President Elect Maria Elisabetta de Francis's announcement of the SIE Peace Prizewinner 2015, Edit Schlaffer, founder of 'Women without Borders/SAVE' (see page 9). The Convention in Istanbul was a fantastic and inspiring experience and something we all can be very proud of.

Training Seminar for Soroptimists

I was pleased to invite Single Clubs and Unions, primarily from Eastern Europe, to a weekend Training Seminar in Belgium. Contributing to the success of this event was the enormous work by the team of SIE trainers. Some 50 Soroptimists took part in the comprehensive programme, which is described in detail by three participants on pages 12-13. Many thanks, in particular, to SIE Treasurer Anne-Marie Hendrickx and Secretary General Birthe Sonne-Schmidt for their tremendous organisational effort.

Thank you so much for embracing my biennium theme 'Let's go green - working for a healthy environment' in the spirit I had hoped for! A cleaner and greener environment is a necessity - especially for coming generations. We can be very proud of all the projects SIE clubs have been implementing, some of which are presented on pages 14-15. I encourage you to continue to support environmental projects because a sustainable and well-protected environment improves the lives of women and girls and facilitates access to education and empowerment.

'Together for the Climate'

The 2015 UN Climate Change Conference, COP21, will be held in Paris from 30th November to 11th December. The objective of the Conference is to achieve, for the first time in over 20 years of negotiations, a binding and universal agreement on the climate. This agreement is not only possible, but necessary and urgent. SI France will host a meeting on 28th November under the theme 'Together for the Cli-

SIE President Ulla Madsen proudly shows a picture which symbolises the cooperation among Soroptimists in realising biennium projects.

mate', also for the participants of the 'Climate Miles' international walk from Utrecht to Paris. It will be an honour for me to speak about a healthy sustainable environment as a human right, which is also indissolubly linked to gender equality for women and girls.

I hope you will remember the biennium as a positive experience, with the implementation of the bottom-up approach, transparency and satisfactory achievements together with a great deal of humour. We were able to stop the trend of losing members and managed to take the organisation to an even higher professional level. These two years have been a fantastic journey for me, and I feel privileged to have had the opportunity to serve you. I thank each and every Union, Club and member for your support. I am also grateful to the SIE Board, Committees, appointees, representatives to different organisations and HQ, who have all worked very hard and in the best team spirit to achieve our biennium goals. Since this is her last issue of *The Link*, I would like to thank Editor Christine Cromwell-Ahrens very warmly for her efforts to deliver a professional, inspiring and diverse magazine and a highly effective PR tool for SIE.

We can be proud to be Soroptimists!

Let us use our achievements as a vehicle to attract new members and to become great story tellers! I wish you the best of luck in your Soroptimist endeavours and personal life. Please remember to have fun as well!

In friendship and thankfulness



THREE DAYS OF FANTASTIC CONTENT, FRIENDSHIP AND FUN!



Chair of the Organising Committee Emine Erdem (left) and Programme and Planning Director Anne Simon receive accolades for the successful SI Convention.

Istanbul – the very name of this superb city, built and rebuilt with such passion through the centuries – evokes colourful images and magical sounds. The metropolis where East meets West was the venue of the 20th Soroptimist International Convention in July 2015.

As host to this important 20th anniversary event, Chair of the Organising Committee Emine Erdem promised us that Istanbul would more than live up to the delegates' expectations. And the local Turkish committee did indeed deliver, warmly welcoming some 1,500 Soroptimists and ensuring everyone was given an unforgettable experience! On their flights, passengers discovered an article in the Turkish Airlines magazine covering the event, and on arrival large 'Welcome to the International Soroptimist Convention' banners were strung above the wide flower-lined avenues running from the airport to the city – impossible to miss from taxis and buses.

A legendary meeting place

Ann Garvie, the Committee Organiser and SI President, together with then SIE President Ulla Madsen had carefully chosen the Hilton Bosphorus as the hub of the Convention. This hotel, attractively renovated, is in itself a legend: the preserve of the world's celebrities and the famous, including Queen Elisabeth, Marilyn Monroe, Cary Grant and The Beatles. It was the epitome of relaxation to sit with Soroptimist friends, share a soda or a refreshing glass of cappadocia wine, gaze across the water or simply enjoy the rhythm of the boats as they crossed the Bosphorus!

Throughout preparations, SI President Ann Garvie assumed responsibility for ensuring that this Convention was truly international – not just a superb event, but THE reuniting and fusion of the four Federations. It was to be a historical event to celebrate this fabulous friendship, without neglecting to reflect the fundamental mission which unites all members: women's causes.

By appointing her Programme and Planning Director for the 2015 Convention, Ann Garvie entrusted SIE Executive Director Anne Simon with this delicate balancing act. Anne was tasked with drawing up the programme to reflect the challenges faced by women at the beginning of the 21st century and also to provide a platform to celebrate the various activities and incredible work undertaken by the 3,000 Soroptimist clubs across the world – from Rio de Janeiro to the Fiji Islands, from Reykjavik to Johannesburg. Using her extensive network of contacts, Anne organised nearly 30 sessions, inviting 94 key speakers and moderators to enrich the three-day programme.

An upbeat tone from the onset

The opening ceremony set the upbeat tone. The addresses were applauded, particularly those from the local authorities and SIE President Ulla Madsen.

But the Convention really kicked off with the Friendship Evening prepared by the Local Organising Committee under the leadership of Lale Kaplan. More than 1,000 Soroptimists gathered together on a warm summer evening in the terraced gardens looking over the Bosphorus. A sumptuous buffet was served around the swimming pool. The verdict was unanimous: the regional cuisine, flavoured with typical spices, was divine. The highlight of the evening came during the Istanbul fashion designers' haute-couture show, when a beaming Ann Garvie, dressed in an elegant outfit embroidered with gold thread, joined the models on the catwalk. It was as if Istanbul had discovered a new star! The memorable evening resounded with laughter and true friendship.

Continued on page 6

Ursula Wynhoven:
'Women in business are champions of women's empowerment within companies.'



Michael Kaufmann:
'Men have a set of invisible privileges just by being men. It's what privilege is, it's invisible if you've got it.'



The official programme commences

The following morning began with the traditional candle-lighting ceremony. The Presidents of SIA, SIE, SIGBI and SWP – Margaret Poco Davis, Ulla Madsen, Jenny Vince and Carolyn Hudson respectively – gathered around Ann Garvie as they lit five candles, the fifth being for SI. Then came the younger generation, representing each of the four Federations, carrying the flags of those institutions that have awarded us consultative or participatory status, including the UN and the Council of Europe. Ann Garvie opened the morning with a speech reiterating the principles which drive our organisation, followed by a warm address from Ulla Madsen, the hosting Federation President, to welcome the guests.

By now, the delegates were eagerly awaiting the actual programme with its high-calibre speakers. Anne Simon, who also took on the role of mistress of ceremonies, welcomed and introduced each speaker in turn, each as acclaimed as the next. Turkish author Elif Shafak offered an interesting insight into the female psyche, women's ambitions and their extraordinary will to surpass themselves. Her talk was very well received by everyone in the packed room. However, the star of the morning was without doubt a male speaker, but not just any man: it was Michael Kaufmann, co-founder of the White Ribbon organisation. He spoke to us very sincerely but with interjections of humour on the importance of not sidelining men in the struggle against violence towards women.

Women must build their self-confidence

Every plenary session was filled with excellent informed discussions. Women's economic power and independence were recurrent subjects covered by many prestigious speakers, including Ursula Wynhoven, General Counsel for UN Global Compact, Marie Gabrielle Cajoly, Managing Director of a private foundation set up by a large petroleum consortium, and Theresa Devasahayam, researcher and consultant UN population fund, herself a member of SI Singapore. One of the main messages was that women must build and improve their self-confidence. The plenary session devoted to Turkey highlighted the influence that women exert in their country. Turkish speakers included Cansen Basaran-Symes, President of the Turkish Chamber of Industry, Hasan Suel, President of the Turkish Vodafone Foundation, Gülay Barbarosoglu, Chancellor of Bogazici University, and Nakiye Boyacigiller, Business Lecturer at Sabanci University. If any lingering doubts about the power of Turkish women remained, they were now banished for good!

Giving women a strong voice

The session on lobbying for gender equality continued in the same vein, emphasising the importance of giving women a strong voice throughout the world and the role of Soroptimists in institutions such as the UN and Council of Europe. It began with a clear message from Ingibjörg Gísladóttir, Europe and Central Asia Regional Director for UN Women, calling for a change in the established norms and doing away with the stereotypes which do so much harm to the situation of women. Her message was corroborated by Liri Kopaci, Divisional Director for Gender Equality at the Council of Europe, who highlighted the power imbalance between men and women. Finally, let's not forget the powerful contribution from Yakin Ertürk, Human Rights Expert at the High Commission for Human Rights, who denounced the intransigence of governments and their lack of engagement.

One of the most highly anticipated items on the agenda was 'Defeating Violence'. The room was full, and we could not have wished for better speakers: the *crème de la crème*! Rashida Manjoo, UN Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women at the UN office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, delivered the unequivocal message that violence is a violation of human rights. Her views were echoed by Judge Silvana Arbia, former Registrar at the International Criminal Court and former Chief of Prosecutions for the International Criminal Court for Rwanda. She vividly recounted her experience in the highest international courts fighting crime and her faith in the justice system.

It was also a pleasure to listen to activists such as Alice Nkom, lawyer and founder of the Cameroon Association for the defence of homosexuality. The

Continued on page 8

Rashida Manjoo:

'Violence against women is a human violation. It is a form of discrimination...'



Alice Nkom:

'Please continue to support us [...] with your voice you can push governments to respect treaties or conventions...'



Counterclockwise from right: Turkish author Elif Shafak offered an interesting insight into the female psyche. SIE Ulla Madsen thanks Gözde Pinar, who took the certificate on behalf of the Garanti Bank sponsorship. Many Soroptimists attended the gala dinner in traditional attire representing their respective countries. In her Turkish designer outfit SI President Ann Garvie on the catwalk dazzles the Soroptimist audience at the Friendship Evening. The booths offered participants the opportunity to purchase a souvenir of their days in Istanbul.

Anne K. Ream:

‘When you talk about gender-based violence, there are so many incentives to be silent, (but) stories put a name and a face to an issue that very often the world (would) rather not see.’



Silvana Arbia:

‘We aspire to a Europe without violence, and we will fight for that. [...] The Soroptimist project Defeating Violence! is a good one [...] because the approach is multidisciplinary and very pragmatic.’



Some 1,500 Soroptimists attended the three-day Convention, which offered high-calibre plenary and parallel sessions as well as practical workshops.

recipient of the Amnesty International Prize reminded us how importance it is that civil society ensures signatories to treaties follow through on their commitments. Anne K Ream, founder of The Voices and Faces Project and bestselling author of victims’ testimonials, brought home the sad reality: violence can affect any woman no matter what her age or social standing. She has devoted her life to listening to victims and giving them a vehicle to recount their stories and then to try to move on. The diverse line-up of speakers allowed for innumerable interesting encounters, which also led to some great discussions during the gala dinner!

Talented speakers at parallel sessions

The 28 parallel sessions and debates that took place during the afternoon did not disappoint either. Participants were offered a broad range of conferences and other workshops concerned with the challenges confronting women at the beginning of the 21st century, such as education for all, trafficking, forced migration, female entrepreneurship and women and Islam. Talented Soroptimist and non-Soroptimist speakers shared the same platform.

Young Soroptimists from the four Federations – Sareh Ameri (Dubai) from SIE, Victoria Pritchard (UK) from SIGBI, Kate Brady Kean (New Zealand) from SISWP and Lee Ann Cochran (USA) from SIA – assembled around SI President Elect Yvonne Simpson at the closing plenary session. The idea to engage the next generation and listen to their concerns afforded a view into the future. A challenge successfully met!

A demonstration of progress

The Federation Presidents welcomed these discussions and presentations as a demonstration of each Federation’s progress and development. It is a credit to Soroptimists from all four corners of the world and a strong message going forward.

The closing ceremony was magnificent. As part of the Change of the Insignia Ann Garvie passed on the SI necklace and a traditional New Zealand coat to Yvonne Simpson to the accompaniment of a Maori performance. As performers danced and sang, the flag representing the next convention’s venue was then handed over. Destination in 2019: Kuala Lumpur!

Many congratulations to the Organising Committee, consisting of Ann Garvie (President SI 2013-2015), Emine Erdem (Convention Chair), Anne Simon (Executive Director, Convention Programme and Planning), Yasemin Özses (Treasurer) and Lale Kaplan, (Local Committee Chair) with her Committee – Inci Erdem (Programme), Esra Disperati (General Secretary), Beril Atakul (Communication) and Güliz Cinar (Event Programmer). A thank you as well for the tremendous help from SIE HQ: Claire Govaerts, France Legendre, Bintou Koïta and Gizel Beccera.

SIE Peace Prize

EDIT SCHLAFFER HONOURED AT THE SI CONVENTION

On the occasion of the SI Convention in July, SIE President Ulla Madsen and SIE President Elect Maria Elisabetta de Francisicis presented the 2015 Peace Prize of Soroptimist International of Europe to Dr Edit Schlaffer. The Austrian social scientist and feminist was jointly nominated by SI Club Spittal/Millstättersee in Austria and SI Club Vaduz in Liechtenstein.

The jury selected Edit Schlaffer for her commitment to women in international politics and civil society. She founded ‘Women without Borders’ in Vienna in 2002. This international research-based NGO encourages women to take the lead in their personal and public lives by acting as agents of change. In 2008, Edit Schlaffer established SAVE – Sisters Against Violent Extremism, the world’s first international counter-terrorism platform bringing together women to fight against violent extremism.

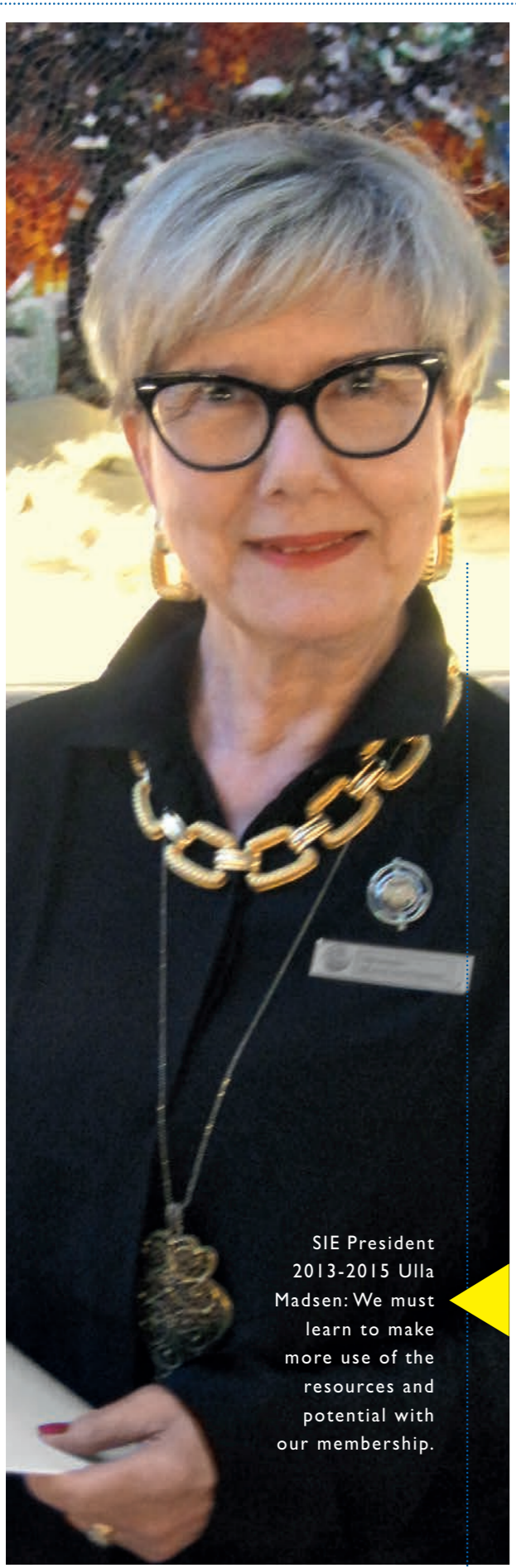
The endowment of €20,000 will go towards Edit Schlaffer’s ‘Mothers for Change’ project,

which aims to empower women to take a more active role in safeguarding their families against the threat of violent extremism. She has developed the so-called Mothers School model to train mothers in personal, communication and parenting skills so that they can recognise and react to early signs of radicalisation in their children.

Conferred every two years, the SIE Peace Prize honours people or organisations deserving special recognition for their remarkable achievements to promote peace. Past recipients are Carla del Ponte, former Chief Prosecutor of the UN International Criminal Tribunal (2005), Vera Bohle, consultant at the Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining (2007), Valdete Idrizi, peace activist from Kosovo (2009), Sylvia Borren, activist for gender equality and the fight against poverty (2011), and Silvana Arbia, former Chief of Prosecutions for the United Nations International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (2013).



SIE President elect Maria Elisabetta de Francisicis (left) and SIE President Ulla Madsen (right) present the 2015 SIE Peace Prize to Dr Edit Schlaffer.



SIE President 2013-2015 Ulla Madsen: We must learn to make more use of the resources and potential with our membership.

Interview at the Change of Insignia

THE ONGOING MODERNISATION PROCESS WILL CONTINUE

The biennium of SIE President Ulla Madsen came to an end on 30th September 2015, when Maria Elisabetta de Franciscis took over the helm of SIE. A change in leadership is an ideal time to reflect – on the past and the future of our organisation.

Ulla, it was your idea to present younger Soroptimists in *The Link*. What did you hope to achieve with these interviews?

I wanted to give younger Soroptimists a ‘voice’ and share their fresh ideas on how to continue the modernising process the organisation that began eight years ago. It is important to show that we have active young members who are committed to our vision, mission and goals and who take responsibility as Club Presidents and officers. They are an inspiration to other Soroptimists.

In your experience as SIE President, how should our organisation change to recruit more younger women?

37% of the 19,700 respondents to the Membership Consultation in 2014 felt that members are leaving because of too much bureaucracy. We should be focusing on achieving our goals rather than worrying about administrative tasks. However, recording our accomplishments is necessary and important. I hope club life will be further simplified once the new Constitutions are completed and approved. In my experience younger professional women want to have greater influence on decisions taken in their club and in the other constitutional bodies of our organisation, and in general, we must also learn to make more use of the resources and potential within our membership. As I have suggested

before, Single Clubs should be afforded greater influence as well, which can be achieved through a new Federation structure. I am equally convinced that a new Strategic Communication Plan, which the Governors have agreed to pursue at the Board’s suggestion, will benefit Soroptimists at all levels.

If the choice were up to you, how would you like Soroptimists to remember your biennium?

I would like members to remember that we implemented the ‘bottom up approach’ to stop the decline in membership and to strengthen the organisation as a whole. Indeed, membership statistics as per 30th June 2015 show that fewer women have left the organisation than over the same period last year. We created greater transparency and managed to take SIE to a higher professional level – both internally and externally.

For the first time in our Federation history, we reached out to Unions and individual Clubs for their personal opinions, and 56.3% of our members participated in the Consultation in 2014.

I hope members will also remember the valuable new tools we introduced, such as Programme News, Advocacy News, the Interactive Map, SIE Facebook and the Photo Competition. Our Federation can clearly be proud of the successful and unforgettable SI Convention in Istanbul.

In addition, the decisions taken at the Governors’ Meeting in Lisbon to draft new Constitutions and develop a professional Strategic Communication Plan will secure the future of the organisation.

And finally, I hope everyone remembers that the biennium theme was in line with UNEP’s programme not only by addressing environmental issues, but also by demonstrating that gender equality for women and girls is indissolubly linked to a healthy sustainable environment.

Elisabetta, in your GM presentation you cited Strategic Leadership as one of the key internal focuses of your biennium. Can you explain what you mean in concrete terms?

To maintain the value of the vision and mission of SI beyond its first 100 years, we must continue to modernise our organisation. Once we agree on this premise, I believe there are concrete steps we can take to drive modernisation: for example, (1) increase efforts to nurture Single Clubs and to offer smaller Unions the necessary accompanying support, (2) further develop the ‘Train the Trainer’ approach and

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SIE President Maria Elisabetta de Franciscis: I believe there are concrete steps we can take to drive modernisation.

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streamline communications procedures with Clubs, (3) simplify and reduce the flow of forms sent to Unions and Clubs and (4) concentrate on a more active advocacy role.

What is your rationale behind the biennium programme 'Education and Women Empowerment'?

I believe we need to sharpen our external message to achieve a better branding and improve the recognition of Soroptimist in the public realm. Clubs and the general public can be confused when every biennium at every level, whether Club, Union, Federation or SI, each new President invites them to concentrate activities and projects on her particular favourite subject. Some eight years ago, Clubs throughout the world answered an SI survey identifying 'Educate to Lead' as the desired focus for a recognisable and catchy branding which would take us up to the organisation's centennial in 2021. Education is a tool which crosscuts all the former UN Millennium Development Goals and the newly defined Sustainable Development Goals. Through education we empower not just women, but entire societies. To this end scholarships, training and mentoring will be given maximum attention in the next two years.

How do you hope to adjust our mission and organisation to better meet the needs of women today?

We have already started the process of drafting new and leaner Constitutions, which is an excellent opportunity to rethink our organisational structure in general. For example, we should consider a geographic remapping of Unions and Single Clubs and a fine-tuning of accounting procedures. In today's competitive environment for top women, our mission needs to be stimulating and thought provoking to retain and be attractive to younger professionals. We should make our membership directory a tool for professional networking across borders and cultures. I also believe we ought to revisit the structure of our annual face-to-face meeting to allow for more debate, more training and a greater exchange of know-how. On the whole, there should be less bureaucracy and fewer administrative tasks, which can be easily dealt with by email or through the Internet. In short, while we celebrate the traditional values of Soroptimist, such as friendship and realising projects to improve the lives of women and girls, we must also embrace new technologies and trends in society to secure our future.

SIE Training in Leuven

AN OPPORTUNITY TO SHARE EXPERIENCE

The presidents and other representatives of European Single Clubs and Unions in Eastern Europe were invited to a training seminar organised by SIE. From 16th-18th October, 58 enthusiastic Soroptimists from 28 countries met in Leuven, Belgium. Seven experienced Soroptimists – Ulla Madsen, Anne-Marie Hendrickx, Tonny Filedt Kok, Maria Luisa Frosio, Birthe Sonne, Gerda Rossier and Anne Wszelaczynska – conducted the training.

Being a member of a Single Club requires extra efforts to follow up on what is going on within the Federation. That is why training is so essential. The Membership Consultation and the comments in the Annual Reports support this view.

After arriving on Friday afternoon, everybody gathered for a session on the SIE website. Both Saturday and Sunday offered a full programme and enough time to cover subjects such as leadership, professional networking, new board structure, internal and external communication, visibility, financial management of clubs and projects, Extension/Retention, conflict handling, Annual Reports and PFRs.

Everyone received a certificate at the close of the training.



Sharing information and experience was particularly valuable.



Daphne Theunissen, President of SI Single Club Costa del Sol, says:

'I am not a stranger to international meetings, but this one was very special. The atmosphere was fantastic, all participants were eager to learn and share the new knowledge with their clubs. As a member of a Single Club you have more freedom, more direct contact to the Federation, but also extra work, because you receive all the information and have to decide what to do with it. I really appreciate the invitation to this training, it was good to refresh our knowledge and to see the amount of information that is available on the SIE intranet. It is so important that all members are registered and have a look around online, because there is so much material. I have started to put the information into short videos so we can use them afterwards for our new members after showing them to the club.'

It is great to discuss the results of the new structure. You saw that all the comments from the participants about their problems were taken seriously.

The advantage of a meeting with members of Single Clubs made us realise how much we have in common. As we were a smaller group, there was time for networking, discussion, exchange of ideas, and really getting to know the other participants. This training seminar was so successful; I hope it will be repeated in the future.

As I like to make movies, I started with a trailer, which can be seen on YouTube: Soroptimist International Club Costa del Sol: "Trailer Leuven". I plan to prepare short instruction videos for the club and especially new members.'

Nada Sabec from SI Single Club Maribor, Slovenia, adds,

'Coming from Slovenia, where there are only four single clubs (ours being the oldest), I looked forward to learning more about the work of other clubs as well as about the Federation. The seminar programme looked very promising, covering various relevant topics in a very systematic manner. All in all, I expected to benefit from it and indeed my expectations were surpassed. All the areas relevant to our functioning were covered extensively. The organisation was excellent and the trainers went out of their way to accommodate us as well as to challenge us to present our own views and suggestions during group work.'

I found this sharing of experience particularly valuable and look forward to implementing some of them in our future efforts. Our club in particular has been very active locally, but based on the seminar, we decided to become more "visible" globally as well, posting information about our activities on the SIE website and trying to intensify our cooperation with other clubs. In short, the entire experience was very memorable professionally and socially.

The beautiful city of Leuven with its long university tradition was the ideal backdrop for everything that we gained on this occasion, which I hope will become a regular event on the Soroptimist calendar.'

Lene Thygesen and Daphne Theunissen, SI Single Club Costa del Sol, and Nada Sabec, SI Single Club Maribor

Participants and trainers gathered for a souvenir group photo in the beautiful city of Leuven.



Biennium theme 2013-2015

'LET'S GO GREEN - WORKING FOR A HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT'

Why did I chose the environment as a theme? Because as Soroptimists, I believe our individual and collective responsibility as an organisation is to ensure sustainable development and to protect our planet. Working for a healthier environment is also in line with the various water themes of my predecessors. In past years, Soroptimists have proved to be highly creative in realising projects that serve their communities – by creating gardens, building sanitation facilities, drilling wells etc. But we must recognise that resources are scarce and not properly conserved. 'Working for a healthy environment' addresses the longer term issue and our engagement and responsibility as world citizens.

Each and every project counts

I am very pleased how you received and understood the seriousness and necessity to help our planet to a cleaner and greener environment – especially for

among other places in Rwanda, Benin, Portugal and Italy. When I attend the SI Future African Federation Meeting in Madagascar in March 2016, I will have the pleasure to visit the overall winner of the Best Practice Award 2015, the School Biogas Station project.

The need to create a global policy

Women form a disproportionately large share of the poor in countries all over the world. Women in the rural areas of developing countries are highly dependent on local natural resources for their livelihood, because it is usually their responsibility to secure water, food and energy for cooking and heating. The effects of climate change can lead to conflicts in which women and girls often are the victims of violence. Droughts, irregular rainfall and deforestation all make it harder for women to secure these resources.

The impacts of climate change have increased within the last two years and

December 2015 represents a historic opportunity to put the world on course to meet the climate change challenge. The world needs a new model of growth that is safe, durable and beneficial to all. COP21 seeks to deliver a clear pathway with short and long term milestones, and a system to help us measure and increase progress over time until we get the job done. The Paris Agreement is not only possible, it is necessary and urgent.

Gender equality is also linked

I hope everyone will remember that the biennium theme was perfectly in line with UNEP's programme not only by addressing environmental issues, but also by demonstrating that gender equality for women and girls is indissolubly linked to a healthy sustainable environment.

Going green is not just a choice, but an imperative. As Soroptimists and citizens of the world, I hope you will continue to take responsibility in implementing good environmental projects



2 Soroptimists from SI Club Targoviste in Romania planted beans in a public square to raise awareness of food shortages.

3 SI Club Wassenaar of the Netherlands brought clean water and sanitation to five villages in a rural area of Northern Tanzania.

4 SI Club Ringsted in Denmark sold 2000 recyclable shopping bags to help minimise the burden on the environment.



1 SI Club Hämeenlinna in Finland initiated a campaign to promote environmentally sustainable practices.

As she looks back on the numerous projects implemented during her biennium, SIE President Ulla Madsen recalls that she first mentioned her passion to improve the environment in her letter of motivation for the SIE position back in November 2010. The theme was then presented at the SIE Congress in Berlin in July 2013.



coming generations. We can be so very proud of all the projects Soroptimist clubs have been implementing during the last two years. It doesn't matter if it is a small or big one because each and every project that makes the environment more healthy and sustainable counts. I have had the privilege to visit several environment projects and environmental events,



have also had an influence on areas that are normally not affected, for instance, by heavy rainfall that has caused terrible flooding and greater pollution. This is why it is vital to create a comprehensive global environmental policy for the future of our planet.

The Paris UN Climate Conference, COP21, from 30th November to 11th



because a sustainable and well-protected environment improves the lives of women and girls and facilitates access to education and empowerment.

Thank you for your enthusiasm and hard work. Your environmental projects have made a big difference for the lives of women and girls. Finally, Let's talk, work and act green in our daily lives!

5 The project realised by SI Cotonou Doyen in Benin provides potable water for drinking and irrigation.

YOUNG SOROPTIMISTS SHAPING OUR FUTURE



Katrien Wayenberg also praised the benefits of the Mentoring Programme as a speaker at one of the SI Convention sessions in Istanbul.

Born in Belgium and now a resident of Germany, Katrien Wayenberg is 41 years old, an entrepreneur and just got married in June. She divides her time between her two businesses, hobbies, family and friends and her commitment as a Soroptimist in SI Club Hannover 2000. She has also enjoyed studying, working and living in the US, the UK, Ireland and Tasmania.

How did you hear about Soroptimist?

KW I first learned about Soroptimist through a newspaper ad about SI Germany's mentoring programme. This ad 'found' me, as my mentor later phrased it, when I felt stuck in my position as Head of the Foreign Language Department at a private school with only male top managers. I applied and was accepted as one of 14 candidates. My participation in the mentoring programme turned out to be one of the best and most rewarding decisions I've ever taken.

What inspired you to join a club, and when did you become a member?

KW Finishing the mentoring programme and meeting all of these women was a turning point in my life, for which I am very grateful. However, it took me a while to implement the lessons learned and realise my vision of entrepreneurship. Two years later, after having built up a solid customer base, I felt it was time to start giving back, and I reached out to a local SI club. Happily, the interest was reciprocal, and I joined the organisation in 2008.

Has your club life met your expectations?

KW Yes! I was new in town and hoped for a warm welcome from the club. But when I met my club members, my expectations were exceeded. I found true sisterhood within the club and was quickly integrated in a reliable network of professional women. As an active member, vice president and then president, I was able to further develop several business skills such as moderation, conflict management, diplomacy and fundraising.

What would you suggest we do to attract more members of your age?

KW At 35-40 we are the sandwich generation. Most of us have children, ageing parents AND a career. Time pressure, family obligations and a heavy workload are constant challenges for women of my age. In this busy phase of life, a member can tend to be choosy about the way she spends her evenings and weekends. Therefore it is important to make club meetings interesting for us with topics such as business development, career advice and networking.



As one of the moderators at the Frauen-BerufsBörse in Hannover, Katrien reminded the audience about the importance of women's resources for the economy.

When you became President, were you able to realise your plans for the club?

KW Not entirely. I took over the presidency quite abruptly, when the then president had to resign for health reasons. Despite being very busy privately and professionally, I accepted the challenge, although I would have preferred to grow into the role more slowly. I had dreamt of initiating a project for people with glaucoma, but instead I ended up continuing with the existing projects and set my goals on membership growth. We recruited six new members during my 14-month presidency, and I am proud to say my successors have even exceeded that number.

Another interesting experience during my presidency was bridging the intercultural gap. As a Belgian with an Anglo-Saxon professional background, I enjoyed holding presentations and moderating club meetings in an interactive and motivating way. This 'youthful' exuberance at our club meetings was greeted with a degree of suspicion and even rejected by some. However, the feedback was always professional, and I learned to modify my presenting style to the expectations of a German audience.

What do you feel are the benefits of joining SI?

KW The sisterhood undoubtedly! The Grants of Friendship that allow you to travel to the other side of the world to meet like-minded women are amazing. The chance to learn more about leadership and develop your own style in a protected environment is also a plus. I personally welcomed the opportunity

to participate in the panel discussion on mentoring at the SI Convention in Istanbul. Private confidences exchanged with understanding women. All this is everything I expected from a great network!

How do you see the future of the organisation?

KW I hope our organisation will further develop a dynamic image and attract even more, younger members. We need to think bigger in terms of events and fundraising and publicise our efforts more widely. For example, I'd love to see more media coverage of our projects in the local and national press. We should also do more to stress the business power of our members. Generally, we should embrace new, bold ideas, while still being grateful for the efforts of the sisters before us. If we do all this, I see a bright future for Soroptimist!



Katrien first learned about Soroptimist through an ad about the Mentoring Programme of SI Germany.

BUILDING A STRONGER NETWORK



The keynote speaker at the SI Club Gulf-Dubai charter, Dr Manahel Thabet, shown here with SIE President Ulla Madsen and SIE Extension Chair Maria Luisa Frosio, was so impressed by Soroptimist that she too became a member.

The future of our organisation depends on the membership. We should never forget that recruiting new members and retaining existing ones are crucial. Chartering new clubs is essential for maintaining the vibrancy and effectiveness of Soroptimist. Each new club offers a variety of resources as well as personal and professional experience with a positive impact at all levels. Guiding a new club to its Charter is a labour of love, but also very rewarding – even more so when we are opening to new countries and to different cultures and traditions.

Soroptimist International is now present in more than 130 countries and territories. In the past two years SIE has contributed enormously to the Soroptimist family – especially by adding the three new countries Serbia (SI Club Subotica), United Arab Emirates (SI Club Gulf-Dubai) and Kuwait (SI Club Kuwait).

Chartering the first club in a new country is a challenge. It is mainly the responsibility of the SIE

Extension Committee, but also involves many other hands at SIE level as well as the dedication of the godmothers and the enthusiasm of the founding members. Since the Soroptimist message is new in these countries we have to communicate our vision and mission and our signature programmes. This helps show them the benefits to their community. For the members it is important that the new club is part of an international network of clubs, and membership provides access to more than 80,000 women worldwide who face the same challenges of balancing their personal and professional responsibilities and their commitment to a service organisation.

Attended by local dignitaries and Soroptimists from the region, the chartering of SI Club Subotica in November 2014 marked a further expansion into Eastern Europe, with Serbia becoming SIE's 60th country. SIE President Ulla Madsen presented the Charter to Founding President Livia Biro. Soroptimists from SI Szegeed in Hungary played the role of godmother club.

Last April the Charter of SI Club Gulf-Dubai took place in the presence of a large crowd of Soroptimists. After the keynote speech by Dr Manahel Thabet (soon to become a club member herself), SIE President Ulla Madsen presented the Charter to Club President Sareh Ameri. Among the founding members of this truly international club are Emarati women, Arab women from vari-



The multi-ethnic Founding Members of SI Club Subotica gather for a group photo.

ous Middle Eastern countries and women from the five continents. Connie Gehrken and Edeltraud Priddat from SI Witten Ruhr/Germany, the godmother club, accompanied the club to its Charter. This landmark addition will lead the way to further growth in the Gulf region.

And finally in October 2015 new SIE President Elisabetta de Franciscis presented the Charter to SI Club Kuwait and welcomed H.E. Hend Al-Subeih, Minister of Social Affairs and Labor and Minister of Planning and Development. To the godmothers Zohra Turki and Saida Fitouri goes the gratitude of the Federation for nurturing the club and giving the members the tools and the support needed to succeed. Congratulations to Club President Stacey Al Ghawas and her Board for putting together twenty-eight extraordinary Kuwaiti and expatriate women.



After receiving the charter from SIE President 2015-2017 Maria-Elisabetta de Franciscis (left), Club President of SI Kuwait Stacey Al Ghawas explained her vision for SI Club Kuwait.

Let us remember that the core elements of Soroptimist are the clubs, and that the work done at Club level provides SIE with the impulse to grow. When we charter a club in a new country, we are not just increasing membership, we are also expanding our capacity to connect diverse perspectives and create positive changes in Soroptimist: we are building bridges between different cultures.

Maria Luisa Frosio, Chair of the SIE Extension Committee 2011-2015

SETTING THE STRATEGY AS AN INCORPORATED COMPANY

The SI Board Meeting (BM) in Istanbul before the SI Convention was the first as an incorporated company. SIE President 2013-2015 Ulla Madsen summarises the results of the proceedings.

Before the BM started on 7th July, I invited the SIE Silent Observers to attend a pre-meeting for a briefing about the agenda. They also met the SIE delegation. This pre-meeting is in general a good idea, but in this case it was absolutely essential because the Silent Observers were not sent the documents for the meeting. The SI Board could not agree on distributing the papers because part of the material was confidential. Some felt this information should be discussed and clarified before making it available to all participants. I fully understand why many Silent Observers felt this was an unsatisfactory situation.

The most important decisions reached by the Board at the final meeting of the biennium 2013-2015 and the first of the biennium 2015-2017 were the following:

- The role of SI Programme Director, which will change to SI Director of Advocacy, will focus on global advocacy and leading the network of UN representatives.
- SI will be restructured and replaced by a streamlined structure which maintains SI as the umbrella organisation in which the primary function is global advocacy and communication.
- 'Educate to Lead' was reconfirmed as the 10-year theme.
- As proposed by SIE, the Working Group will discuss proportional voting as part of SI restructuring.
- The 'Where We Stand' policies for 'Gender-Based Violence', 'Harmful Traditional Practices' and the 'Role of Men and Boys' are adopted.
- The 2015-2017 December 10th President's



The Change of Insignia from Ann Garvie (left) to Yvonne Simpson took place at the SI Convention in Istanbul.

- Appeal will focus on providing education and leadership skills to women and girls to help rebuild their lives following the Nepal earthquakes of April-May 2015.
- A Centennial Celebrations Committee will be formed.
- A Leadership Development Committee addressing the issue of 'Educating Soroptimists to Lead' will be established.

SI Convention 2019 Chair Siew Yong Gnanalingam, SISWP, presented the exciting venue for the event from 19th-21st July 2019, the Kuala Lumpur Convention Centre, Malaysia.

We warmly welcomed Yvonne Simpson, SISWP, as the new SI President and thanked Ann Garvie for her efforts as SI President 2013-2015. On 9th July, SI President Yvonne led the first BM in the new biennium in a professional and friendly atmosphere, which bodes well for future cooperation.

IMPLEMENTING SDGS 5 AND 6 TOGETHER

As a global network of women from all walks of life, Women for Water Partnership strongly believes that access to and control over natural resources, and especially water, are key factors for women's empowerment and equality. And we mean water for domestic purposes as well as for productive uses.

In my role as President of WfWP, I was asked to join the panel at a high-level session during UN summit in New York at the end of September 2015, when the member states unanimously approved the Sustainable Development Goals and the transformative agenda for 2030. WfWP's efforts mainly focus on the implementation of SDG 5 (Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls) and SDG 6 (Ensure availability and guarantee inclusion of women in the water sector). When 5 strengthens 6, the inclusion of women in the water sector is a given. I was happy to invite our new SI President Yvonne Simpson to join me at the event to help raise awareness of Soroptimist during question time.

Why is linking SDG 5 and 6 so important – also for Soroptimists?

Women are experts, leaders and agents of change in the water-sustainable development nexus, thus playing important roles in achieving equitable access to water for all and all uses including sanitation. It is therefore effective to include women at all levels of decision making and to involve them in designing, implementing, evaluating programmes and

projects in the field of water and sustainable development. This is a very important shift in mindset.

However, WfWP contributes to several SDGs, e.g. poverty (SDG 1), food (SDG 2), health (SDG 3) and education (SDG 4). The adoption of the SDGs shows the political will for action on women and water issues at a global level. In addition, target 4.3 – to ensure equal access for all women and men to affordable quality technical, vocational and tertiary education, including university by 2030 – stresses

Uniting Soroptimist objectives with WfWP goals, Mariet Verhoef-Cohen spoke at the UN Meeting on water in Dushanbe, Tajikistan.



High-level panel at UN HQ promotes World Toilet Day on 19th November with specially printed toilet rolls.

another crucial element, and that is to enhance women's professional involvement in water management.

WfWP is also pushing for constructive dialogue with countries and international organisations to promote the connection between SDG 5 and 6. In this connection, the new SDG agenda calls for a strong commitment to reduce inequalities within and between countries, to eliminate all forms of discrimination and to review disaggregated data to 'reach the furthest behind first'.

Campaigning for an International Year 'Water and Women'

25 years after the Dublin Principles for Water were adopted, WfWP has taken the initiative to designate 2017 as a UN International Year 'Water and Women'. Such an International Year would further the implementation of SDGs 5 and 6.

A dedicated year would emphasise the active role of women in water management and governance. Greater involvement of women will lead to more efficient and sustainable use of water resources, thus combatting water scarcity. Funds will be raised and devoted to encourage women to become better educated in water and governance matters. Men and boys will realise that real change to equitable and sustainable access to water can only be realised together. Member States will vote whether to designate an International Year of Water and Women at the end of the year.

Mariet Verhoef-Cohen, President of WfWP, SIE President 2007-2009 and SI President-elect effective 1st January 2016

IT'S TIME FOR GLOBAL ACTION

After over two years of intensive public consultation as well as engaging with civil society and other stakeholders around the world, including Soroptimist, the United Nations agreed to implement the newly proposed 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in September 2015. These SDGs build on the Millennium Development Goals, established in 2000, whereby each goal has specific targets to be achieved over the coming 15 years – 169 in total!

Eradicating poverty in all its forms is still considered the greatest global challenge, and therefore ending poverty everywhere is part of Goal 1. Gender equality and empowering women and girls now comprise Goal 5, which crosscuts many other goals and targets. Improving living conditions and equity for women and girls can be achieved by strengthening and implementing many other goals, such as Goal 4 on Education and Goal 6 on the availability of water for all. To read more about the new SDGs, see www.sustainabledevelopment.un.org.

We Danish Soroptimists are proud that it took the UN just minutes to adopt this declaration at the 70th session of the General Assembly, presided over by the newly elected Danish President of the United Nations General Assembly, Mogens Lykketoft!

Birgit Aarsnes, Governor SI Denmark



THE LUNCHEON WAS A REAL TURKISH DELIGHT!



As Liaison Officer, Henny Knap-Go has met many Soroptimists from all over the world, both long-standing Open Heart – Open Door participants and newcomers.



Established in 1995 by Austrian Heidrun Konrad, SIE President 2003-2005, Open Heart – Open Door (OHOD) has since developed into a highly successful exchange programme with participants from all over the world. For many years the OHOD luncheon has been a traditional event at SI Conventions, and the SI Convention held in July 2015 in Istanbul was no exception.

Some 140 Soroptimists came together for the meet and greet OHOD luncheon on the second day of the Convention. The venue was well chosen on the top floor of the Hilton Hotel. The impressive panoramic view of the Bosphorus and the excellent food will be remembered as a real Turkish delight. Food and friendship never fail to be appreciated!

As Liaison Officer, I was happy to meet Soroptimists from so many countries, both long-standing OHOD participants and newcomers. In my short speech, I updated the guests on OHOD and informed them about the special new directory of Soroptimist hotels and B&B which is being produced. I also invited them to visit the Open Heart – Open Door booth in the Project Fair Hall. It was a pleasure for me to give the floor to SIE President Ulla Madsen who showed her enthusiasm and support for Open Heart – Open Door. Heidrun Konrad was also honoured in a few words on the history.

SIE Headquarters has worked out a concept for an Open Heart – Open Door website, which will soon offer more possibilities. We hope that greater visibility and a new web profile will attract even more participants and make communication easier. The concept was presented during the lunch.

More than 50 Soroptimists showed interest in becoming participants of OHOD. That would make the number of programme members more than 500 in 59 countries!

Open Heart – Open Door programme offers five options for fun, friendship and fulfillment: (1) Home hospitality for one or two Soroptimists or a couple, (2) Contact person as a guide in your hometown, (3) Exchange on a professional level, (4) Home exchanges, and (5) Youth exchanges. To request a registration form, please send an email to hkhknapgo@upcmail.nl.

I look forward to welcoming new participants. I know from experience how meaningful Soroptimist membership can be through the OHOD contacts.

Henny Knap-Go, Liaison Officer of Open Heart – Open Door

WINNERS OF THE SIE PHOTO COMPETITION 2015

This year's Photo Competition offered three categories: (A) Women and Girls Securing a Sustainable Future, (B) Women and Girls Promoting Better Nutrition and (C) Women and Girls Raising Awareness of Climate Change. The prizewinning photos of categories A and B were presented in *The Link* 3/2014-2015. Below are the winners of category C and the Candy Prizes.

SIE Programme Director 2013-2015 Christine Peer chaired the jury, which consisted of former prizewinners Dr Roberta Ghidoni of SI Club Crema (SI Italy) and Villy Makou of SI Club Athens Kifissia Ekali (SI Greece), SIE Editor of *The Link* Christine Cromwell-Ahrens and SIE Programme and Advocacy Assistant Bintou Koita.

The four criteria for evaluation were: suitability to the theme; artistic value; originality of the subject and orientation to advocacy. Two winners were chosen for each category. One additional photo in each of the three categories earned a so-called Candy Prize, based on cleverness.



1st prizewinner
The photographer of the 'Running through the heat' is Maria Fitcal of SI Club Bucharest (SI Romania).



2nd prizewinner
The photographer of 'Will I be able to breathe?' is Ilknur Baltaci Mateescu of SI Club Izmir (SI Turkey).



'Green dreams'
by Ismet Arikanturk of SI Club Izmir (SI Turkey)

'Flood'
by Vanna Naretto of SI Club Valle d'Aosta (SI Italy)



'Kill unhealthy eating'
by Christine Kipper of SI Club Graz (SI Austria)

..... Women and Girls Raising Awareness of Climate
..... Candy Prizes
.....

Kirsten Sveder on Friendship Links

WIDENING THE SOROPTIMIST EXPERIENCE



The Friendship Link clubs met in Söndervig, Denmark in September 2005 where they visited sand sculptures, including one of the world famous author Hans Christian Andersen in the middle.

Kirsten Sveder is a founding member of SI Stockholm-Ekeröe, Past President of SI Sweden and a former Governor of her Union. She was an SIE Vice President and a member of the SIE Extension Committee. Kirsten also had the important Federation task to train Soroptimists mainly in Single Clubs in Eastern Europe. In the following article, Kirsten explains what Friendship Links have meant to her.

Still going strong after 29 years

In September 2015 the Friendship Link clubs shared a weekend together in Varde.

In my opinion, the strength of a club is based on three pillars: friendship between club members, which often leads to joint activities outside the club; cooperating to realise projects, which



strengthens the club's unity; and commitment to Friendship Links with other clubs.

Born in Denmark in 1942, I moved to Sweden after marrying a Swede in 1968. My mother was a devoted member of SI Esbjerg, and based on her positive experience, I joined SI Stockholm-Vaxholm in 1973. The members received me with open arms, drilled me in Soroptimist and were an enormous support for me as a newlywed.

In 1985 my husband died of a heart attack. With three small children it was difficult for me to attend the Stockholm-Vaxholm meetings. Needing something positive to do, I gathered 20 ladies among my dentist patients, friends and neighbours to establish a new club. SI Stockholm-Ekeröe was chartered in June 1986. I chose SI Varde near my hometown in Denmark as a Friendship Link for my new Club, because I knew almost all the members. Four members from SI Varde and my mother came to our charter. My close friendship with SI Varde started from that moment.

Meeting those sisters several times a year has given me joy, stimulation and a deep Soroptimist feeling.

Our clubs had joint projects with our other FL club, SI Flevoland in Holland. For instance we sent a large container with mattresses, medicine, blankets and 100 cuddly toys to a children's hospital in Tbilisi in Georgia, which I had already visited for SIE Extension.

Over the past 29 years our three clubs met about every three years to study local culture and traditions, discuss Soroptimist matters and create wonderful memories. In September 2015, nine members of my club visited Varde at the invitation of President Lone Norman Larsen. The splendid programme was in a true Soroptimist spirit.

Based on my positive experience with Friendship Links, I would encourage all clubs to engage in Friendship Links to widen their Soroptimist horizons and learn from each other.

Kirsten Sveder, SI Stockholm-Ekeröe



Kirsten Sveder presented her club's gift to President Lone Larsen of SI Varde.

SI Clubs Breslau and Bamberg-Kunigunde

FRIENDSHIP ACROSS BORDERS

Two SI Clubs decided to strike up a friendship: one is a relatively young Polish club, the other is a much older German club. This Friendship Link between two extraordinarily beautiful cities was the first for Breslau and the fifth for Bamberg-Kunigunde.

This autumn a large German group travelled to Lower Silesia in Poland to officially celebrate the new Friendship Link. After an introduction to Polish history in the Silesian Museum in Görlitz, Germany, the Soroptimists journeyed via the historic church in Nawor to Breslau, where they were warmly welcomed.

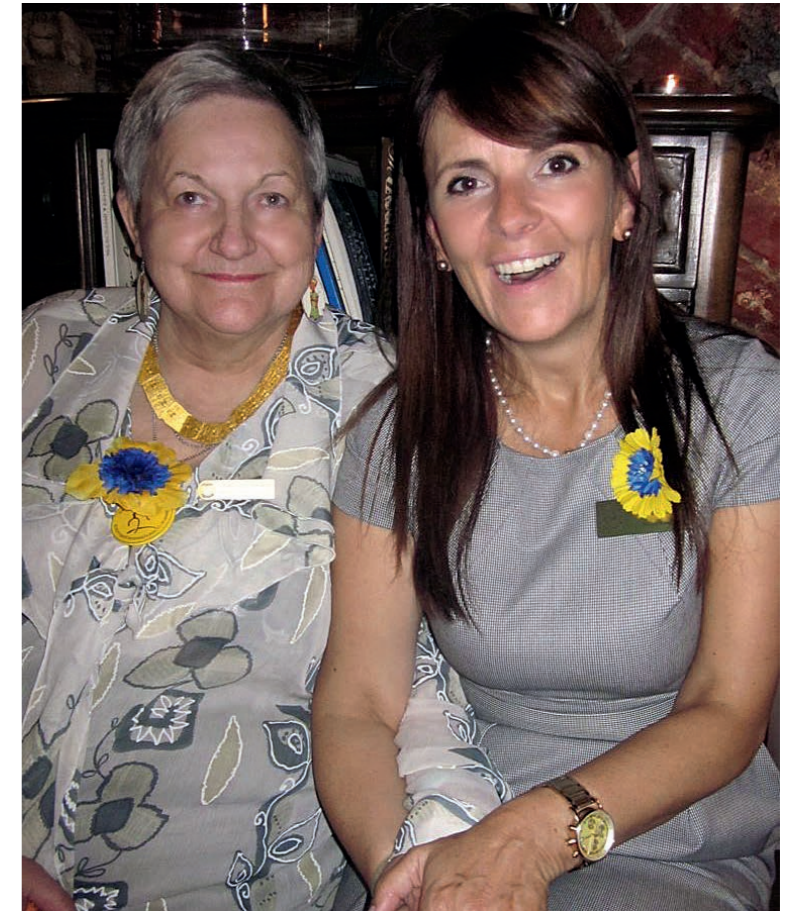
The weekend programme left the guests with unforgettable impressions: The cathedral underscored to the importance of the Catholic faith for Poland. A ride with the historic tram offered a unique view of the sights, while a guided tour through the magical historical centre was the crowning touch.

After SI Club Brünn in the Czech Republic and Ljubljana in Slovenia, SI Club Bamberg-Kunigunde is continuing its drive to establish Friendship Links in Eastern Europe with SI Club Breslau in Poland. The German club is also linked with SI Club Kärnten-Unterland in Austria and SI Club Engiadina Switzerland.

The Soroptimists of SI Bamberg-Kunigunde have practised the idea of international goodwill and understanding very intensively since the club's founding in 1991. We hope to have regular contact, a deep friendship and joint projects and activities with SI Breslau as well.

Next year SI Club Bamberg-Kunigunde will celebrate the 25th anniversary of its chartering. We sincerely hope that many Soroptimists from the Friendship Link clubs will travel to Bamberg so that we can demonstrate once again how important and wonderful Soroptimist friendship is. It is also an excellent opportunity to show European solidarity and the true meaning of international understanding.

Heide Ibach, SI Bamberg-Kunigunde



Soroptimists of all ages benefit from friendships across borders.

The cathedral of Breslau was just one of the sights on the programme.

SI Club Bamberg-Kunigunde celebrate the newly established Friendship Link with Soroptimists from SI Club Breslau.





Members of SI Club Bamberg-Kunigunde are actively involved in the 'Learning is Fun' project.

SI Germany

'LEARNING IS FUN' WINS BEST PROJECT

SI Germany has awarded its 2015 prize for the Best Club Project to 'Learning Is Fun', implemented by SI Club Bamberg-Kunigunde, which offers educational aid and integration support to secondary school children. The support targets German pupils with learning disabilities, school children with migrant backgrounds in the second and third generation, usually with inadequate German language skills, and children of refugees and asylum seekers without any knowledge of German.

The club chose this project because members can independently organise and implement the idea and can make use of their own skills, networks and abilities. Since a large part of the club is actively contributing, the club project allows a long-term commitment. It is something we can do locally and is closely linked to the current situation with refugees and asylum seekers. At the same time, we are not neglecting German pupils with learning disabilities and children of long-standing migrants.

After just one year, the project has been very well received in the public. We are cooperating with four secondary schools, with which we coordinate content and the particular requirements. Six months were invested in the structure and organisation of the programme. During the course of the school year we financed 600 hours of tutoring and invested more than 1000 hours of volunteer work. We funded the tutoring with €18,772 and spent €4,500 on tablets for the school. We earned the money to finance the project through our Christmas market, donations and prize money. Several other service clubs in Bamberg also supported our work by donating the proceeds of their summer fête to our project.

Of our 42 members, 25 are actively working with us this project, including retired teachers. Active teachers are also helping us, as are local students. Among other things we provide private and group lessons in German and maths and special support to achieve a degree.

Our club also organises theatre and circus visits and contact to the Bamberg Symphony. Painting lessons, courses for the prevention of violence and city tours are available as well because we believe acquiring knowledge should be fun, and gaining a better understanding of another culture is an important contribution to integration.

Heide Ibach, Coordinator of the 'Learning Is Fun' project, SI Club Bamberg-Kunigunde



SI Bamberg-Kunigunde is cooperating with four schools in order to coordinate content and the specific requirements of the children in the programme.

Education Foundation of SI Norway

SUPPORT FOR PROFESSIONAL TRAINING



SI Norway once again invites Soroptimist Unions or Clubs to nominate a candidate for a grant offered by its Education Foundation to support the professional training of women in developing countries. Applications are being accepted for the academic year 2016/2017.

The Foundation was established in 1985 and offered its first grants in 1990. The primary goal of this Foundation is to fund the education and training of women who otherwise would not have the financial resources needed to continue their education.

Preference will be given to applications of non-Soroptimist candidates for basic professional training at secondary school level in their home country. Advanced courses and study abroad will be given a lower priority.

The deadline for applications to the Education Foundation of SI Norway – www.soroptimistnorway.no – is 1st March 2016.

Kristin Ruder, Ruder@online.no

SI Perugia

CONFERENCE FOCUSES ON THE UN AND PEACE

For the last meeting before summer holidays, Giovanna Toter De Fazio, President of SI Perugia (Italy), organised a conference on the 'United Nations and Peace' at the magnificent historic Castle of Ramazzano. The Rotary Club East of Perugia was invited to co-host the event, and Prefect of Perugia Antonella De Miro greeted the participants.

The first keynote speaker was General Giuliano Ferrari, a former advisor to the Italian permanent mission at UN in New York while Italy was a member of the Security Council. He is considered one of the world's leading experts in strategic international relations and comparative military laws. General Ferrari summarised the history of the UN, explaining the different organs and the main purpose of their work, i.e. to maintain peace. General Ferrari, who led the international mission in the territories occupied by Israel and was responsible for the rules of engagement of Italian missions, reported on the work done by the UN and the very active part that Italy plays in such missions.

As the next speaker, Dora Poti Vrdlovec, SI representative to the UN in Vienna, then spoke about the role non-governmental organisations with gen-



The panel at the conference in Perugia (from left): Dora Poti Vrdlovec, Giovanna Toter De Fazio, President Rotary Perugia East Fausto Cetrini and General Giuliano Ferrari.

eral consultative status at ECOSOC, like Soroptimist International, can play in promoting peace. She explained that NGOs are gaining a lot of attention at the UN and stressed that world peace goes hand in hand with a sustainable environment, equitable sharing of natural resources, fair social and economic development and securing human rights.

Club President Giovanna concluded the conference and invited the 150 participants to a dinner in the garden of the castle, which offers a splendid view of the Umbria countryside. Here members of Soroptimist, Rotary and Lions had the opportunity to share thoughts and experience.

Giovanna Toter De Fazio, President of SI Perugia (Italy)



SI Brussels Doyen

HONOURING WOMEN NOBEL PEACE PRIZE LAUREATES

The party behind Aung San Suu Kyi, Nobel Prize laureate of 1991, achieved a landslide victory in the recent elections in Myanmar.

With her passion for education, Malala Yousafzai continues to inspire young and old throughout the world. Photo: Antonio Olmos

SI Bruxelles Doyen hosted journalist Princess Esmeralda of Belgium, the daughter of King Leopold III, as a guest speaker on Women Nobel Peace Prize laureates, whom she has researched and/or interviewed. Each has an individual story, but they all showed courage and the profound desire for change:

- 1977 – Betty Williams and Mairead Corrigan, co-founders of ‘Women for Peace’, were dedicated to encouraging a peaceful resolution to the sectarian violence in Northern Ireland in the 1960s and 1970s.

- 1991 – Aung San Suu Kyi, who was put under house arrest for many years by the military junta in Myanmar (Burma), went on hunger strike to defend her cause against the dictatorship. She has since been released and is now a Member of Parliament in her country.

- 1992 – Rigoberta Menchú Tum fought for the rights of Guatemala’s indigenous peoples during and after the Guatemalan Civil War (1960-1996). She was exiled and escaped to Mexico, where she continued to inform about the atrocities in her country. After the war she campaigned to have members of the military establishment tried in court.

- 1997 – As a founding coordinator of the International Campaign to Ban Landmines (ICB) American political activist Jody Williams worked with governments, UN bodies and the International Committee of the Red Cross to achieve the ICB’s goal of a worldwide treaty banning antipersonnel landmines in 1997.

- 2003 – Shirin Ebadi became the first woman judge in Iran. When she was downgraded to simple clerk during the Ayatollah regime, she opened a law office that defended women and imprisoned students. Eventually, she fled to London for fear of reprisals.

- 2011 – Ellen Johnson Sirleaf is the first woman to be elected President in an African country, Liberia. She was recognised for her ‘non-violent struggle for the safety of women and for women’s rights to full participation in peace-building work’. Fellow Liberian Leymah Gbowee, a peace activist who led the women’s peace movement that helped bring an end to the Second Liberian Civil War in 2003. Her efforts, along with Sirleaf’s, helped usher in a period of peace and enabled the free elections in 2005 that Sirleaf won. Co-laureate and journalist Tawakkol Karman was honoured for her fight for more security, freedom of press and fundamental women’s rights in her country Yemen, where she co-founded ‘Women journalists without chains’.

- 2014 – Pakistani pupil Malala Yousafzai is a staunch defender of girls’ rights to attend school and the youngest ever recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize. She gained international fame when the Taliban attempted to assassinate her in 2012.

Renate Smith, SI Brussels Doyen

Battle of Waterloo Bicentenary

EUROPE HAS A DATE WITH ITS HISTORY

To mark the bicentenary of the Battle of Waterloo on 19th-20th June 2015, SI Club Val Brabant-Waterloo organised special friendship days. The programme included a trip to the restored Hougoumont Farm, visiting the bivouac camp, a dinner for the club’s 20th anniversary and, to con-



clude, a re-enactment of the battle. We had the pleasure of hosting several Belgian clubs as well as clubs from Germany, France, Great Britain, Luxembourg, the Netherlands and Switzerland.

Hougoumont Farm, the symbolic site of the Battle of Waterloo, was officially inaugurated a few days before the weekend. Four Soroptimist representatives were invited to the prestigious ceremony. One of the official speakers mentioned SI Belgium’s role in restoring the chapel. As part of the ‘Women Building Peace’ project supported by SIE and in line with the UNESCO theme for 2001-2010, ‘Building Peace through Local Heritage’, SIB backed the project to restore the Hougoumont chapel, initiated by the SI Val Brabant-Waterloo. At the time it won a prize in the Best Project competition. Among other things, the club restored the statue of Christ hanging in the chapel.

The defining moment of this beautiful ceremony was the tripartite handshake between the Duke of Wellington, Prince Charles Bonaparte and Prince Blücher, direct descendents of the bat-

tlefield leaders. Clearly, Europe had a date with its history on this 17th June!

The bicentenary event began on Friday with the Soroptimist guests visiting Hougoumont Farm. This was followed by a wonderful lunch at the *Butte du Lion*. Later that evening, some 100 Soroptimists and their ‘Soroptimisters’ met up for the Club’s anniversary festive dinner at the Rideau Rouge. In a sumptuously decorated hall, our Head of Protocol greeted guests in four languages.

On 20th June, we visited the reconstructed Allied Bivouac camp. The day ended with the very impressive re-enactment of one phase of the Battle of Waterloo.

These few days gave us the chance to see old friends and meet new ones to discuss the projects and themes that unite us. Soroptimist Friendship is not an empty phrase – it is a value that we all hold dear.

The Bicentenary Commission of SI Val Brabant-Waterloo



Thousands of soldiers lost their lives during the Battle of Waterloo, as symbolised in this moving sculpture.

The re-enactment of part of the Battle of Waterloo was a highlight of Saturday’s programme.

The members of SI Club Val Brabant-Waterloo dressed for the occasion!

1st Vaduz 'Fragile Europe' Symposium

A HIGH-LEVEL EVENT ON THE STATE OF EUROPE

Until now the 'Rheintal Meeting' had taken place every two years. For the first time in 2015 it took the form of a high-level symposium: the 1st Vaduz Symposium at the University of Liechtenstein under the motto 'Fragile Europe' was held on 5th September. 53 women from different SI Clubs (Bad Ragaz, Chur, Dornbirn, Goldes, Graz Rubin, Kreuzlingen, Liechtenstein, Luzern, Rapperswil, Vaduz, Wien Donau and Zug), as well as private persons attended the event. In her opening speech as well as in her words of thanks, Monika Studer praised the team spirit of SI Club Vaduz in organising this event. SIE President elect 2015-2017 Renata Trottmann-Probst thanked the club members for their initiative and commitment to realising this symposium with such highly qualified panellists. Vaduz Soroptimist Elisabeth Wintrich-Geiter was the extremely competent moderator of the proceedings.

As noted in the invitation, after 70 years of peace the fortress of Europe is severely shaken.



A top-level panel discussed the challenges facing Europe today.

The Ukraine is suffering under the yoke of a civil war, and so-called ISIS is threatening our very way of life. People are risking their lives every day to flee to Europe.

Four speakers voiced their opinions on these topics. As the first speaker, Edit Schlaffer, winner of the 2015 SIE Peace Prize (page 9), social scientist and feminist (www.frauen-ohne-grenzen.org), talked about 'Mothers in first line of defence against radicalism and recruitment'. Vivien Gertsch, jurist, Past President of SI Club Vaduz

and Vice President of Amnesty International Liechtenstein, then spoke about 'European values - values in Europe' and discussed the range of values throughout history from the early days until today. With her lecture on 'Putin's new policy of expansion' Susanne Scholl, journalist, author and doyenne of ORF's foreign correspondents (www.susannescholl.at), examined among other things the 'non-development' of serfs in the Russian agricultural economy and explained how the nation needs a strong man to lead it. Necla Kelek, social scientist, economist and a permanent member of 'German Islamic Conference' concluded the event with her talk on 'Hurriya is called freedom - Arab Spring and its consequences for women'.

The four different topics with hints of a (possible) new world order could not be digested immediately. The symposium offered challenges both to reflect on and to react to. A call to listen, act and help sounded from Liechtenstein throughout Europe.

SI Club Vaduz plans to organise annual symposia on equally explosive topics in the future with the aim to establish these events as an institution, much like the Rheintal Meeting and the German Friendship Meeting. We are already looking forward to the second edition next year.

A DVD on the 'Fragile Europe' symposium can be ordered from the SI Club Vaduz website, www.soroptimist-vaduz.li.

SI Club Vaduz

Heidrun Konrad, SIE President (2003-2005)

SI AUSTRIA AWARDS RING OF HONOUR

On the occasion of the charter of SI Club Graz Rubin SI Austria awarded its Ring of Honour for the first time. Hardly any member has rendered greater services to Soroptimist or dedicated more to our cause. Thanks to her extraordinary commitment and big heart, Heidrun Konrad is indeed an exceptional woman, who has been associated with our organisation for 30 years!

Heidrun has been a godmother to or strongly supported the founding of numerous clubs in and

beyond Austria. Since 1987 she has organised four international Youth Exchange programmes. Internationally she is known not only as a former Federation President, but also as the founder of 'Open Heart - Open Door' (page 22), which with its 500 participants in 53 countries promotes international goodwill, understanding and networking among Soroptimists.



For her Federation presidency from 2003 to 2005,

she chose the biennium theme, 'Women Building Peace'. The culmination of her term of office was the SIE Congress in Vienna, at which the first SIE Peace Prize was awarded (page 9).

As her own club will testify, Heidrun Konrad is not one to rest on her laurels. The 'Adventure of Reading' project implemented with more than 65 mentors in 10 schools is now in its third year. Yes, Heidrun lives and breathes Soroptimist. And her family has been a great support all these years.

The awarding of the Ring of Honour by SI Austria is a symbol of gratitude and a distinction for a Soroptimist who has served our organisation above and beyond the normal call of duty. She is without a doubt a role model for all Soroptimists.

Christine Gubitzer, SI Club Wien I

Soroptimists from near and far gathered in Vaduz.



Please submit your contributions to SIE HQ – siehq@soroptimisteurope.org.

NEW SIE CLUB TO BE CHARTERED

14th November 2015

Mezitli (Turkey)
Charter to be presented by
Anna Wszelaczynska, SIE Vice
President
Club President
Sembol Tarhan
Phone: +90 0533 814 74 94
Email: semboltarhan@gmail.com

FORTHCOMING EVENTS FOR SIE

3rd November 2015

25th Anniversary
SI Avedore/Hvidovre (Denmark)

14th November 2015

65th Anniversary
SI Turin (Italy)

18th November 2015

60th Anniversary
SI Uusikaupunki (Finland)

24th November 2015

25th Anniversary
SI Bastia (France)

8th December 2015

25th Anniversary
SI Warsaw (Poland)

9th-10th July 2016

Governors' Meeting
Sofia (Bulgaria)

INTERNATIONAL AWARENESS DAYS AND EVENTS

8th March

International Women's Day

22nd March

World Water Day



The Link

4/2014-2015, N° 239. Quarterly magazine of Soroptimist International of Europe, published in English and French.
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Subscription rates (four issues per Soroptimist year starting October to September): Club bulk subscription (minimum five) €10.00 per subscription per language. Individual subscription per language € 12.50 (for airmail please add € 5.50 per subscription).