

# THE **LINK**

A global voice for women



# LITERACY

The key to  
empowerment



**SIE PROJECT  
'MY BOOK  
BUDDY'**

**GOVERNORS'  
MEETING**  
Sofia - Bulgaria

**SIE  
AWARDS  
2016**



**S**oroptimist International (SI) is a worldwide organisation for women in management and professions, working through service projects to build a better world for women. There are currently some 75,000 members in more than 3,000 clubs in 123 countries. Soroptimist International of Europe (SIE) is one of four SI Federations. It has some 34,000 members in 62 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](http://www.soroptimisteurope.org).

Soroptimist  International of Europe

## News from the editorial team

### Dear friends

The summer vacation is often a time for relaxing with family and friends. We hope you have been able to take advantage of the break to share these precious moments with your loved ones.

The Soroptimist calendar was very full leading up to and including the **Governors' Meeting** on 10 July in Sofia. After a short pause, activities resumed in the first week of September with the launch of the Federation project **'My Book Buddy'** for **International Literacy Day** on 8 September.

A new term often brings changes and this is the case for our team; we thank **Anne Simon** for her contribution to our magazine and we wish her good luck for the future.

This biennium's third issue of **The Link** will be devoted to **combatting gender-based illiteracy** in support of **UNESCO International Literacy Day**, the SIE project **'My Book Buddy'**, the **Governors' meeting** in Sofia including our scholarship awards, the **Best Practice Awards**, the **photo competition**, and some of the actions and projects achieved by our clubs and unions.

With our very best wishes and happy reading to all of you!



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## Message from the President

### Dear Soroptimist Friends

It is with great pleasure that I see this issue of **The Link** off to print. It was originally laid out with the help of Anne Simon – who has since left our SIE Headquarters – and brought to the final version by Marie-Claude Bertrand and Bintou Koïta. Special gratitude to them for the extra effort and a farewell to Anne to whom we wish the best for her future endeavours.



### Focus on Literacy and the Governors' Meeting

This issue is in part dedicated to the Governors' meeting – held in beautiful Sofia last July – and in part to the theme of Literacy. To those of you who attended the Governors' Meeting, we hope to bring back fond memories. To those who could not take part in our meeting, we wish to bring some of the highlights.

### Literacy key to empowerment

I have made no secret about how much I care about literacy and how I treasure our long history of passion and dedication to fighting illiteracy. Whether we think of literacy as teaching the basic alphabet or if we consider it as offering specialised training, literacy is the key to empowerment. Not 'just' and 'solely' the empowerment of the individual girls and women we manage to reach, but also the empowerment of the whole gender in a specific country or territory. In fact, literacy reaps substantial and lasting benefits to the whole of society in all of its many aspects.

### Illiteracy not just a third world problem

When we think of illiteracy and of the need to guarantee this basic human right to as many girls and women as we can reach, we immediately tend to imagine the poor and underdeveloped areas of our world. I invite our Soroptimists in the developed world to look carefully for illiteracy within our own cities and neighbourhoods. In this day and age of technological globalisation and automated drones, the number of children who have never held a book in their hands or of adults who cannot read and write properly, or who cannot fill in an unemployment subsidy application, is enormous. In this era of heavy migration, the number of displaced children and adults who need to learn new languages, cultures and skills to fit into their new countries is immense.

**Soroptimists, I know, can and will do the imaginable to bring the light of literacy to this world!**

*Maria Elisabetta de Franciscis*  
President, Soroptimist International Europe

October 2016

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**‘Worldwide, approximately 757 million adults and 115 million children are unable to read or write a simple sentence’**

UNESCO

# Literacy

## key to sustainable development worldwide

The objective of the United Nations 2030 Sustainable Development Goal 4 is to “Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all”.

The global goals aim to stimulate action over the next 15 years in each of the five areas of vital importance: People, Planet, Prosperity, Peace and Partnerships (‘The 5 Ps’).

The success of all these goals depends on **education**, which is also included in goals for health, growth and employment, sustainable consumption and production, and climate change.

The Education Monitoring Report (GEM) launched by UNESCO on 6 September 2016 entitled: *‘Education for people and planet: creating sustainable futures for all’* highlights the key role that education plays in enabling Sustainable Development Goals\* to be met, while at the same time warning of the challenges to be faced in meeting learning targets.

### The evolution of education

Education must evolve to provide a solution to global challenges, including the growth of urbanisation and refugee populations.

On current trends, **universal primary education won’t be achieved until 2042, secondary education until 2059, and further education until 2084 - much later than the 2030 deadline.** The report also states that education must extend beyond the school gates and throughout life; inequalities in education heighten the risk of violence and conflict; one in ten countries in Europe and North America will not reach the further education goal until 2030; the poorest countries

will achieve universal primary education over a century after the richest countries; in low income countries secondary education attainment by 2030 could draw 60 million people out of poverty and prevent 200,000 disaster-related deaths in the following 20 years. The report indicates that even modest advances over the next 15 years will bring significant benefits in terms of development.

**Worldwide, approximately 757 million adults and 115 million children are unable to read or write a simple sentence.** Two thirds of them are women, one in eight children aged 6 to 15 years is deprived of basic education, with girls most excluded.

### Soroptimist commitment

All this serves to strengthen our commitment to our programme **‘Soroptimists Invest in Education’**, and to reinforce our efforts around this very relevant theme. We can be proud that we are doing our bit towards helping to achieve these goals for a better world.

The SIE project **‘My Book Buddy’** and the theme of the next SIE Congress to be held in Florence on 14-16 July 2017: **‘Own the Future - Education, your passport to a better life’** give us the ideal platforms.

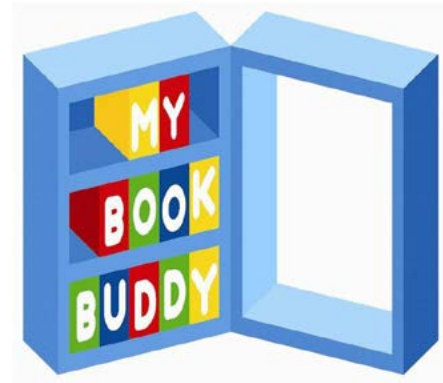
\* Sustainable Development Goals – Sources : UNESCO

*Literacy reaps substantial and lasting benefits to the whole of society in all of its many aspects*

Maria Elisabetta de Franciscis, SIE President



## SIE PROJECT



# SIE partners with 'My Book Buddy' to promote literacy!

The Link has interviewed SIE Programme Director **Marlène van Benthem** about the purpose of the new Federation project for this biennium, and what SIE hopes to achieve by collaborating with 'My Book Buddy'.

**The Link:** *How will a partnership with 'My Book Buddy' (MBB) promote literacy?*

**Marlène:** Many schools in developing countries suffer from a lack of books, and taking them home is out of the question. As part of the partnership with 'My Book Buddy', primary schoolteachers will be trained in the library system, schools will receive bookcases with reading books and children will be allowed to take books home and read them with the whole family.

**The Link:** *Why are we concentrating on reading books?*

**Marlène:** Scientists say that if children cannot read by the age of 12, they will never learn. That is why we are targeting primary schools. But education is not only about technical reading. Ideally, it should involve stimulating the imagination and broadening horizons. Reading books are ideal for this purpose.

Indeed, literacy is the key to achieving equality and being empowered. Without the ability to read, it is difficult to find a job or gain independence. Nowadays, the world is going digital. Imagine how disadvantaged you are, if you cannot access the Internet or make use of all the communication possibilities it offers. But even everyday tasks like reading job descriptions or filling in government forms are impossible without reading skills.

**The Link:** *You speak about children, but we Soroptimists focus on girls. How can you reconcile this project with our own mission?*

**Marlène:** Our clubs are going to nominate the schools for

this project so I'm sure they will choose the appropriate target groups. The idea is to include as many schools as possible in our various communities and regions. By the end of this project we hope to have reached 34,000 girls, which is equal to the number of members in our Federation. I realise this is a very ambitious goal, but I'm convinced it is achievable, if we work together!

We suggest beginning with schools, but as the cooperation progresses, we can also include refugee camps that are in need of books. 'My Book Buddy' already has experience in training older girls to use the library system. The advantage here is that these girls will receive a certificate confirming the vocational training as an assistant librarian!

**The Link:** *Why have we chosen to partner with an outside organisation for a Federation project?*

**Marlène:** 'My Book Buddy' has a unique concept whose efficacy is tried and tested. That means we can step in and create a larger impact with our 62 countries. It is clearly a win-win situation!

**The Link:** *Why have a Federation project in the first place, when our Unions and Clubs can implement their own projects? What is the added value in working together?*

**Marlène:** Can you imagine the impact of 1,265 clubs collaborating on one project? And one big project will improve our visibility as Soroptimists. With 34,000 members we really can make a difference!

**So let's start working together!**

# Roadmap and how to participate



**Marlène van Benthem**, SIE Programme Director and **Caroline Junier**, SIE Assistant Programme Director

The partnership with 'My Book Buddy' (MBB) is for one year and will end on 30 September 2017. This is the 2015-2017 SIE Federation biennium project under its theme: 'Soroptimists invest in education'.

The launch of our partnership was announced in a press release on **8 September 2016**, the 50th anniversary of the **UN International Literacy Day**. You can read more about this event and the importance of fostering literacy on the UNESCO website\*.

## Where do we start?

Over the next 12 months clubs are invited to nominate schools or refugee camps that are in need of books. MBB and the clubs will work together during the implementation phase. However, the first step is to raise the funds necessary to buy the books, build the bookcases and finance the rucksacks and training.

## How Clubs can participate

One idea is to organise a sponsored reading day with schoolchildren in the second week of November. The Union and Single Club Programme Directors who attended the PD training earlier this year suggested this fundraising activity. Clubs with Soroptimist teachers are asked to organise events in which children are sponsored to read a page at their schools in the presence of parents, friends, family and neighbours. Under the motto 'Children read books for children who are in need of books'. Let's all make reading fun again and raise the money

needed for a bookcase. For every €750 raised, MBB can provide one bookcase with books and rucksacks to one classroom. If each of our 1,265 clubs raised this amount, we could provide 1,265 classrooms with books!

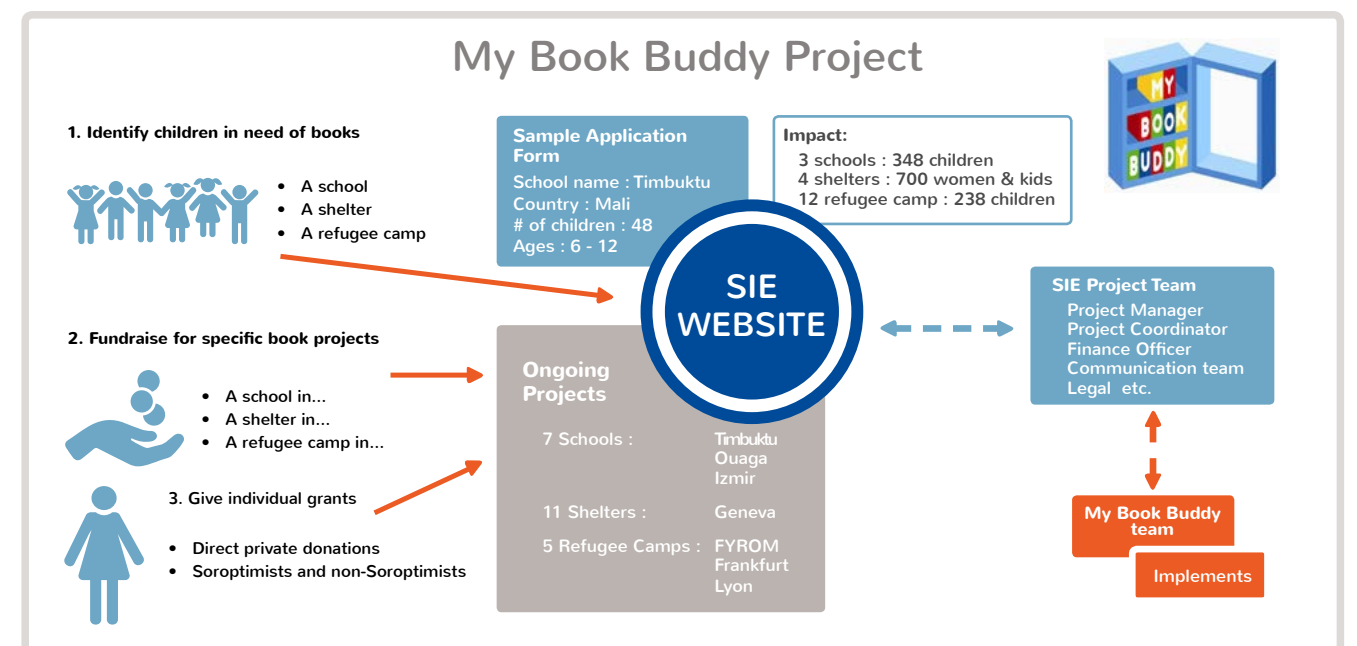
## Where can you find more information?

The new website for this project, in partnership with My Book Buddy, (<https://sie-mybookbuddy.org/>) offers all the information needed to participate!

You can also contact Marlène van Benthem, the SIE Programme Director ([marlene.vanbenthem@soroptimisteurope.org](mailto:marlene.vanbenthem@soroptimisteurope.org)), and Caroline Junier, the SIE Assistant Programme Director ([c.junier@net2000.ch](mailto:c.junier@net2000.ch)), who will team up with all SIE Project Directors to help the Clubs make this happen. Imagine if 34,000 girls are given to access to books with our help. And, remember that literacy is vital for education and empowerment.

**If our efforts are successful, perhaps the cooperation will continue beyond September 2017!**

\*(<http://www.unesco.org/new/en/unesco/events/prizes-and-celebrations/celebrations/international-days/literacy-day/>).





SIE PROJECT

# 'My Book Buddy'

## Why join the project ?

*'By promoting literacy we can help disadvantaged women and girls improve their lives and achieve economic empowerment'*

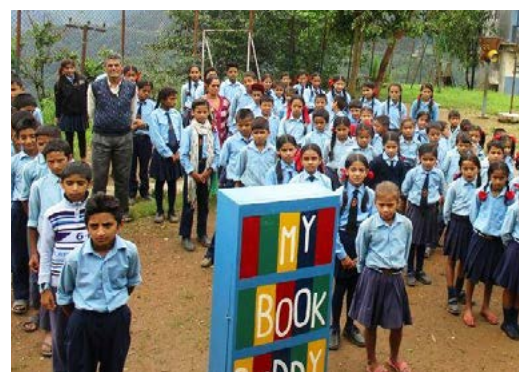
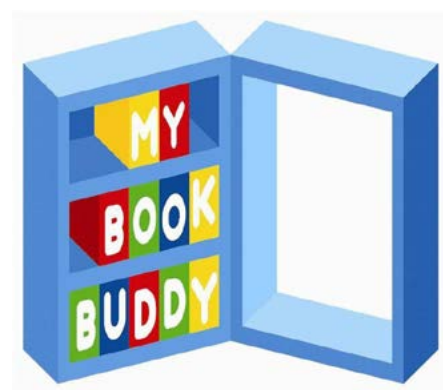
Maria Elisabetta de Franciscis  
SIE President

The goal of the project is to provide access to books for disadvantaged women and girls in our 62 countries.

The ultimate aim is to fight illiteracy among women and girls. By providing greater access to books, we can help women and girls educate themselves, thus creating opportunities to find a job, build self-esteem and gain independence.

Many Unions and Clubs have already signed up to cooperate on the project which involves supplying schools – and possibly refugee camps – with books in custom-made bookcases as well as training teachers in a library system that will allow children to take books home and share the reading experience with the entire family.

We hope that we can expand cooperation in the 'My Book Buddy' project to more areas of our Federation.



Union and clubs representing 20 of SIE's 62 countries have already agreed to participate :

- |                         |                           |
|-------------------------|---------------------------|
| • Austria (Union)       | • Kuwait (Single club)    |
| • Belgium (1 club)      | • Lithuania (Union)       |
| • Benin (1 club)        | • Madagascar ( 3 clubs)   |
| • Bulgaria (Union)      | • Monaco (Single Club)    |
| • Burkina Faso (1 club) | • Romania (Union)         |
| • Dubai (1 club)        | • Russia (1 club)         |
| • Ethiopia (1 club)     | • Rwanda (Union)          |
| • France (Union)        | • The Netherlands (Union) |
| • Italy (Union)         | • Tunisia (1 club)        |
| • Kenya (Union)         | • Turkey (1 club)         |



### Appoline Kangabire, SI President Union of Rwanda

The very low rate of women's literacy observed in Africa remains a hindrance to the economic development of the continent. However, according to recent studies, women and girls in Rwanda have the highest rate of literacy in Africa, with 61 per cent. What is the key to their success?

The literacy rate of women and girls in Rwanda has been increasing for several years compared to other countries in Africa due to different factors:

- Education for girls and women has been a priority for the Rwandan government and is the pillar of Rwanda's Vision 2020
- A focus on empowerment and mentorship has been established for girls'schooling
- Various local and national NGOs, such as 'The Imbuto Foundation', are providing mentoring for girls
- Several schools hold annual competitions targetted at girls to award the most deserving students and those who play a significant role
- Before, in Rwandan culture, only boys were considered able to support family development. Since the establishment and increased awareness of the gender equality policy, girls and boys are now perceived as equal and attitudes are changing for the best. The population understands that educating a girl is educating a country.

Since the end of the Rwandan genocide, women have become more and more involved in key positions in society and play a

major role in transforming the country. Today, 18 per cent of the Government's highest-ranking civil servants are women. It seems that history has brought them both a huge burden and extraordinary opportunities. How do you explain this post-genocide mutation?

In Rwandan culture before the 1994 genocide, only men were considered able to occupy key positions. As a result of the genocide, many women became responsible for their households because their husbands had been killed or put in prison. Women had no other choice than to take responsibility not only for their households, but also in key decision-making roles that demonstrated their ability to transform the country and the entire world.

- Rwanda's Constitution, has since established a requirement that 30 percent of key positions, including managerial, should be held by women. Furthermore, since the genocide, the government introduced a policy of gender equality and gender mainstreaming in all sectors, emphasising the importance of monitoring and evaluating its implementation. These changes all happened thanks to the policy led by his Excellence Paul Kagame, President of the Republic of Rwanda.





## Literacy *projects* by SIE Unions and Clubs

### SOROPTIMIST INTERNATIONAL CLUB OF HANEDEV (ISRAEL) Education of Bedouin girls

The main purpose of this project is to encourage Bedouin girls who attend the local high school in Lakiya to become young leaders. The assumption is that leadership can be taught, and people who were not born as natural leaders can acquire this expertise through appropriate training. For this purpose, the Club arranged a one-year course run by a mentor from the Mandel Leadership Institute (MLI) dealing with all the principles of how to become a young leader in society.

Bedouin society is very conservative and has a patriarchal structure, which makes it very difficult for young girls to achieve their full potential. The course is designed to help the girls to deal with social and environmental difficulties and enable them to acquire the skills that contribute to the capabilities of negotiation, influence and persuasion. Acquiring these skills may help them with self-development, professional progress and contribute to their ability to become local leaders and serve as role models for younger girls. So far, fifteen girls have attended the courses.



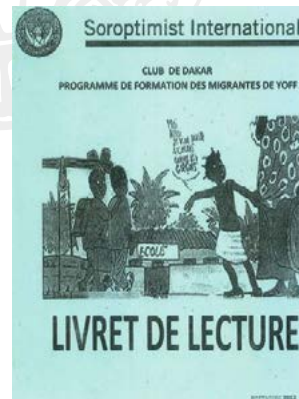
### SOROPTIMIST INTERNATIONAL CLUB OF DAKAR (SENEGAL) Access to education for migrant women

The pilot project (FMAD): Femmes Migrantes Actrices du Développement (Migrant Women Actors in Development), initiated by the **Soroptimist International Club of Dakar** in response to the results of the study by ANUESP (L'Association Nationale d'Union d'Entraide pour la Solidarité et le Progrès), is an innovation to the extent that it supports the training, information and education needs of migrant domestic workers in Yoff (Senegal) first and then throughout the region of Dakar.

Through the education of 600 migrants, FMAD expects to fill existing gaps in knowledge (literacy and numeracy), information related to various diseases (malaria, tuberculosis, and even HIV/AIDS) and family planning.

Training sessions take place in local primary school classrooms three times a week. Information sessions are public and supported by information points, media participation and reactions by local and traditional authorities etc.

The project has been replicated in other parts of the country to the same target group by involving all local stakeholders (physicians, traditional leaders, local elected officials, migrants, administrative authorities).



### SOROPTIMIST INTERNATIONAL UNION OF LUXEMBOURG & SOROPTIMIST INTERNATIONAL CLUB OF LOMÉ AURORE (TOGO) Education Project of Adults in Kodjoviakope Education Centre

Many adults could not go to public primary school because they did not have a birth certificate. With the financial support of the **Union of Luxembourg**, the **Club of Lomé Aurore** organised evening classes to enable these women to learn how to read, write and count. The Club helped them also to get a birth certificate and an identity card.

The Club financed evening courses (primary level) in Lomé, Togo for adult women who have never had any school instruction. They pay for schoolbooks, copybooks, stationery, school desks, scholarships and compensation for teachers, and other associated costs.

Holding classes in the evening makes education much more accessible. The core value – second chances for adult women – is to help women who did not have access to primary, secondary, or tertiary education at the traditional ages and stages of life. This project is aimed exactly at those women and provides the basic skills of reading, writing and maths that they missed earlier in life.



## SIE PROJECT OF THE YEAR 2016



# Reintegrating street children into *a safe schooling environment*

**Annabeth Studer Meyer** and **Roswitha Ott** of the Soroptimist Union of Switzerland tell us about an award winning collaboration between the Lucerne, Bad Ragaz, Schwyz and Vevey clubs in Switzerland, and the Antananarivo Mandrosoa Club in Madagascar, to construct an orphanage and school building.

The Akany Fitahiana Centre in Antananarivo, Madagascar is a school for street children, founded in 2004 by Alex Herivelona who, a former street child himself wanted to give them the same opportunities as other children. The principle is to provide 'education and food'.

In 2010, **SI Club Lucerne** was introduced to the centre by **SI Club Antananarivo Mandrosoa** who already supported it. Keen to get involved with this worthwhile initiative, SI Club Lucerne started to collaborate with the **Malagasy Club** to fund the children's food, and then in 2011, **SI Club Bad Ragaz** joined this sustainable project. The number of children attending the centre aged between 5 and 15 had been increasing every year to stand at around 400 children.

In June 2015, following a dispute between the owners, the school was evicted from the land. The founder and head of the school managed to place 250 primary schoolchildren in local public schools and with host families. But securing continued schooling for the 75 secondary school children proved more difficult.

Alex, the school head, took the decision to move these older children to Anisozato, south of the capital, where he has a small house on a 500 square metre plot with a vegetable garden and chickens, which went some way towards feeding the children. But he needed somewhere to house and school the 75 children.

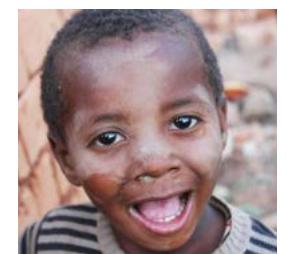
By working with **SI Clubs Antananarivo, Lucerne, Bad Ragaz, Schwyz and Vevey**, he found a solution. The **Malagasy Club** was responsible for the coordination and monitoring on site, whilst the Swiss Clubs financed the construction of the house, equipment for the dormitories, and industrial ovens for the kitchen. In total, these four Swiss clubs raised €21,000 for the project.

An upper floor was added to the small existing house, and a large 200 square metre, two-storey house with two separate wings was constructed. There are two dormitories for

boys, two for girls, a classroom for schooling and vocational training (IT, photography, baking, and a sewing workshop), a canteen, a library and toilets. There is also a well in the courtyard and a vegetable garden and more chickens.

The centre was officially opened in the presence of representatives from all the participating clubs on 17 October 2015 and the school and canteen has been fully functional ever since. Regular contact and exchanges between Soroptimists and the head of the school continues.

**To our delight this joint initiative was named SIE Project of the Year 2016, which has further fuelled our enthusiasm for the project! The school merits and needs our on-going support.**





# Two days in Sofia

## The Governors' Meeting

Marie-Claude Bertrand, SIE Vice President Communication

The annual meeting of the Europe, Middle East, Africa and Caribbean Soroptimist International Governors, under the Presidency of Maria Elisabetta De Franciscis, took place on 9 and 10 July at the National Palace of Culture in Sofia, Bulgaria.

Among those present were: **Yvonne Simpson**, President of Soroptimist International; **Mariet Verhoef-Cohen**, SIE Past President & SI President-elect; **Kathy Kaaf**, SIE Past President and **Sue Biggs**, SIGBI Vice President.

The 186 participants (VIPs, guests, members of the SIE board, Governors, Union and Individual Club Presidents, silent observers) were warmly received by the Bulgarian Union Soroptimists who had put up a row of SIE publicity billboards either side of the pedestrian bridge connecting the hotel to the Palace of Culture as a guard of honour to welcome guests.

### Statutes, regulations and communications

Two forums were held the previous day: the first forum was a discussion of our **statutes and regulations** where members outlined and exchanged their visions and ideas. A second forum was organised in the evening to discuss the proposed tools for the Federation's **communications campaign** (See page 14).

### Funds and pledges

After President **Maria Elisabetta de Franciscis's** welcome speech, the Governors adopted the proposed amendments to the statutes of the **Federation Scholarship fund** as well as the **Peace Prize fund**, which from now on will be awarded every four years at the Federation's Congress.

SI President, **Yvonne Simpson** expressed her sincere thanks to the European Federation for the contribution of €38,805 to rebuild a school in Nepal. The sum was pledged on the back of the SIDAY 2015 appeal.

SIE Treasurer, **Anne Marie Hendrix** presented the 2015/2016 forecasts, the financial situation of the various **Federation funds**, and the **2014/2015 accounts**, which were approved.

On the proposal of **Maria Luisa Frosio**, President of the Scholarship Committee, the Governors awarded €119,750 to **24 women** plus €10,000 to **two women** for the **Suzanne**

**Noel scholarship** (See page 15), and €47,500 was allocated to the **SIE Action Fund**. **Eléna Savu**, in charge of mentoring, reminded everyone of the tremendous benefits this brings to women.

A video of the **new SIE website** was shown.

**Caroline Junier**, Assistant Programme Director, together with the jury, announced the **Best Photo prize winners**, and **Marlene Van Benthem**, Programme Director, provided an update on the SIE **'My Book Buddy' project** and its 8 September launch. (See page 6)

**Renata Trottmann**, President-elect, and the members of the jury named the winners of the **Best Practice Awards 2016**. They received their awards from President Maria Elisabetta.

The President also expressed her commitment to support **Bulgarian Union** projects and handed over €1,300 to its President. Some of this was raised from items sold on the stands during the conference breaks.

A standing ovation was then given to the **Bulgarian Soroptimists** for the organisation, hospitality and media coverage of the event; President Elisabetta and the Governors having received favourable press and television attention (take a look at the **SI Boyanna** Facebook video).

A special tribute was paid to **Claire Govaerts**, SEP Accountant, who is taking her retirement, and a big thank you went out to the SEP team whose hard work ensured a successful two days.

### Congress 2017

The meeting finished on a high with the presentation of **CONGRESS 2017** whose theme will be **"OWN THE FUTURE – Education, your passport to a better life"**. It will take place on **14-16 July 2017** in the splendid city of **Florence (Italy)**. We are looking forward to a very high turnout!

[www.Soroptimistflorence2017.com](http://www.Soroptimistflorence2017.com)

\* [www.soroptimisteurope.org/members/area/downloads](http://www.soroptimisteurope.org/members/area/downloads)

The 'Soroptimist Bridge' linking the hotel to the venue

*'Let us start now...to build a better world for us and for those who come after us'*



## Speech by SIE President Maria Elisabetta de Franciscis 2016 Governors' Meeting

Welcome to the 2016 Governors' Meeting in Sofia and many thanks to our Bulgarian Soroptimists for doing such a fine job of hosting this annual meeting of our Federation!

I would also like to take this opportunity to thank the participants in the two fora that took place yesterday: one on the new Constitution and Bye-Laws and the other on the branding campaign. We appreciate your interest and the suggestions. I can assure you that your comments and ideas will be taken into consideration when the SIE Board deliberates on the future strategy of the organisation.

Looking back at world events in the past ten months, I see signs that lead me to say we are indeed living through an era that we could easily define as a new "Dark Age": vagueness is prevailing over reason; violence against women is on the increase; illiteracy is becoming more widespread despite the advances in technology and last, but certainly not least important, we are witnessing more and more frequent attacks of terrorism.

In the first months of the new biennium, many countries in our Federation suffered at the hands of terrorists. We, as Soroptimists striving to build a world of peace, condemn these horrific attacks. Let us honour the memory of the victims of terrorism not only across the European Federation but also throughout the world by standing in silence for a few moments. Thank you!

In the past 10 months, we have seen an appalling increase in violence against women – notwithstanding or maybe even because of the greater media attention, more international Conventions, stronger national laws and all our beautiful projects and efforts.

Populism and obscurantism can thrive because of society's fear of the "unknown and different" and due to the effects of the worldwide economic crisis. Both easily prevail over reason.

It is also outrageous that so many people, and especially women and girls, are unable to read or write in our age of high technology and global communication. How can it be that even in industrialised countries so many people have never held a book in their hands or cannot recite the alphabet?

Each and all of the above are reminiscent of a kind of 'Dark Ages'.

The Neapolitan Philosopher Gian Battista Vico (1668-1774)

had a theory: history has a habit of repeating itself. I am firmly convinced by this thesis and I believe that just as the brilliant age of the Renaissance followed the Dark Ages in Europe we, as individuals, as women, as professionals and as Soroptimists can contribute to making the passage from the 'Dark' to a Renaissance happen faster.

We need to find a way out of the current 'dark ages', and I believe our organisation is well placed to help improve the situation. I encourage Soroptimists of all ages and cultural backgrounds to react boldly and take firm action to build a better world.

By realising our dreams, we can act against hatred and fight back against the evils of our times. We have to conquer the darkness by not allowing ourselves to be stopped by fear.

We have to work together to find the solutions. I know that Soroptimists have the ability to identify sustainable solutions. You have proved that over and over again. Your many small creative ideas have developed into big projects and resulted in major progress throughout the world. This is one of our strengths that can be put to good use in making a better world in the future. I urge you, my fellow Soroptimists, to continue to be creative, to think out of the box and dare to shape the future. The Board and I know this is the direction you wish to take and we shall do our outmost to set the course in that direction.

Let us start now - here in Sofia, at this Governors Meeting – to build a better world for us and for those who will come after us. We must and will succeed!







## An investment to *strengthen* our image

Christine Cromwell-Ahrens, SIE Communication Officer



Let's be honest: Soroptimist has a recognition problem. We are not widely known to the public. In the past, some Soroptimists may have preferred it that way. After all, membership was by invitation only, and many felt that good deeds for the community needed no external publicity.

Well, times have changed. Soroptimist has competition in recruiting top women. Membership is decreasing across all Federations. And while Soroptimist International Europe (SIE) is still managing to charter new clubs, many existing ones are dying out. In addition, our efforts to improve the lives of women and girls have become more ambitious and require substantial and sustainable funding.

It is therefore evident that we have to do a better job of 'selling' our organisation – and our work. Soroptimist simply must be more recognisable. We need to build an image that appeals to young professional women and to potential donors to our causes. The question is what approach we should take in marketing our organisation!

### Two agencies presented proposals

As reported in the last issue, SIE President Maria Elisabetta de Franciscis and the Branding Working Group interviewed four communications agencies and eventually narrowed down the selection to two:

- The Italian agency **Encanto** proposes to develop a creative 'fil rouge' concept, symbolised by an icon and an ambassador. With the help of their network of boutique agencies, they suggest employing traditional PR methods in conjunction with a press launch, but also digital channels, to promote a metaphor relating to SIE.

- Based in Switzerland, **Leidar** recommends an emotive storytelling approach by means of videos. Six short video stories presenting concrete Soroptimist projects will show who we are and what we do. They will then use their social media expertise – with some PR support – to spread the message and build better recognition.

### More work needs to be done

The two approaches were presented at the forum on the eve of the Governors' Meeting in July. Similarly to the Working Group, participants' opinions on the proposals varied greatly. Participants were invited to communicate their thoughts and suggestions to the SIE Board by September 2016.

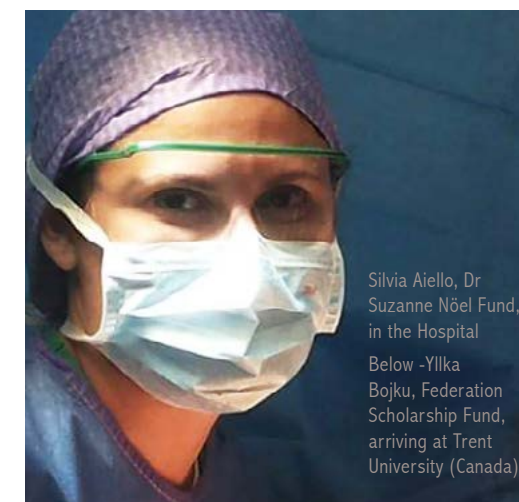
The input from Union and Club experts will be taken on board when considering the way forward. But one thing is clear: more work is required to agree on a bespoke concept that reflects the specific needs of our Federation and inspires Unions and Clubs to identify with the campaign.

*“We have to do a better job of 'selling' our organisation”*

*“Education is the most powerful investment we can make for the future”*

**Ban Ki-Moon**  
UN Secretary General

## Soroptimist **invests** in education *2016 scholarships*



Silvia Aiello, Dr  
Suzanne Noël Fund,  
in the Hospital  
Below -Yllka  
Bojku, Federation  
Scholarship Fund,  
arriving at Trent  
University (Canada)



**Maria Luisa Frosio, SIE Chairperson, Scholarship Committee**

The International Commission on Financing Global Education Opportunity's report was issued on 18 September 2016. The Report, entitled **'The Learning Generation'**, breaks important new ground at a critical time, presenting new data and a bold vision of all young people learning within a generation. It calls for urgent action, recognising that education can create "a world that is prosperous, peaceful, equitable and future-ready". Moreover, in the words of Irina Bokova, Director-General of UNESCO, "[e]ducation saves lives, builds dignity, prevents extremism and brings sustainability to development".

These are the reasons why Soroptimist invests in education, and does so in many different ways at the local, national and international level, funding and supporting schools, supplying tools to fight illiteracy (e.g., the new SIE project **'My Book Buddy'**: special libraries in schools for underprivileged children in primary education), eliminating the obstacles that have held back girls and women in many countries for generations and, last but not least, providing scholarships to empower women and girls through education opportunities. Since the Scholarship Fund was established in 1968, Soroptimist International Europe has done this every year, by giving women and girls the financial resources they need to improve their education, skills and employment prospects.

This year, in order to encourage young women who want to pursue a life in fields that have been typically male-dominated and to help disband the stereotype that these areas are mainly for males, particular attention was paid to candidates in STEM areas (science, technology, engineering and mathematics).

For 2016-2017, the Scholarship Committee received 39 eligible applications, 36 for the Federation Scholarship Fund and three for the Dr Suzanne Noël Fund. For the first time, every application was submitted online. The total sum requested, including the Dr Suzanne Noël Fund, was €367,363; **the amount granted was €129,750**. The Scholarship Committee analysed and discussed every application and made its decisions not only based on the information provided, but also on the accomplishments and future potential of the applicants.

In total, 26 recommendations (18 from Unions, 8 from Single Clubs) were presented first to the Board and then approved during the Governors' Meeting in Sofia in July.

To see the list of grantees, please visit the website of Soroptimist International of Europe: [www.soroptimisteurope.org](http://www.soroptimisteurope.org)

**Educating women and girls must remain a priority**



*At this year's Governors' Meeting there were many reasons to celebrate*

## BEST PRACTICE AWARDS - Project of the year



Awarded as the **2016 Overall Winner** for the project "Construction of an education centre and orphanage for street children in Antananarivo", the Soroptimist International **Club of Antananarivo Mandrosoa** (Madagascar) and the **Clubs of Lucerne, Bad Ragaz, Vevey, Schwyz** (Switzerland) have joined forces to build an education centre and orphanage to educate Antananarivo street children.

*Read more about this project on page 7*



## EXTENSION AWARD



The **Unions of Germany and Italy** have won the Extension Award on several occasions in recent years, including in 2016. This is due to the many highly motivated German and Italian Soroptimists who act as role models and inspire other outstanding women to become Soroptimists.

The **Union of Portugal** also won an Extension Award for its exceptional work in growing its membership and the **Soroptimist Club of Peja** (Kosovo) and the **Club of Davos Prättigau** (Switzerland) received a special prize for gathering the youngest Soroptimist members.



Top left - Soroptimist Club of Peja  
Top right - Union of Germany  
Bottom left - Union of Portugal  
Bottom right - Union of Italy



## BEST PRACTICE AWARDS 2016



### "Educate to Lead" Award



**Soroptimist International Club of Uelzen** (Germany) for the project 'STEM Camp for Girls'



### Education



**Soroptimist International Union of Italy** for the project 'Education to gender diversity'



**Soroptimist International Club of Bamberg-Kunigunde** (Germany) for the project 'Learning is fun – rapid and non-bureaucratic assistance'



### Economic Empowerment



**Soroptimist International Club of Merate** (Italy) for the project 'Empowering Bollate's Female Convicts'



**Soroptimist International Club of Haarlem** (Netherlands) for the project 'Microcredit for Mothers'



### Elimination of Violence Against Women



**Soroptimist International Union of Turkey** for the project 'Evolution workshop'



**Soroptimist International Club of Münster-Mauritz** (Germany) for the project 'Pro filia: save Nepalese girls from trafficking'



### Health



**Soroptimist International Club of Estoril Cascais** (Portugal) for the project 'Handball and Health side by side'



**Soroptimist International Club of Périgueux** (France) for the project 'Cami Help Association, Sport and Cancer'



### Sustainable Environment



**Soroptimist International Club of Milano alla Scala** (Italy) for the project 'Milan, a women-oriented city'



**Soroptimist International Club of Vannes** (France) for the project 'Scholarships awards 2015 for women farmers'

*Congratulations to all the winners !*

*To read more about the winning projects, please refer to our SIE website: [www.soroptimisteurope.org](http://www.soroptimisteurope.org)*



# SIE PHOTO COMPETITION 2016 WINNERS

The third edition of the SIE Photo Competition entitled *'Through the Eyes of Soroptimists'* is becoming increasingly popular generating a great number of participants again this year !

## Promoting education in the field of STEM



'Encouraging girls in STEM'  
by **Villy Makou, Greece,**  
**SI Kifisa-Ekali**



'La jeune fille et la perle'  
by **Carole Plancherel,**  
**Switzerland, SI Fribourg**



## Promoting empowerment of women and girls:



'Looking forward to seeing the statue of Dwawni Vive Kananda, Indian philosopher'  
by **Machtelt Van der Straeten, Belgium,**  
**SI Aalst**



'Give me your hand'  
by **Christine Kipper,**  
**Austria, SI Graz**



To see the photos in high resolution, please refer to our SIE website: [www.soroptimisteurope.org](http://www.soroptimisteurope.org)

*"We are very privileged to welcome our fellow Soroptimists to Sofia..."*  
**Vihra Grigoriva**  
President of the Union of Bulgaria



# Celebrating SI Bulgaria !

Soroptimist International of Europe (SIE) chose Sofia, Bulgaria as the venue for this year's Governors' Meeting. Sofia is Bulgaria's capital and its largest city. Founded thousands of years ago, today the city continues to develop as the country's cultural and economic centre.

With relics dating from Roman times to the Soviet era, a vibrant cultural and entertainment scene, and the breathtaking surroundings of the Plana Zavala Mountain range, Sofia is ready to reclaim her rightful place as one of the leading lights in the European sky.

The **Soroptimist Union of Bulgaria** – with its more than 120 members organised into eight Clubs – hosted the event. "We felt very privileged to welcome our fellow Soroptimists to Sofia for such an important meeting," said **Vihra Grigorova**, President of the Union of Bulgaria.

The Governors' Meeting held in Sofia was a celebration of Soroptimist success and the launch of new initiatives. The event was marked by the warmth of the welcome, the additional flavour of Bulgarian culture, and the symbolic **'Soroptimist Bridge'** – a connection between the hotel and venue – that featured a stunning promotion of Soroptimists who are engaged in their communities and work actively on improving the lives of women and girls.



Standing ovation and presentation of the SIE grant towards a special scholarship for SI Bulgaria - President Marie Elisabetta and President Vihra Grigorova



## SI Club Port au Prince needs our help!

On behalf of Soroptimist International of Europe, SIE President Maria Elisabetta de Franciscis has sent her deepest condolences to SI Club Port au Prince following the devastation in the wake of Hurricane Matthew. The club members are already active in helping the people affected by this natural catastrophe, but they need our support to fund their various efforts. Therefore, SIE President Elisabetta is appealing to your generosity once again. One long-term plan is to rebuild a school, but also to come to the aid of 100 farmers.

Please send donations to aid the club in its work. Depending on the currency of your account, you may donate to the following accounts, using the reference **'Hurricane in Haiti 2016'**



## Donations for earthquake-ravaged Italy - Thank you for your solidarity and your generosity!

Last August, a devastating earthquake hit Central Italy, causing enormous damage. To contribute to the relief effort in the wake of the earthquake, SIE recently decided to set up an **'SIE Fund Earthquake Italy 2016'** to collect money for a project under the motto education and / or empowerment of women and girls in the affected areas.

By October 18th, the European Federation had received the amazing amount of **€25.270,18** and we would like to express our gratitude to all the generous contributors.

Needs are still important in this area of Italy and the **'SIE Fund Earthquake Italy 2016'** remains open for donations; thus we invite you to join the disaster relief effort in Italy. We will of course keep you updated on any future developments.

Depending on whether you are transferring from Euros, Swiss Francs or other currencies, please see the following instructions and use the reference **'SIE Fund Earthquake Italy 2016'**



© ChiccoBodini / Thinkstock

### Transfer details

If your bank account is in the Euro zone (Austria, Belgium, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Portugal, Slovenia, Spain) or if you have a bank account in Euros in Bulgaria, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, United Kingdom, Slovakia or Sweden), please donate to Soroptimist International of Europe at :  
CREDIT AGRICOLE DES SAVOIE,  
74160 Saint Julien en G – France  
SWIFT OR BIC: AGRIFRPP881  
IBAN: FR76 1810 6000 3496 7040 0803 955

If your bank account is outside the Euro zone, please make your donations to Soroptimist International of Europe at :  
UBS, CH – GENEVA, Switzerland  
SWIFT OR BIC: UBSWCHZH80A  
IBAN: CH30 0029 0290 1N10 5239 0

Donations in CHF should be transferred to Soroptimist International of Europe at :  
UBS, CH – GENEVA, Switzerland  
SWIFT OR BIC: UBSWCHZH80A  
IBAN: CH89 0029 0290 1N10 5239 5



## Achieving Gender Equality through Sustainable Development

### SI Report released at United Nations High Level Political Forum

Realising gender equality is essential to achieve the aims of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. With NGOs and civil society having a key role to play in implementing the wide-reaching Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), Soroptimist International has released a report outlining how to make the SDGs work for women and girls. The report was submitted to the United Nations as part of the High Level Political Forum (HLPF).

Soroptimist International's report uses a selection of projects from Soroptimist Clubs across all the Federations to demonstrate how women and girls can be empowered in their communities by other women, ultimately showing how women and girls can be agents of change.

This report has been made available to government representatives, NGOs and civil society, and was submitted as part of the follow-up and review process of the HLPF. The HLPF was held from 11 to 20 July 2016, at the United Nations (UN) headquarters in New York. SI UN Representatives were active at the HLPF, ensuring that the voices of women and girls were heard and that sustainable development efforts worked for them.



Agreed on 25 September 2015, the SDGs provide a global development framework that aims to ensure that all people are able to benefit from sustainable development. The need to include women and girls in development efforts is highlighted across the 2030 Agenda, acknowledging that gender equality is crucial.

To read Soroptimist International's HLPF report entitled **'Global Perspectives on Implementing Sustainable Development: making the SDGs work for women and girls'**, please go to the UN's website on sustainable development: <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/resourcelibrary> and type 'Soroptimist' in the 'Search Sustainable Development Knowledge Platform' window.

## CLUB NEWS

*It's important that Soroptimist International grows organically by attracting new members as well as holding on to our current members*

### News on Extension

Gerda Rosiers, SIE Extension Committee Chair



It's the beginning of a new Soroptimist year and already we have **seven new charters** scheduled between early September and mid-November 2016 – equating to **nearly 150 new members!**

Unfortunately, at the same time some existing clubs are closing for lack of members. It's always a great feeling to inaugurate new clubs, but we must also focus on the retention of our existing members.

It's important that Soroptimist International grows organically by attracting new members as well as holding on to our current members.

The key is to offer members a fulfilling experience, making them want to come back for more. Get them to play a more active role so they will be keen to stay in the club. Propose long term objectives and missions. Establish a mentoring programme with active Soroptimists encouraging less vested members to get more involved.

Be proud of your club! Project a positive image of your club as one that plays a vital, visible role in the community. Initiate interesting and useful projects, since these will help you to attract and retain members.

**We must be proud of being Soroptimists and equally proud to invite other women to join our organisation!**



SI GREECE

Greek Soroptimists deliver medical material to refugee hospital

**Mary Samartzidou**, President of the Soroptimist Union of Greece, tells us about her visit with **Maria Oikonomidou**, Vice President of the Greek Union, and Union secretary **Sylva Moutsoglou** on 25 July 2016 to the hospital in Kilkis where they delivered the hospital's director, **Maria Vlachou**, the doctors and healthcare staff, with hypo allergenic milk for refugee children and weaning pills for new mothers.

We are grateful to the money to purchase this material that was provided by the Soroptimist International of Europe (SIE) in support of actions taken by the Greek Soroptimist Union and its clubs to help refugees. SIE chose to fund two of three programmes we had recommended, offering the sum of €1,965.35. In the creation of these programmes, we cooperated with the district of eastern Macedonia and Thrace, central Macedonia, western Macedonia, and the Municipality of Thessaloniki along with the MKO which is based there, the Red Cross of Kilkis and the Kilkis general hospital.

Hospital very grateful for our continuing donations

On this visit we were accompanied by the president of the Red Cross of Kilkis, **Mrs Kathy Frigidou**, who acted as intermediary in communicating with the hospital.

In our meeting with the new head of the hospital, we told her about Soroptimist activities in Greece and our projects for women, children and the environment. The hospital's staff thanked us with genuine emotion, and hospital director Maria Vlachou begged us to continue supporting them because of the enormous amount of work they do for the refugees.

Improved conditions for children at new refugee centre

As we left Kilkis, the Director of the hospital and the President of the Red Cross helped us to get permission to gain access to visit one of the new refugee centres taken over by the army. We visited the residence area at Cherso, a village near Kilkis, where conditions are quite good. There, we came into contact with the political chief of the centre, which hosts 2,000 people. Besides

improved living conditions, children have a playground, English lessons and daily Arabic and mathematics classes given by teachers of their own race. They also have use of a small ancient Greek theatre to perform plays and rehearse for their choir. We also met the Spanish volunteer group 'Save the Child' with many young volunteer Spanish girls making programmes for the children. The environment has trees for shade in the summer months and, shortly, their tents will be replaced by trailers or Prokat prefabricated houses to provide better living conditions. In the new school year, these children will probably be included in a special school sector in their region.

We would like to thank you for your generosity, which we hope will continue, as new refugee flows are ready to pass through Greece due to tensions existing in our neighbouring countries.

Our visit to the hospital in Kilkis



Copy of a receipt for the purchase of the medicine

The refugees' residential area at Cherso. As the army and the state do not allow pictures to be taken inside the residential area, we were only able to take pictures from outside.

LIECHTENSTEIN & AUSTRIA

CULTURE CLASH – 2<sup>nd</sup> Vaduz Symposium at the University of Liechtenstein

Sibylle Wicky, Soroptimist Club of Vaduz

On the first Saturday in July, guests from near and far came to Liechtenstein to discuss with notable speakers the controversial and highly topical social subject of 'Culture Clash' (referring to the massive migration of people from other cultures). This year's symposium was again organised by the Soroptimist Club SIE Vaduz.

The internationally known social scientist and founder of the organisation 'Women without Borders', **Dr Edit Schlaffer** (awarded the Soroptimist International of Europe Peace Prize in 2015) spoke impressively about proven ways of preventing the recruitment of young people by terrorist organisations. In this battle, women – and especially mothers – play a central and crucial role.

The Chechen journalist and PEN author **Maynat Kurbanova** concurred with Schlaffer that mothers can immediately sense if something 'goes wrong' with their children, because fundamental motherly love, rather than male codes of honour or misleading pride, matters. Kurbanova described the dilemma of patriarchal attitudes coupled with the helpless

lack of perspective when former 'heroes' return from war back to their families. Kurbanova made no secret of the fact that women, in their struggle against war, dictatorship and terror, are threatened with their lives or ruthlessly murdered.

**Reinhard Merkel**, Professor of Legal Philosophy and member of the German Ethics Council, endorsed Schlaffer's and Kurbanova's 'bottom up' approach as effective in preventing violence. On a fact driven basis, Merkel highlighted that legal normative core values in Christian Europe, such as gender equity, might be seriously jeopardised by a 'Culture Clash'.

**Kathy Kaaf**, SIE Past President 2011-2013 and a German journalist, opened further ground for reflection and questioning with her courageous speech about 'Women's vicious label in the Islamic world'.

Lively discussions continued over a delicious dinner organised by our Club members **Gina Dinu**, owner of Restaurant Residence, and **Felicitas Singer**, owner of Art Gallery Felicia.



Soroptimists of SIE Club Vaduz together with speakers

Spectacular car rally raises €20,000 for literacy and healthcare projects

Sibylle Wicky, Soroptimist Club of Vaduz

In the best tradition, the SIE Clubs Vaduz and SIE Club Goldes organised another Salmanazar car rally on 26-29 May 2016 to raise money for Club projects. This year's novel approach and focus was a 'Feel & Fun' round tour of Liechtenstein, Austria and Switzerland under the motto of 'Kleiner Grenzverkehr', reflecting the regional and cross-border philosophy of these three wonderful countries.



The twenty participants enjoyed the stunning scenery and attractions of the Appenzell region of Switzerland, Lake Constance and Liechtenstein, as well as the Bregenzerwald and Corarlberg areas of Austria in lovely sunshine as they sped around in ten cabriolets.

The rally raised the considerable sum of €20,000 which will be donated fifty-fifty to two important current Club projects:

- **Literaturwerkstatt für Volksschulkinder:** a literature workshop for elementary school children to foster intellectual strength and development of the next generation (**Club Goldes**)
- **Brepal: Midwife education/training** and 'Ad hoc' help for women and girls in dramatic health situations in Nepal (**Club Vaduz**)





# Calendar

## New SIE club charters

1 October 2016

### Rødning-Gram-Toftlund (Denmark)

Charter to be presented by: Sigrid Ag  
Club President - Anne-Mette Frandsen  
Email: anne-mette-frandsen@hotmail.com

8 October 2016

### Bennekom & Beekdal (The Netherlands)

Charter to be presented by Anne-Marie Hendrickx,  
SIE Treasurer  
Club President - Helma Nijssen  
Phone: +31 6 133 633 20 / +31 3 184 194 17  
Email: info@nijssenpartners.nl

29 October 2016

### Salò-Alto Garda Bresciano (Italy)

Charter to be presented by Flavia Pozzolini,  
SIE Secretary General  
Club President: Lorella Biancifiore  
Phone: +39 335 5437528  
Email: lorella.biancifiore@gmail.com

12 November 2016

### Spadafora-Gallo-Niceto (Italy)

Charter to be presented by Ulla Madsen,  
SIE Immediate Past President  
Club President: Caterina Trimarchi  
Phone: +39 347 6816369  
Email: nellatrimarchi@yahoo.it

## Forthcoming SIE events

22-23 October 2016

SIE Restricted Board Meeting - Geneva (Switzerland)

12-13 July 2017

Governors' Meeting - Florence (Italy)



## Anniversaries

05 October 2016

25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary - SI Stade (Germany)

05 October 2016

25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary - SI Voorne-Putten/Rozenburg  
(The Netherlands)

23 October 2016

50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary - SI Terni (Italy)

26 October 2016

25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary - SI Liechtenstein (Liechtenstein)

09 November 2016

25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary - SI Bamberg-Kunigunde (Germany)

09 November 2016

25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary - SI Kourou (France)

09 November 2016

25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary - SI Snaefellsnes (Iceland)

30 November 2016

25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary - SI Moscow (Russia)

03 December 2016

25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary - SI St Petersburg (Russia)

20 January 2017

50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary - SI Marmara (Turkey)

## International awareness days and events

24 October – 18 November 2016

CEDAW's 64<sup>th</sup> session at the UN in Geneva

24 October – 18 November 2016

16 Days of Activism (VAW)

25 November 2016

International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women

30 November - 2 December 2016

Women's Forum Global Meeting – Deauville, France

10 December 2016

Human Rights Day

**THE LINK** : Quarterly magazine of Soroptimist International of Europe, published in English and French.

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