EFECW

ECUMENICAL FORUM OF EUROPEAN CHRISTIAN WOMEN

ANNUAL REPORT 2020

2020 will remain undoubtedly a challenging year globally. Even though the Covid-19 pandemic subverted ordinary human activity, installed negative feelings such as sorrow, bereavement, fear, etc., and it felt as if everything was on "pause", human creativity exploded and new forms of being and being together were developed. The shock was followed by an explosion of thinking out of the box (though many are those still looking at the pandemic as a temporary "inconvenience" that once is over, things will get back to what they look like in 2019…)

When the moment came to prepare this annual report, we thought there will be little to write since there have been no physical meetings… But, not surprisingly, we soon gathered an interesting list of the Forum's national and European activities. Apart from a short period of stillness when the first lock-downs were announced all over Europe and all over the world, women of EFECW at local, national and European level, took the initiative or followed others' initiative, in proposing alternative ways of being together, connecting and supporting each other.

The amazing feeling of sisterhood, after our first online EFECW National Coordinators' (NC) meeting (September 2020) were representatives of most of EFECW member organisations were present, was a statement of hope and faith that we all needed from each other.

All physical meetings were cancelled but more frequent meetings of the Coordinating Committee (CC) were organized online. In one of those meetings, the CC decided not to make use of the Jacqueline Stuyt Legacy Fund for projects in 2020 and 2021.

Representation of EFECW by members of the Coordinating Committee was intensified. A highlight was when EFECW was granted the participatory status at the Conference of INGOs of the Council of Europe.

Cancelling physical meetings has reduced some of our planned expenses as explained in the Financial Report that closes our annual report.

Anne-Marie Schott wrote in EFECW newsletter (June 2020): *«This pandemic brutally reminded us that we are all connected, whether we are refugees or well- established owners, slum-dwellers or princes.*

Beyond the risks to our health, our societies will suffer and will have to think of different operation modes to survive even if, once the danger is mitigated, we will tend to forget, as our human memory is short when it suits it.

"Like a sphere radiating from innumerable centers, the Material World seems to us to be suspended, today, from the spiritual human consciousness." Teilhard de Chardin, in 'My Universe', 1924.

Particularly today, the aims of EFECW take on their full meaning: to strengthen the women's ecumenical network in order to develop a deeper understanding for one another; to help women explore their common European identity; to promote initiatives for peace, justice and reconciliation; to commit ourselves to action for the care of God's creation; to commit ourselves to action on behalf of women's rights, which are human rights.

Living one of the greatest challenges of our humanity, as women we have a major role to play in a commitment to solidarity and ecology, a major role to re-enchant the future.

To re-enchant the future is to give life to Hope.

May the Holy Spirit inspire us, the Christian women of the Ecumenical Forum, so that we may be free, creative women, concerned with making this world more human and showing the Father's tenderness to all and especially to wounded and abused women. May the Holy Spirit work in the depths of our hearts to help us discover, in unity, new and original ways to speak the Gospel in deeds and words. »

And we conclude with Evelyne Zinsstag's –still valid- wish at the end of the Annual Report 2019: *"…The COVID-19 pandemic has changed our world completely, and we do not yet know of all the consequences that it will bring us. Let us hope that this common experience helps sharpen our view even more for the burning issues of our times, that it nourishes our passion to build solidarity among women in Europe and beyond, that it encourages us to advocate even more fervently for those who have to live in particularly fragile situations and face violence and persecution."*

EFECW COORDINATING COMMITTEE MEETINGS

26th-27th March 2020, online

The physical meeting of the Coordinating Committee planned for the same dates in Hannover prior to the National Assembly of the German Forum, was cancelled because of the Covid-19 pandemic.

A virtual meeting with a shorter agenda was organised, where it was decided to cancel the National Coordinators' meeting (Armenia, August 2020) because of many uncertainties, caused by COVID 19.

While many known world realities and practices are being challenged and redefined, the Coordinating Committee reflected on alternative ways to continue working towards the vision "EFECW envisions to be a living Christian community of sisters by creating an open and safe space where all women – beyond their differences – are empowered to share their spirituality and to experience faith. EFECW strives to be a recognised voice of Christian women in Church and public life in Europe."

The Coordinating Committee met online several times in 2020, specifically: 25th January, 29th February, 29th August, 5th October, 13th November, and 4th December 2020.

NATIONAL COORDINATORS' MEETINGS

First on-line EFECW National Coordinators' meeting ever:

The COVID chronicles by the Forum CC from Ukraine ☺

10 months before the meeting. CC Skype meeting. The team is actively planning Forum events: the NC meeting in Armenia and the CC meeting in Hanover.

My friends say they have heard of the virus from China. "Aren't you scared?" Not at all! There is simply not a minute of time for this, and China is so far away… ☺

9 months before. CC Skype meeting. We are actively planning the NC event in Armenia, but already thinking about canceling the CC meeting in Hanover.

Source: https://inwilmingtonde.com/events/covid-chronicles-delaware

News from around the world is starting to scare… ☹

An American volunteer from my university: "You Ukrainians are always so fearful. Are you really afraid of that Chinese virus? Relax!"

8 months before. CC Skype meeting. We are still planning the NC meeting in Armenia, but the discussion of the pandemic is serious and long. The CC meeting in Hanover is canceled, we try at least to get back our money for tickets... ☹

Quarantine has started in Europe, it's sad and a little scary, but Ukraine is quite far away…

7 months before. Alarming news from Europe: NC meeting in Armenia canceled… We are so sorry!! ☹

Suddenly, our capital, Kyiv, is completely closed for quarantine, and the next day – my city, Lviv. But it's probably for a month maximum – we just can rest, do household chores…

An American volunteer from our university called with tears in his voice "We are all urgently sent home… So sad!"

6 months before. CC Skype meeting: everyone is scared.

Life came to a standstill... The worst thing is that schools, churches, theaters, cafes, parks are closed and we are afraid to see our parents... We are urgently preparing for online teaching and exams. But at the same time we enjoy close communication with the family, spring nature revival (there was never time for that!).

For the first time in my life, the whole family did not go to the church to receive the blessing and celebrate Easter. It looks like Armageddon… ☹

5 months before. CC Skype meeting: general depression and despair.

I conduct online classes with students; it is difficult – there is a great lack of live communication. But at home we prepare some new dishes every day, in the garden we explore new flowers…. Never before have my parents been helped in their garden so much, and with such great joy!! ☺

4 months before. CC Skype meeting: thinking about online Forum events.

Students take exams and defend their diplomas online – it's incredibly long and difficult!

But nature is more beautiful than ever (maybe we just didn't notice it before?)

How good that the quarantine was reduced!! For the first time in six months I watch a movie in the cinema… outdoors of course! The euphoria is as if I have won a million! ☺

3 months before. We are going to the sea!!! Hooray!! Even though it's in Ukraine, even though we passed difficult Covid tests and will be measured the temperature every day, but…. The SEA!! Beaches are empty, nature has blossomed… ☺

2 months before. CC Skype meeting: how nice is to see these faces again!!! Online NC meetings must be!! ☺

Covid situation is still bad ☹. We already know that studying at the university will be online this semester. But we are ready, – the worst has already happened in the spring; students health is crucial! So happy to see many people near churches again (only some inside…). I can meet friends in a cafe – we didn't even expect it anymore!!! ☺

1 month before the meeting. CC Skype meeting: we approved all the details of the NC online meeting. How well everything was planned by Fiona and Maria! ☺

For the first time I do not hold classes in September – due to the pandemic they are postponed for 1 month…

September 28. 38 women from all over Europe!! Such nice familiar faces and personal stories! What a great experience! Positive emotions beyond any expectations! Tears of joy!!

Thank God and you for an amazing time together!

Looking very much forward to seeing you again!! ☺

Natalya Horbal, EFECW Coordinating Committee

National Coordinators' meeting

28th September, online

"…for wherever you go I shall go, and wherever you live, I shall live…" **Ruth 1:16**

My Dear Sisters in Christ,

I would like to share with you my thoughts on this verse from book of Ruth. This is one of the three books in the Bible named by name of woman. The role of Ruth is more important for me, because, if Esther, being a Jewish woman, saved her people, Ruth was a foreign woman, a Moabites, who had her religion, her customs, her loved country, but this young woman left everything to assist and to encourage Naomi.

Who was Naomi for her? A woman, a Jewish woman, her mother-in-low, who lost her family: husband and two sons. This is a real tragedy for a woman. Naomi gave freedom to the wives (Ruth and Orpha) of her sons, to continue their life as they prefer, but Ruth wisely drew close to Naomi during a time of grief and loss. Ruth's step teaches us that in face of unbeatable loss or crisis, it is wise to seek comfort and solace in others and to care for each other.

There is no lack of grief, crisis, poverty, illness, loneliness in today's world. In our own times, which the Bible calls «critical times hard to deal with», we face all type of losses as well as grief (2 Tim. 3:1). Especially today, when we didn't overcome the corona virus and our losses from Covid-19 are continuing, in Armenia a war started. People are dying just for defending their right to live in their homeland. Even in this hard moments, we should have Ruth's love example.

Ruth's loyal love is a powerful force for good in this world. It is love, care and responsabilites for each other. To stay for each other and not to be left alone

in hard times. We need this love in family relations, we need it in friendships, and we need it in sisterhood in EFECW and in the churches.

The choice of Ruth to follow to Naomi is a start to take care for each other, to allow to caregiver to stand for her. The extended hand for help rises hope for new life. Here we learn how the help and deeds of a young woman may unite with the experience and far-sightedness of an older woman to bare good fruits. This is a good example of sisterhood in which there is no difference of age and nationality, no difference of customs and belief. God united these two women to change not only their own life, but to fulfil His great plan.

Dear sisters, I pray that out love to each other and our care for each other make this world better starting from our environment:

Prayer:

Jesus, wisdom of the Father, give me the wisdom to think, to speak and to do what is good in Your eyes;
keep me away from evil thoughts, words and deeds.
Have mercy on Your creatures and heal all sick people, give consolation to the bereaved families.
O Lord, full our hearts love, faith and hope. Amen

Marianna Apresyan, EFECW Co-President

National Coordinators' meeting

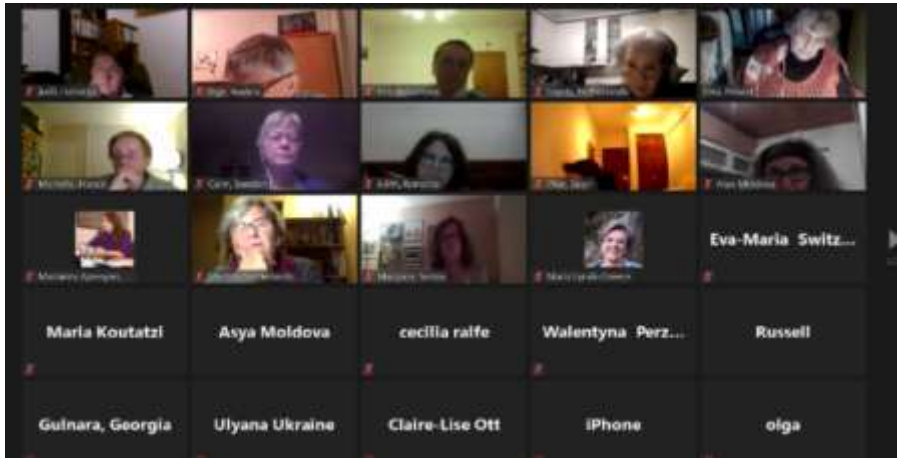
14th December 2020, online

"Keep awake therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour"
(Matthew 25, 13)

56 women from 20 European countries joined the online meeting of EFECW National Coordinators, on the 14th December in the evening. After our ever first online meeting in September, it became clear that EFECW should continue meeting online as long as the Covid-19 pandemic persists and beyond… Women of the Forum need to meet and refresh the strong links of our community.

This time, the meeting served as a spiritual preparation for Christmas "Keep awake therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour" (Matthew 25, 13). Evelyne Zinsstag, member of the Coordinating Committee led a bible reflection on the passage of Matthew 25, 1-13; this was followed by small group discussions. Then, the Armenian Forum presented some facts about the

recent war in Nagorno Karabach and acts of solidarity to conflict-displaced families and the meeting concluded with a prayer and Christmas wishes.



The parable of the ten bridesmaids, Matthew 25, 1-13

A mysterious parable

1. Why 10 virgins, bridesmaids, young women… for just one groom?
2. Why do they wait for the groom in the night?
3. Why the lack of solidarity between the women?
4. Why is the door of the wedding celebration closed for the latecomers?
5. And why is there no bride mentioned?

Some explanations

Large procession of the groom and bride at night from his parent's house to the place of celebration

- Genesis 2:24: That's why a man will leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife.

Bridesmaids as “ladies of honour” to represent zeal and purity

- In the parable, the groom (=God) does indeed want to marry (=be close to) each of the bridesmaids (=each of us).

The wedding lasts all night! So why the door would be closed?

- It reminds us that “there is a time for everything” (Qohelet), and that we need to be prepared.

Jesus makes a parable that the people easily understood then. There are similar parables in rabbinic literature that use exactly the same symbols. You may also remember that there are other parables of Jesus that talk about a wedding or a feast invitation. Symbols are clear: King / host = God, nice clothes

= good deeds, oil = a just life, feast/celebration: an intimate relationship between god and his guests.

Importance is given to: be on time; be prepared; be well dressed; and ready to enter.

This parable is not about…

…sleepiness – both the wise and the foolish bridesmaids sleep!

…lighting the way for the groom – this could be done with fewer lamps!

This parable is about self-love and self-care!

"Love your neighbour as yourself."

To put Christ in the centre of one's heart means to take care of what He loves. In daily life, times of rest, of prayer, of listening to scripture are equally important as our good works and our care of others.

Women need their individual lamps to light their own faces so that the groom will recognise them.

This explains the lack of solidarity of the wise bridesmaids. The foolishness of the others is highlighted as they run out into the darkness to buy oil, in the middle of the night, with no thought for their own safety.

To be prepared for the kingdom of heaven means to put this in the centre of one's actions, and taking care of oneself as one does of others.

That's why this parable is about women, who often forget this part of the command "love thy neighbour as thyself."

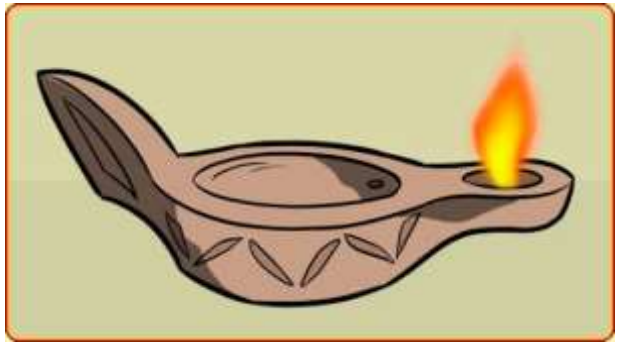
Discussion in small groups

What does this parable mean today for us: as women; as Christians; as Europeans?

1. How do we manage our inner resources as women in these times of crisis?

2. How can our nations heal in these difficult times, and how can they be strengthened in their mission to become safe spaces for all? How can we and do we contribute as European Christian Women?

Evelyne Zinsstag, EFECW Coordinating Committee



EFECW REPRESENTATION

“Brexit: perspectives for Europe”

EFECW Co-President, Fiona Buchanan, held an online speaking club in Lviv Polytechnic University (Ukraine), May 2020

In the framework of the Lviv Polytechnic National University’s Erasmus+ project «EU competitiveness boosting: circular economy» 610641-EPP-1-2019-1-UA-EPPJMO-MODULE, the Co-President of EFECW and project coordinator of Christian Aid Scotland, Fiona Buchanan, held the on-line EuroSPEAKing club for students and teachers, organised at the end of the spring semester by the EFECW CC member and University’s Associate Professor Natalia Horbal.

The discussion focused on the past, present and future of Europe in the context of Brexit and Ukraine’s European perspectives.

Thank you very much Fiona Buchanan for an interesting and inspiring event!

Natalia Horbal, member of EFECW CC

#EFECW-Scotland #EFECW-Ukraine #EU #Erasmus+ #JeanMonnet #LvivPolytechnic #CirclE

International Committee of the Fellowship of the Least Coin

40th annual meeting, October 2020, online

This year’s annual meeting of the ICFLC was supposed to take place in Puerto Rico on the invitation of CLAI, the conference of Latin American Churches. But very soon after planning and at the beginning of 2020 it became clear that we will not be able to travel and to meet in person, due to the pandemic COVID 19. Smoothly the officers together with the Executive Secretary switched to the preparations of an online meeting. Which meant that we finally ended up to meet at the most strange and various moments of the day or night, being spread over so many time zones all over the globe. Three business sessions of two hours turned out to be insufficient to work on the entire agenda. So we added one more business meeting and extended most of the other sessions for an hour and a half. All-in all a good experience for a policy we already had decided for, to reduce costs: we had planned to hold every other year a physical meeting and in the in-between year we would work online. For the future we hope that we can hold on to this altering system, as we experienced

that an online meeting can never replace the real contact and informal talks among each other.

Of course, Corona had an impact on the content of our work. As we announced already last year our offerings were going down. And we had foreseen that we will have to cut the block grants to our member organisations as well as the financial support for the project applications. In this COVID year the income decreased even more. Due to social distancing many in-gathering services had been canceled all over the world. We had to decide to take a part from our savings and to reduce the maximum amounts of all grants so that the FLC work can go on. For the first time a new scholarship has been given: not only to young women of the Global South as before but now also a Bursary for Older Women BOW to support them in their income generating activities. Many project applications reflected on the situation of women in the worldwide Corona crisis which hits women and children most: increasing domestic violence in lockdown situations, growing alcoholism, violence against women and children on the streets, young girls' unwanted pregnancies, difficult economic circumstances and unemployment, women working in the households or tourist industry losing their jobs, women and their children in ethnic minorities, homeless women, cooking or sewing projects for women, anti-discrimination trainings for church leaders, centres to struggle against HIV aids, summer camps for single mothers and children of poor areas. And many other important concerns. We were happy that despite of the tight financial situation we were able to support all these initiatives even if the amount is smaller. Every year FLC gives also emergency grants to regions which had been hit by a natural disaster. This time the support was sent to the Bahamas during the hurricane in September 2019, to India because of the floods in East-India in August 2020 and to the Philippines in January 2020 when there was a big volcanic eruption.

For me, personally, this online meeting marks the end of my second and last term of being the regional coordinator for Europe in the ICFLC, sent by the Ecumenical Forum of European Christian Women.

Unfortunately 'only' online and not in Puerto Rico as planned. There was really no time to come to know each other, to have informal talks with women from twelve partner or member organisations from all over the world. There were no project visits, no tour to see the country, no encounters with local people which make these Annual Meetings so enriching and interesting. I can look back on eight years of exciting meetings at amazing places with interesting and diverse women, such as South Korea in 2013 as a women's pre-conference to the General Assembly of the World Council of Churches (WCC) in Busan; 2014 in the Philippines including the visit to the FLC office and being guests at the Asian Church Women's Conference (ACWC) in Tagaytay; 2015 in Guatemala; 2016 in Louisville Kentucky combined with the 70th anniversary of Church

Women United (CWU); 2017 in Slovenia in cooperation with World Day of Prayer (WDP) Slovenia; 2018 in Thailand again connected to the General Assembly of the Asian Church Women's Conference (ACWC) in Bangkok; and 2019 in the Abokobi Presbyterian Women's Centre in Ghana.

I have learned so many things about life, work and faith of women all over the world, about their circumstances of living, their challenges, fears, hopes and successes. About their societies and about which impact churches and faith can have. As everywhere in dialogue there were similarities and differences. We were however united in the same aim: to use the least coins coming from the prayers of women from all over the world for a better life of women and children. Or as Shanti Salomon, who started FLC more than sixty years ago, formulated the goals: for Justice, Peace and Reconciliation. Integrity of Mother Earth will probably be added next year.

I thank the International Committee of the Fellowship of the Least Coin and all its members whom I met in the last eight years for the good cooperation, the inspiring talks and the warm solidarity. And my thanks goes also to the Ecumenical Forum of European Christian Women to have chosen me to take part in this worldwide ecumenical women's movement and to represent the women of Europe.

Wishing all God's blessing for the future of women and children in this world, in connectedness.

Martina Heinrichs, ICFLC Regional Coordinator for Europe

"Keeping faith – Transforming tomorrow"

1st Assembly on Women, Faith & Diplomacy

10th-13th November 2020, Lindau / online

To focus on the nexus of gender, faith and diplomacy Religious for Peace (https://www.rfp.org/), Ring for Peace (https://ringforpeace.org/) supported by the German Federal Foreign Office invited more than 1,000 international religious leaders, diplomats, and representatives from government, civil society, women, men and youth and academia from more than 90 countries: to assess, learn from one another and exchange on peacebuilding, conflict transformation, sustainable development and multi-religious collaboration.

Peace and Religion

Why should religions be involved? Because faith is a central part of thought, belief, and behaviour across the world. Many are the actors around the world at different levels who have failed to recognise the centrality, marginalising

the impact of religion and women of faith in peacebuilding and diplomacy. For religious leaders, women and men it is a matter of course to be engaged. Faith is inspiration to activism. Faith equips us to listen to others. Faith is what we do, TOGETHER.

Women in the public space is an opportunity not a threat

Witnesses and stories were told, and voices were heard during the conference from many women and some men around the world on how they work, taking leadership together in all kinds of communities for peace, for a healthy planet and co-existence. So many women´s stories but so unseen! One speaker said: "It gives a sense of not speaking out. It is time for change!" How can we achieve equality in both faith and diplomacy? Through the understanding that gender equality is not just men and women. It is a particular way of orienting our understanding of life and also accepting that women´s presence in the public space is not a threat but an opportunity. Women is already significant members of the normally male oriented spaces. "It is a question to see them and start to work together." says Azza Karam, the new Secretary General for Religions for Peace since 2019.

The art of diplomacy

May be, normally we think that professional diplomats are doing diplomacy, but in this contexts in the conference diplomacy opened the perspective on informal structures and multiple strategies of negotiation and mediation, in which many women of faith often play essential roles to build peace, advance human development and uphold and protect human rights. Women of faith are diplomats. In our daily life we are diplomates in different ways if life, said a woman from Kenya.

Women are key for a modern leadership

Leadership is built on service. Stewardship is about service. Leadership is built on service. Women are always serving in all situations. Jesus called women to bring the message of his resurrection to the disciples. Junia was an apostle and Lydia the founder of the first parish in Europe. The same for women in other faith traditions.

But the examples of women leaders at high-level are not that many. There are many experiences of women's high-level leadership in Africa, Asia, Latin-American and the Middle East. But we can't still find many of them in Europe and North America. Kamela Harris, vice president elect in USA, is a recent example of woman in high-level leadership. Angela Merkel, the German Federal Chancellor, who we know since before was one of the leaders welcoming us to the conference.

This year 2020 is the Superpower Gender Equality Year of Beijing 25+ and 20 years since the UN Resolution 1325 Women, Peace and Security, but still we

are missing many women at the negotiation's tables. Which means that perspectives for sustainable peace building are missing. It is not said that women are better peace builders than men but have other experiences to bring to the table. Women use power differently. Women try hard to make transparent in what way and for what goals they use their position. So how can we change this? Education was a topic, to understand our own context as well as the context of the other.

The Covid-19 pandemic

The conference was held in the shadow of the pandemic. No personal meetings but a lot of exchange, new acquaintances, sharing spiritual life, expressing hope and technical learnings. Nevertheless, the faith communities were very early engaged in supporting when the pandemic overwhelmed us in different part of the world. Religions for peace founded the Multi-religious Humanitarian Fund to support interfaith groups around the world for their local collaboration.

https://rfpasia.org/application-for-multi-religious-humanitarian-fund-in-response-to-covid-19/

Faith and leadership

Faith is the relation to the other, to generations before, now and coming. "Hope is essential in faith." "Hope is sustained in the people." "Faith is peoplehood." are some voices from the speakers. Religions for Peace is celebrating 50 years of existence this year. Religious leaders are taking responsibility to create peace. We are different in expressing our faith. To be different is not bad. It gives us diversity to see the different perspectives of life. The youth say, we are here now, not only in the future. The work together must happen now, not tomorrow.

Lessons learnt for the future

So many women heard in the conference. But what prevents women in our faith traditions from taking leadership? It was said that women are key for modern leadership. Women of faith still need to undertake the challenge to redefine leadership!

Leadership is about serving. Women are leaders because they serve others.

Faith is where we find resilience.

Peace is a journey that all of us must take part in every day…

Carin Gardbring, EFECW Coordinating Committee

ACTIVITY AT NATIONAL LEVEL

"Hope: uniting two generations"

A reflection from our sisters in Armenia

COVID – 19 invaded our lives and made us live with its own rules. And people like the ones who don't know how to swim, appeared in the open sea. They did everything not to be drowned.

Endless state of emergency and isolation… On these pandemic days, a new life began that is a remote life. Remote life was a kind of interesting and modern life for the younger generation but unfortunately we cannot say the same for the older generation. For them it was quite difficult and incomprehensible. New rules first of all targeted the older teachers who had to carry on their job on the online platform. In the beginning, the teachers were anxious and desperate as there was no need for them before to have computer skills and as for now they had to teach their children online with computers. Not having the skills of information technologies, the teachers had feelings of anger and disappointment as before there was no need for them to have these skills. Some teachers could not imagine how to organised their online lessons, or did not know what a zoom platform is, or how to work with new equipment.

> *«I think that permanent online studying would not be productive either for teachers or for children and their parents».* Anahit Sayadyan, a geography teacher at N13 school in Yerevan

To overcome these psychological problems of the older generation, the efforts of older generation were great. They helped them to gain new skills that were necessary to use the new technological equipment. The older generation was so inspired by the success they had, that they began to go deeper in their skills, to improve themselves and even took part in different kinds of online seminars in order to become more skillful. A new hope was born; they became more self-confident and energetic.

> *«I was disappointed and didn't know how to arrange my lesson; a sense of inability covered me. But our young parents did their best. If not for their endless diligence I would not succeed».* Lucia Nersisyan, a history teacher at N 13 in Yerevan.

«On March 16 it was decided that we should arrange our lessons on the online platform. I panicked; I was scared and disappointed. But with the help of my children's parents, I overcame all the difficulties and arranged my lessons with success». Hasmik Maryanyan, N 13 school in Yerevan.

> *«At first I was anxious and disappointed, there was uncertainty everywhere, but I was stimulated by my young parents who had skills of new technologies».* L. Margaryan, school in Jrashen village.

The cooperation between younger and older generations born a new strength to accept the challenges of life and make them to work in favor of scientific development, to make life better.

And it is the very moment to remember once again the great Armenian historian of 5th century Eghishe, who said: «Give me a smart and intelligent mother and I will give you a smart and intelligent society».

Syuzanna Sargsyan, Pedagogue-Psychologist, Armenian Forum

“Beginning is one thing, and going on is something else”

Women’s spaces in Swiss Church and society from 1958 until today

A book presentation

The second Swiss Exhibition for Women's Work (SAFFA) in Zurich in 1958 was not simply "a pretty, colourful show with lots of cozy, feminine trappings". The Saffa 58 was also the founding site of the ecumenical women's movement in German-speaking Switzerland. The first part of this book deals with the intertwining of the church and secular women's movement and the theologians Ruth Epting, Else Kähler and Marga Bührig.

The "Saffa Church" was a women's space in which religious women discovered a new language for themselves. Marga Bührig and Else Kähler developed these experiences further at the Evangelical Conference Center Boldern, where they entered into an exchange with younger women. The second part of the book is dedicated to the women's movement as a "women's tradition" and the inter-generational conversation as it is cultivated today in the Frauen*Zentrum (Women*sCenter in Zurich).

Evelyne Zinsstag and Dolores Zoé Bertschinger

"Beginning is one thing, and going on is something else“

Women’s spaces in Swiss Church and society from 1958 until today

Book Launch

What common ground is there really between churches and autonomous spaces, between passionate rebels and fighters on one side and seemingly conservative ladies patiently working on institutional transformation on the other? Our new book makes this connection visible, showing how rebellious and passionate the three theologians Marga Bührig, Else Kähler and Ruth

From left to right: Josefina Hurtado (Mission 21), Evelyne with Tristan, Dolores Zoé Bertschinger (co-author), and Tania Oldenhage (Forum für Zeitfragen)

Epting really were, as they contributed for decades to an opening of conservative Church structures in Switzerland and beyond. It brings the Church spaces to light in which more and more courageous and progressive women’s

work was built up in the 70ies and 80ies, before the spaces were abruptly closed and the Church distanced itself from its too radical sisters. The book talks about the disappointment and spiritual wounds that this abrupt end meant for the involved women. It goes on to highlight the challenge of intergenerational dialogue, of "passing on the tradition" within the women's movement, and shows examples of such initiatives that happen in Zurich, in the autonomously organised "Women*s Center".

The two book launches in Basel and Zurich (25th September and 3rd October 2020 respectively) happened in two very different women's spaces that showed how varied the women's movement is in reality. In Basel, it took place in Zwinglihaus, a church building of the Reformed Church of Basel which hosts the Forum für Zeitfragen, the church's institution for adult education. Tania Oldenhage, the director of this institution and host of the first book launch, linked her impression of the book with her own history with the women's movement in Zurich. Magdalena Zimmermann, Vice-Director of Mission 21, protestant Mission Basel, spoke about Ruth Epting's experiences as a woman theologian in Basel and later as the first female teacher in the Seminary of the Protestant Church of Cameroon. In both contexts she confronted very conservative and hostile attitudes. And in both contexts she inspired new ideas about women's roles in Church and society to the men who surrounded her. Around 50 people attended this book launch, and their interest was most often motivated by their own involvement in the events discussed in the book. Many women told me their own experiences as young women in Switzerland, and about their relationships with the three theologians.

In Zurich, the book launch took place in the "Women*s Center"; the women who attended this event came from a very different background. They were more critical and disappointed of the Church, and questioned the institutional organisations more openly. Can the women's movement even flourish in institutionalised form? Are there limits to the dialogue between women of different attitudes and backgrounds in the women's movement? These questions and many more were raised during the discussion that I had with my co-author Dolores Zoé Bertschinger and with Christina Caprez, who published a book in 2019 about her grandmother Greti Caprez Roffler, Switzerland's first woman pastor, who worked for two years as a village pastor in the 1930ies in the Grisons. Here in the Women*s Center, the participants were welcome to react directly to what was said or to contribute their own testimony, which enriched the discussion further.

Since October, the book has sold well and we have received many encouraging reactions. We are very happy that it is being well received. So much of women's history has yet to be researched and made accessible to the public. May this book be a first small contribution!

Fraum*: Our sofa-talk during the book launch in Zurich, with Christina Caprez

Evelyne Zinsstag, EFECW Coordinating Committee

A very special annual general meeting of EFECW Germany

23-24 October 2020, Bamberg

Because of Covid-19 pandemic, even very few days before the fixed meeting the board was divided: shall we meet or rather not? We decided to meet!

The group was smaller than usual: 15 women. We met in Bamberg, in the house of Franciscan sisters. Another seven women participated online.

One half of our meeting time, we traditionally dedicate to a seminar on an important topic in society, Church, or politics.

Last year we had met in Halle, a few days after the attack on the synagogue. In addition, there was the experience of the last part of the Egeria pilgrimage in Palestine. That's why we chose to have this year a look at antisemitism and the background of the conflict between Israel and Palestine from an ecumenical women's perspective, "with empathy and discrimination". We succeeded to invite Aleida Assmann as lecturer, Egyptologist and, up to 2014, professor of English and Literary Studies at the University of Konstanz. Since the 1990s the focus of Aleida Assmann's scientific work is the "cultural and collective memory", and together with her husband Jan Assmann she established an "anthropology of remembrance". She has long been known by her contributions to the discussion about antisemitism in Germany.

On this Friday afternoon, Aleida Assmann was connected via video. She was excellent; she gave us a very new perspective why the conflict between the two peoples cannot currently be resolved. Her lecture with the key-note "The future begins with commemorating" helped us to understand the situation. It is very complex, since both parties deny the other important memories, and as a third party Germany with its history is involved also. Accordingly, our attitude towards Israel and Palestine can't be clear-cut. Escalate or de-escalate? Look at the conflict in a wide or in a narrow perspective? Solidarity with whom?

In the evening we discussed in two groups how, what we have learned, affects

our everyday attitude towards conflicts between people and nations, based on the speaker's material.

The work of one group resulted in: We have to listen to the personal life stories and to understand and accept the wounds of others. If we do this, wounds can heal, even wounds inflicted by nations on one another.

A second group looked at everyday situations where others get hurt by anti-Semitic statements.

The question was: How can I react appropriately?

The seminar left as well prepared to recognize and confront antisemitism wherever we encounter it.

But this was not the only important subject we dealt with during this annual meeting: Ten years ago the German Forum had adopted ecological guidelines. We considered updating them. In preparation of this, a survey had been carried out: What has been done by members and member organisations in recent years? Were the guidelines of any use? The assembly was in favour of adapting the guidelines according to new developments in environment and society and appointed a small task group to update the guidelines.

After an ordinary business session on Saturday morning, our meeting ended with a worship, where what we had dealt with was summarised once more in the story about Sara and Hagar. In very moving words the two women from the Old Testament were set in relation to each other as symbols of the conflict between Israel and Palestine.

Marianne Milde CJ, National Coordinator

and Elisabeth Buecking Ex-National Coordinator

Armenian Ecumenical Forum of Women serving displaced people

The Armenian Ecumenical Women's Forum has launched an active team of psychologists, medical doctors and social workers, who collaborated with the Armenian Apostolic Church, the Armenian Evangelical Church, the Baptist Church of Armenia, and the Armenian Catholic Church and was involved in missionary work in the camps where displaced women and children from Nagorno Karabach were located.

We learn from the Bible, especially from the teachings of our Lord Jesus Christ, that compassion without deed and sharing, pity without action is a half religion, is a half way of mission.

Just remember the passage of Matthew 14:14: “He saw a great crowd, and he was moved with compassion for them to the depths of his being, and healed their sick” and gave them bread. Being encouraged by the mission of our Lord, we tried not to be only moved with compassion, but to render our emotions into action. In this context the Armenian Forum express its thankfulness to its Christian sisters of the big European family, who were with us during these hard days by their prayers, thoughts and e-mails.

We will remember especially the spiritual presence of the Coordinating Committee and Elisabeth Bücking from the German Forum.

The Armenian Forum appreciates a lot the extended hand of the French Forum who helped us to offer winter boots for 43 people: women, children and disabled men. It is a case when compassion became a deed. It was very touching when one or two pairs of boots brought back a smile to a child and its mother who lost its childhood, home and future. They were forced to leave their homes suddenly sometimes only in slippers at the end of September… Most of them could not leave the refugee camps, because they needed shoes and boots.

Marianna Apresyan, EFECW Co-President

News from Serbia

"Years of courage"

2020 was hard year for all of us. Also, it was a year of challenges. Our Forum was faced with a lot of problems; not just everyday fear which was present and still is present, but also with problems of the way of existing. The main question was how to meet, how to work, what to do… if we are still healthy. So, we continue to work, as we use to say, for our staff.

Svenka Savic and her team (Association "Women's Studies and Research", Novi Sad) during the first six months 2020 did a research titled "What can 65+ women (not) do in Serbia today?"

Numerous studies on ageing and old age have confirmed that patriarchal society (in which we live today) is discriminatory in many ways towards the elderly. At the same time, discrimination against women is more pronounced, compared to men of the same age, so their focus is on the population of women. However, their focus is also on what older women can do. A population of highly educated university professors with the title of professor emeritus was selected. These data show extreme creativity, commitment to vocation and education of young generation in science in order to create scientific and educational continuity, then serenity of spirit and many positive emotions while denying that old age exists as a problem.

Ivana Kronja wrote a book "Aesthetics of avant-garde and experimental film: body, gender and identity". The promotion of the book took place on 4th November 2020.

Marijana Ajzenkol wrote a drama "Owl mirror /Adventure of Til Ojlenspigel," which was adapted for children puppet-theatre play, and the premiere was on 9th March 2020.

The Forum continues to have Monday gathering in the garden of the Franciscan monastery during summer time, and Wednesday meetings during winter (starting from October) in the office, in Zemun.

Being aware that this year, and years to come, will ask our courage, we decided to be more creative, more active and more supportive to each other. So, after prayer we start our meeting with a moment of sharing on the following questions:

1. What beauty I noticed today?

2. Is there anything that I am proud of?

3. What makes me, or what could make me happy?

Being aware that situation in whole world is not easy, and that all countries are facing specific problems, we decided to fight that bad spirit with our positive way of thinking and searching for beauty in everyday life, though it does not seem that there is a beauty at all.

Marijana Ajzenkol, EFECW Co-President

FINANCIAL REPORT 2020

		Budget 2020	**Reality 2020**			*Budget 2020*	**Reality 2020**
EXPENSES				**INCOME**			
General				**General**			
	CC/Working groups	€ *7.000,00*	€ 911,25		Membership Fees	€ *6.700,00*	€ 5.772,00
	Accounting	€ *2.000,00*	€ 400,00		FLC block grant (2019)	€ *8.600,00*	€ 8.069,73
	External Auditing		€ 1.000,00		Ref.Ch.Bern-Jura	€ *5.400,00*	€ 5.525,55
	Office costs	€ *200,00*	€ 61,10		Donations	€ *300,00*	
	Representations	€ *1.000,00*			Other income (Interest)		€ 119,13
	Website	€ *300,00*	€ 368,00				
	Printings	€ *100,00*	€ -				
	Assistant to CC	€ *5.000,00*	€ 4.264,00				
	Bank charges	€ *200,00*	€ 201,41				
	Other costs	€ *200,00*	€ -				
	Reservation GA 2022	€ *5.000,00*	€ -				
	Total expenses	€ *21.000,00*	**€ 7.205,76**		**Total income**	€ *21.000,00*	**€ 19.486,41**
Projects				**Projects**			
	General Assembly (GA) 2022				**General Assembly (GA) 2022**		
	Down payment GA 22	€ *5.000,00*	€ 5.000,00		Donation GA 22		€ 1.810,12
	Reservation GA 22		€ 9.090,77				
	Total expenses		**€ 14.090,77**		**Total income**		**€ 1.810,12**

Financial Report 2020 – overview

SHORT OVERVIEW		Budget 2020	Reality 2020
General	income	€ *21.000,00*	€ 19.486,41
	expenses	€ *21.000,00*	€ 7.205,76
	balance	€ -	**€ 12.280,65**
Projects	**GA 2022**		
	income	€ *5.000,00*	**€ 1.810,12**
	expenses	€ *5.000,00*	**€ 14.090,77**
	balance	€ -	***€ 12.280,65-***
	Total balance		**0,00**

Auditors' Report

Report of the statuary auditors

To the general meeting of the

Ecumenical Forum of European Christian Women

As statuary auditors, we have audited the accounting records and the financial statements (balance sheet and income statement) of the Ecumenical Forum of European Christian Women for the Year ended 31st December 2020.

These financial statements are the responsibility of the board directors. Our responsibility is to express an opinion on these financial statements based on our audit. We confirm that we meet the legal requirements concerning professional qualification and independence.
We have conducted the audit in accordance with Austrian Standards on Auditing. Those standards require that we perform the audit to obtain reasonable assurance about whether the financial statements are free of material misstatement. An audit includes examining on a test basis evidence supporting the amounts and disclosures in the financial statements, assessing the accounting principles used and significant estimates made by the management as well as evaluating the overall financial statement presentation.

In our opinion, the accounting records and financial statements comply with Austrian law and the forum's articles of incorporation.

We recommend that the financial statements submitted to you with the balance sheet of € 220.699,06 and with the capital resources of € 75.388,99 be approved.

Vienna, on 20 May 2021

KOBRE Wirtschaftsprüfung GmbH

Mag. Wilhelm Zmatlo
Auditor

PLEASE REMEMBER to support the:

Ruth Epting Fund (REF)

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

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

Fellowship of the Least Coin (FLC)

When you pray, have the little box ready for the least.
FLC relates us European women to our sisters around the globe.
Details in: https://www.fellowshipoftheleastcoin.org/

Contact

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Twitter: @EFECW

Austrian EUR account number

IBAN (since May 2013): AT64 1919 0000 00269688
SWIFT Code: BSSWATWW
Account Name: Oekumenisches Forum Christlicher Frauen in Europa