ECUMENICAL FORUM OF EUROPEAN CHRISTIAN WOMEN
FORUM OECUMENIQUE DE FEMMES CHRETIENNES D'EUROPE
ÖKUMENISCHES FORUM CHRISTLICHER FRAUEN IN EUROPA

EFECW News

October 2019

"Hope" is the thing with feathers
That perches in the soul
And sings the tune without the words
And never stops - at all

Emily Dickinson, "Hope" is the thing with feathers - (314), www.poetryfoundation.org (42889)

"Hope"

EFECW theme 2018-2022

The Coordinating Committee (CC) EFECW in their last meeting decide "**Hope**" as the theme for the coming years, at least until 2022. We suggest that you also pick up this theme and you work on it in any way that you see fit; a theme which is crucial for today's world.

As an introduction, I propose some of my own reflections.

> "The immense advantage of God, who is so highly unlikely, is to give to the world, also most unlikely, a sort of coherence and something that resembles hope."
>
> *Jean d'Ormesson in "Like a song of hope"*

Is hope an option in our world made unstable by major crises? The blatant inequalities within our current economies feed unrest and pessimism causing a general feeling of insecurity.

Loss of the markers of identity, the mutation of religious beliefs and the difficulties facing the church, all contribute to the sense that we move from darkness to darkness. According to Proverbs 29, 18 "My people die for lack of vision" this despair is promoted largely by the media and used by politicians to their advantage.

When looking at Europe, full of conflicts, with populism on the rise, I say to myself that this is not a time conducive to hope. Yet in spite of – and against all hope – I still have hope.

That is the paradox of hope: when everything is going wrong, we talk about hope! "It seems to be part of the consciousness of human nature to hope beyond death" according to *Karl Rahner.*

Hope may take different forms:

- Hope in human progress, to which one owes a lot. This shows the reign of the human species with all its downsides (transhumanism; contemporary ways of production and consumption causing blatant inequalities as well as ecological degradations leading to catastrophes.) Technological progress is not moral progress.
- Hope in political progress. In the 19th century the proletarian revolution of Karl Marx promised a rosy future to the working class, while doing away with liberty all together. Or, on the other side of the coin, market laws and profit making oppress human beings and enslave them.

- Hope in beliefs that promise to counteract the lack of meaning or rooted spirituality (sects, esoterism, gurus of all kinds…) Some devious ideologies do away with the freedom of choice, and involve mental manipulations that erase the human personality.

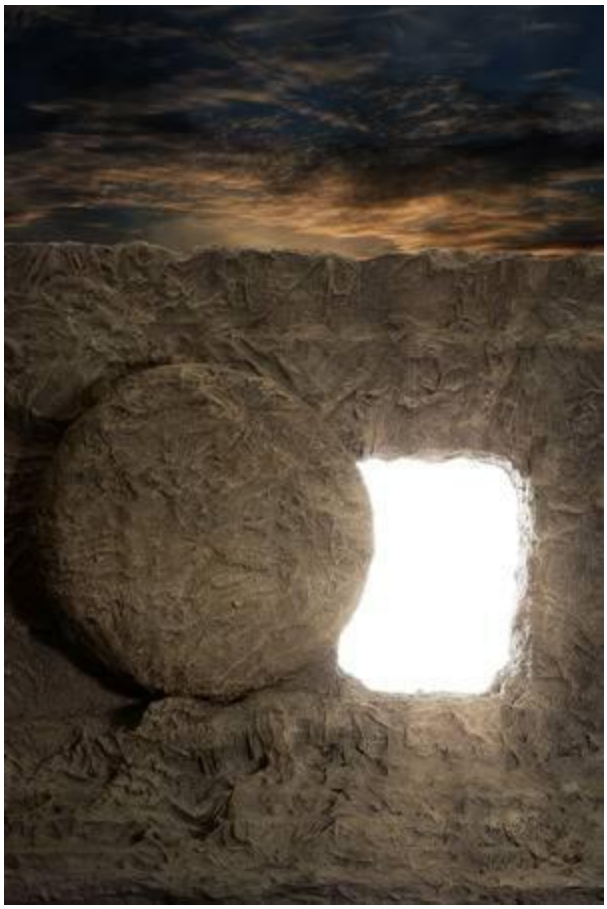
Is Christian hope utopia or a gift from God?

According to Apostle Paul, the three pillars of Christian faith are faith, hope, and love. It could also be said that love is the energy of Christian hope.

Christian hope does not promise a rosy future. It is certainly not stupid optimism or a blindness concerning human difficulties or sin. Hope means to face up to difficulties and find solutions in spite of the lack of clarity.

For us Christians, hope is life in fullness in the paschal light of the kingdom of God.

The theology of Christian hope is rooted in the hope of the Jewish people. It is founded on the continuation of the messianic hope. It is the theology of the promise made to Abraham, whose example allows us to understand how much hope is based on faith. By his faith Abraham adheres to the divine plan of salvation (even if to him, like to us, the latter is incomprehensible), and this adherence fills him with audacity. This promise reveals itself fulfilled in the life of Moses, who continues the journey toward the hope of the Promised Land.



This theology of the promise is revealed for us as Christians in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. We believe that life has meaning. In spite of our limited days, we are promised days filled with eternity. As we proclaim the paschal kerygma, we believe that the destiny of the Risen One is the destiny of all human beings. This life of Jesus Christ is the witness of God, irrupting in our human life. God is love. In God, all human life, even the one that does not seem right in our eyes, carries the seed of eternity. “God writes straight between curved lines!” *Paul Claudel*

Our dark lives become bright through the light of Easter “Aim more, ask more. That's the hope ...; we are depositories of the surplus of hope on the prospective. The announcement of the death and resurrection of Christ is (for the Christian) the reading of the figure of history where the surplus of meaning is attested to nonsense, in the language of St. Paul, where sin abounds, grace abounds. To be Christian is to decipher the signs of this superabundance” *Paul Ricoeur.*

We, as Christians, like everyone else, do question this world in crisis and in mutation. But we have the certainty of the risen Jesus who nourishes our hope, giving meaning to our lives. Our hope is lucid.

Yet without confidence, there is no hope. “Confidence is inaugural” affirms the theologian, *M.*

Deneken. This mysterious salvation surpasses the laws of human reality. It challenges our rational thinking.

We need to have faith and confidence stuck to our bodies to recognize in the cross a future for our lives; to proclaim that God is present in the midst of our suffering, in the midst of Auschwitz. God is present, a suffering, but present God. "Hope against all hope" *Romans 4, 18.*

At Easter, the stone rolled away, opening a gap that allowed the light of the Living One to penetrate the tomb and open a way for us.

The scandal of the cross becomes crazy hope. "Jesus, the surplus of hope" *Kasper.*

At Emmaus, God enters our history and despair becomes hope.

The Christian affirmation of salvation in Jesus Christ calls us to live in a more human way, aware of others, nourishing ourselves by the Word. This Word permits us to advance along our paths of faith and hope.

We need the support of prayer (for St Isaac the Syrian, hope in God comes from the faith of the heart; only the one who always dwells with God has hope), we need the support of the Bible we need the experience lived by others to confirm our hope and to bear this hope in confidence.

At Emmaus, the disciples did not settle for continuing their journey, they returned to the others.

Both in the Old Testament (Sarah, Ruth…) and in the New Testament (Mary Magdalene, the women at the tomb…), women braved their fear, the taunts of men, and the social codes of their time. This bears witness that as women we become bearers and messengers of hope. I invite you to find other Biblical figures, who are signs of this hope for us today.

"Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen" *Hebrews 11, 1.* Hope lives itself out through our witness in living, through our acts.

We are given this hope in order to share it. The theologian J. Moltmann says in his book "The Theology of Hope" that the Christian community is the future of the Crucified. God is in us and manifested through us.

If hope means waiting for the world to come, we are going to be bored or miss the essential!

No! The reign of God is built here and now. Because Jesus Christ is risen already, the end of history is anticipated. The future of eternity is already present in our history now. The eschatological affirmations no longer only refer to a future. Eschatology is conjugated in the present. "The hoping thought is a thought of what is possible" *(J. Moltmann.)*

There is no rupture between today and eternity. The movement of salvation starts every time a man, a woman, or a child is lifted up in dignity. We are called to struggle against despair by gestures of solidarity. Every time we help another human being to stand up again, resurrection is present, and hope is there. “The glory of God is the human being, fully alive.” *Saint Irenaeus of Lyon.*

We are germs of eternity by grace and by the hope given to us.

To bring hope to life also means giving thanks and praising all the lights that sparkle around us: a wall of hate that falls down, young people holding hands across boundaries, numerous gestures of generosity that flourish, a smile offered and returned, the women of the Forum living genuine ecumenism sharing beyond their differences…

“I would believe the Christians, if their faces were a better witness to the resurrection” *("Die Christen müssten mir erlöster aussehen. Bessere Lieder müssten sie mir singen, wenn ich an ihren Erlöser glauben sollte“) Friedrich Nietzsche.*

Promised to life, our responsibility is committed to the hope of life and witness.

“May the God of hope fill you all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.” *Romans 15, 13*

Text and photos: Anne-Marie SCHOTT

"Translation: Roswitha Golder, revised by Terry MacArthur”

“When two or three are together”

A Serbian Forum project funded by Jacqueline Stuyt Fund

The project goal was to gather Christian and Muslim women to learn about traditions, religions, fears, expectations and hope. It was realised in two phases:

Part A: Banja Vrujci, Srbija, 14-16.12.2018 (30 women from Zemun, Belgrade, Novi Sad, Novi Pazar, Ljubovija and Osjek, Croatia)

Part B: Sarajevo, Bosnia and Hercegovina, 21-23.06.2019. (25 women from Zemun, Belgrade, Novi Sad, Novi Pazar, Tutin, Sarajevo, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Osjek, Croatia).

The **first meeting** was organised in a very nice environment at a Serbian spa. Our group spent nice time discussing and learning about and from each other. This time we had a Muslim (covered) business woman telling her experiences. It was an interesting experience swimming together in swimming pool. Firstly, I had to ask manager of the hotel to reserve swimming pool just for us. He was surprised, but he did it. So, we enjoyed our time.
Three day discussion was concluded with the message which was announced in Christian and Muslim media.

Message
Christian and a Muslim women in a three-day work, sharing knowledge, skills, experiences, and hopes have shown that learning, respecting and understanding of otherness could be a safer road that leads to prosperity and peace not only in the community to which they belong but also to the world in general.
At the conference, we specifically discussed the fact that in these modern times and globalizing challenges, special attention should be paid to getting to know, respect and accept the diversity with the clear message to the faithful women, regardless of the religion they belong to, that they should be aware being the agents of change in society. Recognizing motherhood as a common

determinant of the identity of women, not necessarily biological, it was concluded that the training and care of society stands on the woman. Therefore, we are aware that our value system based on empathy and prioritizing peace and love among people, could be achieved by introducing interreligious dialogue and learning, which contributes to fostering a culture of peace

Active need for faith in God, opposing any form of discrimination and violence contributes to the normal coexistence, will be implemented through a series of conferences and meetings both in Christian and in Muslim communities in the Balkans, organizing traditional events and workshops that will engage young people in order to spreading awareness of the ecumenical and interreligious unity as an imperative of our time.

At the **second phase**, our Christian-Muslim group spent three marvellous days in a Jesuit monastery in Sarajevo. It was very interesting, for the Muslim members of our interreligious group, being in Muslim country but in a Christian monastery. So, it was sort of double learning. As a group we met people from different communities that support peace initiatives. We had promotion of the book "Path to Peace" written by Amra Pandzo, and discussion about Islam and Feminism. It was very challenging discussion. Free time we spent visiting the main Mosque, the Orthodox Church and Vrelo Bosne - the national park.

We concluded three day gathering with the message which was announced in Christian and Moslem media.

Message

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

BiH). This meeting is just a step in our work nurturing peace and learning about different traditions, fears and hopes in the region. The meeting was a JSL-funded project. Participants, Christian and Muslim women through discussions, presentations on various topics and exchanging knowledge and experience once again testified that true beauty is the beauty of the diversity of the contemporary society in this region still represents big challenge. Participants said that women should strive to preserve the dignity and through a series of such activities contribute to peaceful coexistence in the region. We will work on building bridges of lasting friendship, understanding and respect for each other. We expand our awareness, first in our local communities, and then beyond. Traces of these encounters are a testimony to the contribution to building peace. Presentations on various topics and exchanging knowledge and experience once again testified that true beauty is the beauty of the diversity of the contemporary society in this region still represents a major challenge. Participants say that women should strive to preserve the dignity and through a series of such activities contributing to peaceful coexistence in the region. He stressed the court building bridges of lasting friendship, understanding and respect for each other we expand our awareness, first in their local communities, and then beyond. Traces of these meetings are witnesses of possibility of peaceful coexistence.

Marijana Ajzenkol, EFECW Co-President

Swedish Forum - Swedish Ecumenical Women's Council (SEK)

Presentation of a national EFECW member organization

The Swedish Forum is an integral part of the Swedish Ecumenical Women´s Council. (SEK)

Gudstjänst Immanuelskyrkan

SEK started in 1935 as the Christian Women´s Cooperation. In the time of in between war it started out of the longing for peace and social development responsibility among women. These two responsibilities are still in focus of the work. In 1959 the organisation was transformed into the Swedish Ecumenical Women´s Council (SEK) with also the responsibility for the World Day of Prayer (WDP). The World Day of Prayer is one of the core activities to express solidarity among women both nationally and internationally and also a way of expressing spiritual belonging and development. SEK collaborates also with the Fellowship of the Least Coin (FLC).

When the EFECW was founded in 1982, the Swedish Forum was embraced into SEK. The Swedish Forum is today a platform or umbrella organisation for Christian women who work for gender justice in Church and Society. It has around 4,000 members in member organisations, local and regional committees and individual members. Women from a diversity of denominations are members, among them the Forum of Ordained Women the Church of Sweden.

The Forum is a voice in Church and society. A carrier of women´s experiences as of spirituality, of life and of knowledge. It is a resource centre for important talks about feminist theology, gender justice and the women´s history. An enabler for women´s empowerment. Offers

meeting places and arrange training in women´s leadership. Forum works with other organisations to make gender justice a reality. Participate and contribute to the Forum for Gender Justice, a conference yearly organised by the Swedish Women´s Lobby for the Swedish civil society as well as for the official authorities to discuss the gender justice issues in Sweden.

The Forum works in the Christian Council of Sweden´s gender justice working group. A working group for the church leaders from the three church families: Protestant, Roman Catholic and the Orthodox. The Forum is a knowable resource in the discussions and activities.

Working with the organisation “Operation 1325”, a civil society organisation for the UN Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security. Gives training in other countries and has a mentor programme for young women during their studies of peace and reconciliation.

“Elsa” is the magazine, the Forum issues four times per year. It is about feminist theology, culture and ecumenism.

Abuse and harassment of women: the Forum was involved in #Metoo, the movements within the churches are still working on the issues. Together with the Uniting Church in Sweden, the Forum is offering a training for trainers within the church to prevent sexual abuse through creating a culture of respect and dignity. It is a one day training on to identify risks, counter strategies, reveal Master Suppression Techniques and constructive talks. The meeting places in the church should be safe. It is important to create a culture of gender justice, security, respect and openness and a place of open conversations and critic.

The Swedish Forum has a general assembly every year. That is part of the right to be organized and exercise democracy in Sweden. But is also a meeting place and an opportunity for education and worship together. This year the discussions were about power, power of prayer, power in poetry, power of God´s creation and norms in the society.

Carin Gardbring, EFECW CC member

“Butterflies for peace”

Tallinn, Estonia 29th May – 3rd June 2019

Pirita convent

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

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

The Neighbourhood meeting took place under the biblical saying from Romans 14:19

“So then let us follow after things which make for peace, and things whereby we may edify one another.”

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

The program was exceptionally diversified:

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

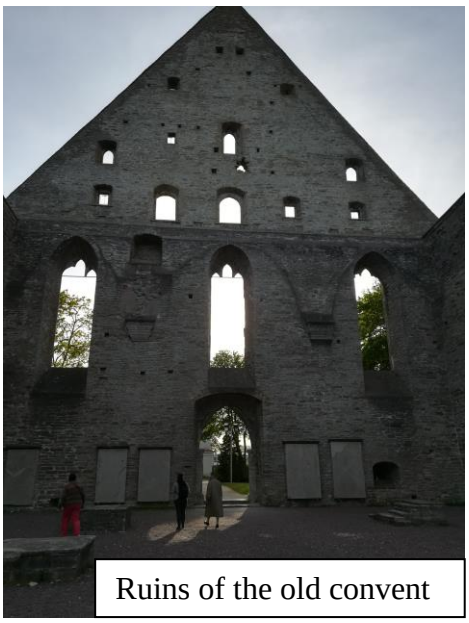
In the afternoon we worked with Dr. Einike Pilli on the issue “How do we find peace?” In the evening a workshop organised by the German women on the topic of peace in Europe took place, which inspired many discussions and showcased very divergent views and experiences.

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

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

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

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



Ruins of the old convent

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

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

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

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

Our differences enrich us

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Translation: Agnes Kienesberger

“Butterflies for peace”

Baltic neighbourhood meeting

On May 29th through June 3rd, 2019, EFECW held a Baltic neighbourhood meeting in Pirita Monastery (http://www.piritaklooster.ee/?lang=en) in Tallinn, Estonia, together with ecumenical Christian women from eight different countries (Sweden, Finland, Germany, Estonia, Poland, Lithuania, Belarus and a CC representative from Scotland). We were 23 women from seven different

Christian denominations; the Lutheran Prostestant, Reformed, Baptist, Roman Catholic, Methodist, Presbyterian and Russian Orthodox traditions.

The Bible verse that guided the meeting was Romans 14:19: ”Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification”. We celebrated morning and evening prayers prepared by the visitors. We ate together in the Pirita Monastery, where the Indian and Mexican nuns served us food. The Estonian women together with a few members from Germany had made a great program. We took part in historical as well as contemporary excursions. On one of the trips we were impressed to see a newly renovated church with a new architecture made by one of the women of the congregation. We also celebrated the Holy Communion in a big Methodist church in Tallinn. I was really impressed by how the other family members of the Estonian Christian women helped with the conference and supported them in their women's work mission.

During the week we learned Estonian handcraft, Estonian singing and dancing, the German women had a very interesting workshop on the theme “Peace in Europe” with many important discussions and insights. There was a bible study on Romans 14 with Helina-Diana Helmdorf who has a

background in the Baptist church in Tallinn and who leads the women's work in her congregation. We had many great lectures on the topic of peace. Dr. Eineke Pilli talked to us on the theme “How to find peace?” with focus on the word Shalom. We also heard the more political voice of Mari-Ann Kelam about how to make peace throughout the continent. We had the opportunity to meet family therapist and pastor Pia Routsala, who spoke about “The process of achieving 'Just Peace' within the family context”. Finally, the CC representative Fiona Buchanan informed us and led us in dialogue about the EFECW organisation and plans for the future, the upcoming goals, and strategies.

Even today, Christian women in and around the Baltic Sea region have very different pre-requisites and opportunities to meet. Many of us come from countries were the battle for women’s rights have been fought for many years and it is now a given right to come together. But for some it can still be dangerous to come together and meet and pray as women. However, my strongest experience from the conference was a strong sisterhood, where these lyrics from one of our hymns still follow me through rough days: “Sister, carry on. Sister, carry on. It may be rocky and it may be rough, but sister carry on”.

So, Christian Women of Europe, let us carry on with our mission to come together and meet, pray, talk and learn more about Jesus and each other. It really makes a difference!

Evelina Hermansson, Ordained Women's Forum, Church of Sweden
https://www.prastvigdakvinnor.se/

EPIL – European Project of Interreligious Learning

Former EFECW Co-President (2006-2014) **Martina Heinrichs** has recently been elected as President into the EPIL board along with Vice President Dr. Sabiha Husić from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Rev. Barbara Heyse-Schaefer from Austria and Dr. Emel Topçu from Turkey. Former EFECW Co-President (1998-2006) Catherine Gyarmathy is EPIL contact person for finances.

EPIL stands for European Project of Interreligious Learning. It is a travelling study course for Christian and Muslim Women. Story goes back to the beginning of this century when Reinhild Traitler and Teny Pirri-Simonian, both Honorary Presidents, started the project in the Boldern Academy in cooperation with the World Council of Churches in Switzerland. An international team worked out the curriculum, and up to now four study courses have taken place. At the moment the participating countries are Austria, Bosnia Herzegovina, the Netherlands and Turkey. We are open to new partnering members. Christian and Muslim women from other countries are welcome. The next course will start in 2020. There will be two international modules in the Netherlands ("The Challenge of Migrant Communities and Social Cohesion", May 29th – June 3rd 2020) and in Bosnia Herzegovina ("Justice and reconciliation as contribution to Rebuilding Society", March 26th – April 1st 2021). In between three shorter national modules will be held in all participating countries.

"For the future of EPIL and in the light of living peacefully together in our multi-cultural Europe and world, I am looking forward to an enthusiast group of women in the new study course to carry on and multiply the idea and practice of interreligious learning. I hope that also Forum women will be involved. In this way EFECW contributes to one of her priorities which is interfaith dialogue." Quote of the new EPIL President.

European Project for Interreligious Learning

For more information please visit EPIL website www.epil.ch or send an e-mail to Martina Heinrichs at heinrichsmartina@hotmail.com

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