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ADVOCACY NEWS

SOROPTIMIST INTERNATIONAL OF EUROPE

A MESSAGE FROM YOUR ADVOCACY TEAM!

Resulting of a prolific activity during the past months at the United Nations in New York and, as well as at the Council of Europe, the OSCE and the European's Women Lobby, our Advocacy Team, its Representatives and our Soroptimists members are delighted to share with you their actions regarding the advancement of the women's agenda!
Happy reading!

Elena Savu, Vice President for Advocacy
Maria-Elisabetta de Franciscis, President Elect & Head of Programme & Advocacy

This time we talk about…

CSW 59

SOROPTIMIST INTERNATIONAL OF EUROPE AT CSW 59

Like every year, Soroptimist International of Europe, **which holds special consultative status with the United Nations' ECOSOC, participates in the two-week Commission on the Status of Women meeting**. The 59th session of CSW took place between **March 9th and 20th** at the UN in New York.

This year is a big year for the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW). Marking 20 years since the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (BPfA), the 59th session of CSW was the occasion to make a global assessment of how far women's rights have come since the definition of this key document for the advancement of the status of women in 1995.

With the session's priority theme being the BPfA, special attention has been given to the current challenges that affect its implementation and the achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of women around the world.





Importantly, since the Millennium Development Goals "expire" in 2015, and since the new priorities for the global development agenda have been articulated during the course of 2015, CSW 59 also addressed opportunities for achieving gender equality and the empowerment of women in the post-2015 development agenda.

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SOROPTIMIST INTERNATIONAL OF EUROPE ACTIVELY CONTRIBUTES TO CSW 59

The participation to CSW 59, of the delegation of Soroptimist International of Europe led by **SIE President Ulla Madsen**, was the right occasion to reflect on analysis and strategies meant to improve the lives of women and girls worldwide**.**

SIE President Ulla Madsen and **Renata Trottman Probst SIE Constitution and By-Laws Chair**, had the opportunity to present the **SIE project Defeating Violence!** during a large session. An audience of more than 150 participants was attending this parallel event.



As Soroptimists, we know very well that violence against women remains globally pervasive. In some countries, we have even seen a rise in incidence. We know that women around the world, whether they are girls, teenagers, adults, or the elderly, have the potential to experience some type of violence. We know that violence is a complex phenomenon but that it is very poorly understood. At the same time, for decades now we have been witnessing the failure of prevention strategies. It is in this context that together Soroptimists decided to join forces and to put together a very large study and programme on prevention of Violence: *"Through the Defeating Violence! project, we wish to reverse this trend and to make a concrete contribution to the elimination of violence against women and girls across Europe, the Middle East, and Africa. We wish to bring about a deeper, more nuanced understanding of violence against women, and thus to contribute directly to the creation of more effective prevention strategies and programmes"* explained President Ulla.

CSW 59 in New York is an opportunity to finalise the approach and methodology for the study.

Understanding violence against Women in its full complexity means understanding the interconnectedness with politics, law, economics, human rights, gender, etc. An analysis shared by Renata Trottman Probst who added: *"We believe that to be able to prevent we must first understand the complex ways in which social, political, economic, cultural, and legal factors cause and influence the manifestations of violence against women. Knowing that gender norms, stereotypes, and structural inequalities are at the heart of the problem, our project seeks to analyse these factors as they are expressed in a social context."*

As Soroptimists, we will continue our dedicated battle against violence against women. We invite all other relevant parties – individuals, organisations, institutions, governments and the civil society – to take a firm stand on this issue and to go one step further in defeating this scourge of our time!

"[…] it is indeed also our role, as civil society and NGOs to make this change. It must change because, whether it is physical, psychological or economic, and whether it happens in the home, at work, in public places, in peace or in times of conflict, violence is a violation of women's human rights. It deprives millions of women of health, of happiness, of productivity, Prevention is its key." concluded President Ulla.

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VOICES OF WOMEN

THE SIE DELEGATION AT CSW 59:

AN OVERVIEW OF PERSONAL EXPERIENCES

TESTIMONIALS BY SURVIVORS OF PROSTITUION ABUSE

Kathy Kaaf, SIE Immediate Past President



The first event I attended at CSW 59 was a difficult one: three former prostitutes from Europe and the USA gave emotional testimonials about what they had suffered. No one in the audience, among them quite a few men, stayed untouched. All gave standing ovations to the brave women, who were visibly shaken when speaking of their experiences. As survivors of prostitution abuse they called for education about this issue and appealed to participants to continue their fight against sex-trafficking and the human rights abuses that are inherent to the sex trade.

In contrast to the personal reports stood the sober facts and figures in other presentations. We learned, for instance, that some western countries do not currently criminalise torture committed by private individuals and organisations (in other words, non State-actors). This means that in some countries no one can be accused and prosecuted for interpersonal violence they might have committed in the private sphere (at home, in hotels, warehouses, etc.).

For Soroptimists it will also be interesting to lean that one parallel event was entitled "The Necessity of the Nordic Model". In 1999, as part of a Violence Against Women bill, Sweden was the first country to pass a law that criminalized buyers of sex while keeping the person who sold or was sold for sex decriminalized. Norway and Iceland have since passed similar laws. We learned more about the 30-year struggle against prostitution in Norway from a representative of Kvinnefronten. You can learn more about it here: www.kvinnefronten.no

At the end of this impressive meeting a young Iranian of IAPSRS (www.sosapoverty.org), an Iranian Student NGO working on relief for people in distress, also gave information on the terrible conditions sex slaves in her country have to endure.

COOL FEMINISM -EXPLORING IDEAS FROM THE NORTH

Hafdis Karlsdottir, former SIE Finance Controller



The "Cool Feminism – Exploring ideas from the North" panel at CSW 59 brought together five panellists from Iceland who reflected on their tiny country's outsized leadership in women-friendly reforms.

"I am proud of living in a country where the gender gap is the smallest, but there is still a lot to do," Eyglo Hardardottir, Minister of Social Affairs, said. "And nothing happens just because you wish for it, you will have to make it happen."

A spokesperson for a Counselling and Information Centre on Sexual Violence talked about the role of ongoing activism on behalf of the government's 2010 ban on strip clubs. She said "we always have a choice; you can sit at the kitchen table and whine, or stand up and do something about it, there is always a way."

The women's strikes in Iceland are an example of how to do this. A film from a strike that took place in 2010 was shown. "Often when the film is shown outside of Iceland women say 'we cannot do that in my country'; I ask why do you say that if you have not tried it?"

A teacher of gender studies in junior colleges explained that the way this subject is taught in Iceland increases critical thinking among students. The approach differs from studying by the book. "We watch something and we discuss it, we analyse it. This learning will become who the students are, the way they are think and view the world."

The course is taught in 17 out of 33 junior colleges in Iceland and there are 14 feminist groups in those colleges that consist of both boys and girls.
Indeed, nothing will happen without us doing something about it. One can fight discrimination and violence by educating people and in the long run through teaching the young to use critical thinking, not just to accept the way things have always been. There is hope for the future!

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AN EMPOWERMENT AGENDA FOR GENDER EQUALITY

Emine Erdem, SIE Assistant Programme Director

The 2015 Women's Empowerment Principles (WEP) event was held as part of the official CSW59/Beijing +20 programme with the theme of "Unlimited Potential: Business Partners for Gender Equality". The opening remarks of Ban Ki-moon and keynote address of Hillary Clinton made "a direct call to action to make it happen" the theme of International Women's Day this year. Businesses have the capacity to shape the agenda of gender equality by direct measures and concrete steps in the workplace, marketplace and



community. Encouraging the business world to sign up to the WEPs is one great move we can all make to put equality and fairness at the heart of business! Becoming partners for gender equality as part of the WEPs means a call for a new business paradigm. It is a form of standardization in alignment with the UN. We must put these principles into practice in the workplace and in everyday life. Throughout this year's WEP meeting, several critical issues were addressed. Technology and women's rights were discussed as intersecting revolutions. Cutting edge practices create employment opportunities for women, but the inclusion of women in the value chain of the market as entrepreneurs remains a concern. The use of the WEP framework maximizes companies' contribution to the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals. It increases accountability with regard to gender equality reporting.

We must overcome the unconscious bias which creates invisible obstacles for women's advancement in the workplace. It is a practical field of women's issues which demands direct confrontation by international standardization. This is a historical problem. In the post-Beijing era, we must unleash the women's economic empowerment agenda as a key component of development. This can only be achieved by solid measures of action which we must initiate and promote at all levels.

FIRST TIME AT CSW

Nora Eleonora, Assistant Programme Director SI Costa del Sol, Spain



Grateful and thankful to have participated in CSW for the first time, my impression was that the whole world was present in one UN building. All these wonderful, and in their own way powerful, women and men talking, discussing, sharing their AHA-moments, voicing, laughing, loving, crying about the progress made since the adoption of the Beijing Platform in Action in 1995 – 2015 is the 20th anniversary – where will we be in 2030? I was present at many presentations and side events, the latter often drawing me more, guided by our "Triple A".

I was impressed by SI's Advocacy Training, which gave me many new pointers and renewed my energy to develop our Spanish Clubs, to support women and girls. I am now even more aware of how Education empowers women – we women make up half of all humanity, and we educate all. In the words of UN Women Executive Director & UN Under-Secretary-General Dr. Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, "We must seize all opportunities at the institutional, national, regional and global levels and give new impetus to the achievement of gender equality, the empowerment of women and women's and girls' enjoyment of their human rights […] Everybody has a responsibility to act. Gender equality is a shared vision of social justice and human rights."

Besides the equal pay and 50-50 managerial goals, there is a groundswell to elect a woman UN Secretary -General (www.womansg.org). The contacts I have made were mainly related to Education, Gender Violence, Leadership, Gender Equality and Aging Society. When during our active lives we are treated as unequal, we are also treated as unequal when we age; having fewer rights, less income, less protection, we are treated as lesser people. Our attention was also drawn to questions of discrimination of women and girls who have disabled children or have a disability themselves. I am thrilled to be part of the Global Voice for Women fighting for gender equality.

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WOMEN FOR WATER PARTNERSHIP AT CSW 59

Mariet Verhoef-Cohen , President of Women for Water Partnership & SIE Liaison Africa

On March 17th, a packed room of international delegates and guests joined co-conveners Women for Water Partnership (WfWP), Soroptimist International Europe (SIE), and the International Federation of Business and Professional Women (IFBPW) at the Dutch Permanent Mission to the United Nations in New York City. The side event was given in conjunction with CSW 59.

Mr. Peter van der Vliet, Deputy PR to the Kingdom of The Netherlands to the UN, welcomed the panel for the side event on *Women's Roles in Water Diplomacy as a Key for Empowerment*. Former SIE President and current WfWP President Mariet Verhoef-Cohen chaired the event, with presentations from Dr. Arzu Oyzol (IFBPW), Ms. Lesha Witmer (WfWP) and Ms. Carolyn Savage, Senior Environmental Architect from New Zealand.

A special keynote address was given by the Honorable Ms. Nomvula Mokonyane, Minister of Water and Sanitation of the Republic of South Africa. Closing remarks came from Ms. Uschi Eid, Chair, UN Secretary-General's Advisory Board on Water and Sanitation. Ms. Eid emphasized the connection of proposed Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5, "Achieve Gender Equality and Empower all Women and Girls" an SDG 6, "Ensure Available and Sustainable Management of Water and Sanitation for All." This connection is especially important to emphasize in upcoming high-level meetings such as the negotiations on the Post-2015 agenda and the World Water Forum 7 in Korea in April 2015.

WHY SHOULD MEN GET INVOLVED IN GENDER EQUALITY?

Amelia Martinez Hockley, SI Costa del Sol, Spain



At a parallel session organised by Sonke Gender Justice (SGJ) from South Africa we heard about ways men can get involved in promoting gender equality. We were told the following story:

An elderly man from Africa had spent the day in a workshop organised by SGJ about gender equality. He had learnt about all the different jobs that had to be done around the home and how many of these activities were neither recognized nor remunerated in any way. At the end he said to the organisers, "I cannot learn to cook, I am too old". Well, they thought, is that all he is going to take away from the day? Oh, no. He turned to them and said that he could, of course, do the washing up. He planned to gather his two daughters and three sons to talk to them about changing their ways. They were no longer going to wait for mum to fix dinner when she got home from work after 6pm, especially when the children finished at 2pm and he himself finished work at 4pm. They were going to start taking charge of cleaning the house, doing the laundry, and washing up after every meal.

This transformational story is just one of many that show how we can begin to engage men and boys in helping us to reach gender equality. Change must come from the home, where norms can be challenged and adapted so men and boys are able to start breaking out of the "masculinity box".

Teaching gender equality at school and at home is an important tool for changing the mindset of boys AND girls and this will lead to serious transformation. Not the fluffy stuff, but gender equality as a crucial economic parameter for companies and countries. Men and women together have the power to empower.

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FINANCING GENDER EQUALITY POST-2015

Gerda Rosiers, SI Visé, Belgium



Sweden and Switzerland hosted a panel discussion on financing for the implementation of the post-2015 sustainable development agenda in relation to gender equality. The panel, composed of representatives from the World Bank, UN Women, AWID, Ethiopia and Sweden, emphasized that gender equality is a prerequisite for achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and must be central to the future sustainable development agenda.

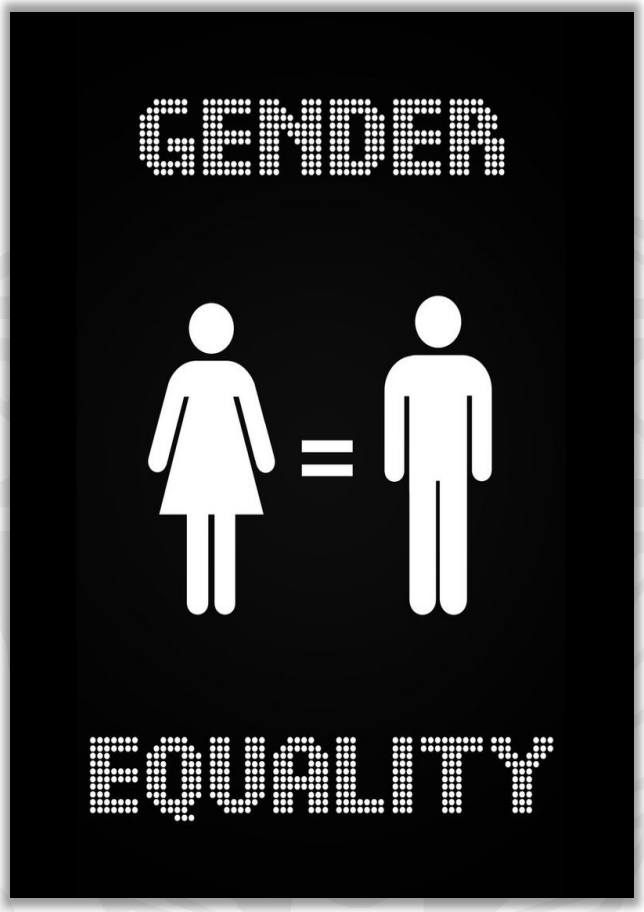
This side event came at a timely moment and should provide a crucial opportunity to strategize collectively about how to shape the outcome document of the Third International Conference on Financing for Development in Addis Ababa this summer. It was argued that that document should be fit to deliver on commitments on gender equality.

This side event also sought to ensure that gender equality and women's rights appear at the forefront of the document. The panelists discussed the barriers to gender equality and the need for transformative social agendas that enable women to contribute economically and to participate fully in society. They highlighted the gaps that still exist between norms and laws on paper and their implementation in reality – largely due to a lack of resources.

They argued that the scope of the post-2015 agenda offers many opportunities for accelerating the achievement of gender equality and that ambitious financing will be needed to turn political aspirations into reality.

It was concluded that financing for gender equality is an essential dimension of the sustainable development agenda. Investing in gender equality is one of the most important paths to poverty reduction, inclusive growth and prosperity. Gender is also a key dimension of vulnerability to poverty. For financing to be effective in reducing poverty and delivering sustainable development, it needs to benefit women and men equally and contribute to empowering women and building equitable societies.

We have to be creative! It's time for action!



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NEWS FROM OUR REPS!

RENATE SMITH SENDS NEWS FROM EWL

EUROPEAN WOMEN'S LOBBY
EUROPEEN DES FEMMES

Launch of the EWL's *Women's Economic Independence – The Foundation of All Rights*

At the start of this year, the European Women's Lobby (EWL) officially started its year of activities around the 20 years of the *Beijing Platform of Action* at its offices in Brussels.

Attendees were moved by the inspiring testimonies of former head of the EU delegation Agnes Hubert, former Secretary General Barbara Hellferich of the EWL, President of PES Women Zita Gurmai and former staff member Marie-Anne Leunis who were all in Beijing in 1995 at the World Conference on Women.



Twenty years ago, this was a difficult event to organise in Beijing. China did not have the same political climate and political will as it does now. Communication was difficult, there was no simultaneous interpretation, and proposals for the change of the status of Chinese women were cut off.

That said, some of the speakers mentioned that the situation of women in some countries, especially those suffering armed conflict, is even worse today.

Barbara Hellferich made the poignant remark that the 90s were the "Golden Years of Feminism", especially in Europe where EWL had a lot more support in the European Institutions than it has now. Beijing in 1995 was the beginning of a pro-active, structured vision of gender equality. Unfortunately, this positive global process did not continue. In particular, European structures need to become stronger.

After these sobering but fascinating personal contributions, the EWL presented a life-size floor game to highlight the backlashes of women's economic independence in a playful way. This was a great basis for networking.



Renate Smith, SIE Representative to the European Women's Lobby

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NEWS FROM OUR REPS!

BETTINA HAHNE SENDS NEWS FROM THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE:

Workshop on sex and gender aspects in scientific research

As SIE Representative to the Council of Europe, I recently attended the GENDER-NET and ERA-NET workshop that gave a comparative analysis of national/regional policies and programmes on the gender dimension in research. Soroptimists will particularly be interested in the following examples:

- Several drugs have recently been taken from the American market as they had severe side effects on women – they had only been tested on men.
- Passive smoking is more dangerous for young women than for young men, because young women spend more time inside the house than young men.
- Car crash tests have been done for a long time on dummies of 76 kg and 1.80m.

Indeed, much research does not take into account differences in sex (biological aspects) between men and women or in gender (societal aspects). An EU study has evaluated which big national and private research organizations already have clear guidelines on sex and gender aspects in research. It turned out that awareness is not the same in different countries – Austria and Ireland are current leaders in Europe.

GENDER-NET
PROMOTING GENDER EQUALITY IN RESEARCH INSTITUTIONS AND INTEGRATION OF THE GENDER DIMENSION IN RESEARCH CONTENTS

The good news is that scientists who apply for research grants at the European Commission now have to describe how their study will consider sex and gender issues. This concerns research in the areas of health, food, public security, transport, etc.

No equal laws for women in many countries

Christine Lagarde, the President of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) recently wrote in an article: "Despite some progress over the past few years, gender-based legal restrictions remain significant. Almost 90 percent of countries have at least one important restriction in the books, and some have many." However, in SIE countries the legal framework is overall quite egalitarian. **The link above leads to a wealth of information state by state, so please check it out!**

EU Resolution on Gender Inequality

The EU has issued a resolution which was approved by its Member States on the progress on equality between women and men in the European Union in 2013. This is a resolution similar to those that the Council of Europe produces, which do not have legislative value. However, they represent a comprehensive overview of all domains where women are disadvantaged. Please find the resolution here.

FOLLOW-UP ON THE ISTANBUL CONVENTION



In April, **two more countries ratified the Istanbul Convention, Finland and Poland**. On **May 4**, another important step was taken by **the constitution of the members of GREVIO,** the Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence. Its first 10 members were elected by the Parties to the Convention, i.e. by the states which have ratified it. All members of GREVIO are women.

Bettina Hahne, SIE Representative to the Council of Europe

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NEWS FROM OUR REPS!

CRACKS IN THE GLASS CEILING OR JUST A TRICK OF THE LIGHT?

Also, on 24 February, the European Women's Lobby, launched its most recent progress report on women on boards in Europe entitled *Cracks in the glass ceiling or just a trick of the light?*

The packed launch event attracted seven esteemed panellists from the business world, academia, the European Union and civil society. A structured yet informal meet-the-panellists group activity kicked off the evening, leading to a fruitful and dynamic panel discussion with excellent audience interaction.

The report shows that, overwhelmingly, the most effective way to increase the representation of women in decision making positions – and in this case, on company boards – is through binding legislation with regular monitoring, intermediary targets and strong sanctions. While some countries (such as Iceland, Norway, France and Italy) have taken the lead and introduced legislation along these lines, Europe as a whole is dragging its feet and making progress that is all too slow. The very latest data show that just two out of ten board members in Europe are women.

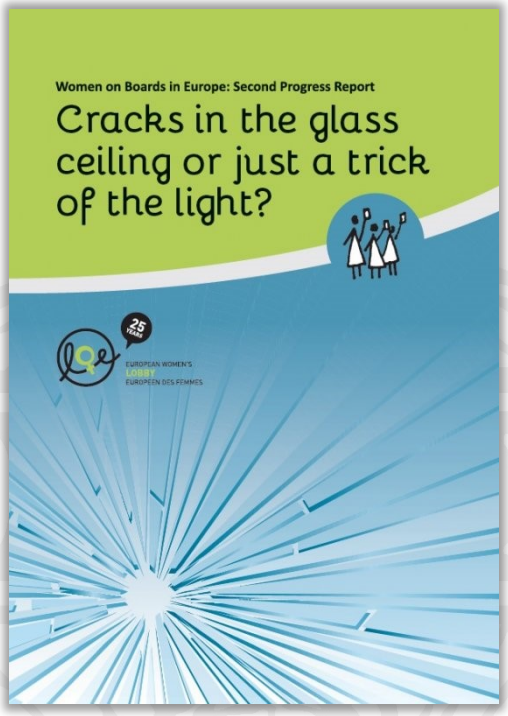
The launch event of this report served as a springboard for a wider discussion around the importance of women's leadership, the reasons for the ongoing overrepresentation of men in the higher echelons of decision-making, and the best ways to tackle the glass ceiling. For me, some of the most memorable and inspirational quotes from the panellists were:

"We have to smash the glass ceiling together" – Monika Ladmanova, Advisor on Gender to Commissioner for Justice, Consumers and Gender Equality Věra Jourová

"There is a need for male champions of change" – Dennis Abbott, Managing Director Communications, Burson-Marsteller Brussels

"Macho culture and old boys' clubs making decisions over our heads are dangerous for our democracies" – Joanna Maycock, Secretary General of the EWL

"It's time to lock arms…this is a systemic problem and has to be looked at holistically" – Professor Linda Scott, DP World Chair for Entrepreneurship and Innovation, Saïd Business School, University of Oxford. She also reminded women to use other means of communication, e.g. by not buying products from companies who do not treat women equally. Women have a very strong influence through purchasing power.



Equipped with their newest report, the EWL invites decision makers, member states and companies to make a choice: to stick with a failed system or to commit to a sustainable future based around collaboration and creativity, where leadership takes on a new meaning and all people, women and men, are included equally in decision making processes. The EU directive on women on boards is one important step towards this transformative change.

You can read the report here.

Renate Smith, SIE Representative to the EWL

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PROGRAMME & ADVOCACY SEMINAR 2015!

A two-day training seminar for Programme Directors and Assistant Programme Directors from our Unions and select Single Clubs was held on **17 -18 April 2015**.

The seminar welcomed 33 PDs and APDs from a large number of different countries, 25 to be exact.

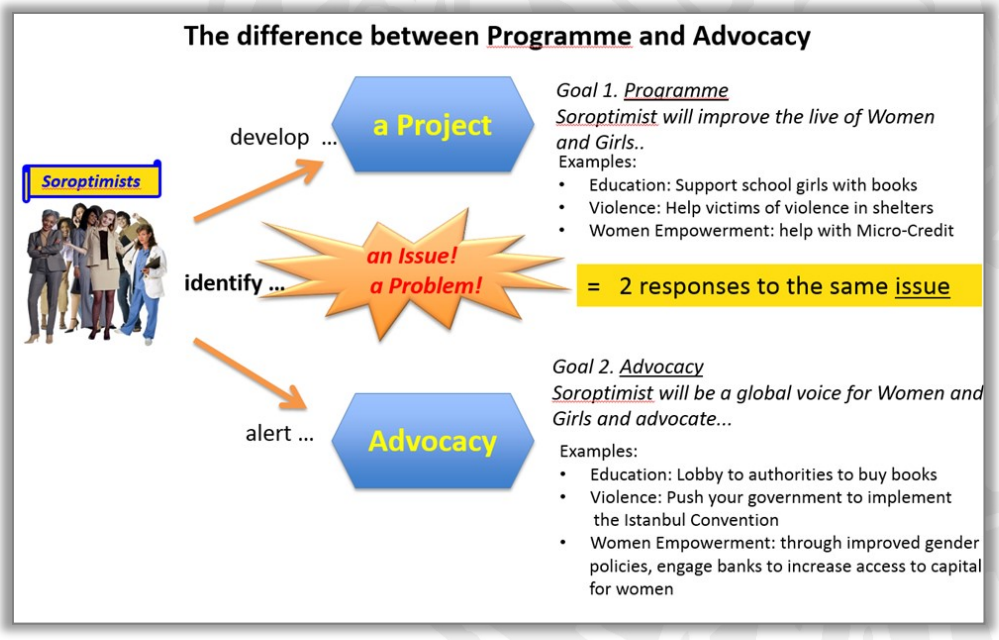
After Geneva, Switzerland in 2014, this year the training took place in Portugal! It was also the occasion to have a *taste of Lisbon*, capital of the **2015 Governors' Meeting**, being warmly welcomed by the **President of the Union of Portugal Maria Teresa Carrilho** and the **SI Constitution Committee Chair Lénia Lopes.**

Emphasis was placed throughout the seminar on **shaping together the future of the organisation**, defining the **role of "Programme"** and responding together in concrete ways to the **needs expressed in the 2014 SIE Membership Consultation**. The Seminar was also the occasion to question ourselves on what Soroptimists can do to be **more effective advocates** for women and girls at the local and national levels. In parallel, attention was continually brought to the importance **that pertinent, well designed and well executed projects have for the life of Soroptimist clubs**. In this context, Programme Directors also had the chance to **discuss and express their comments / requests on the SIE PFR system** and on **communication tools** supporting their role. All sessions and activities met with a great response from the participants and created a positive and constructive atmosphere and a solid basis for collaboration among all in the future!



The Programme and Advocacy Team headed by **President Elect Maria Elisabetta de Franciscis, Vice President for Advocacy Elena Savu**, **Programme Director Christine Peer and Assistant Programme Director Emine Erdem**, **SIE Executive Director Anne Simon and SIE Programme & Advocacy Assistant Bintou Koïta**, was thrilled by the enthusiasm of all the participants and the fruitful and rich exchanges of ideas and experiences that took place during these two days.

To see some pictures from the lively April 17 -18 seminar, kindly refer to the section *Resources* of our website or go to our Facebook page.



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GENERAL NEWS

SOROPTIMIST INTERNATIONAL CONVENTION IN ISTANBUL

Registrations are coming in swiftly for the Soroptimist International Convention in Istanbul. We would like to thank all of you who have already registered, and we're hoping that many more will sign up soon! You can register here.

We're expecting a number of renowned speakers from different fields, and we will keep you updated on who our 'star' participants will be. This and more exciting news to come!

We're also glad to announce we have gotten good flight rebates from our sponsor, Turkish Airlines, which you can take advantage of. We're on track and very excited. You can find more information here.



HAVE COMMENTS?

This is YOUR newsletter! If you have a comment, document, link, or anything else that you would like us to communicate in an upcoming edition of the newsletter, please share it with us! Feel free to send your news to programme@soroptimisteurope.org.

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