



Chapter 37

European Inter-district Weekend Seminars (1994–2007)¹

1994: Inter-club seminar, Burg Ludwigstein, near Kassel, Germany from 6 to 8 May 1994.

1997: Inter-club seminar, Burg Ludwigstein, near Kassel, Germany from 25 to 27 April 1997.

2000: Inter-club seminar, Burg Ludwigstein, near Kassel, Germany from 5 to 7 May 2000.

2004: Inter-club seminar, Burg Koenigstein, Germany from 13 to 15 February 2004.

2006: Inter-club seminar, Bonn, Germany from 10 to 12 March 2006.

2007: Inter-club seminar, Burg Ludwigstein, near Kassel, Germany from 17 to 20 May 2007.

Inter-club Seminar, Burg Ludwigstein, Germany (6–8 May 1994)

This weekend seminar was initiated by Irene Wiese-von Ofen, District 29 governor from 1990 to 1992, to continue the successful relations between European clubs and committees that now belonged to different districts and areas. Cornelia Klauser-Reucker, District 29 governor from 1992 to 1994, supported the idea and appointed Irmgard Wiemer, the district International Relations Committee chairman, to organize the first Inter-district weekend seminar from 6 to 8 May 1994 in Burg Ludwigstein, Germany. Zontians from the eight European districts were invited, under the theme, “Zonta in a Changing Europe: Encounter - Exchange of Ideas – Understanding”.

In these years, Eastern European countries were taking their first steps after the fall of the Iron Curtain. There were many initiatives to found new clubs; it was time of learning from the experience of different political systems, and for necessary, sensible approaches to understanding, and having patience and respect — a time of explaining the principles and the values of a worldwide active organization like Zonta.

Three Zontians were keynote speakers at the event: Edda Reiner from Austria explained what a multicultural state like Austria had experienced; Beate Gösde-Baumans from Germany explained the changed relationship between France and Germany; and Irene Wiese-von Ofen from Germany presented a lecture entitled “The Challenge of Spatial Planning for a Growing Europe”. After each keynote, long discussions followed. In the afternoon workshops, a chance was given to dive deeper into the content from the presentations.

¹ Research and text by Irene Wiese-von Ofen, edited by Eva Nielsen.

On the last day, Past Governors Irene Wiese-von Ofen and Cornelia Klauser-Reucker announced the winners of the Zonta District XIV competition, "How the Youth See Europe", and presented commendations for the best three presentations. The results and discussions were so inspiring that they can be seen as leading to the implementation of the Zonta International Young Women in Public Affairs Award in 1990. The closing presentation was given by Blanche Commerell, a well-known young actress, who presented the biography of Anna Achmatova (1889–1966), one of the extraordinary female Russian poets during a difficult time of revolution, wars and migration.

Inter-Club Seminar, Burg Ludwigstein, Germany (25–27 April 1997)

Organized by Irmgard Wiemer, past district international relations committee chairman, the event featured three keynotes. On the first evening, Ursula Heinrichs, president of the German Fairy Tales Society and a researcher, spoke about women's roles in fairy tales. The next morning began with a report, "Sustainable Development in the International Discussion of Experts and Politicians as a Challenge for Women As Well", by Irene Wiese-von Ofen. A member of the German Delegation for the 1996 U.N. World Habitat Conference in Istanbul, she explained the international view on these topics. Access to clean drinking water, sanitation, affordable housing and property in many societies is not possible for women, so women and their children in most developing countries live in insecure conditions – important aspects where Zonta wants to achieve better conditions for women's lives. As chairman of the International Relations Committee, Irene wanted to connect Zonta with the professional experts and the U.N. She encouraged clubs and their members to support the U.N. through activities, programs and projects at the local and international level. Lively discussions followed this presentation.

Andreas Kruse presented the third keynote speech about work and human rights. A researcher working in the field of psychology at the University in Greifswald in Germany, he said working conditions and working results are crucial for the independence of the individual, and human rights are fundamental elements of working conditions. Fighting for recognition of human rights in this field is of relevance, especially when it comes to the situation for women. The third day of the event was committed to reports on life in Eastern countries after the Berlin Wall had fallen, and in countries such as Bosnia and Croatia during the Yugoslavian War.

With increasing changes in social and economic situations for women, it was felt that, while the solidarity achieved through common service projects, invitations and Zontian-to-Zontian visits may help in concrete situations, the main objective for the Eastern clubs was to be recognized as equal Zontians. The weekend seminar offered a forum to reflect on those aspects.

Inter-Club Seminar, Burg Ludwigstein, Germany (5–7 May 2000)

This was the final weekend seminar. Irmgard Wiemer was mainly responsible for organizing the event, with organizational assistance and financial support from her club, the Zonta Club of Essen I. The theme of the seminar was "Women in Different Cultures – Think the Past, Live Today and Create the Future". The seminar began with a concert of young scholars on Friday. Saturday morning was concentrated on a report by Irene Wiese-von Ofen focused on "Zonta International as an NGO – But How?" with the participating Zontians holding an intense discussion on the impacts of globalization. Very often, the global impacts that are felt are not enriching. Negative reactions are seen in schools, against migrants and in public awareness. In the workshops, participants discussed the difficulties, the advantages of NGOs in times of globalization, and what local Zonta clubs' chances and responsibilities might be to find solutions for conflicting situations.

Women from India, the Czech Republic and Israel who were living in Europe attended the workshops in the afternoon and rated the discussions highly. Demonstrating the living situation of women both in their countries, through their own experience, and in our Western countries, the women opened new horizons for the well-educated, privileged Zontians. On Sunday, a plenary discussion reflected Zonta in a globalized world – positions and feelings which remain. The message was to think of fighting for sustainability, and about how the future might be influenced on a local level, as well as internationally.

Inter-Club Seminar, Burg Koenigstein, Germany, District 29 Weekend Seminar (13–15 February 2004)

District 29 Governor from 2002–2004, Gabriele Springer, from Germany, introduced a new format of inviting people to a weekend seminar to intensify and continue the themes that were discussed in the workshop held at the district conference in 2003 in Oxford.

The themes were:

- “How can Zonta make a difference?”, chaired by Isje Vermeulen, with one discussion leader per area
- “Zonta’s European identity as an NGO”, chaired by Karin Nordmeyer
- “Zonta in the 21st Century: Challenges and Opportunities” chaired by Irene Wiese-von Ofen with one discussion leader per area.

Each workshop was organized as a discussion group in the four relevant native languages – English, French, German and Dutch – to provide an opportunity for more qualified input.

The discussion groups had the following themes:

- “The European Constitution Regarding Women’s Rights”. The workshop results influenced discussions on several initiatives for establishing a European entity (e.g. tax reasons, membership in the European Women’s Lobby, etc.)
- “The Demographic Development and its Effect on Women’s Lives”. The meeting encouraged clubs to work on measurements of an aging society.
- “Development of Genetic Engineering and the Use of Stem Cells”. The result of this workshop was the initiative for a Zonta International resolution in the following biennium.

European Weekend Seminar, Bonn, Germany (10–12 March 2006)

District 29 Governor from 2004–2006 Regina Smit from the Netherlands, invited her co-governors and European Zontians to continue gathering under the motto “Working Women Working Mum”. The event included topics focused on compatibility of family, professional and honorary positions in the different District 29 countries as *pars pro toto* (representative)² of the Zonta world, in presentations and moderations from The Netherlands, Germany, U.K. and France. Friday evening began with an invitation to the private homes of Zontians in Bonn, offering a chance to learn more about life in the country. Sunday morning involved a plenary session where Irene Wiese-von Ofen, then Zonta International Foundation vice president, presented six themes for workshops for the six District 29 member countries, because Zonta International had appointed a task force for revising, modernizing or actualizing a course to the future, defining service and advocacy as Zonta’s primary focus.

That focus had already been discussed in the previous biennium but had not yet been realized in the clubs. The roundtable themes were:

- social security (pension, nursing, care, unemployment insurance, etc.)
- the difference between men and women (honorary positions in parties, nonprofit fields)

² Latin, meaning a part taken to represent the whole.

- compatibility of professions and family (children's care, family time in the first three years, pension and rent, etc.)
- percentage of employment: female and male (different income, different options, etc.)
- freelance occupations for women (self-employed academics, craftsmen, etc.)
- pro-women and pro-family working conditions (flexible working hours, childcare, etc.).

Participants were organized in six different roundtable language groups and asked to discuss legal and public awareness of the six topics in their countries. Each table elected a rapporteur, who presented the outcomes to the plenary on Sunday. The results were material for the ongoing discussion in the field of Legislative Awareness and Advocacy, international program ideas, supporting fellowship, and assisting clubs in their activities, because advocacy can be much more difficult to explain than service.

Irene Wiese-von Ofen's concluding words were: "The intended course to the future defines Zonta's vision as a world in which women's rights are recognized as human rights".

Inter-club seminar Burg Ludwigstein, Germany (17–20 May 2007)

This international weekend seminar was organized under the theme "Me and the Other" by Wilma Estelmann, Zonta Club of Rheingau-Rheinhessen, and Ursula Gehring, Zonta Club of Marburg. Participants came from different districts, including German Zontians and Zontians from Switzerland and The Netherlands. The presentations ranged from using artistic methods of self-expression, presented by Barbara Pfeffer, a professor at the Folkwang University of Arts in Essen, to a presentation by Cooperation Adviser and Professor Barbara Mettler-von Meibom about appreciation as the key to success, where appreciation is based on a special mindfulness.

Irene Wiese-von Ofen, as International Foundation vice-president, reported about work and decision-making processes in the Zonta International Foundation and the challenges involved in reaching a worldwide consensus on projects, including differences between financing and sponsoring, and responsibilities for projects conducted in cooperation with the U.N. and other worldwide organizations. International Director Karin Nordmeyer spoke about the work of the International Board. Both reports provoked a lot of questions, discussion and different points of view, indicating the ongoing necessity of vertical and horizontal information-sharing and face-to-face communication.