



## Chapter 38

### European Seminars (1995–2019)<sup>1</sup>

In 1994, District XIV was divided into five new districts. A number of criteria were defined in the division procedures, especially two items concerning continuity which would allow:

- different ways of cooperating with and in national institutions to open participation in national legal procedures concerning advocacy for Zonta International's goals, and
- Inter-district conferences like those held in the 1970s and 1980s to extend information sharing, friendship, projects and social contacts beyond the new district borders – and to offer a continuation of the European spirit.

Despite the commitment to Inter-district Conferences, only three were organized: in 1995, 1997 and 1999. They failed because of large distances to the respective cities and venues, which were all over Europe, and because of complicated organizational and financial burdens within the five new districts. Since 2001, the five districts have organized their own district conferences.

With the European seminars considered to be a special format, cross-border meetings have continued to the present, hosted in various European countries. The agendas for these meetings reveal both Zonta themes and passionate concerns about women's issues, worldwide. The seminars are open to all European districts but interested Zontians from other parts of the world are also welcomed. The seminars are financed by the participants and are usually held in February or March in odd years in order not to compete with other Zonta events, conferences or conventions.

#### **Inter-district Meetings**

**1995:** San Remo, Italy. Inter-district Conference of the five districts, including individual district meetings

**1997:** Vienna, Austria. Inter-district Conference of four districts. District 29 began a separate District Conference

**1999:** Montpellier, France. Inter-district Conference of four Districts. District 29 had a separate conference.

#### **European Seminars**

**1995:** International seminar for Europe in Lübeck, Germany, 31 March–2 April 1995

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<sup>1</sup> Research compiled by Irene Wiese-von Ofen, Karin Saeger and Eva Nielsen.

**2002:** European seminar in Stuttgart, Germany, 15–17 February 2002  
**2009:** European seminar in Bonn, Germany, 13–15 February 2009  
**2011:** European seminar in Bonn, Germany, 15–17 April 2011  
**2013:** European seminar in Tampere, Finland, 8–10 February 2013  
**2015:** European seminar in Brugge, Belgium, 6–8 February 2015  
**2017:** European seminar in Vienna, Austria, 3–5 February 2017  
**2019:** European seminar in Tartu, Estonia, 8–10 February 2019.

The European seminars try to include special Zonta topics in their program. These have included:

- How to be a Zontian: Women and health, environment and multi-culture (Lübeck, 1995)
- Zonta in a changing society responding to European challenges (Stuttgart, 2002)
- Zonta's way forward: How to implement women's rights (Bonn, 2009)
- Keep up women's rights: Zonta's ability to improve the status of women (Bonn, 2011)
- Women in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century — old problems, new solutions? (Tampere, 2013)
- Empowering women in decision-making (Bruges, 2015)
- Zonta in a changing society: Ways and responses to European challenges (Vienna, 2017)
- Zonta Values (Tartu, 2019).

The seminar structure offers an open forum for exchange and reflection. Outstanding statements, which inspire discussion, are given by invited politicians, researchers, leading officers of NGOs, CEOs and sometimes young entrepreneurs, Zonta awardees or leading Zonta officials. Time is left in the program for networking – coffee breaks are important for informal discussions, talking about the presentations, and strengthening mutual connections.

In workshops, the themes are intensified, and in the evening, music or arts presentations change the atmosphere. On the last day, site visits are possible. Typically, between 100 and 200 Zontians from all over Europe (Districts 13, 14, 20, 21, 27, 28, 29 and 30) attend and appreciate spending time talking, learning and listening.

The event format, created in Europe, is an effective and inspiring alternative to district conferences and conventions where most of the time is dedicated to elections, budget, rules and regulations.

### **1. The European Seminar in Lübeck, Germany (31 March–2 April 1995)**

Past Governor Cornelia Klauser-Reucker, of Switzerland, and Past Governor Leena Kankainen, of Finland, invited the European clubs, and Zontians came from all over the world for this weekend seminar to discuss the U.N. Year of Tolerance, which covered body, soul, health and multi-culture, along with environmental and sustainability themes.

International President 'Folake Solanke outlined Zonta's biennial multiculturalism and tolerance goals. Her vision was the "triple h" of health, human rights and world harmony. She underlined internationalism as one of the pillars of Zonta, a multicultural experience being one of the resources the organization offers. She felt Zontians should contribute more in this field.

Past Governor Irene Wiese-von Ofen, chairman of the newly organized Zonta International Environment Committee, took the initiative to look for a presentation that linked to the U.N. Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro in 1992.<sup>2</sup>

Folake Solanke, with the committee, supported an orientation to more sustainability, as defined in the U.N. goals. She told the audience about the discussion she had with U.N. Secretary-General, Boutros Boutros-Ghali, who had outlined his world vision of sustainability. Zonta, by supporting the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), became an important partner in eradicating violence and poverty and working for the vision of a sustainable, harmonious world.

The workshops at the seminar had the following themes and presenters:

- Women's Situation in Islamic Countries by Dr. Meltem Göben
- Women's Situation in Islamic Countries by Ulrike Neumann-Meyer
- Tolerance and Multi-culture by Zonta International Vice President Val Sarah
- Women's and Children's Health in the U.N. by Fiorina Maggi, U.N. Representative, Geneva, Switzerland
- Women's Work and Health by Marie-Claire Seguret from the Zonta Club of Geneva
- Women's Health from the Mental Point of View by Dr. Marianne Kastrup, from Denmark
- Environment and Health by Els Boelsma, Zonta Club of Den Haag, the Netherlands
- The Human Genome Project by Ursula Friedrich from Denmark
- Genetic Outlook by Professor Leena Palotie-Peltonen from Finland.

Social programs, site visits and many opportunities to meet with the more than 250 Zontians who attended the seminar rounded out the inspiring weekend.

## **2. The European Seminar in Stuttgart, Germany (15–17 February 2002)**

The theme, Zonta in a Changing Society: Responding to European Challenges, was proposed by the eight 2000–2002 European Governors: Mari Ramsten Vangdal (District 13), Barbara Riedel (District 14), Barbro Salste (District 20), Monica Thurell (District 21), Ina Thys-L'abbé (District 27), Monique Schlegel (District 28), Lesje Vermeueln (District 29) and Karin Nordmeyer (District 30).

Karin Nordmeyer was not only the coordinator of this seminar and those that followed, but also their "spiritus rector" (guiding spirit) – she influenced programs, recommended, found and invited high-level speakers, and was in charge of the seminar résumés. As a representative of Zonta International to the Council of Europe, she was able, through her personal knowledge and commitment, to make the European topics recognized by the Zonta International board, as well as by the Zontians who participated in the seminars.

The keynote speaker in Stuttgart was Elisabeth Rehn, honorary member of Zonta International. In 2001, she was appointed as one of the two UNIFEM independent experts to assess women's role in peacebuilding on a global basis. She was U.N. under-secretary-general, member of the European Parliament, minister of defense and equality affairs in Finland, and special rapporteur for the human rights situation in the Yugoslavian War. Rehn also chaired international conferences and gave many official addresses.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/milestones/unced>

Her European seminar speech discussed women as peacebuilders in regions of war and conflict. Women's role in peacebuilding is a long-standing international discussion. Looking at international conflicts, we rarely find women in responsible roles in peace negotiations, although violence against women is one of the main weapons used in conflicts. Rehn concluded her speech by saying Zontians have an important role as advocates and communicators around the world. She urged us to be "a doctor, not a judge" and to support other women.

The afternoon workshops were the responsibility of each district:

- District 13: "Legislative Awareness and Advocacy", Kirsten Theisen, Past International Director and Status of Women Service Committee Chairman
- District 14: "Women and the Democratization Process in Countries of Central and Eastern Europe"
- District 27: "The Enlargement of the EU, Benefits for Women in the Candidate Countries", Els van Winckel, Zonta Club of Brussels, Belgium
- District 28: "Reconciliation of Family, Partnership and Professional Work," Ursula Gehring, Zonta Club of Marburg, Germany
- District 29: "FGM in Europe", Daniele Bugeon, Zonta Club of le Havre, France
- District 30: "Sustainable Development – a Societal Choice", Regine Aquier, Zonta Club of Montpellier, France
- District 30: "Managing Diversity", Cornelia Klauser, Zonta Club of Lugano, Switzerland
- District 20: "Women as Peace Builders" (following the keynote address)
- District 21: "Legislative Awareness and Advocacy". Margit Webjörn, International President-Elect, presented her idea of legislative awareness and advocacy as new Zonta focal point.

A reception hosted by the mayor of the host city was an evening highlight demonstrating to the local authorities the importance of Zonta International as a partner. The eight governors responsible for the event wrote a 20-page summary. The whole seminar brought many new insights, good information on laws and European positions, statistics and published papers, and discussions, as well as reviving friendships and creating sympathetic new encounters.

### **3. European Inter-district Seminar in Bonn, Germany (13–15 February 2009)**

The team organizing the third seminar included Karin Nordmeyer, Zonta International Council of Europe Committee chairman; Annette Binder, past international director; and Gabriele Brübach, vice president of the Zonta Club of Dortmund.

The seminar was entitled, "Zonta's Way Forward: How to Implement Women's Rights", and was thought of as a think-tank to help develop more effective strategies to achieve Zonta's mission. The results were published online.

The keynote speaker on Sunday was Irma Ertmann, ambassador for Finland to the Council of Europe, with her speech, "From Cinderella to Cyberella...can Zontians make a difference?"

The entire Saturday concentrated on workshops, with topics such as:

- Zonta's credibility as a women's NGO – how to take advantage of Zonta's strength, led by Hela Prostedter, District 14 governor, and facilitated by Barbara Devin from the Zonta Club of Fünf-Seen-Land
- Making our clubs fit for international service – how to close the gap between the global and the local level, with moderation and an introduction by Irene Wiese-von Ofen, Zonta International Fund vice president from 2005–2007, and facilitators Susanne von

Bassewitz, past District 29 Area Director, and Britta Gerling-Köhne from the Zonta Club of Essen II

- Zonta advocacy, with respect to CEDAW – how to meet the challenge, led by Ute Scholz, District 27 governor, and Anna Lukasiak from the Zonta Club of Gdansk
- Visibility – how to make Zonta and Zonta's vision better known in a world where branding is so important, with workshop leader Kari Vieth, District 13 governor, and facilitator Poula Helt from the Zonta Club of Frederiksberg
- Zonta's response to the challenges women face in society – an outlook to our future actions and visions, led by Karin Saeger, District 30 governor, and facilitated by Juliane Bardt from the Zonta Club of Bonn-Rheinaue
- Zonta advocacy mechanisms – how to implement legal instruments against trafficking, with workshop leader Jaana Sippus, District 20 governor, and facilitated by Aune Brotherus-Kettunen from the Zonta Club of Helsinki II.

Talking with Zonta International President Beryl Sten was an important part of discussion at this time because of the financial transactions concerning the Zonta building in Chicago, the conflict with the foundation involving buying and selling the building, and the removal of the Zonta International Fund directors and executive director. While questions about intended changes to the core structure of Zonta administration and the consequences of financial transactions could not be answered, Beryl answered and solved many other questions. The main questions were left to be answered at the forthcoming convention because issues had not yet been finalized with the legal advisor.

A pleasant reception for seminar guests was held at the Old Town Hall of Bonn.

#### **4. European Inter-district Seminar in Bonn, Germany (15–17 April 2011)**

Enhancing Zonta's ability to improve the status of women in the future was the motto of this weekend seminar. Karin Nordmeyer, chairman of the Zonta International Council of Europe Committee and the seminar treasurer, was again responsible for planning the event, along with Gabriele Springer from the Zonta Club of Essen I.

While Zonta International President Dianne K. Curtis was not able to come to Bonn, she sent a personal message, and Vice President, Maria José Landeira Oestergaard, was present as a member of the Copenhagen I club.

In a dinner speech on Friday evening, the Bonn Mayor, Angelica Maria Kappel, gave an impression of the situation female politicians face and the extremely diverse responsibilities and activities our cities involve. Cities are the basis of democracy and, in the hierarchy of the federal republic, countries and local authorities, this level is the most important because of the direct influence on citizens' lives. More and more, the capacity of women is being recognized, increasing the percentages of women serving the public as mayors or ministers, whereas in sizeable companies, the percentage needs to increase.

Seven workshops were offered, the purpose of each of which was to inform participants about the different positions and define strategies and find mechanisms to improve women's rights in respective fields to prepare Zontians to become active agents for change.

The subjects included:

- "Who we are? And where do we want to go?" led by Susanne von Bassewitz, Zonta Club of Düsseldorf, with Isabell Ziegler, Zonta Club of Düsseldorf as rapporteur
- "Visibility: how to make Zonta International better known?" with workshop leader Claudia

- Seifert, Zonta Club of Bonn, and rapporteur Tuija Heikkilä, Zonta Club of Tampere I
- “Let's read together: practical Zonta action with migrant women” with workshop leader Raija Kalimo, Zonta Club of Helsinki I, and rapporteur Anu Hamailainen, Zonta Club of Lappeenranta
- “Women and health: today's evidence, tomorrows agenda” with workshop leader Annette Binder, Zonta Club of Hamburg-Elbufer and rapporteur Chantal Platteau, Zonta Club of Waasland and Wiltrud Walther, Zonta Club of Frankfurt
- “Zonta: Catalyst for intercultural and personal development” with workshop leader Cornelia Klauser, Zonta Club of Lugano and rapporteur Eva Heikkilä, Zonta Club of Hämeenlinna
- “Legislative Awareness and Advocacy Mechanisms” with workshop leader Barbara A. Devin, Zonta Club of Fünf Seen Land and rapporteur Fiona Ruff, Zonta Club of Bad Soden-Kronberg and Getraud Ribitsch, Zonta Club of Graz
- “Reconciliation of family and work” with workshop leader Alexandra Wachendorfer and Irene Wiese-von Ofen, Zonta Club of Essen I, as rapporteur.

The rapporteurs drafted a common concluding statement which was discussed with Karin Nordmeyer and read to the plenary by her.

The concluding statement was unanimously accepted and included the following:

- Where do we want to go? Develop the organization by:
  - improving visibility
  - combining advocacy and service
  - advocating and influencing legal processes for reconciliation of family and work.
- Where do we want to go? Personal development in and for the organization by providing:
  - skills to learn
  - encouragement through role models
  - greater awareness of different decisions and support projects, and a campaign concerning women and health.

Many details were discussed, and Zontians could take home many concrete best practice examples for their club activities. The Council of Europe's NGO unit and the public relations division provided excellent informative material. Finally, the reception in the Old Town Hall of Bonn was an enjoyable social event in a remarkable atmosphere – a building standing for urban culture in an old university city.

### **5. European Inter-district Zonta Seminar in Tampere, Finland (8–10 February 2013)**

The weekend seminar was organized by District 20 Governor Tuija Heikkilä and her team: Irma Ertman, Tarja Hopeakangas, Anu Hämäläinen, Tuija Kirveskari-Tähtinen and Erja Lindholm. The initiative came once more from Karin Nordmeyer, the chairman of the International Council of Europe Committee.

The overall theme of the seminar was “Women in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Old Problems, New Solutions?”

President Maria Jose Landeira Oestergaard, then president-elect, and Vice President, Sonja Hönig Schough attended the seminar, contributed presentations, and took part in discussions. The keynote speaker was Sirpa Rautio, director of the Human Rights Centre, Office of the Ombudsman, Finland. The lecture was about violence against women. It was remarkable how

this male speaker was of the same opinion as the Zontians. He stressed that the movement against violence should be supported by Zontians in their own parliaments to eradicate violence against women, especially on the international level,

A second lecture was about the role of women in conflicts and in peacebuilding. Especially with the growing experience in the Iraq and Syrian wars, Zontians were told they must recognize that violence against women has reached new levels of indignity and harm to women. The speaker was of the opinion that U.N. initiatives should be seconded by any national initiative, organization or NGO, such as Zonta.

The necessity of peacebuilding was underlined by Maria Stefanova, member of the Zonta Club of St. Sofia in Bulgaria, who reported about the Yugoslavian War experience.

A workshop on rape as a weapon of war was introduced by Terttu Utriainen, a professor of criminal law. Eva Nielsen, Zonta Club of Esbjerg, was the commentator, along with Anita Schnetzer-Spranger, Zonta Club of Mainz. The event corresponded to Zonta's international programs on violence against women.

Another workshop was on the role of NGOs in the social integration of immigrants. Irene Wiese-von Ofen presented some best practice examples from the Ruhr district, where immigration has been a resource of economic power since the beginning of industrialization, and where immigration is consequently a daily challenge in schools, universities, the arts, music, housing, gardening and many other fields. However, the region had learned to live with conflicts and to pacify a city and region using various strategies. NGOs, particularly an organization like Zonta, can generally help a lot because civil society is able to invent initiatives other than a formalized administration. The best model is for both entities to work together.

Sunday morning, attendees visited the private homes of Zontians and took a walk in the hills in the snow, with a wonderful view of the city.

## **6. European Inter-district Seminar in Brugge, Belgium (6–8 February 2015)**

The weekend seminar was prepared by Frieda Demey and her team along similar lines to the previous seminars organized by Karin Nordmeyer. Zonta International President Maria Jose Landeira Oestergaard attended the seminar, along with President-Elect Sonja Hönig Schough. The motto of the seminar was “Empowering Women in Decision Making”. Rapporteurs and moderators came from institutions in Brussels, so the program offered a high level of knowledge.

Vivian Redding, former vice-president of the European Commission and member of the European parliament, enriched the seminar with her presentation on women in politics, European policy and the participation of women in the decision-making process. She encouraged Zontians, with humor as well as with her precise observations, to trust in their abilities and use any chance they had to be part of decision-making processes.

The second keynote came from Professor Anne de Paepe, the first female rector of the University of Gent, who urged a different approach to education for women. The afternoon brought outstanding women into a dialogue with winners of the Young Women in Public Affairs Award, the Jane M. Klausman Women in Business Scholarship and the Amelia Earhart Fellowship. The definition of the smart woman, used in the program, became more and more visible and characterized the women. Zonta could be proud of these young distinguished prize

winners – it is no wonder that they wanted to continue having contact with Zonta, and Zonta with them.

For District 29, Irene Wiese-von Ofen, past Zonta International Foundation vice president, proposed to build an alumni network to strengthen the award recipients' contact with each other and Zonta. Participants also discussed the necessity of a systematic approach to all three categories of prizewinners, i.e. the Young Women in Public Affairs (YWPA), Jane M. Klausman Women in Business (JMK) and Amelia Earhart (AE) awardees. This District 29 proposal was also in accordance with the views of International YWPA Award Committee Chairman, Ute Scholz. However, more importantly, it corresponded with the wishes of the awardees, who were present in Brugge. District 29 has already experienced the successful area program "Great girls meet Great Women", which Susanne von Bassewitz implemented as former area director. International Director Sharon Langenbeck, as a former AE Fellow, expressed strong interest in including the AE Fellows in this intended network.

In the evening, a sympathetic reception at the town hall – an extraordinary building – was a special seminar highlight and offered many opportunities to exchange experiences and learn from each other. Finally, the Sunday walking tours in the city of Brugge exemplified the high level of European medieval urban culture in buildings, open spaces and landscape architecture. This mixture of meeting extraordinary women and exploring extraordinary sites is a supplementary value of these European Zonta weekend seminars, showcasing the cultural richness of Europe.

## **7. European Inter-district Seminar in Vienna (3–5 February 2017)**

Organized by Past International Director Ingeborg Geyer, of Vienna, and her team, the seminar title was: "Zonta in a Changing Society – Ways and Means of Responding to European Challenges".

The keynote addresses included:

- "Challenges to the European Union," a video message from Sebastian Kurz, minister for Europe, integration and foreign affairs of Austria, and Chairman of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), 2017
- "The Right to the City – The Urban Agenda 2030", by Irene Wiese-von Ofen, Zonta Club of Essen
- "The Female Dimension of Security in Europe," by Cordula Geinitz, first secretary, permanent mission of the Federal Republic of Germany to the OSCE
- "New Challenges for Women in the European Labour Market", by Martina Maurer, Public Employment Service Austria (AMS) who spoke about her country's active employment policy for women.

Workshops were:

- "Securing Human Rights: Women's Rights are Human Rights", introductory notes by Shams Asadi, head of the Vienna Human Rights Bureau, and Anita Schnetzer-Spranger, chairman of the Zonta International Council of Europe committee
- "Combating Violence Against Women – Trafficking", introductory notes by Karin Nordmeyer, Zonta Club of Schauinsland, president of the U.N. Women National Committee Germany, and Austrian politician BM a.D<sup>3</sup>. Helga Konrad, regional implementation initiative to prevent and combat human trafficking, with

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<sup>3</sup> Abgeordnete zum Nationalrat Bundesministerin ohne Portefeuille.

contributions/interventions and presentation of a project supported by the Zonta Club of Vezprem concerning the organization “Missing Children”

- “Job Market: Challenges for Women”, with introductory notes by Claudia Gamon, NEOS<sup>4</sup> deputy, and Els van Winckel, Zonta Club of Morges-La Cote, Switzerland, and Zonta International U.N. Representative for Geneva.
- “Sustainable Development Goals and Zonta’s Mission”, introductory notes by Zonta International President Sonja Hönig Schough, Susanne von Bassewitz, Zonta International president-elect, and Professor Jadranka Mustajbegovic, M.D., Ph.D. from the Zonta Club of Zagreb.

The eighth European Inter-district Seminar was held in Tartu, Estonia (8–10 February 2019)

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<sup>4</sup> *Das Neue Österreich und Liberales Forum*, a liberal pro European Union Party, founded 2012.