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25th September 2015

Report

Twinning SI Union Switzerland with Single Clubs in Ukraine

The Swiss Union and the Single Clubs in Ukraine have been twinned for 6 years now. Every 2nd year on behalf of the Swiss Union I visited some Ukrainian Clubs and reported to the Swiss Union and the SIE Federation. Three Ukrainian sisters have visited the Swiss AGMs and reported about their club lives, joys and sorrows (last time 2012). Also the Swiss members have been informed about the Twinning project in the Swiss SI Magazine "Soroptimist Information".

Since I visited the Ukrainian clubs last time in September 2013, Ukraine has suffered from great political turmoil, followed by the East Ukrainian war, where many soldiers were killed and about 2 million people fled to the centre and the east of the country. The financial problem affects all our sisters. The grivna is only one third of what it was two years ago, but the prices of goods are more or less on the same level. There are less cars on the roads as petrol is too expensive for most people. The only SI club on the Crimea, **Simferopol**, which I last visited in autumn 2012, gave up, mainly because of loss of members – also because the Crimea doesn't belong to Ukraine anymore.

Club **Chernovitsy** was closed by the Federation in spring 2014. The SIE Federation's offer for mediation was turned down by the president. I still think it would have been able to sort the problems out, if they had let the proposed mediator do her work.

For the last two years I have been in contact with all clubs. They all have fine projects, usually with sponsor partners from SIE clubs (mainly Denmark, Switzerland, Luxembourg).

I am very happy that from each of the 5 remaining clubs one member will take part at the Single Clubs meeting in Belgium later this year.

10th to 23rd September 2015

Lviv – Ushgorod – Kiev – Chernigiv – Kiev

Overall impression: After some weeks of tentative peace people in Ukraine seem to gain hope: If only peace lasts, they keep saying. I spoke to many sisters and other people. I was surprised to see a lot of optimism: People now really want to take charge of their future, a good start is the new police that has been installed: well trained young people that will not be allowed to be bribed.

Lviv: The club had its 15 year anniversary in September 2015 when I was there. The SI club is very important to the members. They are all happy to be club members, are very proud of their ongoing projects: the children's hospital Brjukovichy, (with Swiss and Danish help), the renovation of a music school, mainly with Danish help, renovation of the clinic for children with burns, (Danish help), a new kitchen in school 45. I was able to see the huge progress in all projects.

Ushgorod: Some weeks before my visit, one member informed me about severe problems between the group around the old president Magdalena (till end September 2015), and the new president Tetjana (from 1st October 2015) against about 8 club members. First I met the presidents on 15th September. The others had told me on the phone about the problems. They didn't trust the new presidents, claimed even she had not had the majority of the votes at the election in June. The reason: According to them the new president Tetjana was trying to suck up the projects of the SI club in her own charity business. They hadn't met since June. So I really feared the club might collapse.

I first met Magdalena and Tetjana and heard their version. They showed me the protocol, Tetjana had the majority. But according to them there were other problems. They don't have any reports or

finance settlements of earlier times. They had invited the former president Yana (2011 – 2013) to explain where the money went and she couldn't give evidence – but she has now left the club. The club's constitution or bylaws only exist in Russian. In the Ushgorod club the secretary and treasurer were elected by the president! – which in the Ushgorod case is unfavourable, as the secretary and treasurer and two more members work in the new President's charity business. Also the members didn't vote about finances, expenses and budget at their AGM! I told them how a club is run in our countries and that the structure has to be thought over.

I was happy to hear, that they had invited the other group to come two hours later. When they came you could feel the tense atmosphere.

I told them it was about a new start. Everybody was allowed to speak, but only one person at a time. They had to speak clearly in Russian, otherwise I couldn't understand, and sometimes one member helped with English. It would go too much into detail to write all that was being said, but there are some questions that have to be discussed further – hopefully at the Single Club Conference in Belgium this year. The good thing: We ended the discussion with a bottle of white wine and drank on the future of the club.

It became clear: Bad club structures have been causing a lot of problems. I recommended to have a new club constitution drafted and asked an other Ukrainian club to send them their constitution as a model.

One new project had not been openly discussed and accepted by the club members. When the war started, there was an SI project for IDPs (Internally displaced people) launched on the new President's premises. They got money for it from the west (SI Denmark). On the following day, the new president Tetjana took me round, I met some refugees, they are well looked after. I'm sure Tetjana does good work and I wouldn't say anything against it. But it should be made very clear what is Soroptimist and what is something else.

The club Ushgorod also has a **mother and child** project, they support mothers and children, mostly women without partners: President Magdalena told me, they support some mothers with money (I think from club Althuis?). One mother who we visited lives in poor condition with her family. She is very happy to get some monthly support from the Soroptimists, as she gets very little by the State. This is a very good project.

Kiev: The very active president Olena (until September 30th) and the new president (from 1st October) invest a lot of time in two main projects: Renovation of one room in the department for lung illnesses in Kiev's main children's clinic. It is amazing how much renovation work can be done in this country for 3000 euros (from a Danish club). Tamara often went there to observe the ongoing works. – Boyarka: The school for vision impaired children has been the Kiev club's main project for many years. Two years ago the club got 20'000 CHF from a Swiss foundation for the professional education of the children. We went there and followed the information given by a baker/conditor about her profession. Together with the children we made cakes and decorated them. - I met most club members: A good active club that has recovered from a time with some club problems.

Chernigiv: a new club in the north of Ukraine: My impression couldn't be better. These women gave me a wonderful welcome, are full of ideas. They had many questions and I tried to help. It is a wonderful club that would like to have a sister club somewhere in Western Europe.

Next day they took me to one of their projects: they actively support a 105 year old woman: they feed her, visit her, help with personal hygiene. I think she is visited by one SI member every day: What a wonderful Soroptimist Project.

Dnepropetrovsk: I was in contact with this club. Unfortunatley I couldn't go there this year, but spoke with the person who will also be at the conference in Belgium.

I didn't stay in hotels as I was invited as a guest at the members' homes, which again gave me a lot of insight and we spent a lot of time discussing club matters and politics.

Sina Stiffler