



SOROPTIMIST INTERNATIONAL SWITZERLAND

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Dear Soroptimists – Dear Interested Friends!

The summer break is coming to an end, and I am on my way back from Germany to Switzerland. A few months ago, Maria Bilodid, president of the SI Club Kijew, also went home. In an interview with Annelies Debrunner, she tells us what her return was like and what her life looks like now. She has launched relief campaigns and projects in her club to cope with the consequences of the war. Our donations are most welcome, give confidence to the Soroptimists and help to alleviate the hardships and consequences of the war. Soroptimists in Ukraine are not giving up. We must not stop giving either – thank you very much for your support!

Catherine Schuppli, President SI Union Switzerland

Interview with Maria Bilodid: Back in time for the anniversary of SI Club Kyiv

Maria Bilodid has been back in the Ukrainian capital Kyiv for a quarter of a year after fleeing to Switzerland with her two children shortly after the begin of the war in March 2022. During the conversation, Maria, president of the SI Club Kyiv, tells little about the horrors of the war in this country. Rather, it depicts her everyday life, the effort to survive the war positively, towards victory and peace.

How is Mary feeling after the family had been separated for more than a year? "I'm happy that I am here," says Maria. She said she was very happy to have made this decision. Of course, everyday life in Kyiv is totally different, because "we never know what will happen." You have to be able to live spontaneously and at the same time structure everyday life and the future. The most important stage is that the two children will go to first grade and kindergarten after the summer holidays. So you are waiting to know on what date and in which school building the children will start the new school year after the summer holidays.



In addition, the family will soon move into a house just outside Kyiv. This means more security, because the property has a large basement that can be used as an air-raid shelter.

Spontaneously launching a project

As president of the SI Club Kyiv, Maria also takes care of projects intensively, which she will tell about later. The operation against the catastrophe of the dam failure in Kherson was not planned. Maria had reacted immediately with her club. After five to six days, the relief supplies donated by the Soroptimists could be sent. 100 blankets, 100 food packages and 100 hygiene packages reached those in need and were distributed. In August, Maria will travel to the area to orient herself on the ground.

Maria emphasizes, however, that the water disaster and the still unforeseeable ecological catastrophe are only part of the tragedy, although 16 dead and 31 missing are to be regretted.

The other part is cultural heritage. The area around Kherson was known for the healing earth. The Ukrainians loved to be treated in this area with white and blue healing clay for various physical ailments. "It's an ancient wise culture," Maria explains.

The Ukrainian culture, which we have unfortunately not noticed enough in Western Europe for decades, of course does not only contain old forms of body healing with earth. It includes a wide variety of traditional and modern cultural forms, such as music, painting, poetry.

Unfortunately, Ukrainian culture was often subsumed into Russian culture. For decades, the Russian government has been exerting pressure and trying to portray Ukrainian culture and language as secondary or even negate it.

The Ukrainian writer Andrei Kurkov writes in "Diary of an Invasion": "In fact, however, Russia had declared war for cultural domination over Ukraine and other former Soviet republics much earlier. Since the early 2000s, the Kremlin has been spending tens of millions of euros annually to prove to the whole world that Russian culture ... has the upper hand."

Of happiness and positive thinking

Although during the whole conversation the burden to which Maria and probably all people in Ukraine are exposed is very palpable and also depressing, Maria emphasizes very strongly the positive in her country and in her personal experience. It is true that she tells us, almost in a subordinate clause, about the illnesses of the children shortly after their return from Switzerland. She says: «I'm really happy every day, thank you for being healthy. If I'm worried, I think, 'It could be worse.'

In this context, we come to religion, and I tell Maria that in March I visited churches in Lviv, where many people sought solace in liturgy and song.

Maria says that she was raised orthodox but respects many religions as long as they are not sectarian. "It gives people strength in this difficult time. There are people who didn't believe – now they're praying. That helps."

A future without war – "The main thing is that we win this war."

Maria subordinates everything to the belief in a future without war. She says that her husband's business has been much worse since the beginning of the war, that money is scarce but enough to live on. However, this is irrelevant for both of them: "The main thing is that we win this war." It is understandable that for Maria and her family – as for most people in Ukraine – personal well-being has taken a back seat since the beginning of the war. Much more important to them is Ukrainian society in the struggle for survival during this horrible war.



Projects to deal with the traumas

Maria also talks about planned projects that the SI Kyiv club would like to realize. She, who has been involved in many volunteer activities for a long time, is bursting with ideas about what she could 'get off the ground' as president together with the Soroptimists in Kiev. The fact that the state cannot spare any finances in this time of war, especially with regard to the treatment of trauma, makes initiatives by volunteers all the more urgent. The Soroptimists in Kyiv want to develop projects for this purpose. For example, people should be accompanied on their way to healing by specialists through various forms of therapy. According to Maria, painting therapies and body therapies would be particularly important. Specialists who have a sound education in

these areas are ready for these tasks in Kyiv.



Maria has returned in time to launch the anniversary as president of SI Kyiv.

The interview was conducted at the beginning of July.

On our Website <https://swiss-soroptimist.ch/solidaritaet-ukraine/> you will find the blog about the Ukraine war and short news.

Contacts to the **Ad-hoc Commission:** ukraine@swiss-soroptimist.ch

SAVE THE DATE!

BENEFIZ GOLFTURNIER 19. Juli 2024 in Crans Montana

We are looking forward to echoes of this news from Ukraine 16!

Account CHF

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