



europäische allianz katholischer frauenverbände
european alliance of catholic women's organisations
alliance européenne d'organisations féminines catholiques

Report

"Migration to and in Europe from a women's perspective"

Study Days of Andante in Strasbourg, April 20–24th 2018

"A freedom that is not meant for everybody is not a freedom but a privilege", says Theresia Wintergerst while answering the questions at the end of her speech. Human Rights are important for migration, the subject of the Study Days of Andante, the European Alliance of Catholic Women's Organisations.

Migration and Human Rights are also important for the Council of Europe (CoE; not to be confused with the European Union). Andante has the participatory status at the CoE and is a member of its Conference of International Non-Governmental Organisations (INGOs). By following these days in Strasbourg, in the Centre St Thomas, the more than fifty participants from 12 countries got the chance to meet several experts in the field of gender and migration who are connected with the CoE.

The first of them to be welcomed on April 21st by Mary McHugh, president of Andante, was [Mgr Paolo Rudelli](#), Special Envoy and Permanent Observer of the Holy See at the CoE. Important issues for the Vatican at the CoE are culture and justice, family and right to live, freedom of religion, social legislation and transparency. After the interview with him the women's organisations presented him their work with migrants and refugees. It was a fruitful acquaintance for both sides.

Connected with the CoE are also [Anna Rurka](#) and [Anne Nègre](#), respectively president and vice president of the Conference of INGOs, who showed up on April 22nd. During the visit at the *Palais d'Europe* on April 23rd Herr Müller told about the origins and challenges of the CoE. Later that day Michelle Lafferty explained about goals, tasks and results of the work of [Tomáš Boček](#), Special Representative of the Secretary General on migration and refugees.

Attending working groups

Sybille Bader is 'our woman in Strasbourg'. In her presentation she showed how she can contribute to the working groups of the three commissions of the Conference of INGOs (Human Rights, Democracy, Education and Culture), she can also introduce other women of Andante's organisations in these working groups. She welcomes input for her work. Also the Conference is organising country visits and member organisations of Andante can ask for an interview during them, or give their own report about the situation in their country. Sybille has prepared the meeting of the participants with their parliamentary representatives during the day at the *Palais de l'Europe*.

Being home somewhere else

Not only the experts connected with the CoE talked about migration. In her lecture on April 21st [Theresia Wintergerst](#), social scientist at the University of Applied Sciences of Würzburg-Schweinfurt (Germany), connected (free and forced) migration to identity. Women (and men) have different roles and positions: mother and teacher, musician and friend. But also inside a position, by example as a mother, people can have different

ambitions: wanting her children to be good at school, and at the same time not to lose touch with her own cultural tradition. People feel at home when those different identities are recognized, juridical, but important are also encounters, communication and solidarity. Women can stand together, not because female migrants are weak but because of their vulnerable position. Besides catholic women are experienced in finding their way between tradition and modernity.

[Theresa Grabinger](#) works for Renovabis in Rumania, Moldavia and Bulgaria. Women have other reasons than men to leave their country (push factors) and to find a job somewhere else (pull factors). They work in different branches (cleaning and care) and are met with different expectations. Because of migration sometimes only the elder and the children (euro orphans) stay behind in their country. In spite of the departure of the working people a country might profit from migration. But reflection is needed about special labour conditions, by example a longer leave, so migrants can see their children once in a while.

Unlearn fear

[Regina Polak](#), professor at the Institute of Practical Theology at the University of Vienna, talks April 22nd about fear. The unknown evokes fear and if someone is afraid, he or she doesn't listen to arguments. But social diversity isn't threatening in itself. We can unlearn fear that isn't necessary. It helps to look at the world from the perspective of migrants. In the mirror of migrants and refugees we discover something about our own identity. Against their, mostly real fears – because they enjoy less rights or protection – migrants use humour and the art of living, dreams ('next year in Jerusalem'); sometimes mobility becomes the basis of their life.

The ethical monotheism of Judaism and Christianity appears to have everything to do with migration. God travels with us through our life, there is the desire of, and the working for, a just society. Christian identity has to do with moving, and not with maintaining of ourselves.

Role of the NGOs

The information about the CoE learned that Human Rights of migrants are high on the agenda. The office of Tomáš Boček tries to reach that detention of children was seen as unacceptable. It didn't succeed, the countries agreed on 'last solution'. The Convention of Istanbul asks for an autonomous permit to stay for women (art. 59) and an asylum procedure based on gender (art. 60 and 61). Still it is being discussed if women and men from another country outside Europe can possess the same rights as citizens.

Especially here the role of INGOs as Andante is desperately needed. They usually know more about the risks of a certain policy than the authorities, they can protest and they are often the first to organise shelters or to start other activities. For this reason Andante decided to write a [statement](#) after the Study Days.

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