



# Annual Report 2015 of the Foundation Communicantes

## A Word from Our President

**F**or some 15 years now, I have served on the board of the foundation Communicantes as its President. This is a fairly long period. Now time has come for me to move on. It is time for my *Farewell to the Piano*.

Hopefully, end of June, I will pass the helm to my successor. There is no doubt in my mind whatsoever: the board of Communicantes chose a competent and motivated person.

**T**his changing of the guards by no means implies that the work of Communicantes is done. It definitely became more complicated to achieve our mission than, let us say, about fifteen to twenty years ago, that much is true. And this in spite of our growing experience and adaptation to good practices. I will try to explain why.

First of all, the expansion of the European Union diminished the interest for Central and Eastern European region, where a kind of post-communist *normality* was introduced. And, whereas Church in Eastern Europe previously was needy,

poor and deficient, it is growing up to become a self-reliant actor. Now sometimes this Church itself is involved in exchange with believers in the Third World.

Also, the internet hugely expanded the already available knowledge (good and bad). Email and social media, for example, allow to maintain more frequent and intimate contact with Eastern Europe than was possible ever before. As a consequence, the need for service providing intermediaries declined.

**I**n the given circumstances, Communicantes is doing a really good job.

Shifting its focus towards church-based peace, reconciliation and dialogue activities, our foundation wants to draw the attention to the positive, sometimes even provocative role that Roman Catholics, Christians and non-Christian believers can play in Europe today. This is of great apologetic importance.

Even if our role in the public domain is rather modest, it remains, nonetheless, necessary.

**Professor Nico Schreurs.**

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## Europe. Illusions and Disillusions

### Uncertain Futures

**E**urope is the natural habitat of our foundation. Since its very beginnings in 1974, Communicantes engaged in exchange and dialogue between Eastern and Western Europe – Pope John Paul II's famous *two lungs*. Dramatic transformations, which were unthinkable then, still lay ahead of us. Of course, 1989 and 1991 were pivotal years.

East and West are still experiencing institutional changes of major importance and not just in the field of international relations or national politics. Thus the economy of globalisation and the accompanying anthropological concept of the 'flexible man' are becoming more and more pervasive. In terms of cohesion and solidarity, the social tissue is being damaged even more. We have entered the era of a postmodern, philosophical and theological merry-go-round, so it seems we feel ourselves lost. Flexibility, flow, alterity and similar notions apply here.

Change was so abrupt and fundamental that as Christians we sometimes wonder if perhaps, at a given point in history, Europe was issued a false birth certificate. Was our continent perhaps only Christian in name? Often, we find ourselves at odds with Europe. Are we floating in a political-ideological vacuum? Why is it so difficult to pinpoint common roots which convincingly include political, philosophical and religious convictions?

**T**hese are trying times, especially for Christians. For those, who by nature are more tradition-oriented and who have, all in all, a more developed sense of heteronomy, the shortcomings of the new Europe may appear overwhelming. Seen from the secular point of view, adhering to tradition is generally considered to be irrelevant, whereas appealing to ethical principles counts as an unjustified claim to the moral high ground. Both are widely perceived as an attempt to dictate rules and obligations to others.

In spite of all this, for Christians – Roman Catholics especially – it should still be relatively easy to identify with an entity as large as Europe, albeit in a more dialectical manner. The Catholic Church in the second half of the 20th century, from Pius XII to John Paul II, unrelentingly supported *project Europe*.

**W**hile 'Russia is a riddle wrapped in a mystery inside an enigma' (Winston Churchill), Europe seems more of a complicated puzzle, a Rubik's cube. Or is it more intricate and complex than that? Is Europe as much a riddle as Russia still is today?

Let us start with the latter option – there is something her-





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**Is Europe merely a puzzle,  
a Rubik's cube  
or still something  
more intricate?**

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metic about Europe. Why is there so much discontentment about Europe? Who are the producers of the resentment, with which politicians, media outlets, and religious leaders too, so eagerly stuff their critiques? Why is democracy put into question in countries which enjoyed a long democratic tradition, in countries which never knew a functioning democracy or in countries which fall below the mark? Many Europeans live relatively peaceful lives, prosper, seem contented, but they are instilled with disillusionment, cynicism and fear. Why is that?

Could it be that a self-serving, indifferent attitude towards the European idea among policy makers and public figures is fueling resentment? They are eager enough to cash in on the benefits of European Union membership or their inclusion in the European political elite. Meanwhile, less favourable developments are dealt with nationalist ideology rather than with political courage.

**W**hat we need to do now is to save *project Europe* from the farcical idea that it deserves a one way trip to the scrap yard. And we need creativity to improve it. It is high time to let *l'imagination au pouvoir*. If Christians feel that they have a contribution to make, they should state their claim, in all the dimensions of their lives: from day-to-day experiences in the family to the realm of politics.

Today Europe must assert itself globally. In this context any postage stamp size solution to the question of Europe's unique culture and mission is illusory, dangerous and morally questionable. While Europe is at risk of being reduced to a regional power on the one hand, the nation is greatly overvalued on the other. Some may take Switzerland as an example, as a beacon for Europe: clean, rich, well-organised and fenced off from the ugly world outside. But this is an optical illusion. Switzerland feeds off the European Union, by which it is surrounded and on which it greatly depends.

Comparing the European Union with communism is, of course, plain unhelpful and offensively superficial as well.

**E**urope is not merely a puzzle or a riddle. Refraining from simplification and easy judgement, the notions *intricate* and *complex* apply here. Europe is a work in progress to which Christians must lend their talents and efforts. Resentment they must reject: it is a grave sin. Optimism is theirs. If Europe is Christian, we must argue our case.

**Frans Hoppenbrouwers**

# Communicantes in 2015

## Our Main Activities

Over the last few years, the foundation Communicantes has been readjusting its activities. In the process, peace, reconciliation and dialogue have been singled out as core themes. They are relevant to the region, interconnected and well-founded in Catholic doctrine. If applied in a deliberate manner, they can become, indeed, expressions of religiously founded concern for our common “Europe House”.

In several ways Communicantes has drawn attention to peace, reconciliation and dialogue:



*Dr Lidiya Lozova of the Saint Clement Centre for Cultural Interaction and Dialogue in Kiev – one of our key speakers*

**4 April.** Together with the endowed chair *Orthodoxy and Peace Building in Europe* at the VU University Amsterdam, Communicantes organised the mini-conference *The Churches and the war in Ukraine. What do Churches contribute to peace and reconciliation?* On Easter Saturday speakers from Ukraine and experts from the Netherlands discussed the peace potential of Churches in Ukraine.

‘Does there exist a “Ukrainian Ubuntu”? Does Ukraine have a loving kindness, openness and benevolence towards others?’, Dr Cyril Hovorun asked himself. Obviously, Hovorun, a priest-monk of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate, had mixed feelings about the political situation in Ukraine. Like in the days of apartheid, Churches have become an instrument of injustice as much as an agent of change. Father Cyril felt truly sorry that Ukraine is lacking its Desmond Tutu.

The after-effects of the communist repression still determine to a large extent how society and individuals function, Cinta Depondt of the Netherlands peace organisation PAX emphasised. As a consequence, many people still do not believe that they can make a positive, personal impact on society. Here, PAX wants to lend a helping hand.

Dr Lidiya Lozova shared her experiences in the Orthodox Paraskeva parish in Lishnya near Kyiv. By giving support to the humanitarian effort following the Russian invasion of Donbass and Crimea, its members escape the black and white divide between being “Russian” Orthodox believers on the one hand and Ukrainian citizens on the other.

The Euromaidan was a multi-eth-



### *Sisters getting to know themselves and other sisters better*

nic, multilingual and multi-confessional event, Professor Heleen Zorgdrager of the Protestant Theological University Amsterdam explained. She critically reviewed the way in which the over one hundred dead protesters of the Maidan square have been immortalised, especially in the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church.

Communicantes' President Nico Schreurs argued that talking about peace and reconciliation now is by no means premature. He reminded his audience of Europe's founding fathers, Robert Schumann. Already in 1942, Schumann drew up a programme of reconciliation between archenemies France and Germany. Also, Schreurs carefully distinguished reconciliation from forgiveness.

For a full report of our mini-conference in pdf-file, please [visit our website](#).

**29 May.** Frans Hoppenbrouwers gave a lecture at the Netherlands Centre for the Social Teaching of the Church at Vogelenzang. There, he discussed the impact of Catholic social teachings on the Church in Central and Eastern Europe. An English translation of the text was distributed among our partners in Central and Eastern Europe and was well received. It

is [available on our website](#). This text was translated into Croatian and published.

**1-5 June.** Furthermore, Communicantes organised an interesting and inspiring meeting of religious sisters at the Trappist abbey of Koningsoord. Sisters from Lithuania, Ukraine, Romania, Hungary and the Netherlands, from Catholic, Orthodox and Protestant traditions took part. The theme was: "Secluded Life in an Open, Ecumenical Perspective".

The sisters examined the inspiration, issues, merits and future of the religious life. Because of the input from various parts of Europe and from different traditions this was a truly enriching exchange between East and West. Also, Protestant deaconesses from Amerongen shared their inspiration and experiences. It was very well appreciated.

Being a religious sister in the 21st century is not an easy path to follow. Requiring resourcefulness, patience and a quantity of mercy, the sisters also took a look at already known and still hidden talents.

During one of the workshops they had to put on boxing gloves. It was a bit of a shock at first but it all worked out well

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# Projects 2015

## Europe

- Scholarships for participants from Central and Eastern Europe of various European exchange networks:
  - \* the Argau Summer University of the Commission of the Bishops' Conferences of the European Community (COMECE)
  - \* ecumenical meeting of religious sisters at Koningsoord, the Netherlands
  - \* conference of the European Society for Catholic Theology in Louvain
  - \* the *European Alliance of Catholic Women's Organisations* (Andante)
  - \* conference of the *European Society of Women in Theological Research* (ESWTR) in Crete.

## Belarus

- Ecumenical volunteers' programme of the Greek Catholic Church in Vitebsk.

## Hungary

- Council of Major Superiors of Women Religious:
  - \* scholarships for sisters.

## Latvia

- Youth pastoral care programme of the Sisters of the Eucharistic Jesus (SJE).

## Lithuania

- Council of Major Superiors of Women Religious:

- \* informal training
- \* scholarships for sisters.

## Moldova

- Psychological training course for lay volunteers, religious and priests.

## Poland

- Dom Pokoju/House of Peace, Centre for interreligious dialogue, Wroclaw.

## Romania

- Council of Major Superiors of Women Religious:
  - \* informal training
  - \* secretarial costs.

## Ukraine

- Greek Catholic University Chaplaincy in Kiev, Drohobych and Dubliany.
- Interreligious conference in Odessa.
- Commission Justitia et Pax of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church.

The total amount of grants-in-aid was slightly over € 51,000.

under the guidance of karate champion Robin van Soelingen. Playfully, giving and taking and without hitting (really) hard, the sisters examined their more introverted and extroverted impulses. Some sisters showed remarkable boxing skills.

In contrast, the participants deepened their knowledge of nonviolent communication with pastoral psychologist Anke Bisschops. Coach Marjon Bohré discussed the “power of vulnerability”.

More information can be found on [Facebook](#) and on [our website](#). Hopefully, in 2016 sisters will meet again in Lithuania.

**Various encounters.** Frans Hoppenbrouwers of Communicantes participated in several conferences in the Netherlands and abroad, for example:

- the International Conference *Ukrainian Reconciliation Projects and the Future of Europe* in Kiev, 21 and 22 April
- a workshop of the Centrum voor de Sociale Leer van de Kerk *Europa, méér dan een economische eenheid. Oriëntaties vanuit de Katholieke Sociale Leer*, Vogelenzang, 29 May
- the 19th International Renovabis Conference *Jugendliche im Osten Europas – welche Zukunft? Lebens- und Glaubensperspektiven* in Freising, 2 to 4 September
- the 15th Assumption Readings *Truth. Memory. Reconciliation*, in Kiev, 22 to 25 September
- the 8th Ecumenical Social Week *Education for Changes: Spirituality and Innovations* in Lviv, 30 September to 3 October
- a conference *Metropolitan Sheptytsky and the Ecumenical Orientation of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church Today*, Louvain, 12 November.

## Publications.

- ‘Katholieke sociale leer in Oost-Europa. Tussen gelovige inspiratie en gesecculariseerd christendom’, in *Europa, méér dan een economische eenheid. Oriëntaties vanuit de Katholieke Sociale Leer*, Vogelenzang, 2015 (a translation is [available on our website](#): ‘Catholic Social Teaching in Eastern Europe. Faith and Action as Types of Self-Secularisation in the Context of the One Europe’)
- Of course, much attention was devoted to the political and military crisis in Ukraine, in word as well as in print.

**Development of themes of peace, reconciliation and dialogue.** Of course, much time and effort went into the realignment of the activities of the foundation Communicantes. This resulted in a programme that was presented to the board of governors in late 2015

As a consequence the latter part of 2015 was dedicated to presenting our ideas to specialist and potential partners. It became clear that several of the Communicantes proposals will materialise in 2016 or 2017. Meanwhile, this must be said, other proposition found little resonance or are simply beyond what is humanly feasible right now.

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**Constructief en wederzijds  
Constructive Collaboration and  
Mutual Understanding  
Konstruktive und wechselseitige  
Verständigung**

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## Goal of Communicantes

Since 1974, the foundation Communicantes has been working as a facilitator between Churches and individual believers in Central, Eastern and Western Europe. Its aim was – and still is – to promote a dialogue between partners in East and West, which is mutually beneficial: intellectually, inspirationally and practically. Communicantes is a Roman Catholic foundation, but our network is ecumenical, even multi-religious. Communicantes has been working towards its objective in different ways: funding projects, small-scale dialogue/exchange of persons and public information.

## Board Members

Professor N. Schreurs, President  
Father F. Kuster s.s.s., Secretary  
H.A.A. van Bemmelen, Treasurer  
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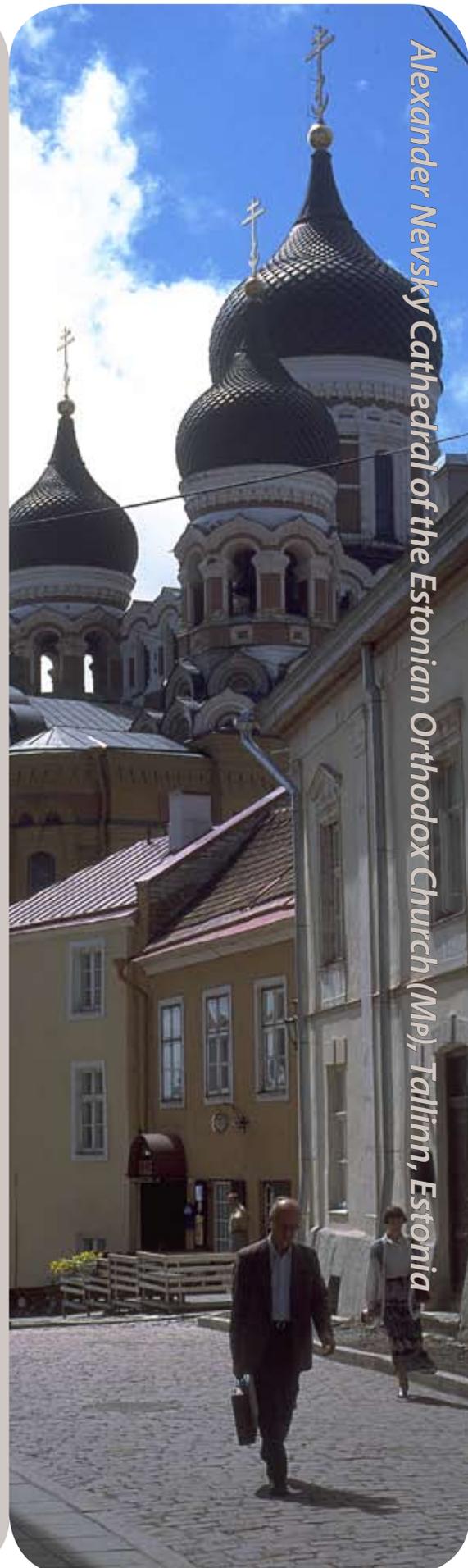
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Algemeen Nut  
Beogende Instelling  
**ANBI**



Alexander Nevsky Cathedral of the Estonian Orthodox Church (MP), Tallinn, Estonia