Senior Friends gathering report
13-15 May 2016
Hungary, Budapest

Senior Friends of WSCF-Europe flew from various countries in Europe to meet in May 2016 with their fellows and catch up with the life of the organization they used to be involved in all kinds of ways in the past. WSCF-Europe was happy to facilitate this meeting and to organize it conjunction with a student conference. This was with our intention to bring both students and former members together in shared spaces. The meeting itself has a history in WSCF-Europe and the previous one happened in Austria, in 2009. WSCF-Europe wants to renew and establish a tradition of Senior Friends gathering and this meeting was the very start of it or rather the continuation of it. The planning committee was composed of the current Chair (Zuzana Babicova) and former Chair (Sofie Eriksen), former Treasurer (Markus Ojakoski) and other former Europe region committee members- Vera Papp and David Cleary who were helping to prepare this event.

Who met?

We were a group of 20 people- Zuzana Babicova (SVK), Sofie Bonde Eriksen (DE), Markus Ojakoski (FIN), David Cleary (IRE), Vera Papp (HUN), Daniel Bonnios de Ruisselet (FR), Pip Sides (IRE), Agnes Pagyanszky (HUN), Hannah & Katharina Satlow (AT & DE), David & Clare Wilkins (UK), Ee Chia Chuah (Malaysia, studying in Budapest), Hans Hommens (DE) and current and former WSCF-Europe staff members Maria Kozhinova, Natia Tsintsadze and Pawel Pustelnik. Our meeting was also joined by the current ERC members Krista Autio, Pawel Cecha and Pavlina Manavska who were participating at the parallel happening WSCF-Europe conference.
What did we do?

The meeting for 2, 5 days was a rather informal gathering. Our first day was opened by a morning prayer led by Agnes Pagyanszky who lives and works in Budapest as a Student Christian Chaplain. It was really great to have Agnes at least for the morning with us as we could go back with her to the times from 10-15 years ago when our movement in Hungary in its former shape was being born in Budapest. After that we spent our morning sharing by what WSCF-Europe meant for each of us - as we all came and made plans to reconnect after a few years. The picture on below shows visually what the group still remembers and value today. A lot of our experiences were connected with Friendships, Learning, Fun and Spiritual experience. Later in the afternoon, we continued with updates on the current life of WSCF-Europe and what has changed, what is new and what challenges and new projects are being started off. We closed the day with the evening prayer which was shared with student participants of the parallel happening conference. Each of us introduced ourselves in the group- thus sharing current and former student involvement in WSCF-Europe by us present in Budapest. After that a Senior Friend Pip Sides from Ireland shared his campaign work for forest protection in Ireland with participants. The next day we spent in a more “work mode” as we wanted to address questions as - what WSCF-Europe can give to Senior Friends and what/how Senior Friends can give/support WSCF-Europe. Before we jumped into this discussion, we brought up a question - let us talk about the term Senior Friends. Is the term Senior Friends what we want to keep using to refer to a group of people not being actively involved in WSCF-Europe but still wishing to be around the
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organization. After careful consideration and discussion, we, 14 of us there arrived at the conclusion that using the term Friends of WSCF-Europe shall be more user friendly and inclusive, though many of us felt also fine with the currently used term Senior Friends. We will start using the term Friends of WSCF-Europe in our official communication that WSCF-Europe will be releasing, though, we invite all to refer to one another as everyone feels comfortable with -even Super Friends as there was a suggestion:). As we finalized the terminology, we went to talk about how now (Senior) Friends of WSCF-Europe can support WSCF-Europe and what WSCF-Europe can do for Friends of WSCF-Europe. After a sharing of much initial input, we started to work in three working groups that moved our thoughts and ideas forward into a plan and action points for the coming weeks even. The three groups were- Communications group, Meetings group and Support enablement group. Communications group envisaged how WSCF-Europe could communicate with Friends of WSCF-Europe and how WSCF-Europe could facilitate interactive communication between Friends themselves. So what we are going to do shall be- special quarterly newsletter for Friends of WSCF-Europe and dedicated space at WSCF-Europe website for Friends of WSCF-Europe for sharing along the broader interest of Life, and Faith. Meetings groups was aiming to create a frame under which meetings of Friends could be happening taking into account various interests Friends of WSCF-Europe still have. The suggested way for meetings organization is to have an annual meeting of WSCF-Europe Friends which shall provide intellectual and sharing space along with space for relax and vacation ideally at the place as a spiritual retreat center. Every other year, another type of meeting of Friends of WSCF-Europe could happen and that would be connected with the assembly of WSCF-Europe- this would be space for Friends of WSCF-Europe who wish to be more involved in the current life of WSCF-Europe. The third group on Support Enablement has worked through concrete ways how WSCF-Europe can create ways to enable Friends of WSCF-Europe to support back the
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organization. Our key outcomes are- financial support mechanism for long term support and ways to support with skills. These are our most substantial outputs and much more you can read in more detailed notes at the end of this report. After our work on Saturday, we went to celebrate the Pentecost Sunday together and departed home.

**What will we do next?** We are going to follow up much work we have thought about together that we wish to do for *Friends of WSCF-Europe*. WSCF-Europe is going to be focusing on communication channels for *Friends of WSCF-Europe* and creating support mechanisms that enable to help WSCF-Europe in all kinds of ways. And our Friends mostly with support from the current Europe Regional Committee will be planning the two meetings which will happen in 2017- summer meeting and the one connected with European Regional Assembly which will happen in October 2017 in Ireland. WSCF-Europe wants to thank to all Friends who joined and also those who wanted but could not come. We look forward to your involvement and making our plans real.

Big thanks Friends!

Zuzana

WSCF-Europe Chairperson
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Sharing of our WSCF-Europe Friends

Markus Ojakoski, Finland
I took part to a WSCF-Europe Senior Friends meeting in Budapest in May 2016, ten and a half years from leaving student leadership position. I see that the issues WSCF stands for have become even more important during these years. That is dialogue is general, including inter-religious dialogue. Learning from different world views. We need organizations like WSCF more than ever. I was really happy I am not alone with this thought. Noting that there was a youth conference going on, too, with such similarity to the ones we use to have, I felt perhaps there is a positive future for our continent struggling with such a worrying small-mindedness.

Sofie Bonde Eriksen, Denmark
I have missed being in the ecumenical setting and spirit, that is so special for WSCF. It was good and important to reconnect. We spent most of our time there looking at how we can make it possible for senior friends of WSCF to stay in touch with the community and support it. To understand our own traditions and communities, it is good to leave them occasionally to be reminded, that you are not primarily Lutheran, Catholic or Orthodox but Christian.

Daniel Bonniot de Ruisselet, France/Hungary
Several years after my previous WSCF event, I did not hesitate one second to apply to participate in this Senior/Super Friend gathering. In our sharing session it came back with a striking unanimity how much we all missed the WSCF Spirit: intellectual stimulation, safe space to share and live our differences, spiritual home even for those not always completely fitting in established churches, community experience, ... And this was why we spent a big part of this meeting brainstorming on a vision for creating future events that would embody that spirit for friends of WSCF of all ages, and deciding on the first steps to make that vision come true very soon. I was also great that the event overlapped with a Student event, so that we could catch glimpses of this Spirit alive and well, meet old and new friends, worship and discuss and sing together long into the night!
Our program

Look below for more ideas from our working groups

1. Communications group notes

We would like to suggest to develop Newsletter and web section for Friends of WSCF-Europe as first essential tools for our communication.

**Newsletter** - to be produced 3-4 times a year, edited and sent out by staff, content contributed by staff and also Friends.

The content suggestions: advertise ecumenical couch surfing, *Eat, Sleep, Pray* (Google doc, or similar couch surfing website); it could feature updates on events especially personal stories, SCM updates, updates from what WSCF-Europe Friends *Life and Faith* content section - to reconnect to WSCF friends and the experience, stories that we want to share, life events, news of individual members. Information on who was involved in WSCF during certain years.

*The introduction to the newsletter,*

*Welcome friends of WSCF Europe, let us announce that you are no longer senior from this moment. The group formally known as the senior friends of the WSCF, decided at the gathering in Budapest from May 12th to 15th, that the adjective, Senior is no longer required. The gathering of friends enjoyed the Ecumenical spirit and community of the WSCF so much that we want to form and strengthen a network of friends of WSCF Europe.*
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We have decided to use a three pronged approach.

1. To develop our information flow and communication, with a newsletter three or four times a year.
2. It will be filled with information about what is going on with WSCF Europe as well as contributions from individual friends, we count on you the friends of the WSCF and your contribution for the next newsletter
3. Eat, Sleep Pray program. We are all spread around different corners of Europe and we want to build and strengthen our relationships, this is why we have conceived Eat Sleep Pray, in short this is an ecumenical hospitality exchange program, this shall be open to all members who choose to either host or visit other members who have agreed to the idea. If interested please contact.

**Website**—should be a communication and interaction enabling tool, there should be a space on the WSCF website related to senior friends, when it comes to content it shall show the table with all past ERC members, including other delegates, create a timeline of events on the website and members, past members and members of the public could see their place in WSCF history; news section. The Website shall provide a channel for communication between superfriends, personal feedback about where your donation was used, give our experience and help with controversial issues, help bring our contacts with interfaith ecumenism to the table.

**Database**—develop a database essential for gathering contacts for communication

2. **Support Enablement group notes**

After common brainstorming on needs of Senior Friends and ways to enable support giving to WSCF and. The group of David, Zuzka and Sofie identified two important mechanisms which should serve the aim of enabling support from Senior Friends to WSCF. Friends of WSCF-E will need to have shared communication space. For that we suggest to create **WSCF-Europe Friends website page** within WSCF-Europe page. This page would build awareness about Friends of WSCF, increase knowledge about people history of WSCF and increase interest in being part of WSCF Friends group. This page would show WSCF history timeline, Public database of past Europe region committee members and staff, visual materials, events info, it would have a link to donate web section and information wow to subscribe to Friends' newsletter. Within this page, we suggest to also create **closed section with the aim to build online community.** The closed Friends web section shall have members’ contact list, members would be able to share updates (Life and Faith), invitations to get involved in gatherings, personal pictures from events, personal prayer requests, vacation service (hour/room/flat for use), information about events which could be joined (Taize).

Another support enabling tool suggested is to have **Friends membership fee**—the minimum fee 5 euro for Friends of WSCF (in return they will get special newsletter), the way to pay either through paypal annually or setting up the standing order, we should identify what Friends’ are getting for payment of fee– in return there will be private section within webpage of WSCF-E Friends website.
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Another suggestion which WSCF-E will work on is to create a better mechanism for long term giving to support financially WSCF mission. There should be a way for giving beyond online donate button.

3. Meetings groups notes
Objectives: making sure the Senior Friends gather more regularly, space to gather, meeting with students; annual gathering. The group suggests to have two types of meetings.

In odd years, there could be a meeting of Senior Friends in connection to the Europe Regional Assembly which happens every 2 years. That would be an option for Senior Friends to come along and support the event from the background.

In even years, so annually, which would be the time fixed for every year, there could be a holiday Friends gathering in the summer. It would be family friendly event – with child free and child care spaces for duration of 1 week. It would have following features: place- countryside, there would be a mix of cooking and catering, 2x worships together each day, flexible program, accessible by public transport, option of camping, the need for the host in the country. This event could embrace along weekend with a student event. Thematically the event could be the same or similar to a student event. We suggest motto: stop + think + go deeper + share. We could have a link in with student events preparatory group. We would share the draft program for feedback to allow others to contribute.

9 June 2016