

1 REPORT FROM EUROPE ALIVE COMMISSION 29/09/2012

The ladies of the EUW in Spain had worked extremely hard to devise an interesting, and informative visit to Santiago de Compostela, in Galicia. It was well attended, about 45 ladies representing 7 countries, and we were comfortably accommodated in a former XVI monastery in the centre of the city. From the first night of welcome speeches, local singing and dancing, in which we all joined, there was no doubt that the social aspect of Europe Alive was very well covered. The ladies from the different countries mixed, and conversation flowed, helped perhaps by the amazing hospitality of our hosts!

The political aspects of Galicia were fully demonstrated to us, and we met representatives of the political hierarchy at all levels. The President of Galicia Mrs. Pilar Rojo Noguera greeted us on behalf of the Parliament, in which the political majority is held by the right wing party, and has 38 female, and 37 male Members.

As well as being the administrative centre of Galicia, Santiago is also recognised by UNESCO as a world Heritage Site, and it has been a place of pilgrimage since the 9th Century. Whilst visiting the Cathedral, and various public buildings, we saw many examples of interesting works of art, and also travelled to the newly built 'City of Culture' outside Santiago. We visited some of the local industries, from the manufacture and retailing of clothing – with outlets throughout the world – to viticulture and to shell-fish farming.

At the last Council meeting I explained that we will be incorporating

an extra dimension to our Europe Alive gatherings to reflect our new status as a Commission, having a theme for each meeting, and discussions relating to this, as well as focussing on the political, cultural and social aspects of our host region. We discussed the topic 'what is your opinion of the European Union, will it, or indeed should it, continue in its present form, and, if not, how should it change?' Added to this we also discussed the issue that we are now gathered to consider 'should E.U.W. continue?'

Discussions regarding the European Union took place between participants throughout the visit, with the Estonian ladies finding themselves in a very divided situation. They are so delighted to be members of the European Union, with its democratic stance, but are terrified that if the EU should fail Russia is waiting nearby to take them over once again. At the same time they are not happy that they, as a small and very poor, country are expected to pay towards the financial situation in, for example, Greece. Our Slovenian colleague felt that the EU should continue to expand, on the basis of a newly created political constitution, whereas a lady from Switzerland felt much of Europe has lost its individuality by being part of the EU, and thinks many people would like to come out. These are just a sample of, the very varied, views expressed, but all debated with a serious attitude, and with no disagreements. I also sent a 'follow up' questionnaire to all attendees so that they could think further and send their answers more fully, and I have received a number of replies.

When it came to discussing the future of EUW there was total consensus, all felt that the organisation is excellent, especially Europe

Alive, and no one felt that it had reached the end of its useful purpose. The ladies particularly appreciated visiting other countries, when they can debate 'face to face'. They valued working together in commissions, where they can debate and appreciate differing opinions and situations, even passing on, or gaining, new ideas. They all felt that EUW was too valuable to come to an end, and that we should look at new ways of moving forward.

Bobbie Middleton