

Minutes of the meeting of the European Poland / Ukraine Collective
on 13 and 14 March 2015 at the Emmaus Brat Albert community in Krakow, Poland.

Participants:

Julio de la Granja, President of Emmaus Europe, Emmaus La Poudrière, Belgium.	Pierre Dubois, Camille Méjat. Emmaus Annemasse, France
Willi Does, Emmaus Cologne, Germany, Collective representative and Secretary of the Emmaus Europe Regional Executive. Johannes Does, Emmaus Cologne.	Sorin Onica, Aurélie Baloche, Frères Europa, Satu Mare, Romania.
Grzegorz Hadjuk, Robert Opoka, Lesek Lizon. Emmaus Brat Albert, Poland.	Maryse Faure, Emmaus Chalon-sur-Saône, France.
Zbigniew Drazkowski, Ela Guc, Emmaus Lublin, Poland.	Marie-Claude Jeannet, Irène Meunier, Emmaus Roanne-Mably, France.
Jacek Drazek, Grazyna Moskal, Emmaus Rzeszow, Poland.	Jean-Louis Paumet, Stéphane Puechberty, Emmaus Paris Community, France.
Vasyl Halod, Nasha Khata, Ukraine.	Nathalie Martz, Christophe Pauvel, Tarek Guellit, Emmaus solidarité, France.
Jos van der Meer, Herbert Bitter, Emmaus Haarzuilens, Netherlands.	Benedikt, Innsbruck, Austria.
Maria Witting, Emmaus Helsinki, Finland.	Emmanuelle Larcher, Head of Solidarity, Emmaus International secretariat.
Daniel Nyman. Emmaus Westerwik, Finland.	Camille Decaens, Head of Solidarity, Emmaus Europe secretariat.

Introduction by the president, Julio de la Granja and the collective's representative, Willi Does.

The European collectives' meetings take place within groups to enable participants to meet up and gain a better understanding of the day-to-day life of groups. A large number of partners have been supporting the groups from their inception and in this way are able to trace their development. Thanks to the participants who travel to these meetings, particularly on this occasion, which marks the inauguration of the Krakow community.

All groups are experiencing major difficulties in Europe. Economic crisis and values. Escalation of poverty, racism and nationalism in every country within Europe. A new war is being waged in Eastern Ukraine. What role can Emmaus play in such a Europe?

Contacts have been made with the European institutions, and the European Parliament in particular. The aim is to lobby and provoke a response from the politicians to try to obtain a real change for poor people in Europe.

For this reason, the meeting of the Regional Council of Emmaus Europe in April 2014 took place in Lampedusa, along with a high level of mobilisation in Calais – with the issue of migrants remaining a real challenge for Europe.

This year with the 2015 Regional Assembly, then next year with the World Assembly, there will be team changes which in a crisis situation must be carefully managed.

The Movement at both European and international level is both strong and weak at the same time. Some countries such as Poland, Ukraine, Germany and Romania are lacking in representation to some degree. Willi stressed the need for leadership and inspiration as this collective may be his last as its representative.

As a starting point, participants around the table presented a quick overview of the groups in attendance.

1/ News from the Ukrainian and Polish groups. Exchanges and feedback on the development of income-generating activities.

a. Emmaus Brat Albert, Poland.

News from the community

There are 14 companions living in Krakow and 24 in Nowy Sacz. The Nowy Sacz reception centre for homeless people continues to accommodate up to 80 people in winter. **The main difficulties concern:**

- the regular turnover of companions, since it is necessary to explain to every newcomer their rights and obligations within the community,
- the companions' ages, which makes it difficult to find assisted employment solutions,
- difficulties in cooperating with the public authorities.

Developing workshops and improving collections of unwanted goods.

It was noted that the collection of used equipment has declined in both Nowy Sacz and Krakow. From this observation stems the importance of developing workshops.

Why have collections declined?

- The problem is not the quantity but the quality. The Poles are taking out loans to buy new furniture, as their current possessions are very old with little possibility of repair. Therefore customers are donating a lot of waste goods.
- Over recent years, the group has focused on building the house in Krakow, so collections have rather gone by the wayside.
- In terms of collecting and repairing furniture, competition is fierce, with government entities now operating in the market.
- In Nowa Huta, investments in road infrastructure have caused access problems between Krakow city centre and Nowa Huta, where the community is located.

The carpentry workshop in Krakow has received funding from the authorities in Little Poland province (voivodeship) for equipment and support from a carpentry professional working on-site and providing training to companions for 4 more months. The group wishes to produce enough to be able to hire this professional using its own funds. A companion from Krakow is doing a 2-month work placement at the Nowy Sacz community which renovates old furniture within a workshop.

Production within the workshop will begin with small wooden items, developing later in line with market demand. The €10,000 received from the voivodeship's authorities to equip the workshop has made it possible to purchase second-hand machinery, but is not enough to buy new equipment. Production will therefore be limited by technical capacity and the group will see if it can invest in the future.

- Members of the collective are invited to share their ideas on what wooden items the group could produce.

Work camp for Emmaus companions and volunteers

The solidarity workshop, due to take place on 23 May - 7 June 2015, will focus on developing the workshops at the Nowy Sacz and Krakow sites. In addition, the volunteers will be able to undertake daily tasks alongside the companions, help with the finishing of the Krakow house and relaxation area and work in the vegetable garden.

- **As part of the 2015 solidarity programme, its implementation requires funding of €10,000 from European groups.**

Inauguration of the Krakow community: 14 March 2015

Brat Albert would like to thank all participants for their support and attendance. The group hopes that the public event will succeed in raising the profile of Emmaus in the neighbouring areas, promote its values, boost the amount of unwanted goods collected from customers and improve the future running of the community.

A potluck dinner and concerts were arranged to celebrate the event.

b. Oselya Mutual Aid Community, Ukraine.

As the Olesya group director was unable to attend, the group's news was presented by Emmaus Lublin. Olesya sent greetings to members via the telephone.

News from the community

The community has 23 companions, including 3 children and is continuing with its traditional activities which are providing shelter, collection of unwanted goods, sale and repair. The hostel provides accommodation for 20 people on low incomes and for former companions. 7 paid staff continue to ensure the running of the group's various sites; 5 work in the community, the shops and furniture workshop, 1 in the hostel and 1 in the social support centre. 30 volunteers offer additional support, both to the sorting operations and to the various events arranged by Oselya.

At the same time, an information campaign is being conducted in the region via a street magazine and the authorities are being lobbied about the homelessness problem.

Solidarity activities are continuing on behalf of the most disadvantaged – outreach work, the social day centre, support for the Nasha Khata group and organisation of Christmas and Easter meals for 400 people. Additional support is offered to refugees from Eastern Ukraine and Crimea.

Emmaus Helsinki has decided to support victims in Eastern Ukraine and on the advice of Oselya, has donated the sum of €2,000 for education to the Lviv Foundation.

The national situation in Ukraine – challenges to be met

Even though it is located in the West, the group is affected by events in the East and is suffering the consequences of inflation throughout the country. Currently 1 € = 25 UAH. The country is also preparing for the liberalisation of the energy market which will provoke a rise in prices and increase the cost of living.

In addition, because of the current situation, the group is collecting fewer goods than a few months ago and the restaurant owner, who was offering free meals, is no longer able to continue with these.

In 2015, funding from the Lviv council for the social support centre will be cut by half (9,500 UAH in 2015 compared with 20,000 UAH in 2014).

Deployment of income-generating activities.

Apart from the traditional Emmaus day-to-day activity, the group is looking to develop its textiles business, grow the furniture workshop business and extend its information campaign in the region.

The 2015 European solidarity initiative is entitled "Developing the textiles and recycling businesses and promoting Emmaus values in Ukrainian society" and consists of the following steps:

- Install 10 additional clothing containers to supplement the 10 already installed.
 - Improve equipment in the storage area in order to optimise textiles sorting and build an additional loft for warehousing.
 - Publish and distribute the street magazine in order to promote the group's values.
 - Translate and publish a book about Abbé Pierre and the Emmaus movement in Ukrainian.
- **The current initiative requires funding of €15,180 from European groups.**

In addition, 3 salaries totalling €11,400 have been paid this year, at the request of the Oselya group, which wished to receive the extra funding Emmaus Europe received in 2014, dedicated to Oselya. The Oselya community would like to thank the groups for their support.

At present, unsold clothing is sold on to an entrepreneur. Every month, Oselya sends a shipment of furniture and clothing to Nasha Khata and other organisations and regularly distributes clothing free of charge to people in Lviv.

Also, in April, the group will receive a new truck from the Henry Nouwen Foundation in the Netherlands. This will be used for collecting unwanted goods from households, with the existing truck continuing to focus on donation containers.

c. **Nasha Khata, Ukraine.**

Group news and activities.

In 2014, there were 38 people living in the community, learning the various trades practised by the community. Companions' salaries have improved somewhat, but by and large remain inadequate. The Emmaus French region of Franche-Comté Bourgogne (hereafter R9) has contributed the sum of €3,000 for the two leaders' salaries for the first 6 months of the year.

Work to renovate the building is continuing. Funds have been received from Caritas to renovate the living room. Work on the 9 upstairs bedrooms has been completed.

Feedback on the immersion experience of Vasyl, one of the Nasha Khata leaders in the R9 groups.

Invited by the region to come and work with the companions and alongside the leaders in the Dijon-Norges group, Vasyl spent the week on sorting activities: at the arrivals bay as the trucks arrived with donated goods as well as collections from recycling centres. He also took part in the weekend sale.

Two meetings with the companions were organised in the evenings, with the presentation of photos and an opportunity for Vasyl to chat with the companions.

In the Planay group. Vasyl spent two days in the Châtillon sur Seine shop, reorganising the second-hand clothes section. Then he worked in all the workshops, before heading off to Sasoge. He also worked in the various workshops, particularly the Sainte Sabine creative workshops, still working alongside the companions.

Activities

The textiles business. The group currently has 6 textiles containers. The textiles are sorted in the community, then sold on using the truck in the neighbouring villages.

The agricultural and farming business. The group now has 5 cows, 45 pigs, 80 hens and 2 horses. Work on the cow shed has been completed. Every day, a companion takes the bus to sell the milk and eggs, which are very heavy to carry. This takes up a lot of time. A car would make selling these more efficient. Pig breeding did not bring in substantial revenue in 2014 but supplied the community with meat.

With the cost of animal fodder high, the group is looking to reduce this by growing cereals. Wheat and peas were planted over a 2.5 hectare area but the crop was unsatisfactory and will have to be begun again in 2015.

2015 assignments and outlook

In late April, an R9 group will carry out an assignment on-site. Vasyl attended the R9 meeting held in Pontigny on 12 February at which the various tasks to be undertaken were outlined: construction of a pig enclosure, potato planting, preparing the vegetable garden and fitting out of a furniture repair workshop in the shed.

In May - June 2015, a group from Innsbruck in Austria is planning a stay with the group, with the proposed task being to work on the façade of the community house.

In July and August, it is planned that volunteers from the Bauorden association will carry out repairs to the premises.

The tasks required to complete one part of the building are as follows: lay the brick walls, build the roof, fit the windows and doors and install the central heating system and stairs.

The most urgent needs relate to development of the workshops:

- The carpentry workshop requires machines for the creation of wooden furniture and swings.
- The soft furnishings workshop requires a sewing machine.

Nasha Khata was reminded of the **need to prioritise activities**, which appear to be numerous, given the group's human and financial resources.

d. Emmaus Lublin

Group news.

The group consists of a community and a social cooperative. There are 32 people living in the community, including children and people with learning disabilities.

The companions live in three houses, of which one is mixed and the other two house men only.

Currently, construction work is continuing in one of the three houses which provides accommodation for 10 companions. The work is being undertaken using the group's own resources and companions' labour, along with a state loan. By the end of March, the companions should be in their new bedrooms.

The next stage, with European solidarity support, is to finish the external work: thermal insulation, complete the façade, construct the car parks and fire escapes. This will increase the number of places for companions in house No. 3 and improve living conditions for them.

→ **As part of the 2015 solidarity programme, its implementation requires funding of €20,000 from European groups.**

Challenges to be met

- **Increase the number of collections** via the creation of a second team of companions; it is therefore important to work with a good driver and people who are in good physical shape, given that to date, the companions' general level of physical and mental health is concerning. The group has noted a positive development with regard to collections, both in terms of the quantity of goods collected and their quality. The group now has two trucks. However, in order to maintain a good balance, support from other groups in the form of sending shipments is still needed.
- **Work to develop the social cooperative's production activities**, on which 8 companions are working, and stabilise its position in the market. The cooperative runs a production / services business mainly in the "landscape architecture" field - garden furniture, bus stops, park benches, chess tables and waste bins.

The social cooperative ended 2014 on a positive financial note with every year, the group introducing new products, which currently total around 30. In 2014, three communities, Emmaus Sion in Switzerland and Emmaus Annemasse and Emmaus Solidarité Paris in France, helped the group to sell the garden benches.

In 2014, receipts from sales totalled €65,000, which was used to run the community. No financial reserves can be released, even if the group continues its efforts to invest.

e. Emmaus Rzeszow.

News from the community house. Work completed and tasks remaining.

The project (supported by the EU) to install renewable energy sources in the new community house was fully completed on 14 November 2014 (geothermal heating, solar panels, rainwater collection etc.). What now needs to be done is to progressively check that the individual systems are operating and obtain authorisation to use the habitable part of the house.

With regard to the internal work, the following tasks have been completed:

- **60% of the habitable section**, essentially the tiling, painting and part of the lighting. Still to be done: the ceilings, doors and toilets.
- **40% of the workshops**, essentially the painting. Still to be done: painting the floor, the doors, toilets and lighting.
- **90% of the external work**, connected to land drainage, levelling off, soil hardening and terracing of the courtyard, car park, interior walkways and fencing.

The 2014 solidarity initiative – to equip and bring into service the kitchen and refectory – has not yet been achieved. The group received €13,000 instead of the €20,000 needed to fully complete this initiative. If Emmaus Europe can still get the support from groups willing to provide it, this initiative will not form part of the 2015 solidarity programme. Emmaus Rzeszow has not submitted a support request for 2015.

The group spoke about its difficult financial situation.

Emmaus Rzeszow told the meeting about its financial operating difficulties caused by the fact that the group:

- Is still awaiting a final decision from the Lemur Programme. This support would be provided by the Polish National Environmental Protection Fund and would total €400,000, to be used for the house building work. The submitted project has successfully gone through the first two phases in Warsaw and received a positive evaluation. The final phase, looking at the association's accounts, is underway. However, a response has still not been received, despite initially being expected by the end of 2014.
- The group has invested all of its own funds in the finishing work on the new house in order to be able to submit this application to the Lemur Programme which would reimburse the cost of the building work, based on invoices submitted.
- The working capital used for operating expenses is no longer enough to keep the community's books balanced. The community has incurred debts on running costs.

In light of the above, **the group asked the members of the Collective representing the groups in attendance to extend a loan for €46,725.** The loan would be repaid over a period of five years starting from June 2016.

Emmaus Brat Albert stated that it would like to support Emmaus Rzeszow but the amount mentioned is beyond its means. Emmaus Lublin has already extended a loan of €6,000 to Emmaus Rzeszow. The loan needs to be repaid in order not to jeopardise Emmaus Lublin in any way, as the group does not have adequate reserves.

The meeting recommended that Emmaus Rzeszow should prepare for the possibility of the Lemur Programme turning down its funding application.

Regarding Emmaus Europe, the Regional Executive will be consulted about extending a loan using the region's funds. The RCEE will be consulted if the Executive agrees to the idea. **However, the emphasis will be placed on members of the Collective extending loans in order to speed up the procedure.**

The members of the Collective will pass on this request to their decision-making bodies, drawing on a detailed overview which will be sent to them following the meeting of the Collective.

The group is planning to make savings between now and the end of 2015:

- The group is planning to move in late 2015 and therefore to stop paying rent on the companions' current house and on the storage area.
- The monthly leasing payments for two cars will end in July 2015.

Update on income-generating activities. The challenge is to increase local collections. Sales income rose by 8% between 2013 and 2014. The development of the workshops should enable further progress to be made in this area.

2/ Discussions about the conditions and arrangements for cooperation between the groups under the framework of the Collective.

What kind of independence is possible for the Polish groups? How can the partner groups be involved in distributing solidarity?

None of the groups in Poland / Ukraine are self-sufficient at the present time, even though they are all making every possible effort to achieve financial independence. The groups are operating but must continue to be creative in order to generate funds and maintain group stability. Further financial resources are being sought in pursuit of this goal even though the Polish groups are still receiving shipments of goods.

If a group decides to help create a new group, it is important that their support continues until the project is completed and that the supporting group does not drop out. Creating a community is a major long-term financial undertaking.

It was reiterated at this point that self-sufficiency is not the issue; the aim is to become financially self-supporting. Self-sufficiency would in fact be a threat if we no longer needed others. Each group depends on someone; they need to receive good quality donations from customers, they need funding, materials, donations and so on... all this is difficult to quantify.

We should not enter into debates comparing the socially-excluded in each country, as this would be like waging 'war' between poor people. Judging poverty in each country is not the aim: the Collectives continue to operate as permanent twinning arrangements.

In light of the tense situation in Ukraine, the idea was raised of creating an emergency budget, if needed, for the groups on the ground.

→ **The idea was not pursued** as the meeting was reminded about how the Emmaus Europe solidarity programme works, about the option of rolling out non-programme initiatives and the availability of unrestricted solidarity funds if the need arises.

As there is no guarantee that all the solidarity programme initiatives will be implemented because solidarity depends upon the funds that the European groups wish to share, creating an additional emergency fund would seem problematic. Furthermore, Emmaus International also has an emergency fund which could meet these sorts of needs.

3/ Regional transport programme

- As of 14 March, Emmaus Brat Albert (Nowy Sacz and Krakow) had received two shipments out of the 12 requested for 2015.
- As of 14 March, Emmaus Lublin had received two shipments out of the 12 requested for 2015.
- As of 14 March, Emmaus Rzeszow had received three shipments out of the 12 requested for 2015.

The members of the Collective expressed a desire to mention only shipment received as of 14 March and not the number of planned loans, in order not to disadvantage the groups by putting forward theoretical projections.

A large amount of textiles are collected in Poland. Consequently, two shipments of textiles a year are enough. Furniture and second-hand goods are the most sought-after items.

There are long-standing relationships between certain partner groups who prefer to send shipments to a specific group. The Polish groups stated that they have no issue with these preferential relationships.

C Discount shipments from EMRA, Emmaus Mutualisation Rhône-Alpes¹.

No shipments have been sent to Poland but further discussions will be pursued on this topic. EMRA is offering 300 shipments a year and has instituted a contribution of €150 for each group receiving a

¹ Please refer to page 7 of the report of the European Poland / Ukraine Collective meeting on 24 and 25 October 2014.

load outside the Rhone-Alps region of France. This funding is aimed at French groups in difficulty and is added to the cost of road haulage based on the distance travelled.

4/ Discussion of national legislation that will impact on Emmaus groups.

As of 1st January 2015, the Polish law on collections has changed. Organisations must register on the website of the Polish Ministry of the Interior in order to be recognised as a public utility body, authorised to sell goods acquired through collections without paying taxes.

Emmaus Brat Albert and Emmaus Lublin both have public utility status, but Emmaus Rzeszow does not as yet. The registration process is underway to sort out the situation, which at the moment is tolerated by the local authorities. Emmaus Rzeszow will then be able to sell collected goods without paying tax.

5/ Paris international solidarity salon, 14 June 2015.

Finland has expressed a wish to share a stand with one or more other groups. The Polish and Ukrainian groups have expressed a wish to take part and to share a stand with Finland.

→ Registration forms will be submitted accordingly.

6/ Any other business

An article has been published in a Polish daily newspaper specifying the Warsaw and Wroclaw² groups as being Emmaus communities in Poland, heirs of the international movement founded by Henri Grouès. The interview was also published in a book. Emmaus Europe/Emmaus International were asked to intervene yet again, as such an article will have consequences in terms of the movement's visibility in Poland. Interventions have previously been made, regarding the status of a Wroclaw group set up in 2007 and using the Emmaus name; however, the Warsaw initiative is new.

A number of potential action areas were proposed:

- Formulate a right of reply to the newspaper in question, in Polish.
- Write a letter to the relevant town halls to explain the situation.
- It is planned to send a letter signed by the presidents of Emmaus International and Emmaus Europe both to the newspaper and to the town halls in question. This letter would include details about the use of the trademark, along with information about the Emmaus movement.

7/ Diary.

- Mention was made of the European training in November 2014 in Cologne, Germany, which is to be repeated in October 2015.
- Regional Assembly of Emmaus Europe, 3 - 6 September 2015 in Manchester.
A reminder of the dates. Participants have until 15 March to select the workshops they would most like to attend, in order to get an idea of the level of interest in core assembly themes. Applications and registrations must be submitted by 30 June. Mention was made of the importance of Poland and Ukraine being represented on the Regional Council of Emmaus Europe, in addition to the national delegates.
- 2016 World Assembly. This will take place in Jesolo, Italy. The RAEE is preparing for the World Assembly.
- The next meeting of the Collective will be hosted by Emmaus Rzeszow. Given the timing of the RAEE, it is proposed to hold the next meeting of the Collective in early 2016.

Thanks to the Emmaus Brat Albert team for hosting the meeting, for the visits and for the festivities linked to the inauguration.

Thanks too to all the members of the collective for taking part and for their support!

² See minutes of the previous collective meetings: <http://www.emmaus-europe.org/669-members-area/collective-working-group/collective-and-working-group-meeting-reportsfollow-up-documents/reports-of-the-polandukraine-collective-meetings>