

Minutes from the General Meeting
Of the Association of Towns awarded the Europe Prize,
14–15 September 2020 held online.

The session was open by **Mr. Krzysztof Matyjaszczyk**, President of the City of Częstochowa, President of the Association of Towns awarded the Europe Prize. The President welcomed all invited guests and presented a film about Częstochowa, and he thanked everyone for the participation in the virtual event the form of which was forced by the pandemic.

Then, the President gave the floor to **Mr. Gerard Dupaty**, the mayor of the town of Amilly, France, awarded the Europe Prize in 2020 who presented his town of 13 thousand citizens, located at the area of 4 ha, dealing mainly with agriculture and industry. For over 30 years of fulfilling his role of a councillor, Mr Dupaty has always tried to transmit European values to his friends. Currently, the city runs 3 main exchanges with Germany, Spain, and Italy, it operates numerous youth exchanges as well as cultural ones in the field of baroque music or modern art. Since 2005, the town has been organising the Europe Day in every first weekend of July, it also implements other European initiatives such as the House of Europe and Place for Europe where games and recreational activities for children are arranged.

Next speaker was **Mr. Stephan Antwerpen**, Mayor of Altötting from Germany, Vice-President of the Association of Towns awarded the Europe Prize, who thanked for the invitation and organising this event which would surely enhance the cooperation of towns that are members of the Association. Exactly 7 years ago, the town of Altötting was awarded the Europe Prize thanks to the cooperation with the reliable partners and efforts taken by the previous mayor, Mr. Hofauer. Then, he presented a film about the town.

After that, **Mr. Igor Terehov**, Mayor of Kharkiv, Vice-President of the Association of Towns awarded the Europe Prize spoke. Mr. Terehov greeted all participants of the conference and thanked for the organisation of such a special event. In his speech, he pointed out that cooperation between the cities is at the centre of attention of European integration. He added also, that the pandemic forced changes on everyone, but it also brought new contact opportunities through an online platform. He also said how important it was to make use of the association's experience, as the organisation of this assembly showed that despite the adversities, the pandemic, we were able to organise ourselves. The association is a bridge between the partner cities and towns which support each other.

The President asked also **Mr. Eneko Goia**, President of Donostia/San Sebastian from Spain, to speak and he congratulated the town of Amilly on being awarded the Europe Prize. He focused on the European values which help currently in the pandemic and should constitute the avant-garde. He also said, that we should not forget about our citizens, social solidarity and abandon European values, because when Europe is together, it is easier to overcome difficult moments, especially due to the fact that the epidemic situation might turn into an economic crisis. Moreover, he noticed that we need Europe which is able to protect its citizens. He said that the exchange of experiences between the cities and towns would contribute to the enhancement of cooperation of the Association and even better cooperation between our cities and towns. That is why it is so important to increase the European unity. 3 years ago, San Sebastian was the European Capital of Culture.

After a two-hour break, there was a conference titled: "Challenges and opportunities for the European unity", where individual cities and towns gave presentations.

The conference was open by **Mr. Krzysztof Matyjasczyk**, President of Częstochowa, President of the Association of Towns awarded the Europe Prize, and presented a film about Częstochowa, promoting the new logo of the city.

After the film presentation, **Mr. Kęstutis Masiulis**, President of the Subcommittee of the Europe Prize, spoke. He greeted the conference participants and said that the pronunciation of the city name "Częstochowa" in Lithuanian sounded very similar as in Polish, referring to the film presented earlier. He warmly thanked for the organisation of this event and the conference alone, the title of the latter is highly topical. He also said that this year, due to the current pandemic situation, was surprising in many dimensions. The current situation has its consequences for the Europe Prize, as well. The Subcommittee where he works, voted on various degrees of online awards this year. He congratulated the mayor of the town of Amilly, and most of all, the town residents on joining the towns awarded the Europe Prize. He acknowledged that no one knows what would happen in 2021, however, the Presidium of the Subcommittee will inform of its decisions on an ongoing basis.

Then, the representative of the cities and towns had their presentations. The first speaker was **Ms. Ana-Violeta Sacaliuc**, Head of International Communication Department of the city of Darmstadt, Germany, who passed along greetings from the Mayor and the President of the Darmstadt City Council. Ms. Sacaliuc informed also that since 1975, the city has been awarded the Europe Prize and actively worked in the Association, willingly attended the General Meetings and was engaged in supporting the European integration. In the opinion of Ms. Sacaliuc, the subject of the conference could be better selected. For Darmstadt, challenges are tasks for the future which may be performed, but only by working together.

The city runs the tasks in the areas such as: digitisation, climate protection and asylum/assistance for refugees. There have been 330 diagnosed cases of COVID-19, 283 among them are cured, 18 deaths reported and, currently, 7 people stay in a hospital. The situation in the city is stable. The demand for event organisation is increasing. Currently, it is allowed to organise events up to 200 participants. The city still cherishes the partnerships signed, that is 16, 15 of which are signed with European cities and towns.

Another speaker was **Mr. Ramazan Kabasakal**, Head of International Communications Department of the City of Ankara, Turkey, who greeted all participants of the General Meeting, and then described the current health situation in the city. 11.03 Ankara noted the first case of coronavirus in the city. Since then, all the city's strengths were allocated to the fight against the pandemic. Additionally, the city supports other foreign cities such as: Sarajevo in Bosnia and Zagreb in Croatia. Protective masks, gloves and disinfectants are being sent. A platform was created where the city shares its methods of fighting the virus. The residents' lifestyle has completely changed. The number of apartments rented has declined, the demand for cabins with a garden on the city outskirts has increased.

Then, Mr. Victor Synyshyn, Secretary of the Ivano-Frankivsk City Council from Ukraine presented the way his city fights the pandemic. There was a network created thanks to which drivers help doctors get to work. A local television station helps with online teaching. Car disinfection campaigns are conducted.

Right after that, **Mr. Krzysztof Stanowski**, Head of the International Cooperation Centre from the city of Lublin, Poland, had his presentation during which he presented the situation of his city in the fight against the pandemic. So far, the city has signed over 40 partnership agreements, however, this cooperation is hampered, now. He also emphasised how important is the equality of all people, regardless of their skin colour, origins, therefore, the city supports migrants. A procedure was launched which enables to quickly obtain a social security number. Another important issue is to inform the citizens through a website, which, during the pandemic, has increased its viewing statistics 10-fold. From over 40 partnership agreements of the city, 10 is in Ukraine, therefore, the city organised a conference online with the partner cities to show solidarity and support. Moreover, the residents buy meals for the healthcare services, there is a radio where a dozen or so languages are spoken. It is the first such a multi-cultural radio.

Then, the President gave the floor to **Ms. Evelyne Beaudeau**, Deputy Mer of Nancy, France, for International Cooperation, who said that COVID-19 had got us to operate in a crisis action mode, and since the health crisis concerned us all, we must fight it together. The solidarity is the very condition of social order. She also pointed out to the fact that the crisis has

highlighted our shortages, the digital divide, and an enormous debt that may be a burden for the future generations. The city of Nancy has solid basis for the international relations which enables them active participation in the partnerships. The first partnership agreements were signed as early as in the 19th century. The city carries out activities based on an expert exchange. Their focus is ecology, sharing experiences from specific programs. Education, strengthening the cooperation between the schools, participation in the programs such as ERASMUS are also a priority. The basis for the activities is mainly democracy based on cooperation. The Citizen's Assembly was appointed. The City wants to help the residents and deal with the issues reported by the them. A book of places, where important points in the city are collected, is also being developed.

After Ms. Beaudoux, **Ms. Ingrid Heihs**, Councillor of the City of St. Pölten from Austria, presented her subject "Challenges caused by COVID and how to cope with them". She said that the pandemic situation was characterised by great uncertainty and fear. The city decided to act promptly and appointed a crisis management team. They established teams working in shifts, remotely and via online conferences. The challenge was to provide the residents with water supply, arrange waste disposal. Another problem was ensuring childcare when the schools suspended its operations. Urban public transport was adapted to this situation, a hotline was launched where volunteers were involved. A "mobile kitchen" was arranged for the people in need. The city currently tries to enable the residents to go back to normal and help with their financial, social, cultural and sports-related issues. Covid has also caused a decline in the city's income. Despite of financial reserves, the debt is a fact that the city is faced with. But there is still the need to invest and maintain the urban infrastructure.

At the end, **Ms. Giulia Manzan**, Councillor of the Udine City, Italy, for European Projects spoke on the subject of: "Challenges of local governments and international cooperation during the pandemic"; She pointed out the fact that not only the unity is needed but, most of all, solidarity in the fight against adversities. The tourist sector in Italian cities is undergoing a serious crisis. Despite that, the city organises fairs and cultural events. The city dared to organise, one day before the conference, a Film Festival and fairs promoting Italian lifestyle. The events were organised via applications. Only cooperation can help develop common solutions.

On the second day of the meeting, the working part of the General Meeting was held. It was chaired by Mr. Krzysztof Matyjaszczyk, President of the City of Częstochowa, President of the Association of Towns awarded the Europe Prize (ATAEP). He started with a film about Częstochowa's cultural attractions. Then, Mr. Krzysztof Matyjaszczyk discussed the report on the Presidium Meeting of the ATAEP Association in St. St. Pölten and actions undertaken by Częstochowa. (Report and actions as enclosed). The chairman gave the floor to Ms.

Ingrid Heihs of St. Pölten, who, referring to the missing document from Udine, the text of the first declaration establishing the Association of Towns awarded the Europe Prize, suggested so that every city should search for it in their own archives.

Another point on the agenda was adopting resolutions on selecting place and date of the Presidium of the ATAEP Association in 2020, selecting the place and date of another General Meeting of the ATAEP Association in 2021.

It was agreed that

– The Presidium of the Association of Towns awarded the Europe Prize would be held in December 2020 in Darmstadt. If the pandemic or any other adversities prevented from organising the event at this date in Darmstadt, then the “backup” city would be Częstochowa, with the date of January 2021.

– The General meeting of the Association of Towns awarded the Europe Prize would be held in June 2021 in Strasburg. If the initiative was not suitable for the authorities of the city of Strasburg, then the “backup” city would be Ivano-Frankivsk with the date of September 2021.

The resolutions were adopted unanimously.

Due to the fact that the association’s founding documents is missing, Mr. Krzysztof Matyjaszcyk suggested a symbolic renewal of the cooperation agreement from Udine thanks to which the ATAEP Association was founded in 1984. The resolution on the cooperation agreement was adopted unanimously.

During the afternoon part of the General Meeting, the deliberations of Mayors and youth forum participants were held. It started with a presentation of another film about Częstochowa. Then, Mr. Bartek Sieniawski from the representatives of the youth, presented motions from the forum:

- Young people as Europeans have many ideas, but the problem lies in lack of unity.
- There is a need of better communication in Europe.
- One must draw particular attention to the climate crisis and the emigration wave related to it.
- The need of better communication and strengthening the cooperation with the EU.
- We must adopt the “less talking, more doing” approach.

During the discussion, Mr. Ludovica Toso from Udine declared the city’s will to organise the Presidium of the ATAEP Association in 2022. The General Meeting adopted unanimously that

– The Presidium of the Association of Towns awarded the Europe Prize would be held in December 2021 in Udine.

Then, Mr. Krzysztof Matyjaszczyk summed up and ended the deliberations of the General Meeting of the ATAEP Association (summary as enclosed).