

## On the Right Track for Europe – The European Charlemagne Youth Prize



The European Charlemagne Youth Prize is awarded to young Europeans who, in the sense of the European idea, realise joint projects. First place in 2010 went to a group of inventive vocational school trainees for their “Train For EUROPE” project.

Donald Tusk, Angela Merkel, Pope John Paul II. and a horde of vocational school pupils from 21 European countries – all of them exemplary Charlemagne Prize winners, but ever since they started to award a Charlemagne Prize to the youth of Europe in the run-up to the main event in Aachen, the average age of the laureates has come down considerably.

Before the Polish Prime Minister, Donald Tusk, accepted the Charlemagne Prize 2010 on Ascension Day in May, the Foundation of the International Charlemagne Prize of Aachen in collaboration with the European Parliament had already awarded the European Charlemagne Youth Prize two days earlier. Since 2008 this prize has been awarded with the aim of acknowledging the extraordinary commitment of young people to fostering European understanding.



First place this year went to the “Train for EUROPE” project that had been initiated by a vocational school in Bad Kreuznach in 2006. In cooperation with trainees from 24 other schools in 21 European countries the pupils constructed a model railway whose carriages were designed to represent both typically and individually the countries they came from. The locomotive on the other hand was a joint project, built by all the countries taking part, and its function was to pull the “Train for EUROPE” reliably along a 12-metre wide rail network.

## The Manneken Pis and “Frau Antje from Holland” hooked up with a Swiss cheese

“This is exactly what makes Europe so special,” says the coordinator of the train project, the teacher from Bad Kreuznach, Heinz Wildgrube. “The locomotive stands for European commonalities, the carriages symbolise particular features of European countries and regions.” The fact that the carriages are all hooked together shows that the countries are united despite all the differences.



The trainees in the various schools throughout Europe summoned up all their imagination when they were designing the carriages. A Swiss school loaded a holey Swiss cheese onto their carriage, the Dutch placed *Frau Antje*, the famous advertising character for Dutch dairy products, on board their carriage. The school in Barcelona had the spires of the Sagrada Familia church towering from their carriage, a French school sent the Eiffel Tower on tour. Belgium had the *Manneken Pis* on board and Germany decorated its carriage with a VW Beetle.

## From inventive tinkering to friendship



The project came about back in 2006 when the Bad Kreuznach school had talks with its partner school in Geel in Belgium. The school in Bad Kreuznach, the school in Geel and the other 22 European vocational schools involved are all partner schools of the EU’s Comenius Program. The Comenius Program is one of the elements of the general EU Program known as “Lifelong Learning”, of which the better known Erasmus Program for universities is also part.

Before the finished train could be proudly presented in Bad Kreuznach and Geel, in Trier and at the European Parliament in Brussels in April 2009, the Comenius partner schools organised meetings in Spain, Italy and France. "These meetings spawned lots of new friendships," says Heinz Wildgrube. It was not just all the inventive tinkering that brought the trainees closer together. One project team was in charge of the joint website, another was responsible for the documentation of the project in images and videos. Furthermore a technical dictionary was compiled that listed glossaries in all the languages of the countries involved in the project – so necessary for the trainees to make themselves understood when they were constructing the train. The dictionary, which also contains audio files for pronunciation and images, can be accessed on the project's homepage ([www.cnc-netzwerk.eu](http://www.cnc-netzwerk.eu)).



### **A robot from Sofia to help separate your waste**



The Charlemagne Youth Prize for second place, worth 3,000 euros, went to an Irish book project entitled "You Are Here". It is a collection of poems that focuses on young Europeans who were born after 1980 and do not live in the country of their birth.

The third prize, worth 2,000 euros, went to Bulgaria. It was a project carried out under the patronage of the Technical University in Sofia, in which 21 European students constructed a robot that uses renewable sources of energy for the separation of waste.

### **What they want are young Europeans with a feeling of community**

The three winners of the Youth Prize were chosen from a total of 27 national winners. The national winners had been selected in the preliminary rounds from out of 219 entries and they all took part in the awards ceremony in Aachen. Young people between the ages of 16 and 30 and living in an EU country are eligible to take part in the competition. Preferential treatment is given to joint cross-border projects that – no matter how they are implemented – "foster the development of a shared sense of European identity and integration."



For the vocational school trainees, Sascha Emrich and Frank Deisen, the blue and white Charlemagne Youth Prize medal that they received from the President of the European Parliament, Jerzy Buzek, does not represent the end of their project, but merely a stop along the way. "For 2011 we have already started planning our new project – 'Train for EUROPE Reloaded'", reveals teacher, Heinz Wildgrube. The follow-up train that is to be financed with part of the 5,000 euros prize money is to have its carriages laden with famous European inventions. The aim this time is not just to produce one train. The next "Train for EUROPE" is to go into "mass" production and the tracks for it are to be laid through the school buildings of all the 21 partner countries taking part.



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