

Brussels, 16 December 2009

Commission awards Golden Stars to citizens' projects

Following a selection made earlier this year, the European Commission awards today 8 projects with the 'Golden Stars of active European citizenship' in a ceremony taking place in Brussels. The ceremony is preceded by an EU conference, which provides an opportunity to debate the issue of civic participation through volunteering and the difference it can make in Europe. This conference, which will bring together practitioners, policy makers and academics, marks the beginning of the mobilization of citizens towards the European Year of Voluntary Activities Promoting Active Citizenship 2011.

"The projects which we are awarding with Golden Stars today demonstrate the central role European citizens play in the construction of a common European space. One of the key objectives of the new European Commission is to further strengthen EU citizenship and participation and provide European citizens with even more opportunities to steer the future course of Europe. The testimonies presented in today's event exemplify the existing potential to achieve this ambition," stated Maroš Šefčovič, Commissioner for Education, Training, Culture and Youth.

The *Golden Stars* are the official annual recognition of projects funded under the *Europe for Citizens* programme, which aims at engaging citizens in the construction of the EU. Since its launch in 2007, this programme has mobilised close to **one million direct participants each year**, giving them a chance to reflect upon their **common identity** through discovering cultural differences and similarities with citizens from other parts of Europe. With town twinning exchanges, trans-European civil society and remembrance projects the Europe for Citizens programme strongly contributes to the creation of **European public space** and active European citizenship.

The European Year 2011 is a political initiative of the European Commission responding to a strong will of European civil society organizations to highlight a very significant potential volunteering represents as well as to mark the 10th anniversary of the International Year of Volunteering organized by the United Nations in 2001. The European Year will raise awareness of the importance of volunteering, promote recognition of volunteers, support debate and exchange of practices in order to improve the policy framework of volunteering and create better conditions for voluntary activities in the EU.

For **more information** on the award Ceremony and the Conference programme, see <http://ec.europa.eu/citizenship>

To register for the event: <http://www.europe-for-citizens.eu/>

A brief reminder of the winning projects is given in the appendix below.

Appendix:

PROJECTS' SUMMARIES

Town Twinning Projects

Municipality of Monza (Italy) for the citizens' meeting "The European Value of the Exchange of Experiences" with partners from the Czech Republic

Activities focused on involving young people in the town twinning programme, encouraging mobility in Europe and highlighting the significance of European citizenship for the young generation of Europeans. The meeting also addressed the issue of female entrepreneurship in particular and equal opportunities in general. Over 3, 000 people participated in the town twinning meeting.

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Municipality of Hamrun (Malta) for the citizens' meeting "European Citizens United through Culture and History" with partners from IT.

The central part of this meeting was a celebration of Europe Day. The cultural and historical links between the two municipalities were highlighted, which contributed to the strengthening of shared identity and the feeling of belonging together, not only within the two municipalities concerned but also in the wider European Union context. Events included art exhibitions, concerts and street festivals. More than 150 citizens participated.

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Municipality of Gyomaendröd (Hungary) for the citizens' meeting "Women's Participation in Political Life" with partners from Romania, Germany, Poland and Slovakia.

A conference was held which provided an opportunity to share experiences and exchange ideas on how to overcome possible obstacles women face in their political career. A rich cultural programme was also organised offering the participants a chance to learn about their respective cultural traditions and to celebrate the cultural diversity which is characteristic of Europe. Around 100 citizens participated in the conference. This meeting helped to highlight the important subject of women's participation in democratic life. Perspectives and experiences from the local level enriched the debate and formed a good basis for future deliberations and actions in this area.

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Municipality of Rijeka (Croatia) for the thematic networking project "Emigration – Yesterday and Today" with partners from Bulgaria and Slovenia.

Organisation of a debate tournament on immigration in today's Europe. The event included thematic lectures and a visit to the City Museum exhibition on emigration from central Europe to America in the period 1880-1915 as well as team-building games, entertainment programmes and a reception at City Hall. The issue was put into a historical context of mass emigration from Europe to the United States in the period from 1815 to 1930 when over 50 million Europeans left their homes. Almost 5 million came from central Europe (the territory of Austria-Hungary), representing the fourth largest source of emigration after Great Britain, Italy and Ireland.

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Civil Society Projects

Re-Life: New Tasks in an Enlarged European Union, an Italian project of the INSIEME società cooperativa sociale, with partners from Austria and Croatia.

The main focus of this project was to offer European citizens from different generations and walks of life an opportunity to reflect, discuss and debate on the lifestyles which facilitate social cohesion, sustainable development and respect for the environment. A European conference was organised at the end of the project to disseminate the results of the activities and to discuss experiences and best practices. Around 500 people were directly involved in the activities of the project and around 6,000 were indirectly targeted by the project through the brochures published by the project organisers and the website developed in the course of the project.

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A citizens' Europe for all, disabled people on the move, an Irish project of the European Blind Union, with partners from Italy, Slovakia, Austria and Malta.

The peak of this project was the conference "A citizens' Europe for All, Disabled People on the Move" held in Dublin. The conference addressed citizenship from the perspective of equal treatment and non discrimination, especially with regard to blind and partially sighted people. The conference resulted in the adoption of the EBU Dublin Declaration aimed at raising European Union decision makers' awareness of the aspirations and needs of persons with visual impairment. As a result, a new website (www.inclusiveeurope.eu) has been developed providing accessible information to the visually impaired.

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Remembrance Projects

***Voix Étouffées du IIIème Reich*, a French project of the organisation Forum Voix Étouffées, with partners from Germany, Austria, Romania, Poland and the Czech Republic.**

The activities of the project contributed to commemorating and raising awareness about composers that were victims of the Nazi regime and their lost music in order to highlight the negative consequences of the Holocaust and Nazi propaganda in the field of culture. There were concerts, pedagogical activities, information campaigns, roundtables and workshops. Around 1,000 students took part in various pedagogical activities. Around 5,000 people attended the concerts performed during the duration of the project.

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Ausstellungsrealisierung - Erweiterte Dauerausstellung: "Ich bin als Mensch geboren und will als Mensch hier raus!" Der Geschlossene Jugendwerkhof Torgau in Erziehungssystem der DDR ("I was born a human being and I will leave from here as a human being!" Juvenile detention centre Torgau in the education system of the former German Democratic Republic), a German project of the **Initiativgruppe Geschlossener Jugendwerkhof Torgau e.V.** with partners from the United Kingdom.

The project contributed to the development of a permanent exhibition in a former juvenile detention centre which is in Torgau in the former German Democratic Republic. Over 4,000 young people passed through the centre between 1964 and 1989 to be "re-educated". They had not committed any criminal offence nor did a legal warrant for their detention exist. Strict discipline and rigidly planned daily routines were enforced leading to unbearable mental pressure. The exhibition uses modern means such as multimedia presentations including photographs, documents and audiovisual materials to allow the visitors to learn about both the facts and the emotions behind this particular aspect of Europe's history.

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