

A CITIZENS' PRIZE FOR DISTINGUISHED SERVICE ON BEHALF OF EUROPEAN UNIFICATION

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"We now take the liberty of presenting a proposal to establish an international prize to be awarded annually for the worthiest contribution in the service of West-European understanding and communal work, and in the service of humanity and world peace. The contribution can be made in the literary, scientific-scholarly, economic, and political sector." When over 50 years ago Dr. Kurt Pfeiffer presented this proposal "to the public in modest restraint", no one would probably have dared to predict that the International Charlemagne Prize would become the most important and renowned European award for distinguished service in the cause of Europe and European unification.

Let us go back to the time of the establishment of the Charlemagne Prize two generations ago and put ourselves in the situation of its initiators. The Second World War, unleashed by the German Reich, had resulted in widespread destruction in Europe. Aachen, the first German city to be liberated by the Allied forces, had not only been for weeks a site of war; it was also the only major city that was evacuated by force and pillaged. The people's material want, the disintegration of their social relationships and the world they lived and moved in, was compounded by moral disorientation of mind and spirit, leaving little room for forward-looking reconstruction.

The Aachen merchant Dr. Kurt Pfeiffer shared the widespread thirst for knowledge that prevailed after years of mental manipulation and indoctrination. This inspired him and his friends as early as 1946 to found a small literary society - the "*Corona Legentium Aquensis*" - with some of the city's prominent personalities. The society grew in importance and influence in Aachen, and with Pfeiffer's financial assistance it was able to put on exhibitions and lecture programmes with political leaders, scholars and creative artists from all over Europe. Stimulated by the discussions in the *Corona*, Pfeiffer began to wonder whether it was enough to provide a platform for new thoughts and ideas - whether an active effort with public impact should not be made to influence the East-West conflict, which, coming as it did after two world wars, was felt as a menace. Pfeiffer the businessman was looking for a way to influence the political process in Europe and participate in the peaceful shaping of the future while avoiding the protracted decision-making processes of political parties or parliaments.

In the winter of 1949, the conditions for launching a European policy initiative could not have been better. West European integration efforts had been plunged into a deep crisis when the British in September 1948 abandoned their negotiations with the French government on a common customs union and in November 1949 stopped the development of the Council of Europe into a European institution. The Americans thereupon called on French Foreign Minister Robert Schuman to take the lead in integrating West Germany into a supranational Europe. To this pointed encouragement there was for a long time no response from the French – a circumstance that left suitably fertile ground for European initiatives, especially as the advancing process of bloc-formation in Europe and the growing vehemence of the Cold War fueled fears of a new military conflict on the old Continent.

Kurt Pfeiffer obviously perceived the unique opportunity. He neatly timed his move to converge with the Christmas season and with the Holy Year proclaimed by Pope Pius XII; and at a meeting of the *Corona* on 19 December 1949, he publicly presented his idea of establishing an "Aachen Prize" for service in the cause of West-European unification, world peace and humanity. His initiative met with an extremely favourable response, both in the press and on the part of important personalities. This encouraged him to mount a vigorous campaign for his plans.

Within a few days, Kurt Pfeiffer assembled high-ranking representatives from the city administration, the technical university, the Catholic church, municipal politics and the business community; and together they issued what was called the "Proclamation of Christmas 1949", which is still today the conceptual foundation of the Charlemagne Prize.

The city was represented by Mayor (*Oberbürgermeister*) Dr. Albert Maas, City Manager Albert Servais, and *Bürgermeister* Ludwig Kuhnen. They saw the Prize as a way to revive the city's half-forgotten European past and to focus the attention of European-minded people on Aachen again, thus making the name of the Imperial City known beyond its own walls. After all, Aachen was once the centre of the first European empire under Charlemagne, the venue of a number of major European peace congresses, for a long time a royal spa, and well known in consequence of the pilgrimages taking place every seven years to view its sacred relics - reason enough to be proud.

Pfeiffer himself proposed therefore to name the award the "Charlemagne Prize of the City of Aachen", thus building a bridge between European past and present. But "Charlemagne" was more than an eponym and a promotional vehicle; for the founders who formed the nucleus of what would become the Charlemagne Prize Society, Charlemagne was a programme, an agenda. The name of the most important Franconian king introduced the idea of the Christian Occident into the Proclamation.

It is not clear whether Bishop Dr. Johannes Joseph van der Velden, who was in charge of the church and mausoleum of the Father of Europe (as Charlemagne is called in a contemporary document), was responsible for this, or whether it was for example the philosophy professor Dr. Peter Mennicken. The historical records are sketchy. At any rate, this "Occidental idea" was a dominant feature of the Proclamation issued at Christmas 1949 by the founders of the Charlemagne Prize, and it was repeatedly used thereafter as a set theme with variations - initially in symbolic retrospect, looking back at the Carolingian empire of Charlemagne, symbol of a European empire and of unity in rules, values, language, currency, administration, religion and culture - but also looking forward as a model and a programme for the task at hand: the economic and political unification of Europe.

The Proclamation's call for giving priority to economic unification as an urgently necessary preliminary step towards the integration of western Europe had long been part of Pfeiffer's thinking on European policy, and probably was vigorously supported in particular by the founders who represented the business community. Among these were the President of the Chamber of Commerce (and later Mayor of Aachen), Hermann Heusch; the head of the *Vereinigte Glaswerke*, Dr. Jean Louis Schrader; and the head of the *Phillipswerke*, Carel Nieuwenhuysen of the Netherlands.

Especially the participation of the two high-ranking foreign business representatives clearly reflects the aim envisaged by the Prize: to create upon the foundation of a large economic area, without borders or customs barriers and irrespective of all nationalism, lasting peace in Europe. This goes to prove that at its very inception the Charlemagne Prize was international both in its objectives and in the makeup of the group of its founding members.

It is not surprising that one of the founders of the Prize was the Aachen cloth manufacturer Erasmus Schlapp. Schlapp was chairman of the *Europa-Union*, which championed the idea of European unification.

Pfeiffer was also able to secure the support of Aachen's academic community for his initiative: three professors - Rector Dr. Wilhelm Müller, Dr. Franz Krauß and Dr. Mennicken - signed the Proclamation. This meant that the representatives of the city's traditional *Bildungsbürgertum*, the educated classes, almost matched the number of entrepreneurs in the twelve-member group of founders.

The International Charlemagne Prize of the city of Aachen initiated by Kurt Pfeiffer was to have an impact on three levels:

1. On the European level:

Not only the Germans but also their European neighbours were to be inspired by the symbolism attaching to the annual award ceremonies and enlisted in the cause of West European integration. The Charlemagne Prize was to constitute a kind of European forum and an instrument to focus broad public attention on the state of efforts toward unification, supporting or exhorting as necessary. Thus the award was and is a symbol of the European will to unification and at the same time a means of conveying political messages.

2. On the national/federal level:

In the history of the fledgling Federal Republic of Germany, the Charlemagne Prize was the first political prize to be established – albeit not a state prize. In contrast to the Weimar Republic, which was deficient in symbols, this award created ways and means of identification. In Germany, too, it was to help to lay the groundwork for a European consciousness based on international understanding.

3. On the municipal level:

Its border situation and its European history made the old imperial city peculiarly suited for a reconciling role reaching beyond all borders. In addition, the award ceremonies would put the city in the public eye and enhance Aachen's standing beyond its borders. Just three months after the Proclamation was issued, the "Society for the Conferring of the International Charlemagne Prize of the City of Aachen" was founded on 14 March 1950 and was responsible for all matters pertaining to the awarding of the Prize. Consisting of a certificate of honour, a medal and a cash award of 5,000 DM (now 5,000 EUR), the Prize was to be awarded annually to a person who had performed outstanding service for Europe.

The energy with which the founders got to work is shown by the fact that on Ascension Day in 1950, five months after the Proclamation was issued, the Prize was conferred on Dr. Richard Count Coudenhove-Kalergi, the founder of the Pan-European Movement and a pioneer in the cause of European unification.

The first list of members of the Charlemagne Prize Society reads like a Who's Who of Aachen. It included 100 personalities from business and church, from the university and the city administration.

Of special importance for the Charlemagne Prize is the Board of Directors of the Charlemagne Prize Society, which chooses the prize-winner and which in terms of basic structure is still virtually the same as the group of founders of 1949. The Society's first board of directors was identical with the signers of the 1949 Proclamation, and its first spokesman was Dr. Kurt Pfeiffer.

The first presentation of the Prize (to Count Coudenhove-Kalergi) in the Coronation Hall left a lasting impression. For the first time after the war, the Town Hall was the venue of an important municipal *and* European ceremony. Although the city was still marked by the ravages of war - the roof of the Town Hall was full of holes; the invited guests could look straight through it into the sky – the festive award ceremony attracted widespread attention. The positive media reaction at home and abroad accordingly inspired the Board of Directors to take an even bolder part in the process of European unification. The conferring of the Prize in 1952 on Italian Prime Minister Alcide de Gasperi – in whose outer office Kurt Pfeiffer waited for a week in order to make the offer - was the international breakthrough for the award.

The political leaders of the fifties - Konrad Adenauer, Robert Schuman, Jean Monnet, Winston Churchill and many more - followed the Italian and were honoured in Aachen for their outstanding service on behalf of European unification. Thus the Prize gained political influence and international prestige. Charlemagne Prize laureate Paul Henri Spaak rightly commented in his speech of thanks in the Coronation Hall in 1957, "These are the most famous names in political postwar Europe."

Since the presentation to de Gasperi, the Prize has developed more and more into a pre-eminently political award. Accordingly, political leaders dominate the long list of prize-winners, since it is the elected representatives of the state, ministers and presidents, who stand in the first rank of those who are actively engaged in the process of European unification and through whom, by means of the Charlemagne Prize, political influence can be brought to bear. On the other hand, the cultural and spiritual dimension of European unity also received its due emphasis, reflected in the choice of later awardees such as Don Salvador de Madariaga, Frère Roger and most recently György Konrád.

The Charlemagne Prize rapidly became the most renowned and sought-after award for special service in the cause of European unification. Aided also by its array of distinguished laureates, the Prize acquired in time its own special political and moral authority.

In 1962 it was not possible to award the Prize - for the second time in its history. To date, there have been ten years in which it was not awarded.

The awarding of the Charlemagne Prize in 1963 to Sir Edward Heath, who would later become British Prime Minister, marked a turning-point in its history, for Heath represented a candidate-country. The British membership bid had been vetoed by France a few days before, and this courageous gesture was meant as a signal in the direction of a future to be shared together.

A juncture of a different kind came in 1968, when the initiator and "father" of the Prize, Kurt Pfeiffer, turned over his post of spokesman of the Charlemagne Prize Board of Directors to Dr. Jean Louis Schrader, who was also one of the signers of the 1949 Proclamation. For his outstanding service, Dr. Pfeiffer was made a freeman of the city of Aachen. On that occasion he described the aims of his life's work as follows:

"The Charlemagne Prize acts in and on the future; enclosed in it, as it were, is an obligation, but the obligation is of the highest ethical content. It aims at the unforced, voluntary union of the peoples of Europe, in order to defend in newly acquired strength the highest earthly values and possessions - freedom, humanity and peace - and to safeguard the future of posterity."

Ever since then, this message of international understanding has been passed on from spokesman to spokesman; for the Board of Directors it is the decisive criterion in selecting an awardee.

Schrader carried on the substance of the work of the Charlemagne Prize's initiator. Also standing for continuity was the then Mayor Hermann Heusch, who was on the Board of Directors for over twenty years. As the city's First Citizen he presided in the Town Hall, where during the annual ceremonies he presented the awards.

In the 70s and 80s, the awarding of the Prize to representatives of the emergent democracies in Greece and Spain was an important signal intended to strengthen the forces of democracy and to bring these states closer to the European Community. In 1981 Simone Veil, the first president of the European Parliament elected by the citizens of Europe, became the first woman to receive the award.

In 1982 the Prize went to King Juan Carlos I of Spain, the first crowned head to be so honoured. The proposal was submitted to the Board of Directors by the new spokesman, Consul Hugo Cadenbach, prompting Kurt Pfeiffer to remark, "We just elected you spokesman and the first thing you do is to present us with kings!" This quip by Cadenbach's fatherly friend was in fact kindly and favourably meant; and the proposal got the undivided endorsement of all the jurors.

For Hugo Cadenbach, being elected spokesman of the Charlemagne Prize Board of Directors after the unexpected death of Jean Louis Schrader in 1980 came as a surprise. But he quickly grew into his new role, especially aided in this by the valuable support of Mayor Kurt Malangré. The spokesman and the mayor worked and got on well together. This important condition for the successful work of the Charlemagne Prize Board of Directors has continued to be observed, as a kind of indispensable tradition, to the present day.

Dr. Kurt Pfeiffer, the initiator of the Charlemagne Prize, died on 30 January 1987. Right up to the end of his life, he actively participated in the development of the Charlemagne Prize, drafting all the inscriptions for the certificates and the medals.

His last nomination for the award, the former US Secretary of State and Nobel Peace Prize laureate Henry Kissinger, was intended by the Board spokesman both as a legacy and a task and commission. In view of the Atlantic community's decisive share in the protection of the states of western Europe, Pfeiffer wanted to reaffirm the importance of the transatlantic ties.

The controversy over this nomination provided the impetus for a critical review of the aims of the Charlemagne Prize. The Charlemagne Prize Society took the occasion to change the award's name to "*Internationaler Karlspreis zu Aachen*", thus stressing its character as an Aachen *Bürgerpreis*, a prize initiated and fostered by Aachen's citizens.

The upheavals in central and eastern Europe and the events of 1989 culminating in German reunification occasioned a rethinking about the Prize, a rethinking that eventually took the form of a declaration supplementing and updating the 1949 Proclamation. The joint "Declaration of the Aachen Town Council and the Society for the Conferring of the International Charlemagne Prize of Aachen" of 14 November 1990 cited the historic importance of the year 1989 and called for "comprehensively joining" the European states together. Also emphasized was the importance of united Europe in the cause of reconciling North-South polarities and in safeguarding our natural resources - important new challenges which were not on the agenda in 1949 but which 40 years later were self-evident facts of life for politically active persons.

The awards of the 90s accordingly focused entirely on the idea of "comprehensively joining" Europe together: they were conferred in particular on representatives of the countries of northern and central-eastern Europe. On all of these awardees, coming as they did from countries not yet belonging to the European Union, were pinned hopes for European unification with the broadest possible reach. The honours were intended to give a positive signal encouraging the awardees to lead their countries into the Union. At the same time the aim was to utilize the international repute of the Charlemagne Prize to strengthen the domestic position of the awardees and boost the standing of their countries.

The awarding of the International Charlemagne Prize to U.S. President Bill Clinton in 2000, fifty years after the first presentation, paid tribute to the representative of a nation that throughout five decades has always been a reliable partner of the free nations of Europe.

In honouring an outstanding representative of European literature, the Hungarian writer and sociologist György Konrád, the Board of Directors focused attention in 2001 on the valuable contribution rendered by culture and by creative artists to the integration of our continent.

Last year, 2002, was the first time in the history of the Charlemagne Prize that it was awarded to an object – the EURO. For no step taken towards integration since the founding of the European Communities has penetrated so deep into people's lives as the launching of the common currency. Since the time that one currency has been the legal tender paid across the counter in twelve member states of the European Union, each and every one of us has been taking Europe at face value as it were, carrying its coin in our purses, and literally being able to grasp that the European Union is an organic whole, and that the EURO is a symbol of this. When in May 2002 European Central Bank President Wim Duisenberg received on behalf of the EURO the Charlemagne Prize medal and certificate, tribute was being paid to the contribution of all those who remained faithful to the vision of a common currency for a United Europe and who translated it into reality.

The small steps and the bigger stages of the European unification process are reflected by the Charlemagne Prize in its awardees. These include both the architects of integration and those on whom hopes of integration have rested, as well as those who have rendered outstanding service in the cause of peace and freedom in a unified Europe. In all of them are expressed the spirit, the vision, and the task and commission of the Charlemagne Prize.

The Charlemagne Prize Board of Directors and the Society feel committed to carry on the work begun by Kurt Pfeiffer over five decades ago; for there is no alternative to international understanding and European integration – also with regard to creating and safeguarding peace, freedom and prosperity in Europe.

The Board and the Society are supported in this by the "Foundation of the International Charlemagne Prize of Aachen", which was initiated in 1997 and whose membership includes European personalities representing business, politics, the media and the scientific/scholarly community. With the events it sponsors – including this year's "Charlemagne-Prize-Europe-Forum in Aachen", jointly organized with the Bertelsmann Foundation for the second time – the Charlemagne Prize Foundation aims to give a new impetus to the process of unification and to help gain the interest and support of citizens and young people for Europe.

Standing at the beginning of the new century, we realize that a long stretch of the road leading to United Europe still lies ahead of us. The task of the Convention on the Future of Europe is to set a further milestone on this road. Forty-five years after the taking effect of the Treaties of Rome, the Community is now about to create a new and historic treaty framework and to give itself a constitution. With the conclusion of the Union's largest and politically most complex process of enlargement at hand, the essential thing is to give United Europe a new structure, a new interior form by means of a new treaty foundation, enabling it effectively to meet the new challenges facing it.

The European Council has entrusted the leadership of the Convention to a great statesman and European, who for decades has served the cause of unification. Together with the members of the Convention, Valéry Giscard d'Estaing has become a decisive driving force bearing the hopes for the reshaping of United Europe. In the awarding of this year's International Charlemagne Prize of Aachen, which will approximately coincide with the conclusion of the Convention's consultations, the Board of Directors is thus sending out a very distinct signal of encouragement, to the end that the work of the Convention may join the people of our continent more closely together and that United Europe, as a union that is also a Political Union, may take a leading role in the world.

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