

## No More Obstacles Against Town Twinning with Sulmona

Alsbach-Hähnlein extends network with Italian Community

Alsbach-Hähnlein (tt). It has been on the table since July 13, 2021: the unanimous decision of the Municipal Council on town twinning with the Italian city of Sulmona. It has still not been confirmed. And many citizens of Alsbach-Hähnlein thinking the European way hope that the ink under the treaty of town twinning will dry soon.

One of them Mr. Hans Hermann. He wishes that the dialogue between both communities will soon have an official character. The exchange has been vivid for a long time the chairman of the partnership association of Alsbach-Hähnlein points out. An intensive contact to the city in the province of L'Aquila in the region of the Abruzzi has existed already for almost ten years. In April of 2012 people of both communities had met for the first time on the occasion of a EC project under the title of "Building Solidarity in Communities (BSC)", initiated by the Hungarian town twinning partner of Alsbach-Hähnlein, the city of Diósd. Among the nine communities Sulmona was, too. Each of the participating cities and communities took turns hosting all others. Solidarity in action on a European level. Thus, the contacts have never ceased. Moreover: the experience made from this international process finally had been the impulse for the foundation of the local partnership association in the year 2014, since the beginning presided by Mr. Hermann.

Since then there have been more than 25 German-Italian encounters. Among others on the occasion of the Alsbach Fair and of the Christmas Market in 2019, says Mr. Hermann, who had travelled to Italy with a delegation of 10 people in the middle of October. Originally, the trip had been planned for April of 2020, however, then the pandemic had started. Hans Hermann reports on extremely positive talks. It is also said, that the recently elected successor of Mrs Mayor Annamaria Casini, Mr. Gianfranco Di Piero, has a very open and constructive attitude towards the town twinning with Alsbach-Hähnlein. Mrs Casini had no longer run for Mayor on the occasion of the October elections.

Already on September 30, the community was host of the project "Solidarity – key to solving social problems and supporting the evolution of Europe in future". This event had also been postponed by more than a year due to Corona, however, during the first miles at least some online meetings took place. Taking the initiative, the partnership association built on experience made during the earlier EC Project. Beside Diósd and Sulmona communities from Poland, Greece, Spain, Albania, Bulgaria and Czech Republic participated. Specifically, it is about solidarity in Europe as a key for the future of Europe. "The first meeting would have been an ideal opportunity to seal the partnership with Sulmona". Because also, Annamaria Casini had had stayed at Alsbach for some days. Even though an official treaty might scarcely change something in the quality of an international relationship, a mutually signed deed of partnership is a ticket to receive grants of subsidies which play an important part in the realization of joint projects. In addition "KeytoEU" is being co-financed by the EC Programme "Europe for Citizens" as the only German Citizens' Project. "An honour" as Mr. Hermann points out.

At Alsbach, the three-day' kick-off took place for a discussion format where up to August of 2022 all other eight cities and communities will act as hosts. The start was extremely pleasing. Among others, there were discussions with young people of School Village Bergstrasse ventilating relevant European challenges of the coming years. Also participating were Mayor Sebastin Bubenzer and the Hessian State Secretary for European Matters, Mr. Mark Weinmeister. Mr. Joachim Felix Leonhard, former Hessian State Secretary for Science and Arts, presented a historical dissertation on Europe with a view to the future. Especial emphasis was laid on the bilateral relationship at citizen level, says Hans

Hermann, who is a member to the municipal council for the Initiative Environment Protection of Alsbach-Hähnlein-Sandwiese (IUHAS). He parts from the assumption that within the frame of the next meetings further partnerships may be on the way. This is also one goal of such dialogue panels.

However, he also knows that sometimes it may take longer – not only because of a globally raging virus. After the first contacts in 2012, the first letters of intent on a partnership and cooperation of both communities had been exchanged at the end of 2018. The goal was consolidation and deepening of the mutual relationships. The signees from the side of Alsbach had been Mr. Hermann and the former Mayor, Mr. Georg Rausch. The parliament of Sulmona had agreed to town twinning. At Alsbach a corresponding vote took a bit longer. The partnership association welcomed the resolution of the municipal council in the summer of this year as a decisive position.

The fact that the kick-off of “KeytoEU” did not also become the official start of the town twinning has been regrettable, but ultimately it is only a temporary aspect. This will scarcely have an influence on the good relationship between Alsbach and Sulmona, says Hans Hermann. It will be possible at any time to catch up on the ceremonial act. Moreover, a draft of treaty has already been set up – ready for signature.

Photo No 1: Members of all delegations from nine European communities (photo Hans Hermann)

Photo No 2: In the centre of the old part of the city of Sulmona, there are most of the restored buildings of the city (photo shutterstock)

Photo No 3: The Chairman of the Partnership Association of Alsbach-Hähnlein (PVAH) Hans Hermann, left, in conversation with Mark Weinmeister, State Secretary for Europe to the Hessian Minister for Federal and European Matters