



EUROPEAN RESTORATIVE JUSTICE AWARD 2014

Dr. Michael Kilchling, Chair of the European Forum for Restorative Justice

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In 2010, the European Forum for Restorative Justice launched the European Restorative Justice Award in order to provide public recognition of outstanding contributions to the development of Restorative Justice. It is awarded in the name of the European Restorative Justice Community. We are very happy that this prize is already highly respected, and that it is considered and referred to quite frequently.

The award is also an excellent opportunity for the board to actively involve members in the nomination procedure. Consequently, this year's nomination is based on the input of a considerable number of proposals.

When the board discussed the incoming proposals, and the reasons and explanations given, the decision was a rather clear one, both in terms of counts and reasoning – although I have to emphasize that decisions are not taken on the sole basis of the number of persons proposing a particular person. Other aspects have to be considered as well. Therefore it was clear from the beginning that gender balance would have to play a major role this time. Luckily, the prize winner is not just a woman, but THE person that obviously merits the 2014 award most.

And this person is: Christa Pelikan.

Since 1998, Christa has been one of the key persons behind the setting-up of the European Forum in Leuven. It can be said that Christa was really at the origins of the Forum and turned out to become one of its rocks.

Besides her Forum activities she was one of the most influential promoters at the level of the Council of Europe. She chaired the Expert Committee for the preparation 1999 Recommendation (No. 19) on mediation in penal matters, to which some other key experts who are with us tonight, contributed as well.

Even when this work was successfully finished, Christa remained active in the field, promoting, with restless energy, RJ at national, European and international conferences. A particular focus was on Poland where she formed many strong bonds. Besides countless projects relating to the European Forum, she also participated in the COST action on restorative justice in Europe which, in the period from 2002 to 2006, prepared the ground and set the standards for joint activities of – and in the meantime more than solid connections between – stakeholders in the

RJ field in almost all European countries. She has also been a pioneer in issues relating to the potentials of RJ in intercultural conflicts. Therefore, not surprisingly, she was one of the responsible researchers in the drafting of the successful application of the ALTERNATIVE project. One of the proposers praised this in a very nice way (I quote): "Christa is always traveling, always reading, always doing hard work when others have started entertainment already, her diligence and hard work is an example of commitment for all of us".

In her own country, Austria, she was likewise influential. Since it was founded in 1973, the Institute for the Sociology of Law and Criminology in Vienna has always been her home base as a main researcher; even today, after her retirement, she still has a workplace there. With her background as a social historian, Christa has always tried to combine theoretical insights with practice- and policy-oriented developments. She has been successful in building a relationship with the "field" in Austria, including actors from extremely different angles such as the Ministry of Justice, probation service, victim support, and the feminist movement.

One of her greatest achievements is certainly her valuable research on the application of RJ in cases of domestic violence, in regard to which she presented strong empirical evidence that largely contributed to the implementation of RJ in this area – notwithstanding high resistance from some groups of practitioners and parts of the womens' movement. In this context in particular, Christa always followed her inner voice as a scientist.

There is, however, one particular field in which her success was limited, although she tried hard and with a comparable extent of insistency as in the purely scientific area. This is related to her prior role as main organizer and programme officer of most of our conferences. Regular participants might certainly remember what I am referring to the café conference concept. Although this format was never really admired by the various audiences, Christa always persisted in sticking to that concept and providing it again in the following conference.

Besides that, she was – and still is – extremely influential in the development of a European Restorative Justice.

A laudatio like this should, of course, also address the personal aspect. One of the proposers highlighted, for example, the special style Christa has adopted to speak at conferences. It is direct communication rather than just reading a paper. I quote again: "sometimes a bit lengthy, but deeply struggling with the thoughts and arguments inside her. In doing so she is always able to let the whole audience 'work' mentally together with her – hard work from time to time!" Martin Wright, our previous award holder, praised her love of languages, both German and English, that lets her recognize that the German translation of "I am sorry" that literally means "it hurts me" is part of the restorative idea. Others praised her empathy in humans, and her real interest in her colleagues. And one contributor just asked: Isn't she remarkably young and very good looking for her age? How is she preserving this youth in her?"

Well, it is time to come to the conclusion now. Let me just make a final quote from a further nomination letter, which I personally consider to be the perfect summary:

"On the night when Alice Monroe was awarded the Nobel Prize I'd like to nominate the grand (old) lady of Restorative Justice: Christa Pelikan."