Croatian project “Shelter and Counselling Centre for Women and Children Victims of Violence” of the Autonomous Women’s House Zagreb wins the First Prize of the ERSTE Foundation Award for Social Integration 2011

The Third Prize winner is also from Croatia: project “Roses of Saint Francis Homeless Shelter in Rijeka” of the Order of St. Francis, Local Chapter “Trsat”

Prague was for two days the centre of social integration, welcoming organisations from 12 CEE countries (Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Czech Republic, Hungary, Kosovo, Macedonia, Moldova, Montenegro, Romania, Serbia, Slovak Republic and Slovenia) at the final Ceremony of the ERSTE Foundation Award for Social Integration 2011. Over 650 representatives of the civil society, business and media organisations gathered in the famous Barrandov Studios on 20 June 2011 to applaud this year’s winners.

Six additional special prizes were offered: two by the jury; three by all 132 shortlisted organisations, who voted for the best peer projects (awarded with €15,000 each); one by all Erste Group employees, who voted for their favourite project.

The outstanding winners were selected by an international jury out of 132 shortlisted projects who were ranked by a group of national and local experts from a total of 1,850 submitted applications.

Andreas Treichl, chairman of the board of ERSTE Foundation and CEO of Erste Group, handed over the first prize: “We initiated this Award in 2007 because we believe in the existence of societies without prejudices and with equal rights for all. But in order to create such societies, we all need to contribute. These winning organisations dedicate their entire work to achieving this goal. The least we can do is to publicly honour their engagement and outstanding results, and try to follow their example” Treichl said.

36 winners will share 613,000 EUR money prizes, while all 132 organisations will receive benefits such as: media relations support provided by professional PR consultants financed by ERSTE Foundation for a 2-year period; participation in capacity building workshops (on topics such as: developing social businesses as an alternative way of financing, building media relations capabilities, acquiring social media skills); presence on the ERSTE Foundation’s Social Integration Network (www.socialintegration.org/network), an interactive database of best practice projects from CEE countries, whose aim is to attract the attention of potential funders, and thus to connect the non-profit with commercial sector.
The jury of the ERSTE Foundation Award for Social Integration 2011 was made up of 18 experts in social integration issues: Haris Pašović (Bosnia and Herzegovina), Andrea Feldman (Croatia), Terezie Hradilková (Czech Republic), Maria Nemenyi (Hungary), Shkëlzen Maliqi (Kosovo), Vladimir Milčin (Macedonia), Marija Todorovska (La Strada, winning organisation EFASI 2009, Macedonia), Corina Cepli (Moldova), Mihajlo Jovović (Montenegro), Dana Deac (Romania), Miljenko Dereta (Serbia), Martin Bútora (Slovak Republic), Vlasta Jalušič (Slovenia), Franz Salm-Reifferscheidt (Member of the ERSTE Foundation Board), Andrew Baker, Francis Davis, Sandra Pralong (International Experts), Franz Karl Prüller (Regional Expert).

More about ERSTE Foundation Award for Social Integration here: www.integrationaward.org

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ERSTE Foundation
In 2003, ERSTE Foundation evolved out of the Erste Oesterreichische Spar-Casse, the first Austrian savings bank. Currently, ERSTE Foundation holds 25.3% of the capital shares of Erste Group. The foundation invests part of its dividends in the development of societies in Austria and Central and South Eastern Europe. It supports social participation and civil-society engagement; it aims to bring people together and disseminate knowledge of the recent history of a region that has been undergoing dramatic changes since 1989. As an active foundation, it develops its own projects within the framework of three programmes: Social Development, Culture and Europe.
Information about the winning projects:

First Prize (€40,000): Shelter and Counselling Centre for Women and Children Victims of Violence (Croatia)

Autonomous Women’s House Zagreb (AZKZ) has been enormously influential in pioneering support for victims of domestic violence in Croatia. At an undisclosed address, women and children affected by this societal scourge are given the time, space, and expert help they need to recover and rebuild their lives. Even by the highest international standards, the “Shelter and Counselling Centre for Women and Children Victims of Violence” is extraordinarily successful. It has a +90% success rate in preventing returns to violent situations; the women who recover there all leave the shelter capable of supporting themselves and their children. Starting out in the 1980s when domestic violence was legally ignored and no provision was made for its victims, AZKZ has paved the way in asserting women’s rights to a life without violence.

Second Prize (€30,000): The Roma Press Agency (Slovak Republic)

The “Roma Press Agency” counters the negative reporting – due largely to media ignorance – of Slovakia’s Roma people. The first stage in setting up the agency involved identifying Roma individuals willing to complete their education and pursue a media career. With the establishment of an editorial office, the newly trained journalists were able to bring greater objectivity to media reporting on Roma issues; they also served as role models, inspiring Roma youngsters to follow their path. The agency’s work has led to a dramatic increase in the use of the Roma language in Slovak TV and radio. Innovatively, it has taken the Roma struggle for equality into new spheres of society: middle-class professions, helping not only to integrate a community but also to empower it.

Third Prize (€20,000): Roses of Saint Francis Homeless Shelter in Rijeka (Croatia)

In a country whose laws simply ignore the existence of homelessness, the “Roses of Saint Francis” homeless shelter in Rijeka is a vital resource. Set up by the Secular Franciscan Order, it is, uniquely, open 24 hours a day and offers a comprehensive resocialisation programme. Those who find themselves homeless through addiction, poor psychological or physical health, or lack of family and social support, are helped to again become valued members of society. An expert team and volunteers run the programme, which includes creative activities and group therapy. Around 60% of those who pass through the shelter become “resocialised”, with many beating their addictions and finding work and accommodation. Publicising the issues around homelessness is also a key, and so far successful, aim of the project.
Twenty-eight Honours Awards (€16,000 each) went without ranking to the following projects (from 4th to 31st place, in alphabetical order by country):

**Bosnia and Herzegovina**
- Delta Project - Centre for Drama Education, Mostar
- Rehabilitation and Reintegration of Mine Victims through Water Sports - Eco Sports Group, Sarajevo
- Social Integration of Young People in Podrinja - IPAK - Youth Builds the Future, Tuzla
- Youth Culture Festival 2010 - Bridge of Peace, Prijedor

**Croatia**
- Diving for People with Disabilities - Diving Club “GeRonimo”, Zagreb

**Czech Republic**
- Fair School - The League of Human Rights, Brno
- From an Institution to a Firm and a Flat – JURTA, Děčín - Nebočady
- We’re in it together – Assistance, Prague

**Hungary**
- Bődvalenke Fresco Village - Hungarian Reformed Church Aid Foundation, Budapest
- Integration without boundaries: Baráthegy Farm - Symbiosis Foundation, Miskolc
- Retextil - Ecological Recycling Program - Retextil Foundation, Pécs
- Romani program not only for the Romani - Hungarian Civil Liberties Union, Budapest
- Secret Years - Civil Works Association, Budapest

**Kosovo**
- Integration of Children with Autism in Society - United for Autism, Pristina
- SOS New Kindergarten - SOS Childrens Village, Pristina

**Macedonia**
- Creative Minds Create Work Opportunities - Municipal Public Library “Miladinovci Brothers”, Radovis
- Social Partnership in Responsible Society - Polio Plus, Skopje

**Moldova**
- Educational inclusion of children with disabilities in the Republic of Moldova - HOPE Center, Chisinau

**Romania**
- Better Homes - Foundation for Social Assistance and Youth, Sâcêle
- Close to School - Association for Promoting Social Inclusion, Campia Turzii
- Concordia Bakery - Concordia Humanitarian Organisation, Bucharest
- Democracy in Padureni - Pro Democracy Club Association, Timisoara
- Diversity, the reality around us! - ACCEPT Association, Bucharest
International Romani Art Festival - TURN Cultural Association, Timisoara
Serbia
Assisted living - Half Way There, Pančevo
Third Age - Association for Local Development Kamenica, Nis
With Health Against Poverty - Association of citizens and parents of children with needs for special support, Kruševac
Slovak Republic
Social Theatre - a Tool against Social Exclusion and Poverty - The Theatre without Home, Bratislava

Two Special Prizes of the Jury (€15,000 each) were awarded to the projects: “Hospic” of the Slovenian Hospice Society, and “Together for Integration of People with Intellectual Disabilities” of Women’s Safe House from Montenegro.

The Erste Group employees from Austria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Hungary, Romania, Slovak Republic, Serbia and Ukraine voted for their favourite project as well. The winner of the FIRST Choice Prize given by Erste Group employees is “Concordia Bakery” by Concordia Humanitarian Organisation from Romania. The initiative will receive special benefits by BCR, Erste Group's subsidiary and biggest retail bank in Romania.