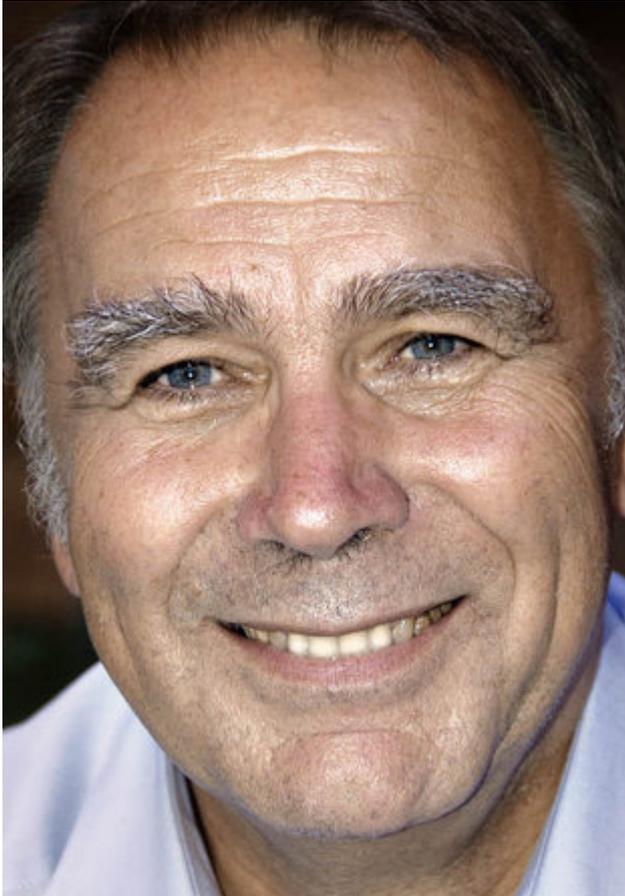


Europe – A matter of heart

Detlev Hoffmann was honored by the Regio Basiliensis for his campaign for promoting Europe among the young.



Detlev Hoffmann Picture: Andrea Steinhart

GUNDELFINGEN. Detlev Hoffmann from the German town of Gundelfingen has been honored for his great commitment for democracy and tolerance in Europa by the trinational organization Regio Basiliensis. As the co-founder of the Youth Parliament Upper Rhine (JPO), Hoffmann has been traveling across Europe for many years in order to get young people enthusiastic about Europe. “We want to make young people become curious about Europe”, says Detlev Hoffmann.

The teacher, born in Kassel and now retired, has been teaching pupils for decades at the Rotteck Gymnasium (high school) and has already received many awards. Detlev Hoffmann lives in Gundelfingen, from where he cultivates his contacts which span across the whole of Europe. “Our methods are now being praised as a good-practice example by the competent authorities”, says Hoffmann. Already in his position as a teacher for social studies he became annoyed with the lack of interest of the young for the topic of Europe. This had consequences – for his unhappiness became the motivation for the founding of the Youth Parliament Upper Rhine (JPO). Together with the former member of European parliament Dietrich Elchlepp he

called JPO to life in 1999. For this and their rendering of special services for the region, both have been honored as fighters for democracy and tolerance in Europe by the general assembly of the Regio Basiliensis.

“We want to achieve that young people from Baden, the Alsace and Basel debate together and think together“, says Hoffmann. How little the young population is interested in the political Europe was shown by the extremely low voter participation by first-time voters during the elections for the European parliament in 2009. Only 14% cast their vote. Still, Hoffmann says, Europe has become a matter of course for the young population. “We therefore have decided to build bridges between the direct life world of young people and the distant anonymous bureaucracy in Brussels.” This is to be accomplished in particular by the Youth Parliament Upper Rhine (Parlement des Jeunes du Rhin supérieur). “After all, between 60 to 70 percent of all decisions affecting their lives are being taken in Brussels today”, Detlev Hoffmann makes clear.

Once a year, Hoffmann and his team organize a two day congress for 50 and 70 young people from three countries. During this congress, parliamentary sequences of events are simulated: After the getting to know during the first day of the congress, the election of the congress president takes place and various committees are being formed. During the second day of the congress, the young participants then work on a resolution which is discussed in the plenum, modified and ultimately ratified.

First of all, however, the young people decide on the topic of the congress.”It is striking that they always hit the nerve of public political discussions”, says the former director of studies (*Studiendirektor*). In 2007, for example, “climate conference” was fixed as the topic, before becoming a permanent topic in the media. “In 2010, the question of freedom of religion, human rights and minarets at the Upper Rhine are on the agenda.”

In order to reach even more young people, the initiators think about offering two congresses per year. “However, we have already reached the point in which this can no longer be done with volunteer work alone”, says Hoffmann.

The second project in which Hoffmann has also been actively engaged in in the past years is the Comenius-Network, which is closely linked to the work of the Youth Parliament. In this project, 16 partners from 12 countries participate in order to develop innovative methods and concepts for the training of teachers regarding the topic of European politics. “We have decided to integrate political education about Europe into foreign language teaching”, says Detlev Hoffmann. This, according to Hoffmann, is ultimately one of the biggest pedagogical challenges of our time.

For further information about the Youth Parliament, see <http://www.jpo-eu.org>.
Information about the Comenius Network for teachers, see <http://www.ccll-eu.eu>.