

European City Festival

A celebration of international friendships

"Seven cities - one vision: Town twinning as an engine for the future of Europe!" - against the background of one of the most important future topics of the European Union - "The Conference on the Future of Europe" - the city of Bocholt celebrated its 800th anniversary and the round town twinning birthdays in 2022 - 70 years with Bocholt (Belgium) and Rossendale (Great Britain) and 50 years with Aurillac (France) - with the visit of delegations from all friendly and twin towns from 12 to 16 June 2023 as well as with a big European town festival on Saturday, 14 May 2022.

In addition to the celebration, the guests were given the opportunity to collect and exchange their wishes, ideas and suggestions for the future design of town twinning and town friendship together with their partner associations. The project was funded by the CERV (Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values) programme of the European Union.

Delegations from Rossendale (Great Britain), Aurillac and Arpajon-sur-Cère (both France), Bocholt (Belgium), Akmene (Lithuania), Vlora (Albania), Wuxi (PR China) and the neighbouring Netherlands visited the city of Bocholt during the weekend. The European City Festival started at 10 a.m. with a varied stage programme from the twin cities.

Music and dance groups typical of their countries gave a glimpse of the traditions of their home countries until about 5.30 pm. The event was presented by Radio WMW. At 11 a.m. the official opening of the town festival took place by Mayor Thomas Kerkhoff with the signing of the town twinning certificate between Bocholt and the Lithuanian region around Akmene. At the same time, a declaration of friendship was signed with the Albanian city of Vlora.

Visit of International Delegations

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Opening evening at the City Hotel

On **Thursday evening, 12 May**, many of the foreign visitors already arrived for the European City Festival in Bocholt. In the city hotel, there was a joint dinner and a first exchange of the visitors of the foreign delegations. Bocholt's deputy mayor Gudrun Koppers welcomed the guests.

"The city of Bocholt has been involved in European policy for years," said Koppers. That's why it was a great pleasure "to be able to welcome so many nations as part of the city's anniversary." And this was not the only anniversary to celebrate: "We are also celebrating 50 years of town twinning with Aurillac and 70 years of town twinning with Belgian Bocholt and Rossendale," said Gudrun Koppers.

She stressed the importance of friendships between cities in different countries, also referring to the conflict in Ukraine. "The relations and the knowledge of each other are invaluable in these days."



We are also celebrating 50 years of twinning with Aurillac and 70 years of twinning with Belgian Bocholt and Rossendale.

Gudrun Koppers, Deputy Mayoress

Gallery: The opening evening





Lecture on Europe Direct Bocholt

On **Friday morning, 13 May**, the delegations from the friendly cities started with a joint breakfast and a presentation by Sebastian Borgert, Head of Europe Direct Bocholt. He introduced the network of Europe Directs and explained that there are 433 such offices in the countries of the European Union. "In Germany alone, there are 50 Europe Directs, nine of them in North Rhine-Westphalia," Borgert said.

Borgert also spoke about the "Conference on the Future of Europe". All 550 million inhabitants of the EU had been able to participate in this, the basis for which was a corresponding resolution of the EU Parliament of 10 May 2021. 49 topics had finally been presented on the past Europe Day (9 May), said Borgert.

He presented some particularly relevant topics, including the renunciation of the EU states' right of veto. At present, he said, every member state has a right to veto in addition to the right to vote. EU citizens want a majority of EU states to be able to make decisions without veto power in future.

According to Borgert, many of the messages at the conference also had a thematic reference to climate change. Many participants saw this as the most important issue for the EU. Finally, Sebastian Borgert distributed brochures with basic information on the European Union.

Gallery: Lecture on EUROPE DIRECT





Signing of the contracts on the market square

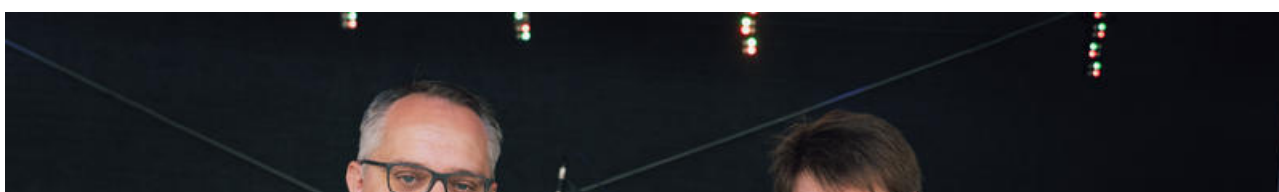
After more than 30 years of town twinning, Mayor Thomas Kerkhoff and his counterpart Vitalijus Mitrofanovas from Akmene in Lithuania signed the contract for a town twinning between Bocholt and Akmene in Lithuania on **Saturday, 14 May**.

In addition, Mayor Kerkhoff and Dr. Dritan Leli from Vlora in Albania signed a declaration of friendship between Bocholt and Vlora. Together with the international guests and many people from Bocholt, the ceremony was celebrated under the large skyliner on the market square in front of the historic town hall.

After the signing of the contract, Vitalijus Mitrofanovas signed the Golden Book of the city in the hall of the Historic City Hall. Representatives of the other guest nations also gave short speeches and underlined the good partnership with the city of Bocholt in the past years.

Gallery: Signing of the contracts





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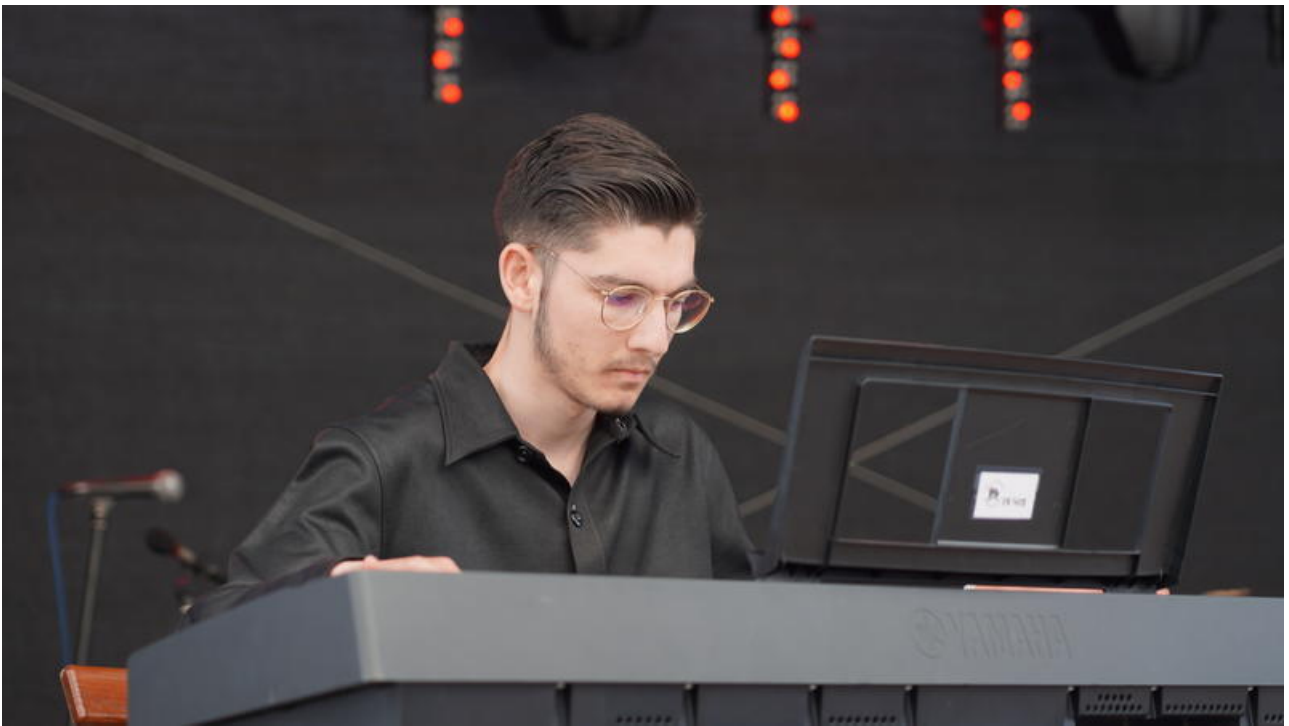
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Gallery: European City Festival



















Joint service in St.-Georg

On the occasion of the celebration of the round partnership anniversaries, a joint service was celebrated in St. George's Church on **Sunday morning, 15 May**. Many representatives of the foreign delegations from Lithuania, Great Britain, France and Albania took part. Part of the delegation from Bocholt, Belgium, had already left on Saturday evening.

The service was musically arranged by the choir "Cementininkas" from Akmene (Lithuania), accompanied by Dr. Georg Dieckhues (trumpet) and Werner Hesse (organ). Following the mass, which was held by Pastor Matthias Hembrock, Mr Dedebara Hajji Edmond Brahimaj, the head grandfather of the World Centre of the Bektashim, also said a prayer for peace.

Gallery: Church service in St. George















Friendship Concert in St. George's Church

Music is the language that is spoken across national borders. In this sense, the concert on Sunday evening was entirely in the spirit of European friendships. Under the motto "Europe sings - the friendship concert", performers from Bocholt in Belgium, Bredevoort in the Netherlands, Ulf and Akmenė played and sang.

The musicians were accompanied by Dr. Georg Dieckhues on trumpet, Klaus Tewes on organ, and the pianists Henk Bennink, Jeroen Beckers, Jelena Pakatilyté and Nanako Fukuda.

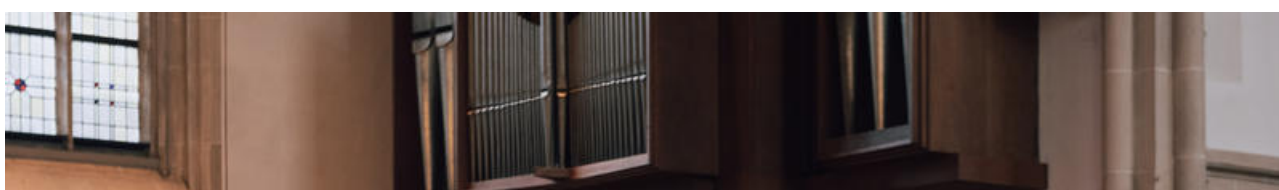
(Photos: Herbert Kellermann)

Gallery: Friendship Concert in St. George's Church

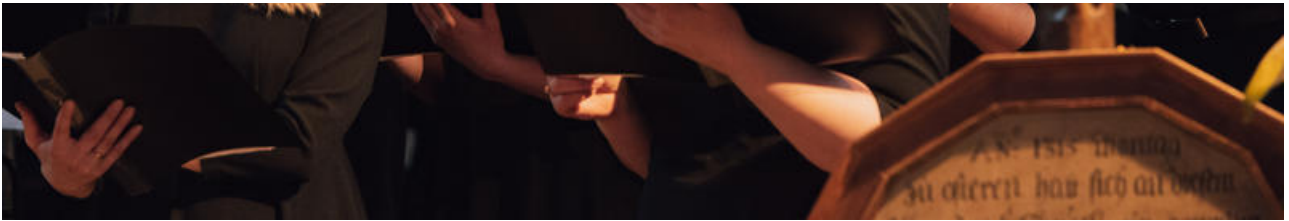












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