

EuroNatur Award 2020 goes to the municipality of Mals

Speech at the EuroNatur 2020 Award ceremony on 8 October 2020 on the island of Mainau

Prof. Dr. Thomas Potthast
President of EuroNatur

Dear Earl Björn,
dear Dorothea Wehinger, Member of the Landtag,
dear prior EuroNatur Award laureates Volker Angres and Erst Paul Dörfler,
dear celebrants,
please forgive me that I do not address other attendants personally, but simply close the salutation with: Dear friends of EuroNatur – European Natural Heritage Foundation!

It is very nice to see you here today and to be able to welcome you to Mainau Island.

This award ceremony is different from those of previous years in several respects.

It is an unfamiliar sight from here: where 150 people used to sit close together, there are now gaps and much of the – by the way very beautiful – parquet flooring is visible. But I am very pleased that the EuroNatur Foundation has made it possible for us to celebrate the award ceremony even in times of a pandemic in 2020 and to pay tribute to our award winners from the municipality of Mals – and to do so in the familiar and much appreciated festive setting of the White Hall.

Our special thanks therefore first of all go to the host, Earl Björn Bernadotte, and to Sabine Neufang's Mainau team, as well as to the technical team, who made a livestream of the ceremony possible. At the same time, we would like to thank you, dear guests, for adhering to the rules of distance and hygiene. We want to celebrate our laureates and enjoy our personal gathering that we have been missing for so long, but of course we want to stay healthy and protect everyone in this room.

There is another change from last year: over the past nine years, my predecessor Christel Schroeder used to welcome you here – you probably already noticed the change. For almost a decade, Christel, as President, has been a warm host to this special event. I would like to take this opportunity to thank Christel once again, even if she cannot be here in person today for good reasons – I would like to send her greetings to you all. I have now taken over the baton – with Dr. Anna-Katharina Wöbse as the new Vice-President, with respect for this office and with pleasure at the tasks, and one of the particularly pleasing ones is to be able to open and conduct the presentation of the EuroNatur Award in this festive atmosphere.

The next, third, change is more relevant for you; as you already saw, it will be a somewhat “dry affair” today – at least as far as catering is concerned. Unfortunately, we cannot offer

you nice drinks and delicious snacks today, although this would have fitted so perfectly with our theme for the evening: What do we actually eat and how were the wine, bread, vegetables and fruit produced? And what exactly happens in the fields on our local, European and global doorsteps?

Today, we are giving the EuroNatur Award 2020 to a community that has asked itself precisely these questions. For six years now, people from Mals in the Vinschgau area in South Tyrol have been fighting for their health and for an ecological and biodiversity-friendly form of agriculture in their home region, which is strongly shaped by fruit growing.

The citizens of Mals are concerned about the common good, the basis of coexistence in their community, which includes a nature and landscape worth living in. And as a community, finally on the basis of a referendum, they have declared that they will no longer accept any harmful pesticides. Not in the soil, not in the air and not on the plate. It was thus a veritable community decision, which makes Mals a contested exception in the pesticide-oriented fruit-growing region of South Tyrol. And at the same time, it makes Mals a model for many other municipalities throughout Europe. By rejecting pesticides, the citizens of Mals are both materially and symbolically making their conscious decision in favour of ecologically oriented local agriculture in the region. The citizens are actively involved in shaping regional development in a civil society spirit, and they stood tall when the Vinschger wind blew bitterly in a political sense, bringing complaints and abrogations of decisions. It is perhaps no coincidence that this step comes from a region that in the 20th century had to deal with the impositions of changing rule time and again, as the writer Marco Balzano recently described in his very readable bestseller “I’m staying here”, describing another struggle in the Vinschgau Valley, namely that over the Resia reservoir.

These are worthy laureates, this community of Mals with its upright civil society, whose commitment has already become a real brand: the “Mals Way”. The fact that a community is leading locally for pesticide-free agriculture is truly exemplary. We will learn more about this in a moment. This path is not yet at an end, but with the EuroNatur Award we want to add another landmark and thus add a sign of support from European civil society. Because together it will be easier to move forward on this road to sustainable and nature-friendly agriculture and regional development.