

## Karlspreis-Europa-Forum

13 May 2026, Aachen



### Speech by Professor Jörg M. Fegert:

When the President of the European Commission, Dr Ursula von der Leyen, called me last year shortly before she was awarded the Charlemagne Prize to discuss proposals for how the prize money could be used, I was very happy.

For the first time last year, the International Charlemagne Prize was accompanied by a prize fund of €1 million. Ms von der Leyen expressed the wish for projects that would benefit children across Europe, and in particular children in Ukraine. Her call came at exactly the right moment, as we had, with great voluntary commitment and the support of the German Trauma Foundation - of which I am a founding member and of which Ms von der Leyen is the patron - as well as the European Society for Child and Adolescent Psychiatry (ESCAP), of which I am president, established a webinar series for Ukrainian colleagues. We had successfully run this over the course of an academic year but no longer had the resources to continue.

Both applications were reviewed and promptly approved, and I am therefore able to report to you today on the current status of both projects.

With the support of the International Charlemagne Prize Foundation, the European Society for Child and Adolescent Psychiatry (ESCAP), in cooperation with UNICEF Ukraine and in coordination with the Mental Health Coordination Center of the Cabinet of Ministers of

Ukraine, was able to continue the webinar series within the framework of the initiative of the Ukrainian First Lady's "How are you?". Through these training sessions, delivered by some of Europe's most renowned child and adolescent psychiatrists, we reached a total of more than 10,000 individuals. Between 400 and 1,000 participants joined each webinar via Zoom. At the same time, the content was also made available via other channels such as YouTube, both live and in recorded form, ensuring that it remained accessible even in situations where, for example, bombing attacks took place and live participation was not possible. Participants receive a certificate from the Medical Association of Baden-Württemberg for each session they attend. Moreover, when successfully answering the corresponding assessment questions, they also receive certificates issued in Ukrainian which are recognised by the Ukrainian Ministry of Health and the relevant authorities.

At present, this training series for child and adolescent psychiatrists, child and adolescent psychotherapists, school psychologists, general practitioners, paediatricians, adult psychiatrists, and many other psychosocial professionals is one of the few continuous educational resources available in a changing healthcare system.

Earlier this week, I received a letter from the National Health Service of Ukraine expressing strong gratitude for this initiative and the hope that we will be able to continue in the next academic year. This will be possible thanks to the funding provided through the International Charlemagne Prize resources.

The letter explicitly states: "We would also like to express our special gratitude for the level of international attention that this area of cooperation has received. The decision of the President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, laureate of the Charlemagne Prize, to allocate part of the prize funds to further support ESCAP's work with Ukraine is an important confirmation of trust in this initiative and of its practical value for the Ukrainian healthcare system."

I personally moderate all of these sessions, together with Dr Kateryna Bulavinova from UNICEF Ukraine and Ms. Oksana Zbitnieva, the liaison person from the Mental Health Coordination Center of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine. I have the impression that, in addition to the content input that directly benefits children, these regular meetings which are often held under the most difficult conditions, with participants sometimes sitting in front of their devices during the extremely cold winters wearing several layers of clothing, represent an investment in a better future and in a transformed healthcare system for all. They also serve as a direct signal of hope and symbolise the fact that Europe stands alongside its colleagues, and that outstanding European experts are actively considering how best to provide professional support in these times.

The second project addresses a topic that has been very close to Ms von der Leyen's heart for many years: the protection of children in an increasingly digitalised world. Here, I first need to distinguish between some of the terms, as I am currently, together with my French colleague Dr Maria Melchior from INSERM, also chairing a Special Panel for the EU President

on Child Safety Online. This panel deals with the general population and the broader framework conditions of media use for all children.

In the International Charlemagne Prize project, the aim is to provide frontline professionals in child protection with guidelines on how to deal with direct harm and situations of child welfare endangerment arising from online activities. Thus this concerns the consequences of digital neglect, for example when toddlers are “parked” in front of devices for hours in order to keep them quiet. It also includes sexual offences committed online, which are unfortunately very widespread. Of particular concern is the finding that children and adolescents who have experienced maltreatment and abuse in the real world often face an increased risk of being targeted again in the digital environment afterwards.

Thanks to the support of the International Charlemagne Prize Foundation, the German Society for Child Protection in Medicine which is currently in the process of revising the German Child Protection Guideline, is also able to include the topic of child protection in the digital world in its comprehensive literature review.

Based on this work, we will, through the European professional society, develop a Europe-wide guidance paper for professionals on how to deal with such specific situations of child welfare endangerment. The project is scheduled for completion at the beginning of the second quarter of 2027, allowing us to present the guidance paper to all European colleagues at the 2027 congress of our society. Naturally, it will also be disseminated and made available in digital form.

We are grateful that the German Ambassador in Athens has already invited us, on the eve of the start of the congress, to an event at the German Embassy with the European ambassadors and members of the Greek government. There, we will present the key findings to this group as well, thereby contributing both to their dissemination and to raising awareness of the valuable work of the International Charlemagne Prize Foundation.

In addition to these two projects, which indirectly benefit children by supporting the professionals who care for them and better preparing them for their daily challenges, the International Charlemagne Prize Foundation also directly supports affected children.

It is a fantastic opportunity that this highly prestigious award gives its laureates the chance to set a personal example by also participating in decisions on how the prize money is allocated.

As project beneficiary, I would therefore like to express my deepest gratitude and thank you for the opportunity to share this new development from the Charlemagne Prize initiative with you.