

Laudation to the winner of 2022 Mayor Paweł Adamowicz Award, the City of Michałowo in Poland

By the President of the European Committee of the Regions, Vasco ALVES CORDEIRO

In September 2021, Belarussian autocratic leader Alexander Lukashenko was luring migrants and refugees from the Middle East and Asia, instrumentalizing their hope to put pressure on the European Union. Thousands of newcomers from countries gripped by humanitarian crises and wars were fooled by the promise of entering Europe.

In reality, they found themselves trapped between Belarus and the borders of the European Union. Inhumane treatment, beatings, abuses and neglect were the daily realities of the migrants, including mothers with children in need of medical and legal assistance.

At the border with Poland, under a state of emergency, some of those migrants were lucky enough, in these terrible circumstances, to find themselves near the city of Michałowo.

On 27th September 2021, a group of about 20 Iraqi Yazidis, mostly women and children, arrived at the border guard post in Michałowo. They asked for asylum but were all returned to the border the next day. Soon, the question "Where are the children from Michałowo?" circulated throughout Poland.

A few days later, an aid station was set up in Michałowo, where people could find clothing, a warm meal, and accommodation. Citizens and firefighters joined forces and donations and aid began to arrive from all over Poland.

Hundreds of people from across the country came to Michałowo.

One of the symbolic moments during this difficult time was the initiative taken by Mayor Nazarko, as inhabitants started to light a green lantern in homes as a sign of solidarity with the migrants. Green lanterns were then lit in many Polish homes and became synonyms for solidarity and tolerance. Where the green lights were lit, refugees knew it would mean shelter.

This courage, this solidarity, they are the foundations of the Mayor Paweł Adamowicz Award and this why - upon the nomination by the cities of Krakow and Wroclaw - the Jury decided to grant this year's award to the municipality of Michałowo, as a tribute to the courage and solidarity of its citizens.

Polish Nobel Prize winner Wislawa Szymborska, wrote in one of her poems, "We know so much about ourselves as we have been tested." The attitude of the citizens of Michałowo is worthy of this note and distinction.

As millions of refugees of Ukraine are seeking safety in our regions and cities, let's remind ourselves of the duty to confront "fear, ignorance, stereotyping and anti-immigrant populism," as Mayor Paweł Adamowicz said. We are being tested as much as Michałowo. A test we can only pass with solidarity, freedom and equality.

On behalf of the European Committee of the Regions, the City of Gdansk and the International Cities Of Refuge Network, I am honoured to award the citizens of the municipality of Michałowo, represented today by their Mayor Marek Nazarko, with the Mayor Paweł Adamowicz Award 2022. Congratulations!