

Santa Maria da Feira From cork to Europe

For a strong and lasting relationship cities need an effective start, an official event that will lay the foundations of the town twinning and open up the initial debate. This is why Santa Maria da Feira (a town situated between the Douro and Vouga rivers in northern Portugal), which embarked on a new twinning partnership with Targovishte in Bulgaria, decided to mark the occasion of the twinning ceremony in October with a conference on twinning and on EU enlargement. As well as 43 representatives of Targovishte, the conference was attended by 27 people from the town's French twinning partner, Joué-lès-Tours.

But how did two cities so distant from each other decide to twin? 'It all comes from the links one of the companies in Santa Maria da Feira built with Targovishte', explains Maria Rosário, from the twinning committee of Santa Maria da Feira. 'Subearus, a medium-sized company specialising in the production of cork for bottle stoppers, established relationships with Targovishte wine producers. As a consequence of their decision, a few years ago, to create a joint venture with partners from Targovishte in the field of bottling, the mayor of the Bulgarian city wrote to try set up even closer cooperation. The twinning ceremonies firstly took place in Bulgaria, in May 2002, then here, in Santa Maria da Feira. As for the future, we have already planned a youth exchange in July 2003 and we are also preparing a business trip to Targovishte'.

The well-planned programme, with active contribution of different local players, provided the Bulgarian delegation with profound knowledge on local administration (finances, public services), local business, local culture and traditions in their new twin town, which constitutes a solid starting point for this new twinning.

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