

European Lions Clubs bring electricity to Ukrainian schools

March 30, 2023 – More than 2,200 power generators of between 3 and 9 KW have been delivered to Ukraine since last December through a special international fund-raising project worth over €1.5 million. The last convoy is due to arrive in Kyiv today. The vast majority of the generators have been set aside for schools, kindergartens and orphanages all over the country to allow them to cope as fast as possible with the frequent blackouts caused by Russia's constant bombings, which have paralyzed on and off much of the country's electrical infrastructure.

This unique humanitarian project has involved more than 1,200 out of the 5,676 **Lions Clubs** that operate in the following 13 European countries (*in alphabetical order*) : Belgium, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Iceland, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Sweden, Switzerland and Ukraine.

The generators are providing electricity for light and heat for the babies, the school children and their nurses and teachers. They are also used to keep refrigerators and kitchen stoves running and to recharge computers, tablets and smartphones. They are mostly portable generators, powered with gasoline or diesel oil, so they can be moved to other locations when needed. A few other generators are being used for temporary shelters occupied by victims of the destruction, including school children.

More than half of the generators have already been delivered since the project began in October, and most of them have been installed, but the conclusion of the operation has been complicated by several factors. The delivery of the last batch of generators, which has been delayed by a shortage of components from Asia and by some last-minute administrative issues, is now set to be completed next week. A last convoy of five trailer trucks is set to arrive in Kyiv shortly from a Turkish factory, **Guçbir Generator**, for immediate distribution to the country's schools and other institutions (*we can give you the exact date of arrival at the warehouse upon request*).

Incidentally, Guçbir has also sent around 1,600 generators to the Turkish areas destroyed by a devastating earthquake on February 6. Lions Clubs are participating in a separate disaster relief project in that part of the world.

This unique European power generator project for Ukrainian children has been launched and led since October 2022 by **Björn Hägerstrand** (photo attached), a 56-year-old veteran of the Lions Clubs based in the Åland Islands, an autonomous and demilitarized Swedish-speaking region of Finland. The distribution of the power generators in Ukraine has been led by **Valentin Kravchenko**, a leading member of a Ukrainian Lions Club in Kyiv and a 20-year veteran of the Lions movement.

The Lions who have been managing the generator project have insisted on making it 100% transparent. Throughout the process, **Daniel Isenrich**, a former International Director of **Lions International** and accountant for the Lions' **Europa Forum**, has been reviewing all transactions to ensure maximum traceability of the donations and the purchases.

About Lions International

Lions International (formerly Lions Clubs International, or LCI) is the largest service club organization in the world. About 1.4 million members in over 48,000 clubs are serving in more than 200 countries and geographic areas around the globe. Since 1917, Lions have strengthened local communities through hands-on service and humanitarian projects, and they extend their service impact through the generous support of the Lions Clubs International Foundation (LCIF). Together, in addition to disaster relief efforts, they are focused on supporting vision, the environment, childhood cancer, hunger, diabetes and other pressing humanitarian needs to help address some of the biggest challenges facing humanity. For more information about Lions International, visit www.lionsclubs.org.

I join some pictures. You can ask me or Valentin Kravchenko (lion.valentin@gmail.com) to share some photos, most of which show donations of generators to Ukrainian schools by Lions Clubs in various countries. After reading the rest of this press release, you can ask me any questions and I shall do my best to answer them. I can also help arrange interviews and video shootings for you with Valentin and other interested parties.

Some video clips should become available soon.

You can find more background information about the development of the project here below.

Regards

Eugenio Di Maria, international spokesman for the project, based in France – E-mail: eugeniodimaria1@gmail.com – Mobile phone: +33 609 12 16 05

<https://www.linkedin.com/in/eugenio-di-maria-66119b15/?originalSubdomain=fr>

How the European small generator project developed

The history of the European generator project for Ukrainian schools is interesting in itself. Before hitting many hurdles, it started last October in the Åland Islands, an autonomous and demilitarized Swedish-speaking region of Finland. **Björn Hägerstrand** (photo attached), a 56-year-old Past District Governor and a member of the Lions Club Åland Culinaria, proposed to raise funds locally to help Ukrainian citizens to cope with Russia's bombing of the local electrical infrastructure. After a few days, he saw on a Facebook post by Kent Benediktsson that his Swedish club, LC Reng Höllviken, had collected funds for generators being sent to Ukraine. Eventually, Kent became the project coordinator for all of Sweden.

Björn Hägerstrand, a dynamic person with 30 years of experience in international trade, discussed the idea of a joint project with other Lions in other Nordic countries, as he is the Lions Clubs' coordinator for the Nordic region. They agreed in principle to target schools and kindergartens after discussing the project with **Valentin Kravchenko**, a leading member of the Ukrainian Lions Clubs based in Kyiv and a 20-year veteran of the Lions International movement.

The program was finally launched on a voluntary basis under Björn's leadership in early November under the title "Winter is coming to Ukraine." Other countries joined the project after it was debated during the annual Lions Europa Forum, which took place at the end of October 2022 in Zagreb.

A total of 18 generators donated by Estonian Lions Clubs and about 40 generators donated by Swedish and Norwegian Lions Clubs were delivered to Ukraine before Christmas.

In general, Lions Clubs have collected the funds to buy the generators donated to Ukrainian schools – without engaging in any big marketing campaigns – on top of many other smaller individual, regional and national actions that they have already undertaken or planned to support the victims of Russia's invasion of the country.

For example, Swedish Lions are planning to donate seeds and food to Ukraine by the springtime. Many Lions Clubs all over Europe have collected and are still collecting funds, warm clothing, food, candles, water purification pills and medication for Ukraine on an individual, regional or national basis, while continuing to serve for other causes. For example, German Lions have been collaborating with Czech, Slovakian, Polish and Romanian Lions to help the people in the Ukraine and Ukrainian refugees in Europe.

While there have been a few individual big and small donors for this purpose, including a famous theater in Munich, most of the funds had already been raised by the participating Lions Clubs for other local, national or international humanitarian causes through charity events such as concerts, conferences, lotteries or the sale of Christmas trees or pancakes. Most Lions Club members are not rich, but they all have a big heart.

In most cases, the funds were redirected from other causes for this urgent relief mission. On the other hand, some clubs didn't hesitate to organize new events and solicit new donations specifically for this project. For example, members of a Finnish club collected €700 in only two hours from the public in a shopping mall, asking for the donations by holding funding boxes in their hands.

Some Lions Clubs in Belgium, Finland and Poland donated a few large generators to power hospitals and other large institutions, even before the execution of a similar joint program decided by member governments of the European Union. More donations of this kind are in the pipeline.

Working largely on the logistic side, Lions Clubs in Poland were involved in 66 other humanitarian actions worth more than \$1 million in Ukraine during the 2021/22 Lions year alone, and many others since then. They have been mostly financed with grants provided by the **Lions Clubs International Foundation (LCIF)**, but also with funds coming from Denmark, Switzerland, Germany, Sweden and Japan.

The LCIF has been particularly active in Ukraine, including the provision of food and shelters for Ukrainian refugees. You can check here a video about this service action conducted by the LCIF, changing the language for the subtitles in the Parameters slot on the bottom right of the frame: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m26i8SqjLwE&t=53s>

To ensure that the generators would be dispatched to the right locations, the project team has been working for most of the deliveries with 12 Ukrainian Lions Clubs. The effort has been coordinated by Valentin Kravchenko because of his good connections with local educational officers and authorities, as he is in charge of the Lions Quest program in Ukraine. It's a program under which Lions work with local schools to organize special workshops intended to build up good citizens. Ukraine's Lions Clubs have been working with up to 200 schools annually for each of the past seven years under this program.

With the harsh Ukrainian winter approaching and Russian rockets continuing to pound Ukrainian cities, interest about the project spread fast within the international Lions community, creating an overwhelming snowball effect. Much higher funds than expected kept pouring in. However, Björn Hägerstrand was faced with a big problem: The whole European market was practically cleaned out of generators, due primarily to the war in Ukraine. On top of that, many European households had started buying generators for their own homes, fearing a shortage of gas or electricity due to geopolitical tensions.

The prices charged by the factories escalated, especially in Ukraine, but also in Germany and elsewhere, and Björn Hägerstrand was eager to close the project by the end of 2022 to meet a deadline set by the EU to exempt NGOs from paying VAT on goods and services used for aid to Ukraine. He politely refused offers of cooperation made by Lions Clubs as far away as Hong Kong, Malaysia and the Philippines, but he agreed to push forward the final fund-raising deadline for the European project to January 31 to give him and his team time to find a solution.

Finally, Björn and his collaborators located a big manufacturer in Turkey, Guçbir Generator,- which agreed to charge a reasonable price for the generators. Furthermore, Turkey doesn't charge VAT for such humanitarian causes. Björn then ordered 1,080 units from its two factories in the Istanbul area. He also allowed the French and Belgian Lions Clubs to join the project in mid-December, and he boosted the order to 1,355 units after getting additional support from them and from other clubs in other countries. Additional donations from Finland, the Netherlands and Switzerland allowed Björn to raise the total number of generators ordered from Turkey to 1,817.

Lions Clubs in Finland, Sweden, Iceland, Denmark, Estonia, Poland and Germany were the first to get financially involved in the project, with logistical help from Lions Clubs in Poland and in Ukraine. With other countries offering their help, Björn Hägerstrand told the European project team on Nov. 16: "It is so amazing when you work together. The energy just multiplies when others are joining in and all want to help as the Lions' DNA is loaded." Lions Clubs in Norway, the Netherlands, Switzerland, France and Belgium joined gradually the initial group, in some cases without asking permission from their national or regional hierarchy.

Many of the actions carried out by Lions Clubs go unnoticed by the media, but this particular Ukrainian aid project deserves to be publicized because of its size and because it has turned out to be their first major solidarity project on a European scale. It built up gradually and spontaneously from the bottom up across national borders.

Officially, the project has come to a close, but the participants are considering a possible extension.

Meanwhile, immediately reacting to the disastrous earthquake that hit Turkey and Syria on February 6, the Lions Clubs International Foundation (LCIF) launched during the same week a big new humanitarian relief project in the area, starting with an initial \$200,000 grant to the Lions Clubs of Turkey. The grant is intended to help create a "Lions Village" for the survivors in the province of Hatay and to participate in the immediate and longterm clean-up, repair and reconstruction efforts. Swedish Lions have sent over 300 tents for this project. The LCIF has asked Lions Clubs and their members all over the world to make additional donations to help cope with the damage caused by the earthquake.

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