

Conference of European Rabbis Presents Tech and Innovation Prizes in Malta



Maltese Minister for the Economy, Silvio Schembri speaking at the conference.

Last week, Rabbanim, entrepreneurs and business leaders gathered in Malta for a double day of the CER Prize for Tech and Innovation award ceremony.

Since the pandemic has prevented travel and gatherings the prizes for 2020 and 2021 were both awarded this year, with the prize winners from each event attending the three-day event. Participants arrived on Monday afternoon and were housed in a four of Malta's capital Valletta, and the twin cities of Rabat and Mdina, with a focus on the 2000-year Jewish history of the islands. Although the community in Malta numbers only around 1,000 people, there are many strong Jewish connections from the past, including street and place names, an old Jewish cemetery purchased by Sir Moses Montefiore and a new synagogue and community center consecrated in 2000. There are plans for a new kosher restaurant to serve the growing Jewish community and observant visitors.

The event was hosted by the Conference of European Rabbis (CER), the Malta Investment Management Company Ltd. (MIMCCL) and the government of Malta's Ministry for the Economy, European Funds and Lands. Malta has a strong economy with particular interest in tourism and the various aspects of the tech industry, hence the offer to host the prize giving ceremony. On Tuesday, Hon. Silvio Schembri M.P., Minister for the Economy, European Funds and Lands, was the keynote speaker at a day conference showcasing what Malta's economy has to offer, both for investors and business startups.

Mr. Schembri told the rabbis that although the United Kingdom is no longer part of the EU, Malta (a former colony) has always considered the United Kingdom to be their ally, regardless of its EU status. He has visited London recently, to promote Malta to a wider audience, and said that it is very open to continued trade and economic activity with the United Kingdom. He explained that Malta, as a small archipelago in the Mediterranean, is adversely affected by climate change, but has not contributed very much to global emissions. The country is working hard to build a more energy efficient infrastructure and produce more green energy.

Speaking about the event, Mr. Schembri said, Malta has 2,000 years of Jewish history, and the government through MIMCCL was delighted to write the next chapter of that history with the Conference of European Rabbis by hosting the CER Prize award ceremony here. Whether for tourism, business, or investment, we invite the Jewish community, including our friends from Israel, to consider Malta as your next destination. We will welcome you with open arms.

The conference proceedings served as a tremendous warm up to the awards ceremony of the CER Prize, at the spectacular Westin Dragonsara Hotel. The Prize is designed to support tech start-ups that innovate in ways that improve the world, rather than benefit solely their creators. The prize was sponsored by technology investor and science philanthropist Juri Milner and his wife Julia, with the first prize winners receiving 20,000 euros, and the second and third prize winners receiving 8,000 euros each, to invest in their businesses. These figures were chosen, as Chief Rabbi Pinchas Goldschmidt explained, because we should bring Chedut into the world and save lives, and the technologies being celebrated by the CER Prize do just that.

This year's winners in Malta were:

- 1) For 2020 Verónica Celis Vergara, founder of EnlightAID (Norway)
- 2) For 2021 Nina Patrick, founder of memido (Germany)

EnlightAID is a financial technology that shows when, where, and on what donations are spent, in real-time, boosting transparency in the charitable sector.

memido is a technology that uses testing cards and an app to translate results into science-backed advice on hydration, nutrition, immunity, liver, and kidney health.



Chief Rabbi Pinchas Goldschmidt opening the gala award ceremony.

In an exciting development, while the conference was still underway, Israel's Ministry of Foreign Affairs announced its backing for the CER Prize, saying that it would be inviting the winners for both 2020 and 2021 to Israel for five days each, for meetings with the country's renowned technology sector. The programme will include tours, meetings at start-up and technology companies, visits to innovation incubators and conversations with the officials on the subject at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The prize winners were delighted with this additional gift.

This offer has the potential to further boost Maltese-Israeli ties, as, on hearing the news of the Israeli offer, Maltese officials said that they would look to reschedule a Maltese trade delegation to Israel, postponed due to COVID, to coincide with the visit of the prize winners.

Following the conclusion of the event, Chief Rabbi Pinchas Goldschmidt, President of the Conference of European Rabbis, said, "Our religion has always survived, and so often thrived, because it has faith in the future. The CER Prize for Tech and Innovation is our way of celebrating the best in technology where it is a force for good. Malta, with its fascinating history, and forward-looking, tech driven economy, made an ideal location to present it. I congratulate the winners and look forward to an ongoing partnership with the government of Malta."