



# *Tolling to get its just desserts?*

**Thinking Highways, LUCY CONE reports from the ASECAP Days in Krakow, Poland...**

A warm welcome awaited ASECAP members, associate members, guests and local representatives in Poland's "cultural capital", Krakow. What better location for the ASECAP Study and Information Days than a World Heritage Site that boasts the highest density of pubs and bars! Not only was the weather stunning and the venue for the Gala Dinner, Krakow Castle, spectacular, but the ASECAP had taken care of every small detail in order to make the congress not only an informative exchange of information, but also an enjoyable social event.

By hosting the Days in Poland, ASECAP extended a hand to its newest member, Autostrada Wielkopolska S.A., a body that represents the interests of the three main Polish Concessionaires (Gdansk Transport Company, Stalexport Autostrada Malopolska and Autostrada Wielkopolska).

Polish speakers and guests, including the Minister of Infrastructure, Cezary Grabarczyk and Autostrada Wielkopolska president, Andrzej Palatas, provided a unique insight into the latest developments and challenges in the Polish tolling industry.

The agenda of the Congress was in tune with the current climate for the tolling industry in Europe, focusing on how ASECAP members and associate members were dealing with the economic crisis and the repercussions of a new, greener transport policy. Issues up for debate included the role of concessionaires with regard to the old and new Eurovignette, the deployment of ITS, interoperability of national charging schemes, the future for concessionaires and the challenges of road safety for ASECAP members.

With obvious relevance, the last session of the Congress provided a revealing account of transport sector developments in Central and Eastern Europe. Key speakers included Lech Witecki, General Director for National Roads and Motorways in Poland, Edgar Thielmann, a representative of the European Commission, Robert Keitlinski of the European Investment Bank and Kallistratos Dionelis, ASECAP Secretary General.

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Outgoing ASECAP President Fabrizio Palenzona took the opportunity to officially pass the torch to José-Luis Feito, president of ASETA, who received the unanimous vote of ASECAP members for the period 2009-2011.

The hand-over was formally (and traditionally in keeping with the setting) confirmed by Palenzona ‘knighting’ the new President with a ceremonial sword at the Gala Dinner.

Highlights of the dinner included sword fights between knights in armour, pyromaniacs on stilts and the strangest dessert I have ever experienced - a baked cinnamon apple filled with coffee cream, complemented by a dash of caramel sauce, a ball of rum and raisin ice cream, a selection of red fruits including approximately two-thirds of a grape, a drizzle of chocolate sauce and garnished with a stick of chocolate protruding from the apple...and all that on one plate. Delicious but quite bizarre.

The spectacular Gala Dinner was typical of the superbly organised ASECAP Days and was definitely one not to be missed.

All in all, with the help of Polish member associations, ASECAP succeeded in organising a relevant, informative and fascinating congress that by all accounts lived up to the high standards set by last year’s event in Marrakech. Let’s hope Oslo can do the same next year – as long as it goes a bit easier on the pudding. **TH**

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