

Baltic Sea Secretariat for Youth Affairs

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Report on the “Tolerance Trip” with youth from Sweden, Estonia, Latvia, Denmark, Russia and Germany into the German-Danish border region and for a visit to Ladelund (former NS- Concentration Camp) memorial site, August 29. to 31., 2007

First Day, 29.08.2007

The participants arrived to Kolding, Denmark at about 13.00. They were picked up at the train station by the team of “Tolerance Trip”: Carsten from Ungdomsskolen in Kolding and Helge from the Baltic Sea Secretariat for Youth Affairs in Kiel.

The first activity of the day was a visit of the Town hall of Kolding. We, as the participants of the trip, were greeted in name of the City Government of Kolding and got an introduction into the matter of the whole event. The national flags of all the participating countries stood in the room and the young guests had a chance to leave a message in the Guest Book.

After that our whole team went to the Youth School in Kolding. We had lunch and a break in order to drink coffee or tea and get to know each other. After this short break the program was continued by the trainers Patricia and Christian from Germany. The contents of this first learning impulse activated the knowledge of the group about minorities and included information to the minorities at the Danish-German border region. After an introduction, which included a prejudices barometer exercise, we split up into the groups of 4 people. The working groups received different tasks. The first challenge was to pronounce the names of the group members in a way they should be pronounced. The second exercise was aimed at the activation of knowledge of minority related topics. We tried to find a definition of “a minority”, told our colleagues from the group about the minorities in our countries and their claims. The learning impulse on the situation in the border region followed. We got to know the main facts about the history of the region, aspects of life of the German minority in Denmark and the Danish minority in Germany in past and present. As this region is an example of peaceful and tolerant way of solving minority problems today, we studied the structure of the minorities and their main institutions. The working groups prepared short reports about school system, political activities, press and media in the Danish minority. Every participant received a book dealing with minority question issued by the European Centre for Minority Issues. I found it really useful, that the work was done in smaller groups and every person had a chance to speak to the topic and to tell about his or her own experiences with the minority issues.

After the workshop the participants left for their accommodation in Skelde – the House of the German minority in Denmark, which is situated in a beautiful landscape on the seaside. The guests were welcomed with a typical German dinner.

The evening program was made up of the ice-breaking games and a moonlight walk at the seaside. During the games we got to know each other by interactive introductions, learning the names, guessing hobbies of everybody, trying to find out true and wrong facts about each other as well as playing active games outside. I found the evening program very funny and

joyful, as the learning methods were easy and creative. The best of the activities for me was a hobby guessing, because we didn't know each other and tried to find a correspondent hobby for everybody judging the person according to the clothing, age, hair colour and different many things which supposed to give us a "key". I think that through these games we learnt, that the outfit and that what we see is not always the point and that only the real interaction with a person can bring us the understanding of s/he.

Second Day, 30.08.2007

The first event of the day was a visit of the concentration camp Ladelund at the border region, which is a memorial and encounter center today. Ladelund was one of the satellite camps of the Neungamme concentration camp that existed from November to December 1944. Ms. Karin Penno-Burmeister, the director of the memorial center, led through the exhibition and gave a deep insight into the times of Nazism terror and how people did cope with their guilt afterwards. We visited the place where the concentration camp was situated, the graves of the victims and the exhibition in the memorial center. She explained the history of the concentrations camps and told the particular story of Ladelund as well as the post-war development and background of the memorial. The most touching facts were the private stories, destinies of concrete people. We felt like we saw that people, like we could feel their sadness and happiness, their grief and hope. After a long and challenging excursion we received the texts with the main facts on Ladelund, which needed to be completed with the help of the information from the exhibition. A concluding reflective discussion was covering the themes of tolerance and memory. In this discussion we reflected our opinions, as well as the new experiences, that we took with us home. We talked about how to remember the past and forgive the evil and mistakes of the past times in order to create the better and peaceful future. I think that some of us changed their mind on the matter of discussion and all of us had a possibility to realize the importance of interaction, discussion and transparency and access to the information, which built the new understanding of the old problems.

Then we left for Flensburg. Flensburg, one of the biggest cities in Schleswig-Holstein with a population over 90 000 people, is a former Danish city and the center of the Danish minority in Germany. It is situated directly on the seaside, has a perfect harbor and over hundred years was a matter of argue between Germany and Denmark. Firstly our team visited the head of the Danish minority in the Danish House of Flensburg. Mr. Jens E. Christiansen informed us about the present state of the Danish minority, the financial aspects, the history and Copenhagen-Bonn-Treaty as well as co-operation with the other minorities in Germany and other countries. A special attention was paid to the cultural issues, education and the preservation of the "Danish way of life" in Germany. I think, that the most important thing we've learnt is, that a peaceful life in the border region is possible, when the both sides are interested in this and co-operate in order to make it come true. In my opinion, the easiest way to tolerate is be open and ready to communicate and that was shown in the speech of Mr. Christiansen.

Next we visited a Danish school, where one of the students made an excursion and talked about the history and presence of his school. The system of Danish education in Schleswig-Holstein includes 49 schools and 57 kindergartens, but that school is the only gymnasium in Germany where the main language of instruction is Danish (and of course German). The pupils benefit from an education that is officially accepted in Germany and Denmark. The school consists of two huge buildings, and there are over 1000 pupils at this gymnasium who come from all the regions of South Schleswig, the territory of inhabitation of the Danish minority in Germany. One of the most exciting facts was that the young people at this school are multilingual and are all speaking fluently Danish and German, as well as the foreign languages that are taught there.

After that we had free time in Flensburg. Some of the participants were sightseeing, the other were sitting in cafés or looking for souvenirs to bring back home. The weather was fine and offered a various possibilities to relax and think over the day.

As we were back in the House of German minority in Denmark, the evaluation of the day took place. At evening there was barbeque outside and an intercultural party. The participants from each country presented songs from their home countries. The text was written on huge posters that it was possible to sing all together. For example, I presented a traditional Russian birthday play and song and it made me very happy, that the other participants enjoyed playing and singing this game. I'm sure, that the participants from the other countries found it also exciting to present a part of their native culture and to join this culture with the others. That was a great evening! Some of the group could not find an end, were sitting outside, enjoying the night, chatting and making friends.

Third Day, 31.08.2007

The last morning of the trip was rainy and cold. After cleaning the house and packing the lunch, the participants left for Sønderborg. On the way they made a stop at the Memorial of the Danish-German War 1864. That was a dramatic time full of cruel battles, the Germans and the Danes were fighting against each other, and the Germans finally won. The battlefield still is a reminder about these not very peaceful times.

In another war, the last one among Danes and Germans, the Second World War, the Germans were defeated. The German-Danish history demonstrates that - although both nations have fought against each other for a long time and have suffered much - it is possible to make a change and start to live with each other in peace and concession. The results of the visits and learning impulses were discussed during the last workshop session in one of the schools of Sønderborg.

The first workshop was devoted to the evaluation of the prejudices. The results of the prejudices barometer from Wednesday were collected on one flip-chart. Some of the prejudices were expected; some of them surprised the participants. But the most interesting was a discussion to the topic: (Why) do we need prejudices? Are stereotypes of any use at all?

I thought that the prejudices are spoiling the communication and that we should try to leave them away. But during the discussion I understood, that we need them in a very special way, because they help us to define ourselves and to create our picture of the world. At the same time it is extremely important to keep in mind, that the prejudices are not the true facts, that they are not allowed to influence our communication with the other people and that we should always try to stay open and not paying attention on our prejudices.

As a kind of feedback we had the possibility to exchange our opinions about the trip and express our opinions interactively by recording it with a video camera. The workshop continued with a discussion on the minority issues. We thought over the possibilities of using the German-Danish minority model in their national issues. Such a good example gave a hope that minority issues do not necessarily have to cause conflicts, but could also result in understanding and co-operation. Each of the participants tried to work out the strategies which s/he can use when we are back at home in order to prevent the conflicts and involve minorities in the society.

The Tolerance Trip left nobody untouched - it's got something to do with us. All of us from six different nations (Russians, Latvians, Estonians, Danes, Germans and Swedish people) were really highly involved in all discussions and workshops. We touched upon the very sensitive questions and we recognized, that minority problems are complex and include social, economical and a, political dimension. We must respect the differences and find the compromise through our involvement and eagerness to create tolerant, peaceful and happy Europe. We all are different – we are all equal. Aiti-Marin Eisenschmidt, Estonia; Jan-Fredrik Wahlin, Sweden; Antra Bermaka, Latvia; Daria Gritsenko, Russia