



# **WARSAW DIARY ...**

**21 – 25 EKIM 2013**

This is a compilation of the daily accounts of the participants of the study visit which was organised to Poland between 21 and 25 October 2013 in the scope of Generation Democracy Project.

## **21 October 2013, Monday**

*"Dear Diary,*

*Today is 21 October 2013 Monday. In the morning, the first question in our mind was about what to eat. Thank God we did not starve and found something to eat.*

*At 09:00 Ms Olena Styslavaska came to the hotel and she went through the five-day Programme with us. Then together we walked to the Ministry of National Education. You know, when we walk we have a greater opportunity to observe the surroundings.*

*There are many similarities between our education systems. We got a lot of information about the topics we were curious about through the answers we received. After lunch we went to the Centre for Education Development. Ms Marlena Falkowska, who made a presentation in the afternoon, answered our questions quite sincerely. The Programme ended at 17:00.*

*What remains on my mind after the first day:*

- 1. Gaseous-mineral-sparkling water is common.*
- 2. You do not hear a "beep" in traffic.*
- 3. There are many parks and green areas, which are quite big.*

*Mustafa ABRA*

## **21 October 2013, Monday**

*On our first day in Poland, Ms Olena Styslavaska met us in the hotel lobby and introduced the weekly programme of the study visit. It provided us clear guidance about the content and detailed plan of the week. Then we walked to the Ministry of National Education, which was really appreciated by the group because it was our first time in Poland and we were very curious about the surroundings..*

*The fact that the Ministry building was so plain and there were no guards was really surprising. It was not crowded and it was pretty well-organised. A group of people welcomed us warmly and then the Ministry officials gave general information about the Polish education system. In all presentations, speakers were all teachers, which stroke me the most.*

*In Poland, children start attending a preparatory class called the "Zero Class" at the age of 5. They remain in primary education until 12. Then they take a central examination to enrol in a secondary school, but this is not a selection or placement test, it aims at defining the level of the students. At the age of 16, they have to take another central examination in order to continue with their high school education. In this case the score they get from this test and their average score in lower secondary school define the high school they could attend with a ratio of 50% each. There are three types of high schools: those who want to attend the university follow a general high school; there are basic vocational high schools for those who want to learn a craft/ profession; and those who would like to become a technician but at the same time continue with university education can go to vocational technical high schools.*

*In Poland, the Ministry defines a core curriculum. Schools and teachers adapt this core curriculum according to their own specific needs. Similarly, texts books are selected by the teachers and students have to buy these books at their own expense. We asked a lot of questions and we had to change to get very detailed answers*

*In the remaining part of the presentation, they told us about the education reform which started in 1998/1999 in Poland. The most striking point here is that in the beginning of 2000s, Poland was quite below the OECD countries in the PISA Study, while it ranked rather above this level in 2009. Authorities believe that both the reform and the increase of students' interest played a role, as well as the growing amount of information sources. They do not merely boast by saying "This is the result of the reform." They are quite critical and honest about the deficiency of the reform. They acted very quickly during the reform process and they did not compromise. As a result, level of attendance to high school and university has gone up.*

*In the second presentation they provided general information about citizenship and democracy education. In this field, the ministry defined the core curriculum on 1 September 2009 and defined the target for schools. In Poland citizenship and democracy education starts in pre-school. At this stage they learn the national symbols and that everybody has equal rights. But the main course is taught in lower secondary school one hour a week for two years. In high school, it is again taught as a compulsory course for one year. If the student wants to be responsible for this field in his/her final examination then s/he takes the optional course 3 hours a week for 2 years. Lower secondary students learn the meaning of citizenship, nation, minority and hegemony, and how democratic participation should be, while high school students are taught the meaning of democracy, human rights and laws. High school students also learn how human rights are protected in different countries and they take part in a number of projects.*

*In another presentation we were informed about the inspection system. It was explained to us that inspection system has comprised of "control, evaluation, and support" since 2009.*

*In the afternoon, we visited the "Teacher Training Centre". It was again a very neat and organised place. Although there were many people working, there was little noise, almost none. The head of the centre provided general information. They answered all our questions about the situation of teachers and schools in Poland without showing a sign of boredom and they helped us understand the situation. They were very attentive and well-prepared. They talked about 4 stages/steps in a teacher's career. Graduates of universities can directly apply to schools for teaching posts. According to what the Head said, there is no strategy or special attention to have a balance between the needs of schools and number of people studying to become a teacher at the university. They consider this as a flaw because sometimes due to lack of students, some schools are forced to close down. On the other hand, if the number of graduates is higher than the need of the market for teachers, then there is unemployment.*

*They also talked about how teachers are supported by in-service training services and some nice examples were given and that was the end of the day.*

*H. Cansu Uyan*

**24 October 2013, Thursday**



Lena, a trainer of the Project, started today's session by a reflection round about what we did yesterday. She answered our questions about the potential situations we might encounter during EDC/HRE training seminars. She guided us to work in 4 groups in the first session.

Our task was to assume that we were invisible and visited a school. In that school, we would be expected to observe and list democratic approaches that we can detect in the management, teaching and education, and communication spheres of the daily routine. We put these observations down on flip-chart papers and we made group presentations.

The best part of the group work was the brainstorming session we had. After every group presented their group work, Lena asked us to put stickers next to the most important ideas/items on the papers. Each of us were given three stickers and we were allowed to use them either for different items, or if we wanted to focus on one crucial item we had the chance to use three stickers at once for the same point.

Following this activity, in the next one, the Johari Window technique was used and we were asked to consider the time from the beginning of the Project and to answer the following questions: 1) Things that I know and others also know, 2) Things that I know, but others don't know, 3) Things that others know, but I don't know, 4) Things that neither I nor others know...

This intensive work lasted until lunch time and in the afternoon, which was spared as free-time for the group, we explored every inch of Warsaw streets...

Gonca Önal

**24 October 2013, Thursday**

What remained on my mind...

- It is difficult to work with a group. Even if the group members have worked together before and even if they already have an existing level of preparedness, there is always a concern about whether the group work could be accomplished successfully.
- Is it a democratic approach to tell the students their rights and then to have the teacher make the final decision? Should democracy be understood as mere freedom? Here the important thing is to show students the way and to ensure freedom once they have a level of maturity.
- Democratic methods should protect minority rights. That is why we have human rights.
- There are some irreplaceable basic values of democracy and in each activity at school these basic values including justice, freedom, equality, tolerance, respect, human dignity, and solidarity should be emphasised.
- We looked for answers "What should be the elements of an ideal school?" and "Which principles of democracy can be observed in what type of school activities?" and we had a group work on this issue.

Bilal Yaman

## **24 October 2013, Thursday**

*"Dear Diary,*

*There is a primary school right across the street from our Hotel. The students are so quiet and calm that we hardly recognised that it was a school.*

*08.40 – We went to the Citizenship Education Centre from the hotel. Ms Olena welcomed us with her smiling face and friendly attitude as usual. Like yesterday, she asked us to express ourselves (how we felt inside) by one word. Among the responses were: "excited", "cute", "don't know", "sleepy", "calm", "happy", ...*

*Then we had some group work and individual work based on the example of "Democratic School".*



*Chat over tea/coffee was extremely useful. It was raining outside."*

*"Everything is in your hands"*

*Mustafa Abra*

## **25 October 2013, Friday**

*"Dear Diary,*

*Today we will split into two and visit different schools. We will have the chance to sit in a class and observe the environment.*

*08.15 We arrived at the school by bus. The school is the equivalent of a normal high school in our country. The school principal took us around and told us about their activities. Last year it was the 20th anniversary of the school. Therefore, there were film stripes on in the hall. Memories of the past 20 years ran along the wall...*

*09.05 We observed a Democracy and Human Rights course. The topic was "Reforms and Revolution". It started with the video of Martin Luther King's "I Have A Dream" speech and then it focused on legalising illegitimate and homosexual relationships, which is a contemporary controversial issue in Poland. Students were divided into groups and discussed what could be achieved by means of; a) a revolutionary approach, b) reforms, c) doing nothing. After the lesson we had the chance to have a short conversation with the students with the help of our interpreter. We left the school around 10.40.*



*What took my attention?*

- *Students were very well-behaved and calm during the breaks.*
- *Cushions and pillows were placed in front of the Windows. (students asked for these cushions and pillows as they liked sitting in front of the Windows during their breaks)*
- *Students could ask questions to us in English and they could also answer our questions in English. It made me think why we cannot learn how to speak English. Not only students but also an average person in Warsaw can speak English.*

*At lunch time, we had our Friday prayer in Mevlana Cultural Association. After the prayer we tasted some offerings special for Fridays. We had the chance to meet Muslims from different countries. Then we returned to our hotel, met the rest of the group and then Ms Olena took us for a stroll in a magnificent park. At the end of the day we had some time for ourselves and everyone went shopping.*

*Will it be possible for me to come to Warsaw? Who knows....*

*Mustafa Abra*