



# Mardin Diary

April 2014

## Mardin

On 8th April, our project team including Ms Sarah Keating, Head of Unit for Regional and Bilateral Co-operation - South East Europe Education Department DG II - Directorate of Democratic Citizenship and Participation, Council of Europe, and Ms Isabel Cristovam-Bellman from the same department, Seda Arican, Project Officer, and Arzu Burcu Tuner Dedeoğlu, Linguistic Assistant visited two pilot schools in Mardin. In both schools, they were welcomed very warmly and were impressed by the results of the project activities implemented in schools so far. In Selahaddin Eyyübi Primary and Lower-Secondary, president of the school parliament made a presentation to the delegation. In her presentation, she summarised how they implemented democratic school activities, with a specific focus on the "Democracy Desk". School counselling teacher also provided information about the outcomes of each specific activity and their methodology.

In Mardin Technical and Industrial Vocational High School, project team

met the school parliament members. Students proudly presented the accomplishments they have had since the project started. Their belief in the sustainability of the democracy culture was promising. Almost all classroom representatives underlined that they have built a culture in which they feel comfortable and can find solutions to their common problems. This process seems to have empowered students and built their self-confidence, equipping them with necessary skills to negotiate and to solve problems, which is one of the main aims of the elective course on "Democracy and Human Rights", as well as the activities carried out under the scope of democratic school culture.

Now let us explain what we did in Mardin so that you know more about what our schools are doing...



### Selahaddin Eyyübi Primary and Lower-Secondary School

Our first stop was Selahaddin Eyyübi Primary and Lower Secondary School. We were really pleased to see and feel the excitement of the students who took part in democratic school culture activities.

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### Mardin Industrial and Technical Vocational High School

In the afternoon, we were in Mardin Industrial and Technical Vocational High School. Students from the school parliament said that they no longer see their wishes as dreams.

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# Through the teachers' eyes...

## 9:30- 10.00 Meeting with the school principal

When we arrived at the school, we were welcomed by Mithat Tanış, the school principal. He informed us about the school in general and the activities they implemented.

## 10:00 10:30- Meeting with teachers

Then, Mr Tanış took us to the teachers' room and introduced us to the teachers, so we had the chance to have a nice chat with teachers. Ms Sarah Keating, who was quite pleased to meet the teachers in person, thanked them for their contribution to establishing a democratic school culture in the school and she underlined that democracy does not come by birth and each person has to learn and develop this concept in time. She also inquired how the teachers felt and what they thought about the activities.

We have their comments already printed in our minds and we would like to share them with you.



- ✿ We are happy that students are involved in the Project and take responsibility.
- ✿ When they were dealing with "Discovering the issues around me" activity, they spot the issues around and their awareness on environmental problems increased to a great extent.
- ✿ At the end of this activity, a photography exhibition was organised and the provincial directors who were also invited, felt responsible for the environmental problems illustrated.

- ✿ Students' education within the family is as important as their education at school.
- ✿ Economical and even psychological problems of families also reflect on the children and in some cases the atmosphere at home conflicts with what the students experience at school.

*"Families are vital in establishing a culture of democracy. There should be more activities targeting families."*

# Classrooms whispered in our ears ...

## 10: 30-11:00 Classroom visits

Mr Tanış's eyes do not hide the love he feels for his school. It is so obvious that he is proud of each one of his students. He wants to invite us to the classrooms, without disturbing the lesson, but at the same time maintaining the enthusiasm and excitement of the students about having guests in the house...

We walk along the corridors and peek into classrooms.

First we are in an 8th grade chemistry class but our questions are more about the school in general. Students say that they are happy at school and they are involved in various

activities with the support of their teachers and school management.

Next, we are in an 8th grade art lesson. The teacher shows us the work of many talented students. If there were more time, one would like to see each and every piece of work, and even sit down with the students and start painting....

Mr Tanış shows one of the classes as a good example. "It used to be a class with low academic achievement and a lot of internal conflicts" he says, "but thanks to the understanding of democratic governance and cooperation between the school management and teachers, students' grades also increased."





## Democracy Desk

Counselling teacher Tarık Abdi Altınöz and the students on duty told us how the desk functions.



Mithat Tanış, the school principal of Selahaddin Eyyübi Primary and Lower-Secondary (Middle) School, counselling teacher Tarık Abdi Altınöz, and Yener Özmen, monitoring expert Abdurrahman Ekinci, and Sarah Keating, Isabel Cristovam-Bellmann, Seda Arican, and Arzu Burcu Tuner Dedeoğlu from the Council of Europe, and of course students.



## Presentation of Democratic School Culture Activities

President of the school parliament, Necmiye Aydin, and the counselling teacher made a presentation about Democratic School Culture activities.

### LESSONS LEARNED FROM PRACTICE



When Democracy Desk was first established, class representatives would visit classes one by one and collected all kinds of complaints and requests from their class mates. After these were analysed at the Desk, sufficient feedback was given to those who made the request and/or complaint.



In the second term, however, they decided to put a box on the desk and the complaints and requests became completely anonymous, which made it possible for the students to express a wider range of issues, but on the other hand it reduced the possibility of providing feedback considerably.

## When it comes to Democratic School Culture

### 11.00- 11.30 Presentation on the activities carried out in the scope of Generation Democracy Project

Three activities that were selected by our pilot school were; Democracy desk, Discovering the issues around me, and School advisory commission. The president of the school parliament Necmiye Aydin stated that the awareness level of her friends increased notably especially when dealing with "Exploring Problems Around Me". She further added that the photography exhibition also made it more fun to run the activity. The president of the school parliament also said that they will continue with "Shaping My Future" and "Thematic Meetings with Parents".



We also asked Kuban Ulutaş, who is one of the classroom representatives and at the same time is the person who made a presentation in our workshop in Antalya, how he felt about all the activities he was involved in.

He said "I would never think that I could be a part of such a big Project although I am so young". Maybe this is the summary of what we have been trying to explain; these kids with great ideas and good intentions do not have to wait to grow old in order to influence their surroundings.

In Antalya, we also had the chance to meet Kuban's father Hakan Kuban Ulutaş. Mr Ulutaş said that Kuban's self-esteem has increased since he started to take part in these activities. He also added that it was the first time that he was involved in school activities to such an extent and it was really beneficial to him as well.



#### 11.45- Meeting with the School Principal

Representatives of the Council of Europe met Hüseyin Ataç, Mardin Technical and Industrial Vocational High School, Muhiddin Daş, teacher of Democracy and Human Rights elective course, and other school managers and were informed about the school and the activities carried out in the scope of the project.

It was stated that parents' interest in the Project is not as much as it should be, but the members of the school parliament are actively involved in school related work.

## School parliament talks...

#### 13.45- 14.45- Meeting with the school parliament

There was a nice atmosphere with the school parliament and the President. Erkan Ercan, one of the members, made a presentation on the activities they carry out to establish a democratic school culture. Following his presentation, he gave some examples of issues they were able to solve.

“Our school yard is already small, and people used to park their cars in the yard leaving no space for us. First we discussed it among us and then we met the relevant authorities and asked them to turn the empty land next to our school into a car park. Now the school yard is really ours, we can use it the way we want.”



“We experienced the suffering of Syrian people around us. We organised a campaign to help them and sent 35 packages of materials in total.”

The most striking sentence of Erkan's speech was “Now we know that our wishes are not dreams” and the other students also made similar statements and explained that with the support of the school management, they realised that their ideas are not mere dreams and they could contribute to school life by putting their ideas to practise. It is clear that their solid accomplishments boost up their enthusiasm and determination.



# Important message from students

Despite all the positive developments, we were still a bit concerned and asked the students about what they thought concerning the sustainability of all these activities and the results they have achieved. The brightness of their eyes and the excitement in their voice inspired us as well. They replied "Now we have an environment in which we can find solutions to our problems, we have a democracy culture. Why should we lose it?"

The achievements of the school parliament, whose problem solving skills seem to improve in each visit, strengthened the hope we are determined not to lose. As long as there is this self-confidence and determination in their face it is clear that these young people will have the strength to overcome the challenges on their way.



## CLASSROOMS AND WORKSHOPS



Before we left, we walked around the school and visited the classrooms as well as the workshops together with Hüseyin Ataç, the school principal. During our visit, we had a nice conversation about the importance of vocational education.



## Souvenir photo with the school parliament

Of course we did not forget to take a souvenir photo with the members of the school parliament.

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Generation Democracy

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