

Seventh Estonian History Competition

Newly independent Estonia 2005/06

Report

The history research competition for pupils was organised by the Estonian History Teachers' Association for the 7th year. The concept of this competition originates from the Körber Foundation in Hamburg that also gave its financial support to this event. The patron of the competition is the President of the Republic of Estonia.

The Estonian History Teachers' Association has elected two coordinators and the organizing commission to carry out the competition.

The competition was announced on September 1st 2005. The concept of the topic was proposed during a round table discussion with the organizers and the supporters of the contest. The topic was supported and precisely phrased by history teachers during the Estonian History Teachers' Association's summer conference held in Jäneda County in August 2005. Subsequently, in September, an informative brochure consisting of requirements for those participating reached all Estonian schools. Information concerning the competition is available on the Estonian History Teachers' Association's website, which also provides guiding materials on how to write a research paper. The same requirements were also used by the jury at assessing the research papers. On October 25 there was an informative meeting with 81 pupils and teachers participating held in Tartu. During this get-together, historians, museum and archive workers, experienced research instructors, and history teachers all gave their advice, and talked about their experience in doing research.

Thus, 97 research papers from 118 pupils were received this year, twelve of which were presented as group work. There were 52 teachers instructing the papers, and the papers came from 36 schools. One of the research papers was received with delay (being posted on April 1st), and according to the requirements for the competition, the jury decided not to accept this paper. The authors of 41 research papers were written by basic school pupils, 56 papers were written by secondary school learners. All in all, during the 7 years of competitions, there have been 955 participants represented by 713 research papers.

All the papers presented for the seven contests are available to be read at the Estonian Literary Museum.

The research papers were assessed by a jury. They are all working as scientists either at Tartu University, either at museums. The head of the jury is professor Eero Mediainen.

The award ceremony was held in Tartu on May 13 2006 in the hall of the Ministry of Education and Science.

What stood out in reading and assessing this year's papers? First, it must be admitted that this year's topic was more complicated than that of the previous years`. Some professional historians believe that their work begins

only after a certain amount of time has passed since a historical event or a process has taken place, be it five, ten, fifteen or even more years. Yet, this year's topic obliged you to primarily deal with the last fifteen years. This task demanded skill and ingenuity from you as well as your tutors. Let us admit that this time it was more difficult to decide how to verbalise and approach your thesis. This also complicated the work of the jury. This year we showed quite a lot of good will to acknowledge many of the papers as being in accordance with the topic. There are plenty of examples where a big part of the paper's volume concerned the Soviet era or even an older period.

However, there were many fascinating findings on how to entwine 'historical' material into the topic of 're-independent Estonia'. On the other hand, mere use of interesting sources was not enough for a paper to receive a high mark, since in many cases the result steered too far from the general topic of the competition. A number of papers would have gained a higher mark if they had worked harder on creating a structure more suited to the topic, or emphasised the thesis, and brought in a moment of historical comparison.

Sometimes the sources used began to work against the author's ambitions. In some cases the jury could notice simple gluing together of different sources. In a number of papers a whole paragraph consisted of an interview or reminiscences in first person singular. However, the actions and basic rules of historians assume that all sources need a critical assessment and analysis.

Regardless of the critical remarks presented here, all the authors of the papers that reached us did extremely well. Our learners have proved their will and urge to be serious researchers. They can think and work independently and critically. This is to be considered the biggest and most important outcome of the whole event.

Already for the second year our President Mr. Arnold Rüütel and Mrs. Ingrid Rüütel have asked the winners of the competition, the tutors and the coordinators to a reception to the Palace of Kadriorg . This year it took place on June 13 2006.

Tiiu Ojala
Viivi Rohtla
Coordinators of the Estonian History Competition