

Fourth Estonian History Competition

“Transitions in 20th Century Estonia”

2003/2004

Report

The topic of the fifth round of the Estonian History Competition was declared on September 1, 2003: “Transitions in 20th Century Estonia”. A booklet with terms of participation was sent to all schools in Estonia. Moreover the homepage of the Association of Estonian History Teachers offered additional information about the contest and supplementary material for writing a research paper. These requirements formed the basis for the jury’s evaluation of the papers. In addition to this more than hundred students and their tutors were counselled in Tartu on 29 October 2003 by Mrs. Ingrid Rüütel – wife of the Estonian president -, historians, people working in museums and archives and by experienced tutors.

125 students (60 basic school students, 65 secondary school students) from 37 schools participated in the competition. They handed in 97 research papers. The research papers are available at 17 Karu St., Tallinn in the room of the Association of Estonian History Teachers.

The award ceremony was held in Tartu on May 15th 2004 in the ministry of education and science. Mr. Arnold Rüütel, the President of the Republic of Estonia and patron of the competition, participated in the ceremony together with his wife, Mrs. Ingrid Rüütel, and the Minister of Education and Science of the Republic of Estonia, Mr. Toivo Maimets. All participants, their tutors, the headmasters of the schools who participated in the contest and the parents of those students who received monetary prizes were invited. Those students who won the first to third prize gave a short presentation of their research papers. These participants were awarded with monetary prizes. More than 50 students and supervisors won book prizes. Every participant and supervisor received a letter of thanks of the Estonian President. The Cultural Foundation of the President of the Republic funded the monetary rewards, the Ministry of Education and Science paid for the book prices. With the help of the President’s Cultural Foundation it was also possible to publish the awarded papers of the third and fourth contests. This collection of abstracts was published on May 15th 2004.

Moreover Mr. Rüütel invited the winners, tutors and coordinators of the Fifth Estonian History Competition to his residence on June 17th 2004; together they discussed which topic should be chosen for the next competition round.

The jury of the fifth history competition stayed the same as in previous years: PhD Mr. Eero Medijainen (headmaster of the jury, Tartu University, faculty of history), B.Sc.(history) Ms Anu Raudsepp (Tartu University), Ms Anu Järs (Estonian National Museum) and B.Sc. Mr. Heiki Pärdi (Tartu Art Museum). The most important criteria for the jury’s evaluation was the innovative character of the research papers, for example a new way of presenting old explanations. The jury underlined the importance of a tutor’s supervision in order to avoid a non professional presentation of the material and to train working skills. Moreover a tutor was needed to choose a good research topic as the topic of the competition as a whole left much freedom to the students. The introductions of the research papers should reveal to which degree a tutor supervised the student’s work.

Most contributions focussed on the life of one person, a family story or the history of one’s native place. Students, who wrote that kind of papers stressed in their summaries that with the help of this work they have acquired new knowledge about this person, their family or their native place and thus feel more connected with this heritage. In addition to the experience of

compiling a research paper they also realized the continuity of times and the communal ties of themselves.

But this kind of papers has also its weak points. Often they are too descriptive, the material compiled lacks generalizations and conclusions. The jury stressed pedagogical value of this kind of papers, but stated that it is difficult to compete for the highest prizes with such a research topic.

Other research topics of this year competition were for example: first names given in 20th century, monetary reform in Estonia, three generations and their sources of information, childhood in 20th century, dresses for graduation ceremonies, slang throughout the changing times, the story of the Estonian flag etc. Especially those works were of a high quality, that included material basing on well-compiled questionnaires.

Unfortunately the research papers of Russian students did not get prizes because in most cases they were written in an emotional style and thus did not reach a scientific standard. Their papers speak about their connection with their national community and their wish to find bridges to the Estonian one. Many of these papers described the cultural life of the Russian community and analysed social politics in Estonia.

All in all the jury underlined that the quality of the papers has risen in the course of the last 5 years.

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