

## **The first EUSTORY-history competition in Finland Finns against Finns – traces of 1918 in our memories Report**

The first round of the EUSTORY history competition was organised in Finland during academic year 2008-2009. Practical arrangements were taken care of by the Association for Teachers of History and Social Studies and the competition was financed by The Finnish Cultural Foundation and The Swedish Cultural Foundation.

### **Topic**

The topic in the first EUSTORY competition was *Finns against Finns – traces of 1918 in our memories*. There were many reasons for choosing this particular topic: in 2008 exactly 90 years had passed since one of the cruellest civil wars in Europe. Only one person who had actually fought in the war was still alive in spring 2008 (by the time the first competition round ended even he had passed away). Still, memories of the war are still very much alive in the Finnish society. Since the war there have been at least two different versions of the truth and often the “right” version has been passed on to the next generation. People even call the war with different names – civil war, uprising, liberation war and so on – depending on whose side they take. Today understanding of the year 1918 has become more versatile and multidimensional, at least in the academic circles but still the Finnish civil war and all the cruelty attached to it seems to be “a difficult truth” to many Finns, as one member of the final Jury, professor Pertti Haapala, put it.

### **Competition arrangements**

The first EUSTORY competition was open to upper secondary school students and it was possible to participate either in Finnish, Swedish or English.

The first EUSTORY competition in Finland was announced in July 2008 with the inauguration of the competition website. Unfortunately, teachers were on their summer vacation at the time and getting the message through to them proved quite a challenge. Competition posters and information leaflets were posted to schools right at the beginning of the school year in August. The project worker responsible for the competition arrangements also travelled to six different cities in Finland to tell teachers about the competition. Our goal was to make it as easy as possible for teacher to get information.

Unfortunately, information on the EUSTORY competition reached the upper secondary school history teachers too late and the actual competition time was too tight: students had to send in their contributions at the beginning of December. This meant that with the matriculation exams over in September/October, they had only a couple of months to work on their EUSTORY contributions.

Because of the too tight schedule the number of participants remained low: only 12 students handed in 9 contributions. Participants had chosen quite different approaches to the topic: in the winning contribution a talented female student looked into memorizing the year 1918 in her own family by interviewing and going through her grandfather’s memories. Two students, whose contribution came second in the competition, examined civil war monuments in Vaasa (a town in Finland) and asked their fellow students about their perceptions of the year 1918. Third in the competition came a contribution in which the student explored the partition of local sports clubs into “red and white” after the civil war. One student also looked into the traces of 1918 in literature. A positive thing in the first competition round was that the participants came from across the country.

On the grounds of preliminary evaluation six contributions were sent to the final jury and all these six contributions (nine students) were awarded in a ceremony on January the 30<sup>th</sup>. The Finnish member of The Board of Patrons President Martti Ahtisaari also joined the award ceremony, which made the event even more festive. The Association for Teachers of History and Social Studies is quite content with the media coverage on the competition and the award ceremony. Positive publicity should make it easier to attract more participants next year.

### **Plans for the future**

The biggest challenge concerning the future of the EUSTORY history competition is to make it attractive for history teachers by integrating the competition in the Finnish educational system. Fortunately, the feedback on the competition has been rather positive: history teachers appear to think that the EUSTORY history competition provides one way of teaching not just historical knowledge but also skills and that's why it supports the aims set for history teaching in the national curriculum.

The Association for Teachers of History and Social Studies has already started to work on the next competition round: information, posters and a publication with tips for teachers will be sent to schools as early as in April 2009. In this way we make sure that teachers can take the competition into consideration when they are planning their work for the next school year. The last day for competition entries is scheduled for March 2010. In addition to upper secondary school students, also pupils in the upper level of comprehensive school will be able to participate in the competition. Longer time in planning and carrying out the competition as well as enlarged target group should lead to a notable rise in participation numbers.