

## LATVIAN HISTORY COMPETITION

2006/2007

### MAN AND FREEDOM

Regaining national independence

In 2006/2007 the Latvian EUSTORY competition took place for the sixth time. This year's competition topic was "Man and freedom. Regaining national independence". The decision for this theme was based on several factors. Firstly, Latvia was celebrating the anniversary of its historical independence. Apart from that, academic historians more and more undertake research of the second half of the twentieth Century. The third factor was the fact that students haven't experienced themselves the years when Latvia regained its national independence but can ask their parents, grandparents and teachers about their memories. Another reason for choosing this topic was the aim to find and evaluate authentic material from the end of eighties and beginning of nineties that is hitherto unknown. This especially concerns the countryside from where many people came to Riga to join the independence movement. Last but not least the competition should stimulate the students' curiosity to find out more about those movements that changed Europe at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, thus to discover the European dimension in Latvian history and to stimulate the integration processes in Latvia.

Participants:

Age	Girls	Boys	Total
11 - 14	46	22	68
15 - 16	38	18	56
17 - 19	45	18	63
Total	129	58	187

The Latvian History Teachers Association (LVSA) received 112 research papers for the competition round 2006/2007. Like every year the LVSA noticed that the quality of research works is constantly increasing. Tutors are more and more competent concerning contest requirements and methodology of historical research and thus their ability to supervise students who take part in the competition is growing.

Another positive development is the fact that the organizers receive works from students with Latvian nationality and students with other nationalities. They perceive this as a proof that students in Latvia in general are interested in the political development of their country back then and now.

A challenge for the competition organizers in Latvia is the fact that by far more girls than boys take part in the history competition; this proportion can be also seen among the finalists and winners. The organizers are convinced that the reasons for that are to be found in psychology or stereotypes but not in the concept of the history competition.

Concerning the age of the participants, the organizers notice that the most active in research work and investigations of resources are students at the age from 11 to 14. Their interest in history is comparably high as at this age children just start their study journey into the past. The second group which is well represented in the competition is the age group between 17 and 19. These students are developing interest in "real" historical research on local history.

The increasing quality of research works can be seen in different aspects. One is the selection of topics that the students decided to work on. Most of them chose concrete themes connected to local history which give the possibility for serious research. Another favourite aspect of the topic was the role of arts in a changing society, for example the influence of rock music in regaining national independence. Another aspect of quality of the students' works are the preambles and the scientific quality. Students clearly defined the aim of their research, described the methods they applied and analyzed the sources they used. Third thing what is considered by students as important is willingness of inhabitants from cities or villages share sources about their part in historical process. We have received a wide research of local history. Unfortunately in the selection of resources the main are written or oral sources (interviews). The visual resources, mainly photos are used for illustration not for analysis.

We have got an interesting feedback and conclusions from the young researchers. Almost everyone stresses that it is a good chance to study history and especially local history. They also mention that it is important to follow historical events in which their parents took part. This year theme gave chance to research not only the Latvian history using local history sources, but also gave a chance to make history very individual. The contest brought a surprise. We discovered that a lot of parents in families do not talk with their children about historical events. Usually it is because of the political reasons like it was in the USSR or when the people have been involved in events that they see very negative today. It was weird that there were some adults that didn't want to share their memories with children because today the political events are in opposite of their hopes back then. Young researchers and historians understand that there can be such standpoint. Same time such standpoint amazed reporter that wrote about this theme and our contest, it also amazed the guests of the final ceremony.

The research works of this year competition "People and the freedom. Time of regaining of national independence" was filed in collection of Latvian Popular Front museum and it means that the research works of students are highly evaluated by the Museum.