

Third Latvian History Competition

“Everyday life in Latvia in the 20th Century” 2003/2004

Report

The topic of the 3rd competition round was “Everyday life in Latvia in the 20th Century”. It was announced in September 2003; the final award ceremony took place on May 15th, 2004.

The two previous competition rounds made clear that an attractive topic is the best possibility to raise the quantity of participants as well as the quality of contributions constantly. The topic of the 3rd Latvian History Competition seemed to be a good choice for several reasons.

Our pupils were born in the end of the 20th Century; the oldest of them started school in the beginning of the 90s. That means that the last century is history for them as they do not have any personal memories of this period of time. The history competition confronted these students with questions, which are so obvious and ordinary for the older generations of our society but completely unknown and unusual for the younger ones.

Issues and problems of the 20th century are very popular in today's Latvian society. Many events and processes that happened in this time still influence everyday life of the citizens and often cause controversial discussions.

Moreover from a didactic point of view it can be said that the history of everyday life is still neglected in Latvia's school curricula as well as in textbooks - although the teaching experience shows that students find this topic very interesting.

Last but not least this topic offers great possibilities for the use of oral history because every person from the students' surroundings can share his or her memory from the past with the young historians.

The number of participants shows that this topic was interesting for both, teachers and students. Only some contributions dealt with political issues and were thus disparate to our topic. The students' contributions give evidence that the history of everyday life is something new and interesting for the students. They want to understand social aspects of their own and their parents' life, they want to see and understand the changes and reasons of these changes.

318 (mostly female) students handed in their individual competition works. Most participants were about 17 – 19 years old. This might be explained by the fact that in most Latvian secondary schools and gymnasiums research works are compulsory. The competition offers these students the possibility to connect their historical interest with the official curricula and to improve their research skills.

The members of the jury agreed that the quality of the competition works is constantly improving and that the students' creativity in presenting the results of their research is growing. For example a web site cinemas and their history in Ventspils and a photo exhibition about the history of fashion were created.

The jury members criticized the tutors' work in the group of 11–14 year old students. This problem has been ever since the competition started. It seems that the tutors lack

motivation to thoroughly check the research work and give advises. In many cases the teachers did not notice the inadequate choice of resources, their insufficient incorporation into the student's text or the lack of footnotes.

Another problem is the missing attention of the media towards the history competition. Once again we find that TV and radio stations and the newspapers don't consider this big contest to be of any importance. The first round formed an example because the president of Latvia, Vaira Vike-Freiberga, took part in the award ceremony. Because of this prominent visitor some newspapers and radio stations published some news about the contest.

As always an exhibition of the research works took place in the war museum, where the award ceremony took place so that every visitor could see the results of the competition.

This year we entered into a cooperation with the state archive that will integrate this year's research works into its funds. Our aim is to continue this cooperation also in the next year's contest.

The coordinators of the competition