

First Serbian History Competition

“Remembering childhood”

2003/2004

Report

MEETING THE PAST – this is the official name of the EUSTORY History Competition in Serbia. At the beginning of October 2003 its first round was announced by the Association for Social History-EUROCLIO. The topic of this competition round was “**Remembering childhood**”. High school students from all over the country were invited to research recent local history, focusing especially on various aspects of children’s life in the past. The organizers prepared a special methodological guideline for tutors and students that explained general requirements and rules of the competition and also offered a detailed description of the topic and historical research method. This guideline was published and sent to each high school in Serbia in October 2003.

We also conducted three teacher training seminars “A guide through historical research” in the months of November and December 2003 and of April 2004. 78 history teachers participated in these seminars, mostly those who already got interested in the competition and started to work with pupils.

The deadline for participants to submit their papers was April 2nd 2004. By that time, we received 120 contributions. Although it was stressed out that group work was not allowed, there were three papers written and signed by two students each. The organizers decided to accept these contributions as well. In total 123 students participated in the competition: 90 girls and 33 boys. They came from 64 different schools and 36 different towns. The majority of the contributions came from the northern part of Serbia, a province called Vojvodina – 53 (44,2%), but also from Belgrade, the capital town – 27 (22,5%).

The evaluation of research papers lasted about 6 weeks, from the middle of April till the end of May. The papers were analysed and evaluated in two eliminatory stages on the basis of preset criteria. The winners were chosen during the third, final jury meeting, after plenary discussion and by consent of all jury members. The Nominated Jury consisted of 10 historians: five high school teachers and five scientists. They all agreed that the topic was interesting, but too wide and too serious. For the students it was especially difficult to isolate an issue of interest and to focus on it and not to get lost in the forest of so challenging questions. It was also not easy to find relevant sources and to deal with them in a critical way. According to the jury's opinion good tutors could obviously help students to cope with these difficulties.

The most frequent topics were:

- toys and children's games and, in connection to this, various ways of spending free time in the past
- education in the past
- childhood in the war time, especially during the Second World War.

The students mostly tried to reconstruct the past and to describe the living conditions of children, instead of, for example, explaining the reasons for such living conditions or enlightening what influenced these conditions etc.

The award ceremony took place in Belgrade, on 19th of July 2004. Our host was a small Belgrade's theatre that is now settled in one of the oldest high schools of Belgrade. Participants were greeted by the representative of the Ministry of Education and Sport and Gabriele Woidelko from the Körber Foundation.

Lidija Pejcinovic, student from the 13th Belgrade's High School, won the first prize. She wrote about education and pupils in Belgrade during WW II. We had two second awarded papers and three third awarded papers. Four papers among the awarded ones were about school, students and education in the past. Fourteen students were commended. All participants were awarded with a certificate that confirms their participation. The first twenty students won book prizes and apart from these awards, those who won the 1st, 2nd and 3rd prize won also a small amount of money and a chance to join the EUSTORY

Summer Academy and Young Adults' Academy. The best papers will also be published. Tutors were awarded with a certificate and a book prize. After the award ceremony we had a sightseeing tour around Belgrade by boat.

All in all we are satisfied with the first competition round. We succeeded in organizing this competition; we had much more entries than we expected; there was a great number of very good works; we managed to motivate the teachers to guide their students. After this experience we now do believe, that this competition has a future in our country. Thus we will organize another "Meeting the past" in the next school year. In the future we should try harder in order to gain media and public attention. We will also try to increase the number of participants and the quality of their works.

Jelena Popovic

Organizer of the Competition