

Declaration of the German-Cypriot Youth Exchange Programme

Cyprus/Germany, 25.09.2008

The German-Cypriot Youth Exchange Programme was established in 2007 by the Socialist Youth Movement of Germany The Falcons (SJD Die Falken).

The aim of the programme is to bring young people from Cyprus and Germany together within the framework of tri-communal projects to facilitate dialogue and trust between the two communities in Cyprus in particular and between Cypriot and German youth in general through travel, workshops and social activities. We want to strengthen the ties between the German and Cypriot partner organisations and create friendships between the participants. At the same time, the project aims to be a contribution to the development of the civil society understanding in the European Union.

Activities in 2007 and 2008

The purpose of the programme is to have an exchange every year; taking place either in Germany or in Cyprus alternately. The first exchange programme took place in Cyprus (25.10.2007 - 05.11.2007) with 9 participants from Germany. The second joint seminar took place in Germany (04.08.-14.08. 2008) and was organised together with IKME and BILBAN; the core Cypriot partners. The project is supported by different NGOs/Foundations, including Friedrich Ebert Foundation.

This year's programme included workshops on the Nazi Regime, current issues in today's Germany such as immigration and xenophobia, problems of the German education system, recent political developments regarding the Cyprus conflict and the role of nationalism in the emergence of the conflict.

The group also did sightseeing tours, visited the German Parliament (Bundestag), the ruins of the Berlin Wall, the Holocaust Monument and the former Nazi concentration camp Bergen-Belsen. The group met the German-Cypriot Forum, Friedrich Ebert Foundation and Gerd Andres in Berlin, a member of the German parliament from the Social Democratic Party (SPD). The group also met the assistant mayor of Hannover from the Christian Democratic Party (CDU), Dr. Mönning, and the German War Graves Commission in Hannover.

Conclusions and Demands

We support the negotiation process that has started on 3rd of September between the leaders of the two communities and demand a federal settlement to

the Cyprus conflict. The elements of bicommunality and bizonality are essential for a solution to be achieved under current circumstances.

The unified Cyprus we desire should disassociate with ethnic and cultural sectarianism and help to (re-)build, create and strengthen the common ties and structures of both communities. The federation should actively support rapprochement via sufficient programmes, adequate funding and functional mechanisms. Unifying institutions and organisations at all levels of the Cypriot society (social, political and economical levels) that include members of both communities are essential.

In our opinion it is of utmost importance to incorporate bilingualism into the education system of the both communities. The (public) educational system has to be restructured and especially it is essential to revise the history textbooks used at schools. This can happen via a school book commission. Further more, there is a need to revive common villages, encourage village partnerships, bring people together geographically after a political agreement is reached. We also condemn any permanently separatist ideals and ideas of domination of one community by the other.

Our vision for the future is simple: we desire progressive people in key positions in the new unified Cyprus.

We would recommend a Truth and Reconciliation commissions like in South Africa and Latin America which were established not only to bring the war criminals in front of courts at least for confessions but also to promote trust within these countries by facing the history. This is essential to give dignity back to the people and victims of violent actions in the history.

Though at different scales, both Germany and Cyprus had devastating experiences with nationalism (fascism) in their past. Sharing common problems and solutions for Cyprus and Germany can be helpful. For example, it is useful to compare and contrast the societal divisions caused by the aftermath of the Second World War until 1989/90 (for Germany) and the civil war 1963-1974 that ended in a de facto partition (for Cyprus).

Regarding the issue of missing persons and those who lost their lives during the conflict years, a humanitarian approach should be developed that disassociate politics from humanistic issues and that is devoid of the nationalist rhetoric and propaganda. Politicians should not abuse the issue of the dead and the missing for their political ends. In this respect, the War Graves Commission which is an organization that takes care of German war memorials worldwide on behalf of the German government can be a good example for Cyprus.

We support the ideal of a non-exclusive common Cypriot Identity, independent from ethnic backgrounds, creed and religion that anybody may have and based on the constitutional citizenship of the new federal republic. The redefined Cypriot identity should be taken out of the monolithic understanding and based on humane and civil values to avoid that it becomes just another new nationalism. Lastly, we underline our vision that EU should not only come together as economies and political elites, but also as civil societies, because the future of a society-driven EU lies on the common momentum of its people, as a basis.

Future activities

Our aim is to establish the German-Cypriot Youth Exchange Programme as a long-term project by continuing the exchange of youth (one year in Cyprus, next year in Germany and so on). We want to propagate the results to as much wider audience as possible.

The organization process of the coming project that will take place in Cyprus next year has already started.

We emphasize the openness of our programme and its independence from political parties and we do not want to exclude people because of such perceived biases. The core partners of the programme, the Socialist Youth Movement of Germany The Falcons and the Cypriot IKME and BILBAN, will decide on a possible widening of the project to more organisations and possibly other regions as well.

Finally, we opt and support long term and sustainable actions for the future of a solution of the Cyprus problem. The actions of our group are only a small contribution to this process and others are needed. We are interested to keep people alert to the lurking of nationalistic tendencies, as indifference and tolerance towards such tendencies pave the way to destruction.