

**Article by Ödül Aşık Ülker from Turkish Cypriot newspaper Yenidüzen, published 17.08.2010**

**translated by Emrah Günen**

The Fourth step of the German-Cypriot Youth Exchange Project has been realised. Both, Turkish Cypriot and Greek Cypriot Youth desire a bi-communal, bi-zonal and politically equal federal United Republic of Cyprus which has a single citizenship and single international identity.

**“The Cypriots should believe to deserve a better future”**

**Günen: “At the end of the project, both community participators met at the common point bi-communal, bi-zonal, politically equal federal United Republic of Cyprus which has single citizenship and single international identity.”**

**Tringides: “It’s obvious that there is a pessimistic incline on the youth of both sides regarding the results of these negotiations - especially after the accession of Mr. Eroglu’s to the power, considering his anti-reunification background, however one can argue about that. But, if you stick and work on optimism, then optimal results will happen.”**

The Fourth step of the German-Cypriot Youth Exchange Project, which has been initialised by the Hannover branch of the German Socialist Youth Movement (SJD – Die Falken) in 2007, occurred between 16 July – 28 July in Germany.

It was a tri-communal project in which Turkish Cypriot, Greek Cypriot and German youth have participated. At the end of the project, both community participators met at the common point bi-communal, bi-zonal, politically equal federation of United Cyprus Republic which has single citizenship and single international identity.

Emrah Gunen and Orestis Tringides told their impressions to Ödül Aşık Ülker of Yenidüzen newspaper.

**What is the German-Cypriot Youth Exchange Project?**

**Günen:** It is a tri-communal project, which has been initialised by the Hannover branch of the German Socialist Youth Movement Hannover (SJD – Die Falken) in 2007. Turkish Cypriot, Greek Cypriot and German youth have participated in this project. IKME foundation participates on behalf of Greek Cypriots and BILBAN represents Turkish Cypriots in project. The aim of the project is to bring young people from Germany and Cyprus together and provide solidarity and mutual trust through workshops, group travels and other social activities. In other words helping them to understand each other in tri-communal frame.



Besides, another goal of the project is to contribute to the civil society movements in European Union. The project is funded by Friedrich-Ebert Foundation, Gedenken und Frieden Foundation – Volksbund Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge Foundation.

The creator and the main coordinator of the project is Coşkun Tözen who is a Turkish Cypriot and still a academician in Leibniz University of Hanover. Every delegation has also a coordinator. The project takes place regularly every year; one year in Cyprus one year in Germany and so on.

**“It was one of my most enjoyable and most efficient project that I have ever participated in.”**

**Seminars had been conducted in both sides of Cyprus in last years. How many times did you participated?**

**Günen:** This time was the fourth exchange of the project. It took place 6 days in Hannover and 6 days in Berlin. It was my first time in project. I had attended many times in similar projects before. To be honest, It was one of my most enjoyable and most efficient projects that I have ever participated in. In my opinion, one of the reason of this was tri-communality of the project. Germans have relative similar historical experience with us. It helped us to create common ground in order to understand each other. Meanwhile, because of German participators’ strong academical background in social sciences kept workshops quality high. Also well preparation of the both Cypriot delegations brought productivity to the project.



**Tringides:** I already have participated in previous seminars of the project. I agree with Emrah. I must say from all the bicomunal / multicomunal seminars that I had attended, in this group I feel that we make the best of our time in producing workshops, in cooperating and bonding as a team, within a democratic socialist framework. And having great fun too!

**“It is impossible to consider the division of Germany and Cyprus independently from international dynamics.”**

**You had discussions about division of Germany and Cyprus. What are the similarities and differences in these cases?**

**Günen:** As you know, Germany was divided between 1961-1989 as east and west. After

Berlin Wall Fall in 9th November 1989, Germany has reunified and began to governed with federalism. It's for sure unlike Cyprus that the reason of division of Germany was ideological. East had been governed by socialist system and capitalism was the dominant system in west. If we look at the Cyprus problem, main reason of division is helenic nationalism which came out in colonial period with demand of independence and contra Turkish nationalism against helenic nationalism. We should also consider international dynamics in both issues. France, USA and England on West Germany; Soviet Union on East Germany had great influence. For Cyprus, besides of the three guarantors, policies of World's most powerful states like USA, EU, Russia are determining the future. Another common point in both issue is othering policies against each other by using education and media.

### **Mass graves....**

We can find some other similarities before division of Germany. We had chance to visit mass graves which have been done by Nazis. Mass grave issue is still on the agenda of Cyprus at the moment. We saw different types of mass graves. One of them is a Jewish mass grave to which hundreds of people buried without respect to their identity and religion. The other one is a captive Soviet soldiers' grave. They supposed that all of the soldiers were orthodox and they put orthodox symbols to each grave. If we consider these examples, we shouldn't do same mistakes in order to transform existent sensitive relationship to trustful and respectful relationship. Furthermore, some pieces of the Berlin Wall have been protected in order to fix remembrance culture up in communities minds. So after the reunification of the island, we should also do something for fixing up remembrance culture to prevent re-division.



### **Integration of immigrants....**

Another similarity issue is integration of immigrants. After the division of Germany, Federal Germany (west) invited workers from various countries of Europe and consider them only with economical motivation. It caused an integration problem between immigrants and Germans which still goes on. Both side of Cyprus have similar problem. As our German friends mentioned in some workshops in project, if we can't draw humanitarian plans in this issue, most probably we will have more complex problems in the future like Germany.

Although re-unification of Germany was an expected result after Glasnost and Perestroika, the social movements and mass demonstrations in east had a so crucial role

in reunification.

### **“The Cypriots should believe to deserve a better future”**

**Tringides:** Indeed we had discussions and experiential visits about the division of Germany and Cyprus, from different perspectives. In both cases (CY and Germany), the change comes from the people, from the civil society, from organized concerned citizens that believe they deserve a better future. In both cases (divided Cyprus and divided Germany) there were strong institutions and forces that would prohibit reunification.



Based on the above, in Cyprus I notice the sense of hopelessness and disbelief in both sides, that we don't really hold our future in our hands, and that our fate depends on the “stronger masters” e.g. in Turkey, EU, NATO or whatever. As it was done in Germany, in Cyprus as well the people should first believe that they deserve something better and they can achieve the unification themselves, and also that the Cypriots are those primary responsible for their future, prosperity and well-being.

### **“People should prepare themselves to reunited Cyprus”**

Yes, in the divided Germany things were very tough: it seemed that the external forces would never allow a reunification. Same now in Cyprus. The difference is, in Germany, albeit the circumstances, the civil society was doing preparations for the prospect of reunification: spreading the idea, building institutions, giving the hope. Not so much drastic measures (they couldn't), but they prepared the people. And then, they just waited until an opportunity arrived, in that case, a crack into the hard policies of the Eastern-bloc. And the German people were able to harness that opportunity to the maximum and achieve the inconceivable: Reunification. But this would not be possible unless the people were ready. And in Cyprus, we need to work much, much more to prepare the people for the prospect of a reunified Cyprus. Otherwise, it will not be done, and if it will be done “artificially” (by a staged foreign plan), it has great risks to fail if the people are not prepared. And it's their responsibility to prepare themselves.

### **What will be done in the future in this project?**

**Günen:** In coming days, in the light of our discussions in workshops, a declaration will be published about Cyprus conflict and recent developments about this issue. Also the 5th step of project will take place in Cyprus next year. We are starting the preparations from now on. I hope it takes place in reunified Cyprus.

### **What do the young people desire?**

**Cyprus has new negotiation period since October 2008. What did you discuss in seminars about new negotiation period? What are the ideas and expectations of Turkish and Greek Cypriot youths about negotiations?**



**Günen:** We emphasized more to find an ideal solution to Cyprus conflict instead of the contemporary negotiation period. As a result, Republic of United Cyprus which is bi-communal, bi-zonal, politically equal and has single citizenship and single international identity came out as a most desirable solution. We meet at this point through discussion of every single concept in this result. For instance, we had discussions about power sharing in order to reach political equality and sustainable solution, cross voting, representative rates in parliament, demilitarization of the island, duty of the federal police forces, ownership of crucial resources like water and electricity must belong to constitutive states or central state etc.. We also had discussions about how should we help to both community to accept federalism as a way of life. Our German friends have presented pragmatic suggestions to us about this topic.



**Tringides:** As Emrah told before, we did not go so much in depth about the procedural and semantic aspects of the new negotiations. We do though actively support any process and initiative that will result in a unified Cyprus - including these Talks. The politicians, Mr Eroglu and Mr Christofias, or whoever has a “main role” in the negotiation process, will only aim to achieve what the basis of the democracy, the people, demand from them. If the Cypriots build up their will and awareness for a solution and then voice it loudly to their elected leaders, then the leaders must follow (and not the other way around). The future fate of this island is the cumulative result of the actions and in-actions of all its inhabitants.

**“After the accession of Mr. Eroglu to power, youth of both sides turned pessimistic about negotiations.”**

Generally, it’s obvious that there is a pessimistic incline on the youth of both sides regarding the results of these negotiations - especially after the accession of Mr. Eroglu to power, considering his anti-reunification background, however one can argue about that. But, I would say that in our seminars we made it omnipresent that if you stick and work on optimism, then optimal results will happen. If you stick to pessimism and just sit and do nothing and mourn about your bad fate, then how can you expect anything good to happen? Nothing good comes from that. Youth should stand up in their level of their responsibility as future holders of this country.

**What do young German observers think about the negotiation period and the future of Cyprus?**

**Günen:** They got positive opinions when they saw how intensive participation we have.

But they have concluded that we have some mutual understanding problems. In order to create mutual trust, we should improve our discussion culture and express our opinions without our feelings, they said. Furthermore they are thinking that our mission for the future of both community, should be to spread the peace culture and will of living together. In this point, education is the most crucial element in order to create mutual understanding and rehabilitate both communities. They believe that only through education we can learn our common history, our languages and get views beyond the nations which bring us peace...