

German-Cypriot Youth Exchange Project has been done for the 5th time

Article by Ödül Asik Ülker, published in Yenidüzen newspaper, 01.08.2011

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One of German Socialist Youth Movement, Youth Exchange Project coordinators, Coşkun Tözen and one Turkish Cypriot, one Greek Cypriot and one German participant have told their impressions to Face to Face.

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Stavrou: “There is too much nationalistic propaganda in South. You can not have clear ideas and can not see what is happening clearly. Previously I do not know why but I used to think that Turkish Cypriots do not belong to Cyprus and need to leave. During our workshops, I have realised that they are Cypriots too and we are not different from each other. Briefly, this project has completely changed my vision”

Müezzinler: “When I was walking in Berlin I saw the scars of the war, the left overs of the Berlin Wall, I have realised that Nicosia is not the only place with a wall. Cyprus is not the only ‘hurt’ country and this kind of conflicts can happen everywhere. The fall of the Berlin Wall symbolises that the conflicts can be got over with. This made me more optimistic and gave me a bigger perspective”

Roeske: “When I think of the world map Cyprus is a tiny island and a wall divides this tiny island into two. It is really strange to see what is like to live in a divided society. I have listened to what it was like in case of Germany from those who has experienced those days but I have observed and experienced the division myself here. Division is stupid”

The fifth stage of the German-Cypriot Youth Exchange Project that has ended last week has been done in Cyprus. It has started on 22nd July in South Cyprus and continued in the North. The coordinator from German Socialist Youth Movement, Youth Exchange Project Coşkun Tözen has indicated that the project which started in 2007 aims to bring young people from these 3 communities together to understand each other by creating friendship and trust between them.

Greek Cypriot participant Stefanos Stavrou said that the project has completely changed his mind. He said: “There is too much nationalistic propaganda in South. You can not have clear ideas and can not see what is happening clearly. Previously I do not know why but I used to think that Turkish Cypriots do not belong to Cyprus and need to leave. During our workshops, I have realised that they are Cypriots too and we are not different from each other.”

Turkish Cypriot participant Aysel Müezziner said that the three-communal nature of the project makes it special. She said: "We as Cypriots think that the world evolves around us. We believe that everyone cares about the Cyprus problem and there are not any other conflicts in the world. When I spoke with German participants and when they explain the conflict in Germany; when I was walking in Berlin and saw the scars of the war, the left overs of the Berlin Wall, I have realised that Nicosia is not the only place with a wall. Cyprus is not the only 'hurt' country and this kind of conflicts can happen everywhere. The fall of the Berlin Wall symbolises that the conflicts can be got over with."

German participant Alexander Roeske finds the division 'stupid'. He said: "When I think of the world map Cyprus is a tiny island and a wall divides this tiny island into two. It is really strange to see what is like to live in a divided society." Müezziner has expressed that she is worried to have another disappointment because of the negotiations. She said: "I believe that if a solution will be found one day it will be very sudden as unfortunately this does not depend on us." Stavrou said that the leaders do not prepare the societies for a solution. He expressed that he worries about possible problems that can be experienced in case of a solution. Roeske said that the solution should be found soon as it would become even harder in the future.

"The aim is to make them to understand each other."

Question: Can you please give us some information about the German-Cypriot Youth Exchange Project?

Tözen: German-Cypriot Youth Exchange Project is a three-communal project with German, Turkish Cypriot and Greek Cypriot delegations. It was initiated by the Hannover branch of German Socialist Youth Movement (SJD-Die Falken) in 2007. This is a completely independent, education-oriented organisation and is not linked to any political party. IKME and BILBAN are involved in the project representing Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots respectively. The project aims to bring young people from these 3 communities together to understand each other by creating friendship and trust between them. The project has started in 2007 and takes place one year in Germany and next year in Cyprus, once a year. This year it is the fifth stage of the project. This project is funded by Friedrich-Ebert Foundation, Gedenken und Frieden Foundation - Volksbund Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge Foundations.



Question: What have you in the project this year?

Tözen: Each year we have some focus topics. We are discussing issues such as nationalism and the Cyprus conflict. We compare it with political history of Germany and discuss the similarities and the differences. We also include the issues suggested by the participants. For example this year we have spoken about environmental matters and media. We have visited the Cyprus Mail, Afrika and Politis newspapers. We have carried out workshops at Home for Cooperation and Cyprus Community Media Centre (CCMC). Having workshops at Home for Cooperation was special to us as we remember that building from 2007 when we have started our project. This year we have also focused on discrimination, racism, isolation and immigration issues. We have met with KISA and

ACCEPT which is an LGBT organisation. We have visited the former president of North, Mehmet Ali Talat and met with Alpay Durduran. We had a very interesting presentation about 'missing people' by Sevgül Uludağ and met with Tony Angastiniotis. We also met with Dr. Hubert Faustmann who is a representative of the Friedrich-Ebert Foundation and lecturer at the University of Nicosia. We met with Chrysanthi Kyriacou and talked about the excavations done for 'missing people'. She is a former participant of the project and now works as an archeologist in the excavations. We have carried out a workshop with Muharrem Faiz about population matters of North. We met the head of Cyprus Turkish Teachers Trade Union Güven Varoğlu. We visited Famagusta and Varosha and met with Serdar Atai from the Famagusta Initiative. He informed us about the demands and suggestions of the Initiative.

A very small step to end the 'sovereignty discussions'

We have also evaluated the effects of the explosion in South and spoke about the 'cooperation' that has started between North and South. This is actually not a real cooperation. North sells electricity to South. South has supplied North with electricity for years. We think this can be a small step to end the 'sovereignty discussions'.

“My thoughts have changed a lot”

Question: Have you attended to other bicomunal projects before or did you have any contact with Turkish/Greek Cypriots? What makes this project different from the others? Did any changes occur in your thoughts after this project?



Stravrou: I had contact with Turkish Cypriots before the project as I was learning German at Goethe Institute. But with this project I had the chance to have a closer contact. As I got closer with Turkish Cypriots I have seen that they are not different. My thoughts have changed a lot honestly. There is too much nationalistic propaganda in South.

You can not have clear ideas and can not see what is happening clearly. Previously I do not know why but I used to think that Turkish Cypriots do not belong to Cyprus and need to leave. During our workshops, I have realised that they are Cypriots too and we are not different from each other. Briefly, this project has completely changed my vision.

Müezzinler: I have participated to many bicomunal projects before. But what makes this project special is its three-communal nature. We as Cypriots think that the world evolves around us. We believe that everyone cares about the Cyprus problem and there are not any other conflicts in the world. When I spoke with German participants and when they explain the conflict in Germany; when I was walking in Berlin and saw the scars of the war, the left overs of the Berlin Wall, I have realised that Nicosia is not the only place with a wall. Cyprus is not the only 'hurt' country and this kind of conflicts can happen everywhere. The fall of the Berlin Wall symbolises that the conflicts can be got over with. This made me more optimistic and gave me a bigger perspective. When we look at Germany as an outsider they



speak the same language and all of them are Germans. But I have realised that what divide them is neither language nor religion. They are all Germans but there is still a distinction. Language or religion are not reasons for division. What divides Cypriots is neither language nor religion. I understood that it is history that has divided Cyprus.

“Division is stupid”

Question: (to German participant) Is it your first time in Cyprus? Was there anything that you find strange about Cyprus?

Roeske: There were actually many strange things. When I think of the world map Cyprus is a tiny island and a wall divides this tiny island into two. It is really strange to see what is like to live in a divided society. I have listened to what it was like in case of Germany from those who has experienced those days but I have observed and experienced the division myself here. Division is stupid.



“I think we will again have a big disappointment”

Question: There are 17 meetings of the negotiations left until October. Do you have any hope for a solution?

Müezziner: Hope is something that has ups and downs for me. Turkey’s rush as Cyprus Republic will have the EU presidency, the recent meeting in Geneva and intensified negotiations process all made me more hopeful. But I think we will again have a big disappointment. I believe if a solution will be found one day it will be very sudden as unfortunately this does not depend on us.

“We need time for people to be prepared”

Stravrou: I hope for a solution. In case of a solution even if it is approved in the referendum, I don’t think that the people will accept it. There is too much nationalism in South. The history is in a way given a new ‘shape’ and the truth is not there. People don’t know the truths so I think we’ll experience problems after a solution. I don’t mean that I don’t want a solution soon but I think we need time for people to be prepared. I don’t think that the politicians do the necessary things to prepare the communities to a solution on both sides. I don’t think politicians in South really want to do this anyways. Maybe only some special leftist politicians work for this.

“It will be even harder in the future”

Question: (to German participant) What do you think about the future of Cyprus when you consider the discussions of Turkish and Greek Cypriots?

Roeske: I also hope for a solution. But as far as I have listened from those that we met here this is a bit difficult to happen in near future. Most of people that we’ve met here were pessimist about a solution in near future. Someone told us that; ‘the generation that will

solve this problem is not born yet'. I think there should be a solution soon, otherwise it will be even harder in the future.