

Third Romanian History Competition

“Help your Neighbour. Human Solidarity in Communities Yesterday and Nowadays” 2003-2004

Report

Help Your Neighbour. Human Solidarity in Communities Yesterday and Nowadays was chosen as the topic for the third edition of the Romanian historical research competition. This choice was consistent with the more general philosophy of the Romanian competition and of the EUSTORY network to document and to help fostering social cohesiveness and human values.

The third edition of the Romanian historical research competition for young people was organized by the New History Foundation with the support of the Körber Foundation and in cooperation with the Romanian-German Interdisciplinary Research Institute. The competition was supported institutionally also by the Romanian National Commission for UNESCO, by the Ministry of Education and Research, by the National Bank of Romania and by the historical journals “Magazin istoric” and “Dosarele istoriei”. The President of Romania, Mr. Ion Iliescu, agreed to be the patron of this edition. A Scientific Board formed by academics and university teachers was charged with the choice of the general theme and with the final assessment of the entries. As national coordinator of the competition was appointed Prof. Dr. Bogdan Murgescu, who was assisted by Dr. Mirela-Luminița Murgescu and by Bogdan Popa, M. A.

The theme of the third edition and the general rules of the competition were publicly announced on May 8, 2003, at a ceremony hosted by the National Bank of Romania. Posters were sent in all schools with the help of the Ministry of Education and Research, and booklets with specific advice and information were disseminated both through the network of the Ministry, and by the competition staff. Various newspapers, the historical journals “Magazin istoric” and “Dosarele istoriei”, radio and TV further disseminated the information.

The competition was open to all young people born after January 1, 1984, without any discrimination. The participants were granted about 9 months to prepare their contributions, the deadline for submitting their entries being fixed for January 15, 2004. Upon demand, the competition staff supplied further advice either by phone, by e-mail, and by normal mail.

Although the history of helping is not at the core of history teaching in school, a significant number of young people answered to the challenge. There were received 181 entries, to which contributed a number of 399 participants. Although this represents a progress compared with previous editions of the competitions (109 entries at the first edition, 163 entries at the second edition), the numbers do not match the expectations of the organizers. Participants came from most counties and all historical regions of Romania, but mostly from an urban background; in fact, there was a decrease in the participation of village pupils. Bucharest leads in the number

of participants, followed by the counties Brăila and Braşov. Participating girls clearly outnumbered the boys (285 vs. 114). Most entries were individual, but we had also a respectable share of group entries; most groups numbered 2-4 participants, the biggest group consisting of 11 youngsters from the Bogdan Petriceicu Haşdeu National College, Buzău.

The entries varied a lot, both quantitatively and qualitatively. Generally, the participants preferred to use oral sources, but many of them corroborated the information obtained through interviews with the data obtained from various written materials, newspapers and even archival sources. Many of the entries included photos, audiotapes and/or videotapes with interviews, and other various additional materials. Some of the entries were realized on CDs, exploring original ways of presenting the findings.

Two different juries, formed by university teachers, secondary school teachers, and specialists working in museums, assessed the entries. After these assessment sessions, the Scientific Board also assessed the best entries and decided the final list of prize winners. There have been awarded 3 first prizes, 5 second prizes, 11 third prizes, 30 fourth prizes, and 4 special prizes for the best diary, for the most active school, for the youngest participants and for the most creative presentation of the entry. 5 of the prizes were sponsored by the Bucharest Rotary Club, by the Federation of the Jewish Communities in Romania, and by the Catholic Archbishopric of Bucharest.

The variety of topics was considerable. Both individuals helping others or making grants to various cultural and social institutions, and communities acting in critical historical moments were chosen as concrete research topics. There were several entries which focused on the relief for Romanian and Polish refugees during World War II, or on the help for Jews hunted by the Romanian and/or Germans during the same period. Other well-documented and award-winning entries focused on the human solidarity during the floods in 1970 in the Satu Mare county, or on the way people helped one another after the earthquake of March 4, 1977, which has hit severely Bucharest. The award-winning entries distinguished themselves through the large set of sources, including eye-witness interviews, articles from newspapers, photos and archival materials, and through the effort of researching the events from multiple perspectives.

The award ceremony was hosted by the Romanian Presidency on April 30, 2004, and president Ion Iliescu personally awarded the prize winners in the presence of a significant number of teachers, journalists and officials. The program for the awardees included also a guided visit of the Cotroceni Museum.

Bogdan Murgescu
Competition coordinator