

# Report

about the first meeting of the Erasmus + project EVA  
in Mönchengladbach from December 1<sup>st</sup> to 7<sup>th</sup>, 2019



## Arrival:

Since all travel groups live very far from Brussels, and we in Mönchengladbach are very close, it made sense to start the meeting in Brussels. We - the host pupils and four teachers from Mönchengladbach - picked up the French group at 9:30 a.m. from the hotel and the Turkish, Portuguese and Estonian group at 10:30 a.m. at the airport in Brussels to experience a day together in Brussels. We drove straight to the European Quarter and visited the Parliamentarium, where you can easily learn about the history of the European Union with lots of interactive stations and AudioGuides in European languages. After a little refreshment in the museum restaurant, we walked into the city center, past the European Commission's Berlaymont building and other new buildings on Rue de la Loi. Of course, with a photo stop at the graffiti "The Future is Europe". Shortly before the old town we took a short look of the Cathédrale Sainte Gudule, which is a small version of the Notre Dames de Paris. For a snack on the Grande Place we divided into many groups. The early evening in Brussels with lots of Christmas lights and the huge Christmas tree in the big square was enchanting. Then we drove with the full bus past the beautifully lightened Atomium to Mönchengladbach. There the Bulgarians were waiting for us at the hotel and the host parents at the train station. The museum was very well liked by our guests, but the temperatures were quite new for the people from Turkey, La Réunion and Portugal. Everyone was able to get a bit closer in the bus.

## Monday:

We all met at 8:30 a.m. in the auditorium, which had been very nicely furnished and decorated on Saturday. We - that was a pretty big group, as you can see on the group picture. 32 guests from 5 countries, 10 German teachers, 24 pupils from the project course and the host pupils were given 77 name badges and first heard the welcoming speeches by the headmistress Carolin Mühlen and the coordinator Susanne Gründler. We were then greeted with music: choir, rap and piano with drums. Then there was a breakfast buffet with French sweets from Réunion Island and a 2 m long German "Weckmann". Then the playing area was released for the games. Pupils of the project course with the support of Birgit Bolten had prepared games to get to know to each other and could now guide them:

- 1. Name Game:** What does your name mean? Why did your parents choose him? In seven circles, students and teachers in mixed groups have exchanged their names. Roots from the Bible or the Koran, family traditions and interpretation of the zodiac were discussed.
- 2. I or I not:** everyone was on the playing field and had to answer statements with yes or no. Everyone who made a statement (e.g. I like to sleep a lot. I am a vegetarian) went to the right side, the others to the left. There was a lot of movement in the large group of teachers and students.
- 3. Prejudices:** Characteristics were mentioned and students and teachers should spontaneously assign them to countries. That worked quickly and clearly. We all have a lot of prejudices from people from certain countries.
- 4. Germany:** Then everyone was allowed to get rid of their prejudices against Germany. The country groups received prepared flipchart sheets with the outline of Germany and were able to write down and paint their prejudices. After a short time, the sheets were full and the students were able to introduce and explain them to the large group.

Overall, the games made for a lot of fun and a better getting to know each other. That was the first highlight of the week.

Then we went to the mayor's reception through a sunny, wintry M'gladbach past the old city wall, the woman's sculpture, the Münster and then we came to the town hall in the hall for festive receptions. The city tour continued past the Alter Markt to the water tower for lunch in the restaurant (buffet) and all this with the group of about 65 guests and hosts. Then finally there was free time to explore the shopping opportunities in Mönchengladbach. The "Minto" was at the top of the list. At 6 pm we met again in the auditorium to have a look at the presentations of the six schools together with the guests. Afterwards there was a buffet in the cafeteria, which students, host parents and teachers had put together. There was something for every taste. After eating everybody could dance and an eventful day came to an end.

### **Tuesday:**

The school started at 8:00 am as usual. The guest students went to class:

60 min. German basics guided by Ms. Schiffer

School tour, break

90 min. Discussion about problems with minorities, migrants and refugees from the pupil's perspective, led by Ms. Bolten

### **Discussion with students on Tuesday, 3 December 2019**

We first took a look at the name of our project and exchanged our ideas on equality, variety and acceptance. Then several statements concerning these topics were presented, and the students each got three green dots that they should stick to those statements that they most agreed to. The statement "It does not matter where you come from, it matters how you act." was chosen by most students.

We discussed this statement in detail, evaluating whether this is wishful thinking or a reality in our different countries. Students reported events in which they felt discriminated against, mostly due to their skin colour, their origin or because of who their friends were.

The students told each other about the situation in their countries as far as immigrants, minorities and refugees are concerned. While there seemed to be considerable differences in this respect, they all agreed that the acceptance of homosexuals is obviously a generation question, as they all claimed that things are changing for the better in their country.

Finally, the students from different countries got together in small groups and they created slogans having to do with acceptance and tolerance. Each of them wrote one slogan on a folder that they could take home - completed with the signatures of their new friends.

90 min. Technical lesson for labeling a cotton bag with a memorial value by means of a plotter guided by Ms Scott. The plotter didn't work, but it was improvised well.

Meanwhile the teachers met in the library and first discussed all organizational questions for the further meetings of the project:

- expectations of this project? Fears and hopes
- What experiences have you had with international projects?  
What was funny, annoying, satisfying? How did the students react?
- Budget
- Scheduling the meetings in Portugal, France, Turkey and Bulgaria
- Role of the hosts / Role of the guests
- Selection criteria for students
- Work between sessions in classes, workshops, courses?
- Public relation
- Evaluation
- Establishment of an accompanying e-twinning project for the exchange of documents
- What needs to be done for the meeting in Estonia?
- Others

After a breakfast break, we showed each other the prepared presentations about the very special situations in our schools with minorities, migrants, immigrants and refugees and the problems that arise from these situations. So different we did not have seen our schools in advance.

**DE:** The presentation from Mönchengladbach emphasized above all how many nationalities of origin (approx. 45) and how many religions are represented at our school by the students, but also by the teachers. We have long been a “school without racism / school with courage”, which does not mean that there are no conflicts. We address these different religious origins and experiences in religious instruction and in practical philosophy. We try to work through conflicts in the class council hours (each class one hour per week with both class teachers) so that the students learn to solve conflicts independently. If necessary, there is also coaching for the teachers through counseling teachers, the social worker or the school management. The most common difficulties arise in physical education (especially in swimming), in the acceptance of headscarves by teachers, in the consideration of pupils during Ramadan and when taking part in school trips.

**EE:** Estonia has about 68% Estonians and 25% Russians, and there are also minorities from the Ukraine, Belarus and Finland. All other nationalities still make up 1.6% of the population. The Russians are not evenly distributed across the country, but there are communities without significant Russian share and others near the Russian border, which are inhabited by up to 95% of Russians. From the history of the Soviet Union there are still great fears among the Estonians towards Russia. The Russian-speaking population rather chooses pro-Russian parties, and informs themselves about current events in Russian newspapers, some of which have very different representations to Estonian newspapers. Only half of all Russians living in Estonia understand the Estonian language. For some years, the partner school in Pärnu has been seeking to bring Russian songs to their school through the concert of minorities, thereby establishing contact through the music. Integration as usual in Germany, does not take place, can hardly be prescribed by the state. But at least there is a language café where Estonians and Russians can meet each other.

**BG:** In Bulgaria, immigration is less a problem than emigration is. Especially in rural areas like Kubrat, many employable people leave the country towards the west in order to earn more. The children often stay with their grandparents and rarely see their parents. The Bulgarian population is made up of approximately 40% Muslims and 40% Christians. The remaining 20% are Roma. There are no conflicts between Muslims and Christians, all the more with the Roma, who often refuse to send their children to school. (6 Bulgarian children between the ages of 12 and 15, who are illiterate, have just arrived at the comprehensive school in MG.) To avoid discrimination, there is a no-bullying day at school every year, a project day on which the whole school deals with bullying. Teaching religion and politics in schools is prohibited in Bulgaria. Subjects in which we can often work integratively in Germany.

**FR:** There is a great diversity of origins on the Isle de la Réunion, historically due to the late settlement by the French and the influx of Africans and Asians. Slavery has long been abolished, but it still has an impact. French, Hindus, Creoles, Madagascans, Chinese, Muslims from India form a “melting pot” from which no one emerges unchanged. The partner school is a private, Catholic school with compulsory school fees, but it has no fear of contact with other religions. Nevertheless, the poorest immigrants are often left out because the school fees are a deterrent. At school, individuality is very important and a lot is done so that the pupils can develop a good self-esteem and a lot of self-confidence. The class is the experience space for different values. Involving immigrants to take on tasks for the class should help to make them better accepted. Project work is great for integration. Working together makes you feel good and not invisible.

**PT:** The problems at the partner school are very different again. Children from a children's home (orphans) - without parental support - need special support. There are also special teachers for this. Immigration comes from former African colonies as well as from India with considerable language problems. (The Prime Minister comes from an Indian immigrant family.) Recently, Northern and Central Europeans have come to Portugal to settle there. Their children also come without any knowledge of Portuguese. Overall, the school tries to ensure the emphasis on the individual needs of integration and the development of all of the children entrusted to it.

**TR:** In Turkey, Turks and Kurds live together peacefully through their common faith. But since the outbreak of the conflict in Syria, a large number of refugees have fled from the war zones to Turkey. Although the Syrians are also Muslim, they speak and write Arabic. They had to leave their culture, customs and traditions and are now in a foreign country. In Gaziantep - a city with 2 million inhabitants - there were an influx of 500,000 refugees. Around 100,000 of them are housed in a huge camp near the city in tents. The Syrians compete with the Turkish workers because they offer their labor very cheaply and which has led to higher unemployment in Turkey. Education for all the children is important, but in principle not organized. There are no Syrian children at our partner school in Gaziantep, where Syrians live. (At the comprehensive school in Mönchengladbach, there are some Syrian children, and also with the success that some of them have not only graduated from school, but are already preparing for their "Abitur".) There is already talk of a lost generation in Turkey who can hardly make up for their school deficits. First, separate training centers are set up in Turkey, but they have no connection to the Turkish school system. The refugee children, often orphans, do not feel they belong to any country - not Syria and not Turkey.

The presentations were each briefly discussed, but the conditions are really extremely different and in part not influenced by the schools. What goes everywhere: preventing bullying, strengthening self-confidence, recognizing and responding to individual needs, project work to strengthen the feeling of togetherness, additional courses on literacy and first language acquisition, deliberately teach tolerance, etc.

Lunch was served after finishing work in the cafeteria. Afterwards we went back to the Abteiberg in the big group. This time we went to the Abteiberg Museum. The students of the project course had previously learned in a guided tour what the modern works of art of the 20th and 21st centuries meant and positioned themselves, just like Frau Bolten and Frau Gründler, near to "their" works of art, to explain to their guests the meaning of the masterpieces.

The guests were thus able to move freely in the museum designed as a maze and repeatedly came to stations with "living" explanations. It was a lot of fun for all of us and we would like to thank all the employees of the museum, who with a lot of patience forgive us some noise and some running. But in this way all modern art needs often a bit tolerance. We will certainly use this highlight of the day more often to discover a museum. At 4 o'clock the program was over, only the teachers met in the evenings for dinner in the time-honored St. Vith for getting to know the regional cuisine.

### **Wednesday:**

At 8 a.m. we started with the bus to Cologne, German students who had no more space on the bus followed us by train. The first surprise stop for many was at the **DITIB mosque**. It presented itself from the outside very imposing in the winter sun. It looked even more beautiful inside with the sky-blue carpet, the large windows and the light-flooded interior. Our group of almost 70 people was allowed to sit on the carpet after getting rid of their shoes and covering up their female hair. The guide was translated by Mrs. Bolten simultaneously and we listened to her words in silence for an hour. Then we knew many new details about the structure of the prayer room, the rules of Islam and the importance of the church. It was the first time for many visitors that they entered a mosque. Certainly one of our highlights of the week.

Then we went to **Cologne Cathedral**, which is particularly full of visitors from all over the world in the Advent season and in which even a mess was held. No special opportunity to visit. The guests were very impressed by the cathedral. Afterwards there was the possibility to climb the tower, in glorious weather, or to go across the Hohenzollern Bridge, or it was finally time to eat a candy on the Christmas markets and explore on its own the surrounding of the cathedral.

At 15:00, the meeting point was the **Rautenstrauch-Joest-Museum**. And all of them, all of them came together punctually (like every other day).

The teachers went on a **world tour** organized by the "Kölner Klüngel". They visited African and Asian shops, listened to Indian music and visited the Cologne Synagogue, which also turned out to be a highlight, because now the teachers got to know all three world religions intensively in one day. The **Synagogue** for many teachers was the first meeting with Judaism.

The students stayed in the Rautenstrauch-Joest-Museum and were able to make many ethnological discoveries. There are also many exhibits of Hinduism and Buddhism and individual natural religions. The students of the project course were already prepared here and were able to show the guests where particularly beautiful rooms were waiting for them. The students drove back full of impressions on the bus, while the teachers later came back to Mönchengladbach in private cars after a visit to the brewery to think about the many impressions.

In retrospect, a tour of Cologne Cathedral would have been very desirable. We should have visited the synagogue together with the students. And we could have done without the Rautenstrauch-Joest-Museum and the world tour. Although: some of the students have just mentioned the Rautenstrauch-Joest-Museum as particularly interesting in the evaluation. The direct comparison of the world religions Islam, Christianity and Judaism was a very special experience for the teachers, as they emphasized again and again. And even if only superficially considered, the different rites concerning the head covers. (Mosque: women have to cover their heads, men don't care, church: men don't have to cover their heads, women don't care, synagogue: men have to wear the kippa, women don't care)

#### **Thursday:**

After the many impressions from Cologne, we worked again at school. Students took part in the Identity Flags Workshop, which was conducted by Ms. Gründler, while teachers worked on "Diversity and Tolerance" with two moderators, Mrs. Oberdrevermann and Mrs. Sass, organized by Regina Sasse.

Documentation: //gesamtsschule-volksgarten.de/eva/doku/idflag.ppt

And: //gesamtsschule-volksgarten.de/eva/doku/presentation\_MG.pdf

The teachers finally had their school tour, which ended in the INNO truck, which was just standing in our school yard and in which modern technical professions were introduced. After lunch, the students presented their flags individually to the whole group of hosts and guests in the canteen. The results were serious, impressive and diverse. Coffee and cake from the "Abiturienten" were provided, while most of the teachers disappeared on the Parents' Day.

An example of the identity flags:

My name is Niya Pavlinova and I come from Bulgaria. My flag shows how I see the world. The background is blue and represents the sky. The various colored dots on it are the people who live on our planet - under the same sky. Even if they are as different as the many splashes of color, they belong together and are all the same. Just as the colors match and each one is beautiful and unique. This is the world I want to live in. In which everyone is the same and accepted. The sign in the middle means equality and the white color means peace.

In the evening everybody met again in the Circus Messajero, the teachers to eat, the students to dance. All in a very good mood. That was certainly a highlight. Not only the people from the different countries had gotten to know each other well, but also the country groups - especially the Germans - had learned to appreciate themselves in completely new roles.

#### **Friday**

On St. Nicholas' Day, the students received their certificates from Nicholas Herrn Kotzowski, of course, even Santa Claus made of chocolate, Santa Claus hats and a group photo from the first day. The teachers discussed the evaluation session (very positive feedback) and there were final questions about the departure and the next meeting in Estonia. The students also had to complete evaluation interviews and questionnaires for the week.

## Evaluation questionnaire:

Arrival	unanimously good
Brussels	good, but too short, too cold, too little food
Welcome	unanimously good
Breakfast	mostly good, but some (5) didn't like it.
Games	well, 1x very well, 1x didn't like it at all
Mayors	mostly good, but some (4) got bored
Lunch	4x very good, otherwise good (best food rating!)
Presentations	mostly good, but some (6) got bored
EVA party	18x good, 2x did not like it
Lessons	10x good, 10x goes from bad to boring
Canteen food	mostly good, but some (6) didn't like it.
Abteiberg Museum	4x very good, 11x good, 4x is fine, 1x bad
Leisure time	unanimously good
Family	evening unanimously good
Mosque	good except for one
Cathedral	unanimously good
Leisure time	18x good, 2 x bad, because they didn't do what they wanted
RJM Museum	4x very good, 15x good, 1x medium (too short!)
Workshop	7x good, 3x medium, 10x bad because too long!
Pizza	mostly good, but some (3) didn't like it.
Presentation	mostly good, 4x medium
Disco evening	2x very good, 13x good, 5x very bad, as they were not there
Santa Claus	17x good, 3x not there or much late

- The two museums performed surprisingly well in the students' favor.
- The task of the workshop was sometimes too demanding linguistically.
- On the night of the disco, some host parents probably had other plans.

After work, we then went by train to Dusseldorf. In "Orbit" and at the Christmas markets, last impressions could be collected and souvenirs bought. Also train and subway rides were a new experience for many guests. In the evening we went our separate ways: the students were partly skating in the ice disco in Greifrath, partly in the families. The teachers met for the "Last Dinner" with the headmistress Carolin Mühlen.

The mood was very friendly, the tenor of the last words was that we all got off to a good start in a complicated, challenging project and got on well with each other. The mutual trust has grown and gives hope for a good working atmosphere for the further course of the project. The host students and guest students have had a great tolerance experience as our schools are located not only in different parts of the European Union, but on three continents (Europe, Asia and Africa), and at this first meeting we have come to realize how different our living environments are. This is a great foundation for EVA and a great challenge at the same time! The German school in Mönchengladbach has a special role, because no other school combines as diverse origins at one school (45 countries of origin) as we do and no other has as much experience with integration as we do. On the other hand, we are very privileged.

Even though Erdal Erez, Uta Goldenberg, Lydia Hagemann, Johannes Stüve and Aleya Corapci and the employees in the secretariat and kitchen did not mention here by name, made the whole organization of the week possible with their daily work. In addition, many colleagues in a hectic time had to take on additional lessons for the teachers in the project with the day of the open door, quarterly conferences, and the Parents' Day.

The week was very exhausting for everyone, but also a great experience that will have a long-lasting effect.