

Peace, Democracy and Human Rights

Background

The Nordic model with peace, democracy, freedom, open borders and a common labour market between the Nordic countries were established a long time before the European Union, is a good example of peaceful neighbourhood and cooperation. The Nordic countries have also a long history in successful peace mediation in different conflict areas, such as the Balkans, the Middle East and the Caucasus.

The Åland Islands, a small autonomous and demilitarised region of Finland, sometimes called the Islands of Peace, are also a good example of peaceful existence. Åland is an unilingual, Swedish speaking province belonging to Finland, where Swedish speaking people represent a lingual minority (5,5%). Åland has, however, through the years managed to maintain its own language and culture as well as the autonomous status without any conflicts or political troubles. Differences of opinion on political level occur naturally, but these problems have always been solved by peaceful discussions.

The Nordic countries have, however, not always lived in peace. There have been wars and conflicts in Scandinavia both between Nordic countries and with other countries. For instance the Crimean war between Russia on one side and France and Great Britain on the other reached also the Baltic Sea, Åland Islands and the coasts of Finland in 1854. Finland including Åland was a part of Russia in those days. The Russian tsar had been building the fortress of Bomarsund in Åland for the previous 40 years to protect the western outpost of his empire. It didn't, however, take more than a few intensive days for French and British troops to destroy the whole fortress.

France, Great Britain and Russia signed a treaty in Paris in 1856 regulating the terms of peace after the war. A separate agreement placed Russia under an obligation not to build fortifications or to maintain or create any military or naval establishments in Åland, which means that Åland for the first time was considered to be a demilitarised area. The 150th anniversary of demilitarisation of the Åland Islands will be celebrated during 2006. The peace camp, which is planned to start this youth exchange will be an important part of the celebration as well as a manifesto for peace. We can therefore say that the Crimean war and the peace in Paris gives us a reason to initiate this youth exchange.

Objectives

The Åland Islands Peace Institute focuses on conflict management, research, peace education and youth work. By organising seminars and conferences on autonomy, self-determination, security policies, and minorities, the Peace Institute operates as an information centre.

The idea of the planned project is to create a network and an exchange between youth from North-West to South-East with a special focus on the outlying areas Åland and Northern Ireland (United Kingdom) in the north, and the South-East European countries in the Balkans and around the Black Sea.

The main objective at the network is to arrange annual youth exchanges concerning peace, democracy and human rights as the theme. We want to bring together young people from different parts of Europe to work with these subjects. They will see the differences between the countries as well as the similarities. They will learn how other young people live in totally different environments with different culture, customs and religions. We want to highlight what anybody and everybody can do for peace, tolerance, solidarity and equality. The aim is that the participants, both the young people and their leaders, will after the exchange be able to work for these ideals by leading a good example and informing their community about the project.

The Project

The network is going to organise youth camps 2 times/year during 3 years in the participating countries. A normal camp would be about 40 youths between ages 18-25 years, and their leaders, from 8 countries. The duration of a camp is supposed to be 7-10 days.

The first planning meeting will be arranged in April 2006 in Åland to plan the co-operation and the first camp. The first youth happening is an international peace camp for youth in Åland in July 2006. The camp will thus be an important part of the celebration of the 150th anniversary of the peace in Paris and demilitarisation of Åland. It will be a splendid manifesto for peace and tolerance with young people from the North-West to the South-East.

The peace camp 2006 will be held at the Lemböte Youth Camp or another similar centre. During the camp the young people will work with subjects as peace, democracy, equality, human rights, solidarity and tolerance. The participants are supposed to arrange workshops within these subjects with guidance and

assistance from their leaders and the camp organisers. They are going to make presentations with all media available, such as music, dance, theatre, writing and drawing. All presentations will be shown in exhibitions and performances on the Åland Islands – mainly in Mariehamn, the capital of the Islands as well as in the ruins of Bomarsund. We are also going to be part of the Åland's Museums exhibition for demilitarisation. The Peace Institute has also started a project to incorporate peace education into schoolwork in basic and elementary schools in Åland. The schools will also work with the demilitarisation exhibition and there will thus be a natural contact with the school children and the participants.

The local newspapers and radio are going to be involved in the information process, and as the camp is a part of the 150th anniversary celebration there will certainly be interest both in Finland and Sweden for the camp. A separate Peace Camp, web page will be established and linked on the homepage of the Peace Institute (www.peace.aland.fi), and we hope that the other participating organisations will make a link to their own pages as well.

One of the local newspapers, Tidningen Åland, has, as a matter of fact, already printed an interview about our plans for the camp (29th September 2005).

We will thus be able to reach the local community as well as the numerous tourists visiting Åland in the summertime.

The network is going to have two meetings each year to plan the next youth camp. The youth camps will be circulated between the participating organisations. The organisation responsible for the next camp is also responsible for the planning meeting. The most peripheral participants should also have opportunities to arrange a meeting although the travelling costs can be rather high. Each organisation arranging a youth camp or meeting will work independently and give the meeting their own national identity. The role of the planning meetings is to discuss practical and economical details as well as assist the camp organiser with ideas. The reports by the participants and leaders will serve as good background material for planning coming events.

Partners

- Albania: Beyond the Barriers, Ana Dervishi, www.beyondthebarriers.org
- Bulgaria: Agency for non-formal education and European information, Svetozar Daskalov, www.aneei.org
- Bosnia-Hertzevovina: Helsinki Citizens' Assembly, Jelena Protic,
- Macedonia: Youth Forum EYE, Bosko Nelkoski, www.youthforumeye.org.mk
- Romania: Youth Action for Peace, Tina Rezmuves, <http://www.yap.ro/>
- Serbia – Montenegro: The Sombor Youth Boom, Dimitrije Ostojic
- Finland: The Åland Islands Peace Institute, Marja Leena Magnusson, www.peace.aland.fi
- Public Achievement, Nordirland, Paul Smyth, www.publicachievement.com

Organisations in Åland:

- The Åland Islands Peace Association – Emmaus, Gunn-Britt Andersson, <http://www.emmaus.aland.fi/>
- Punkt. (Youth organisation working with peace, nature, environment) (<http://www.peace.aland.fi/ungdomsverksamhet/punkt.htm>)
- SKUNK (Organisation for youth in archipelago) <http://home.aland.net/skunk/first.htm>)
- Red Cross in Åland (<http://www.redcross.fi/aland/>)
- Youth Association (<http://www.auf.aland.fi/>)