

## The Federal President's History Competition Results of the 20<sup>th</sup> Competition in Germany 2006/07: »With or against each other? Generations in History«

Autumn 2006 – a fierce public debate stirs up German society. In 2050, experts say, around 33 per cent of the German population will be older than 65 years. Based on statistic modelling, the number of 80-year-old people would overpass the number of newborn children by then. The aging of German society prompts younger politicians even to question the inter-generational contract. The decreasing number of children and its consequences for the social security systems are widely discussed as well as the future of the family in a society marked by single households. Whatever the arguments are: The demographic change and its far-reaching impacts are seen to be the utmost challenge to German society. In light of these public discourses that often oscillated between alarmism and fanaticism, the German history competition called for entry. Its theme: »With or against each other? Generations in History«. Students between eight and 21 years were asked to take a historical perspective on the relationship of generations. How would they characterise the relationship between young and elderly people? And which examples of 'togetherness' and 'conflict' would they discover in their researches? 5,117 children and youths (slightly more girls than boys) embraced the challenge posed by the theme of the 2006/2007 competition and delivered 1,257 diverse and high quality contributions.

### New structure: The national competition awards regional prizes

The expectations as regards content were high. At the same time, the competition organisers were anxious to see the results of a new structure given to the competition. For the first time, the Körber Foundation awarded – in addition to the national prizes – the best competition works in all of the 16 *Länder*. These new regional awards were given in June and July 2007. 176 prizes were issued for the best regional competition works as well as 278 promotional awards for the most promising researchers. In this first year of regionalisation public award ceremonies were held in cities in 9 *Laender*, namely in Berlin, Dresden, Erfurt, Halle, Hamburg, Hannover, Kiel, Mainz and Stuttgart. With great success as the number of guests and the immense public interest revealed. It showed that the intention to attract even more young people to participate in this competition by showing a greater regional presence has turned out to be the right strategy. For the first time also, on a national level, prizes are awarded not only to the most excellent participants but also to three teachers for their pedagogical commitment to their students and the ideas of the competition. The names of the 50 national laureates who will be awarded first, second or third prizes will be announced by the German Federal President Horst Köhler at Schloss Bellevue in Berlin on 31 October 2007.



Charming winners: Larissa Seyboth, Efstratia Tramountani and Sanarya Kamal not only won a regional award in *Baden-Württemberg* but also the hearts of the Stuttgart audience. (Foto: Körber-Stiftung / Kraufmann)

## Major themes: Family, relations at school and youth protest

But what did the students find out? Which themes kept them busy for six months of research? Most contributions clustered around the themes of family life, the relationship between teachers and students and the rising of youth cultures and youth protest. Apart from these focal points further topics such as the killing of children during the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the boycott of churches by young altar servers during the 1960s and the situation of underage mothers during the last decades were aptly documented. The lives of young people in history were of particularly great interest to most participants. However, that does not mean that the elderly were not represented in their works. On the contrary, elderly people played a major role as interview partners and contemporary witnesses. It turned out that the competition theme encouraged an even more intensive dialogue between the generations as in the years before.



Archival findings: 18-year-old student Marion Darilek discovered and interpreted a school regulation from 1611. The document was hitherto unknown. (Foto: Körber-Stiftung / Himsel)

## Competition results: Togetherness 'beats' conflict

As the contributions show, most participants have a positive image of family relationships. Many of the works submitted undermine the wide-spread notion of a new generational conflict. Rather, they show that the family remained a stable social unit in times of crisis and that this is likely to be the case in the future, too. Family conflicts and their concealment were noticed and scrutinised by the students, but the positive evaluation of the family and its function for social co-habitation and solidarity between the young and the elderly was not affected by these findings. Overall the students observed a general change from inter-generational conflict to dialogue.

The chance to take a closer look at youth culture and youth protest was taken by senior students in particular. Documentation ranged from analyses of the uprising of radical teenagers during the 1950s to the punk movement of the late 1970s. The example of the social unrest during the 1960s underscored the fact that youth protests tended to be a result of the generation gap while, at the same time, echoing the contemporary political and social situation more generally. These reflections on the past have led to a more nuanced evaluation of present social situation. Compared to the late 1960s an overarching topic that links different generations seems to be missing today. Some students, however, state that the challenge of the imminent climate change may in future bring generations together – or in conflict again.