

Our Comenius-trip to Komotini in Greece (17th-22nd February 2013)

The focus of our current international Comenius-meetings is the fight against ethnic discrimination and violence at European schools (see Comenius 2012-2014). Back at our home countries before we travelled to Komotini, all the participating representatives of the different European countries had prepared presentations on traditional costumes and games as well as performances of folklore dances. Moreover, the pupils had also rehearsed a song against racism. Thus the coordinators of the project wanted to ensure that, while watching the presentations and performances of the partners during the meetings, the pupils deepen their cultural knowledge of the inhabitants of the different European countries, abolish ethnic stereotypes and prejudices and make a stand against racial discrimination. These in advance prepared presentations and performances were displayed in the mornings of our Comenius-trip in the auditorium of our host school, the Music School of Komotini. In the afternoons we had the chance to learn even more about Greek history and culture: We visited the local museum of archeology as well as the local museum of Folklore, were guided around the ancient theatre of Filippi and strolled around the “old city” of Xanthi. In the evenings our pupils spent time in their host families, enjoying home-cooked Greek food and getting to know their hosts a little better.

Back in Germany we asked ourselves and our pupils the following questions: Did we achieve our objectives? Did our pupils gain cultural knowledge of the inhabitants of other European countries and diminish ethnic stereotypes and prejudices? According to our pupils, they were especially nervous what their Greek hosts might think of them. However, since their hosts and everybody else was very friendly, our students felt comfortable in this internationally mixed project-group. Knowing and interacting with pupils from the other countries made it more interesting for our students to watch the presentations and performances of the other groups. Our pupils also noticed similarities in the costumes, games and folklore dances between themselves and the different countries. So they realised that almost all the traditional costumes basically consist of the same pieces and that hopping games are common among children of all the European countries. When our students found differences they were either impressed or open-minded. For example, they praised the colourful, richly decorated costumes of the Turkish and showed interest in the Bulgarian tradition of making female costumes unique by embroidering them. What our pupils emphasised most were the new friendships they gained as well as the experience that they speak English well enough to communicate successfully with the other partners. Like us, our students are looking forward to welcoming our partners in Germany in June and hope to see some of their new friends again!