



Summer school participants learn from the history of their countries in order to change it.

Photos: N. Claus

# Still enemies, or now friends?

The burden of the past, and looking forward to the future: **young Europeans and Asians** move toward a common tomorrow.

**W**ouldn't it be better if the case of the Korean comfort women could be brought before the International Criminal Court?" asks Yu from Japan and waits to see the reaction from Professor Moon from South Korea, who is also editor-in-chief of *Global Asia*, a quarterly publication on international affairs. Yu is in Seoul to discuss "Nations and Identities," together with 20 other young adults from Japan, South Korea, and China, as well as Germany, France, and Poland. The meeting is organized by the Exchange Program for Regional Integration in East Asia and Europe (EPRIE). The summer school aims to promote exchange between neighboring countries whose relations are characterized and severely strained by past experiences of war. Korea, for example, is still waiting for a formal apology from Japan and compensation for South Korean comfort women who were forced into prostitution by the Japanese military during World War II.

## The past is ever present

Early in the summer, the participants first completed an intercultural training course in Tokyo, as discussions are conducted very differently than in Europe and Asia. Here, it's important to understand the culture of your counterpart in order to avoid conflicts. Afterwards, the workshops and seminars focused on issues such as regional identity in the age of globalization, nationalism in East Asia, and cooperation in Europe. The participants also visited Tokyo's highly controversial Yasukuni Shrine, which commemorates soldiers who have died in the service of Japan, including a number of convicted war criminals. The shrine draws regular criticism from China and South Korea.

Although the young adults are looking ahead to the future, the past remains ever present. In Europe, the participants believe that the level of reconciliation between France, Germany, and Poland has reached

**Professor Moon: East Asia has to get beyond thinking in national terms.**



A regional understanding of history is key

an advanced stage. This is especially true at government level. However, Johanna from Poland notes that the wounds are still very fresh among private individuals. She mentions the moment when Willy Brandt dropped to his knees at the Warsaw Ghetto Memorial. The moment became a symbol of Germany's plea for forgiveness for war crimes committed during World War II. Japan, on the other hand, has not yet made any similar gestures toward China and South Korea.

This makes Yu's proposal on the issue of comfort women a constructive attempt to move forward in the process of reconciliation between the two countries.

Professor Moon welcomes the proposal, but points out that a "trial before an international court would be possible, but both Japan and South Korea would end up as losers. It's a political solution that is needed

in this case, not a legal one. Europe has a regional understanding of history, but many countries in East Asia are often prone to thinking in purely national terms. We have to get past this if we want to reconcile."

EPRIE and its young participants are contributing to the promotion of reconciliation by emphasizing the importance of the regional perspective. *jh*

## Program and partners

The Exchange Program for Regional Integration in East Asia and Europe (EPRIE) is organized by the Korea-Verband organization in Berlin. The Robert Bosch Foundation is its strongest supporter. The 21 participants from Europe (France, Germany, Poland) and East Asia (China, South Korea, Japan) worked on the issue of "Nations and Identity" in seminars and workshops in July 2015. After completing the summer school, they will remain connected to the program as alumni, thereby creating a multilateral network for exchange and mutual understanding. Other partners include the Friedrich Ebert Foundation, Yonsei University Seoul, and the East Asia Foundation.

## Schools in turmoil

School Turnaround: Robert Bosch Foundation helps at-risk schools make fresh start.

For the past two years, the Robert Bosch Foundation and the Berlin Senate Department for Education, Youth and Science have provided support to ten schools in disadvantaged neighborhoods of Berlin that could no longer meet their educational mandate. The students achieved poor results in the classroom, were often absent, and many left school without earning a diploma. Few new students were registering for places. The School Turnaround support program made the difference. The first signs of success in Berlin are already visible after two years, as with similar approaches in New York City, England, and the Netherlands. Here's an interim assessment with Petra Serbe, Principal of Bücherwurm-Grundschule elementary school in the Marzahn-Hellersdorf district of Berlin.



Petra Serbe

### Your school has taken part in the School Turnaround program since 2013. Why did you require assistance?

I was vice principal and still in my probationary period when our principal became ill and was unable to work for a long time. The teachers tried to bridge the gap, but that can only work for a limited period of time. After all, a school is only as good as its management. It leads the way and dictates how things are going to be done. That's what we were missing. On top of that, we had a high rate of illness-related absences among the teaching staff, which led to a lot of classes being cancelled. Unhappy parents constantly complained to the local education authority, and newspapers reported on the crisis, writing: Nothing works here anymore. They can't even conduct classes.

### It's now two years later and the first phase of the program is complete. What positive effects have you seen?

We have resolved the school's management issue. We now also have a permanent steering group, whereby the responsible colleagues bring forward school issues with the school management. Examples include the development of school programs and curriculum. Although we're in a difficult social environment, we didn't have a school social worker. That's changed now, and we've had a school support center for children that require special support since April, all thanks to the School Turnaround program.

### How have students, parents, and teachers reacted to the changes?

Elementary school children don't really give a lot of feedback. We have a parents' meeting every six weeks, and I attend that. The parents are keeping a close eye on developments and they provide support where they can. The school's reputation has improved considerably, and overall satisfaction is very high. The rate of illness-related absences among our teaching staff has also decreased significantly.

### You're going to continue being in the program. What aspects will you focus on in the coming two years?

The school support center is to get more staff. We also want to transform the street in front of our school into a zone with traffic-calming measures. Up to now, we have had to use our well-trained staff to accompany the children to our sports buildings across the street. In terms of school management, we want to fill the vice principal position. Some of our teachers will take part in a curriculum development training workshop, which is intended to benefit all of the teaching staff. We also want to take advantage of the connection to other schools participating in the program in order to learn from their experiences. *kv*