

Warsaw, 27.07.2003

Dear Sponsor,

The last three weeks I spent in Kartause Gaming, a marvelous place in the Austrian's mountains. I participated in three courses:

- "The virtue of courage: 4000 years of definition, discussion and debate in Western philosophy, religion and literature" by Dr. Paul Gabriner
- "Personalism and European Unification" by Prof. Dr. Ferdinand Kinsky
- "Private property and social responsibility: societies in transition" by Prof. Dr. William B. Simons.

I learnt a lot during the course about Europe, i.e. I learnt what is Europe, what are historical reasons for the European unification and I gathered many important information about the enlargement of EU. Poland is one of the candidate states to become a member of EU; therefore I am very interested in Europe. I know by now, what the results are of the negotiations with the other countries, which problems other candidates face, I see advantages and disadvantages of the enlargement. I feel more conscious as a European woman.

One of very interesting issues was how the other countries perceive my fatherland – Poland. However, sometimes we had to correct the image of reality, meanwhile we learnt much about ourselves. We will be soon together in Europe, so we have to improve our understanding of our culture and tradition. It was amazing to recognize that we are so near and sometimes so far.

I became aware of problems in the other EU countries. When I am all the time in Poland, I see only the problems of 'my' Poland. I broadened my scope in discussions with others, who told me about their experiences, for example from Mexico. We saw pictures, which allowed us to realize how the poorest people suffer over there, 50% of population of Mexico. I am convinced that these kinds of relations made me more sensitive and helped me to understand differences between societies.

Thanks to these experiences I started to reflect about questions, which I have never thought of before. I learnt to listen to more and understand better other persons. We discussed often and not only during the lessons. I have enjoyed the atmosphere between students and the professors. The professors were very friendly. I was not embarrassed to ask something, we could discuss about every issue. Although they worked really hard, they always found time for us, even after classes. They also became our friends. It is the first time, that I experienced something like that.

One of the things, which made us closer as group, was the common prayer. Every day we had the opportunity to attend Rosary. Praying in different languages; an amazing experience. I did not realize its value before. My faith deepened and I feel more spiritualized.

During the course of Dr. Gabriner I read Plato, Aristotle, The Holy Bible, Hemingway and also English and American poetry. It helped me to gain a better understanding of myself. I realize better which values are important, what is courage and which direction I might choose. I think that this kind of courses is rather important for young people like me, especially nowadays.

One of the things I liked most was the play "Crucible" written by Arthur Miller. The author describes there how we can be persuaded by others and that in reality we are weak. If everybody says something, we are able to trust on it, even if it is a nonsense. It takes courage to say no, to set

against the whole village. Although Aristotle taught us that already, we do not remember about it. It has to be repeated. We have to be stronger. It is important in our daily life.

I was also interested by Hemingway's story "The Snows of Kilimanjaro". To illustrate what impression the story had made on me, I would like to quote one of my papers, the part about the main character of this story. Hemingway writes about a man, who is waiting for a plane and is near to death. He starts reflecting about his prevailing life.

"Harry is courageous. He is able to look backwards, regard his past and reflect on his life. It is not simple. He has to return to the unpleasant moments, it hurts him. But I think that he does something more courageous. He realizes that he made a lot of mistakes and he confesses it. It is very difficult. It is always easier to think about ourselves like a good person, who did many things well and achieved his goals. But is it true? Sometimes we prefer lying to admitting mistakes. Harry on the contrary reflects his life, notices that it was not perfect, and even more – awful. He has not more time to change himself. However I think he learned a lot."

The issues discussed during the course as well as my own reflections on the topics mentioned have, to some extent, influenced my way of thinking. It gave me new inspirations to think about my own life, my own decisions, defeats and victories. I found it very fruitful to have an opportunity to exchange my ideas and reflections with other students and with the professor. In the "normal" life you rarely have the chance of making an experience like that.

As far as other things are concerned, I found the environment very nice. The monastery had an atmosphere to study, because of its quietness and its peace. I had to study very hard, but I know now that I learnt a lot. I improved my English and I developed myself in many different disciplines. I study computer science in the Warsaw University, so the courses were something new and very interesting. One of the advantages of the Phoenix's Summer Course is the variety of faculties and, par consequent, different offered perspectives.

I am very happy that I was able to participate in this Summer University. In my opinion the atmosphere would not be possible, if the students were from only one country. Here we had so many cultures, traditions, religions and experiences together. Thanks to the Mexican and Dutch parties I learnt a lot about other customs, dishes, dances and other forms of amusement. Everybody was very friendly. We helped each other, there was no envy or rivalry. People, who came to Gaming, knew exactly what they came for. We were studying a lot, but we knew, that we would use our knowledge in the future. I worked very intensively and I am sure, that I will have marvelous remembrances. This course changed me a lot and I am very happy for that.

Thanks a lot.

Yours sincerely,
Elżbieta Iwaszkiewicz.