

## SECRETARY GENERAL'S REPORT TO THE EAY GENERAL ASSEMBLY IN PRAGUE, TUESDAY AUGUST 5 - 2003.

### "INSPIRED TO SERVE"

#### Introduction...

Dear friends,

I will take you back to a cold winter- night in 1981. The European Alliance of YMCAs is 8 years old and is covering much less than half of the European continent. In these years the first Secretary General of EAY, Egon Slopianka, is paying a few visits to communist Europe, contacting youth workers in Hungary, Czechoslovakia...Short visits with lots of bureaucratic problems involved. Europe is deeply divided. It was a cold winter-night in 1981, as cold as the cold war ever was. December 13, 1981.

This evening they had 30 degrees minus in Poland. Empty shops. People were going shopping with toilet-roles in their bags, in the hope to exchange them for bread or butter. Toilet-roles were of the most popular things to find, and very difficult to come across. The fact that communist regimes were never able to provide the population with enough toilet-paper was probably one of the important reasons for the regime eventually to fall. Hard to understand, but for those who experienced it, it was just an element of irritation too much.

This evening, 13<sup>th</sup> of December, nobody was thinking of toilet-paper. The strikes in Gdansk and the Solidarnosc fight for freedom gave everybody a new sense of life.

Michal Szymanczak, as almost everybody else in Poland, was involved in the Solidarnosc movement. In universities, in pubs and in factories there were never-ending discussions about freedom and democracy. The only big, dark cloud hanging over all this enthusiasm was the fear of brotherly assistance to Polish Communists by the Soviet-Union, like it happened in Hungary in -56 and in Czechoslovakia in -68.

The 13<sup>th</sup> of December 1981 I was sitting in front of my TV, and there were references in the news to Hungary -56 and Prague-68. I was a lieutenant in the Norwegian Army, a NATO-country, and all of us felt the dangerous tension, the cold war was heating up.

It is a cold night also in Moscow. Michail "Misha" Guskov is teaching his students in the Red Army Air Force Academy. He is a very talented officer with a great career ahead of him, one of the youngest full Colonels in the Red Army. This evening he is trying to look through the frozen window to see the stars above Kremlin. He feels happy not to be struggling in the Siberian winter. Moscow somehow feels warmer.

The news is full of reports about the Polish counter-revolution, about the Polish virus which should be stopped as soon as possible, using all necessary means.

Even Germany has not escaped the cold winter. The evening of 13th of December 1981 Alexander "Sasha" Artushenko in his Red Army Airbase in DDR, North Berlin, wears full battle uniform. The alarm is still ringing in his ears. A few minutes after the alarm went off; he sits in the cockpit of his bomber-plane, the famous SU 17. According to special orders he is switching on the engines of his aircraft. He sits there with the engines running for thirty minutes. Still no details about the late night mission, but he expects that the reason for the alarm a few minutes ago is related to the counter-revolution in Poland. He expects the final order to be to fly over Poland and maybe to bomb Polish cities.

A possible target would be Warsaw. Szymanczak fortunately lives in the countryside, but his wife is pregnant, they are expecting a baby in January. Therefore, he is in Warsaw the evening of December 13, 1981, to organize baby-soap and other goods needed for a birth in the mountains. The whole family has been organized to collect what was needed, a difficult task involving exchanging their ration for vodka or meat for several months into baby-food. He is nervous as he is cuing for the train to leave Warsaw that night. The amount of soap is already a criminal act, and in his luggage is food for Christmas, the traditional carp. But instead of the legal quantity of one fish, he has two.

Not far away from the main railway station, and at exactly the same time as Michal enters his train, General Jaruzelski with his typical black glasses introduced Martial Law in Poland. All of a sudden there were tanks in the streets, the phone-lines were cut, no television, no newspapers. The prisons started to fill up, Solidarnosc-activists disappeared from the streets

The news of the Martial Law is spreading all over the world.

Sasha Artushenko in DDR stops his engines; he never received any orders that night. Misha Guskov in Moscow leaves his battle against frozen windows and Michal Szymanczak falls asleep in his Polish train. In the military camp in Kongsberg, Norway, I turn off my television set and go to bed. My wife and I also expect a baby in January.

22nd of January Szymanczak's daughter is born. Five days later our daughter is born. Two babies, on each side of a deeply divided Europe. And still many years before they eventually got to know one another.

Sasha, Misha, Michal - please join me for a minute.

We were symbols of a divided Europe, soldiers of different armies, preparing to go to war against one another.

Now we are friends, colleagues, together we are leaders of YMCA. Somehow a symbol of the new Europe, with potential to overcome the gaps of the past. Potential to overcome the gaps....

The division of Europe was the reality of our youth, we grew up with it. The fall of the Berlin wall happened when we were grown men.

What I am trying to say, is that this is the challenge of our generation.

I once told this story to 2000 young Germans in Stuttgart. The four of us knelt together on the stage. 2000 young people followed our example and knelt, as a symbolic act to accept that overcoming the gaps of the past is the challenge of our generation.

In my report to the EAY Assembly in Bratislava in May/June this year, I gave a lot of facts and details of the past year. Today I hope you will allow me to look back a bit and say thank you for well done work to all of you, and also to look into the future and talk about our common vision.

I will also focus on the efforts of building and strengthening this unity in Europe, a process of integration inside the YMCA.

I will focus on the global YMCA and the new plan called "Strengthening the Movement".

What is the profile that we want to build in our generation, worldwide?

At the end we will visit a funeral in New Orleans....

## **1. Unity and Integration in European YMCA**

When I look back through half the history of EAY, it has been one long, exiting, wonderful journey for me. I traveled Western Germany before the wall fell and lived in a nice little village close to Stuttgart and got to know many German YMCAs. The travel took me to Lake Sevan in Armenia; I walked the streets of

Tbilisi in Georgia and stood watching the Angel of the North in England together with Ken Montgomery. The sun was shining in Thessalonica in 1992 and Tom took me to the island of Gozo in Malta. A few days before I had been walking in the mountains above beautiful St.Gallen with my dear friend, Dölf. In Madrid Juan Simoes gave me a big poster with my name in glittering letters - the toreador of the North! The Trans Siberian Railway took me to fascinating Siberia with 52 degrees minus in Novosibirsk and Russian Christmas. A boat ride on mighty Volga and chilly canals of Venice in January. A bus ride in Hungary took me deep into the forest because the driver did not tell me that the end station was reached half an hour ago and I stayed with his mother in the forest. A few kilometers only between beautiful Krakow and hell in Auschwitz. Beautiful Kiev and the opera in Minsk.

I cannot mention all countries and far from all the friends. But today I will thank you from the bottom of my heart for all the hospitality and for the privilege it is to know you and to have been a guest in all your countries. I will thank you for the fantastic job you have done, participating in the biggest project ever for the EAY - to rebuild unity in the YMCA all over this beautiful, fantastic continent of ours. You have sent your best people to Field Groups and Partner Groups, organized exchange visits and huge conferences. You have come to the Assemblies and given full hearted support to strategies and projects. You have made the EAY strong, not because we are rich or because we have formal power. We are strong today, because we stand shoulder to shoulder, we walk side by side and because we are one body, moving ahead, slowly but steadily. And the goal is not to go back in history to re-establish the past. Our goal is to go into the future to build a new European YMCA-house, where we all belong. Not to build Fortress Europe with a wall around, but to strengthen our Movement so that we can participate in the global dimension of our YMCA, based on the deep conviction that sisters and brothers have no borders between them.

Thank you for helping us to establish the training Centre in Litomyšl, do you remember the wonderful Czech evening we had during our assembly there two years ago? Do you remember the beautiful brewery where we are building our centre? It is even more beautiful today and reconstruction is going on full engine! The Czech Government is supporting us in the most generous way together with the city of Litomyšl. People of vision are building for the future - we will have a new "Schloss Mainau" in the EAY.

Thank you for making this festival possible. You all agreed and now we are doing it. We have 7500 people from all over Europe and guests from around the globe. A very warm welcome to all our friends from Latin America, Africa and Asia, from Canada and Near East. A special salute to our friends from the YMCA of the USA - what a partner you are in all these challenges!

For the first time we are brought face to face from all corners of Europe, and in big numbers. This is the strategy of EAY being fulfilled - because young people will become friends across all borders and languages and differences in culture. We inspire one another because we see how big we are, how much we have to offer, we see the huge potential in this movement and we are this week in a gigantic laboratory to experiment and develop innovative programmes and learn from one another. There will be a fund for further development of YMCAs coming out of this festival, if you buy enough refreshments and souvenirs!

But first of all - thank you for making it possible for thousands of young people in our YMCAs to have a life-changing experience. This is creating leadership for the YMCA for years to come.

It is difficult to talk about God to young people, and young people find it difficult to penetrate the culture and language of the churches. We hope that they will have a warm and friendly memory from this festival that will stay with them. And through the way we are sharing the gospel, we hope that they will be able to see Jesus Christ as a brother and friend, who will stay with them in their busses when they are heading home on Saturday.

Thank you for having helped us to develop EAY into a more stable, I would almost say - normal situation. The headquarter of EAY is no longer moving after the Secretaries, the Secretaries have to move to the headquarter. From last year there is a pension scheme for all employees and also from last year we are able to pay for our own governance structure, which means that at last we are on our way into real democracy.

We still need to improve the information work; we need to co-ordinate and develop the Programme Field, because the normal interaction between member movements will take place there in the future, more than in the Movement Development Field. And we need to invest more resources in fund raising.

I do not want to build a big structure on European level. Let us go back to the picture of us walking side by side, standing shoulder to shoulder. This festival is a brilliant example on how National Movements have let us utilize existing expertise and resources to make it happen. Thank you - it has been a fantastic experience. Can we do more of that when we go back to play the Grey Music?

I introduced three of my friends and colleagues a few minutes ago. They are for me the Blue Music, making everything worth while. I can play a lot of Grey Music with these friends at my side.

I see working in the YMCA as almost working in a Cathedral of friendship and fellowship. To build unity with strength, we need to go deeper into this

Cathedral. It is not enough to take responsibility for others. We also need to open up our own weaknesses and needs - so that we mean something to one another - both sides.

Dear friends, it is so easy to make speeches about integration and unity and friendship. As Christians we know all the right answers, and we give the answers with smiles. Christian smiles.....

Nearly three years ago I told the EAY Assembly in Jormala, Latvia, that half my vision for this festival was about the preparation process, to see leaders from East and West, South and North working together to create this fantastic event. I can tell you that there have been tears and loud voices, deep frustrations and lack of trust, sometimes based on geography. And it has been going both ways. There have been situations with no Christian smiles and with no Christian answers.

I am happy and proud to say that we overcame all of those situations and learnt a lot from them. It just shows me again and again that talking about unity does not move us much forward. Working together in projects big enough to motivate us to invest ourselves, for better and worse, is painful, but it moves us forward and it moves us together!

At the far end of this Cathedral of Fellowship stands a cross. I am personally not looking much for Christian smiles or Christian answers in speeches. I am looking for people brave enough to be honest to one another, brave enough to challenge people from the East or people from the West, and then asking forgiveness when they step over the line. Kneeling together at the cross, getting up together and walking side by side out of the Cathedral and into the world of real challenges. Again inspired to serve!

## **2. Strengthening the Movement Worldwide**

One of the most inspiring examples of Blue Music I have participated in during the last few years has been the development of a strong and warm relationship between the World Alliance of YMCAs and the Area structures. We have all agreed that the World Alliance will only do what the Areas cannot do themselves, and the Areas will only do what the National Movements cannot do themselves. This is really pushing responsibility down to where it belongs and takes away all the power struggle of the past.

Do you know what I think will be one of the results of this unity? If I go down to the reality, where people live their lives and struggle to improve their societies, I see Dimitry from Jaroslavl in Russia, Olga from Odessa in Ukraine and I see Vladimir from Lida in Belarus. Three young people, I do not know them, I just took their names out of thin air. But I see three young people,

hopefully hundreds and thousands more will experience the same destiny. And the destiny of Dimitry, Olga and Vladimir will be that they avoided the disaster of HIV-Aids because teenagers from the YMCA came to their schools and gave them understandable information on how to escape this terrible danger.

We have young people from Africa here in the festival, and they are doing the same all over the African continent.

The idea of the World Movement, all of us, is to co-ordinate all our resources, human as well as financial, so that we can create an effective project to strengthen YMCA Movements around the globe to become relevant YMCAs to deal with relevant challenges in their cities and villages, wherever the YMCA is represented.

Can you imagine what this will do for the profile of the YMCA in the world?

There are many other challenges than HIV-Aids which we will try to deal with.

We have just started, and it is of vital importance that we can produce some successful results already now, to inspire and motivate more and more of us to get involved in what we have called the Global Operating Plan - Strengthening the Movement.

EAY has launched three pilot projects in Russia, Ukraine and Belarus, a regional project to fight HIV-Aids. Can you see the brilliant idea behind? At the same time as we are training young people, employing a few experts, resourcing some offices in the regions and attracting media attention, we are together building stronger YMCAs, stronger infrastructures and making the YMCAs known and respected in their local societies.

The YMCA of the USA is shouldering this responsibility together with us and is generously investing human resources as well as finances to make this succeed.

Next year we will introduce GOP in Georgia, probably with a democracy-project, and most likely the same in Albania and Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.

Will you help us here in Europe and around the globe, to make sure that the Blue Music of the Global Operating Plan will not too early fall down to the Grey Music of everyday frustrations and become just another good idea which we file somewhere? It is about the destiny of Dimitry, Olga and Vladimir and the future of a whole generation of young people....

### **3. Funeral in New Orleans**

I do not have to remind you of the pain and the problems we are facing in our generation. War is painfully close in time, on our continent. The Balkan

countries are the new priority area for EAY and we are facing the biggest challenges ever in building a new unity in Albania, Kosovo, FyroMacedonia, Croatia and other places. We are afraid of terrorism and I already mentioned the terrible explosion of HIV-aids in Russia, Ukraine and Belarus. Poverty and exploitation of the environment is threatening the global stability.

Through all of that I hear the Blue Music singing and playing in the YMCA. It is like a funeral in New Orleans. It is like a jazz-band from Preservation Hall playing and swaying down Bourbon Street. Slowly first, sad, but still swinging. Then faster, wilder, not swaying anymore, but dancing, the trumpets moving from one side to the other.

The Blue Music is the miracle, the mysterious and inspiring power of God; it is the singing voice of Jesus Christ our Brother and friend. It is the dancing wisdom of the Holy Spirit. And the YMCA is the band He is using to play the Blue Music to the world.

I like to think of God playing the Blue Music. It is a much nicer picture than that of the old man sitting on a cloud. Have you ever met God physically? A daring question. I told you the story of Sasha, Misha and Michal. Through them, and hundreds of other friends in the YMCA, I have experienced unity in Europe. At the same time I believe I met God as well, He only looked surprisingly different from the Sunday school images.

The YMCA is not stuck with the fears and the tears and the sorrow and the grief. The Blue Music is blowing the trumpets to get us up and inspire us to take this beautiful vision of the YMCA and struggle with it, bend it and change it and make it relevant for our generation, for our time. We have analyzed and philosophized and written hundreds of resolutions. The GOP invites us to take action together, now.

I see monuments over the work of previous generations of YMCA-leaders, buildings, documents, projects of vital importance for their generation. Where will they find the monuments from our time? I am not talking about sculptures to praise our importance. I am talking about evidence that what we did in the YMCA was of relevance to the young people of our time. We need huge visions if we will take part in the global process of pushing the world in a better direction.

The Blue Music is showing me YMCA in the next 30 years, and it is a modern, Christian, Ecumenical Youth movement, fighting for the rights of children and youth, famous for its global fight against HIV-Aids and poverty and known for its interpretation of the Christian Message to a modern world, not adding to the clashes of civilizations.

A YMCA building unity and fellowship in Europe because it serves young people all over the continent.

I do not see Fortress Europe in this vision. The Blue Music has no geographical limits. Therefore, as I already said, unity in Europe shall strengthen us to invest our resources in the global challenges.

I see fewer and shorter speeches, I see less statements and fewer words and less money going into theoretical conferences. In fact I have a wonderful vision of a YMCA without e-mails!

Can you imagine the Lord Almighty playing the horn in a swinging tune?

If you listen carefully, you will feel it responding inside yourself, you become a part of the music and dancing and suddenly you realize that this is real, this is life and you are part of it. Let us go together, like the band from Preservation Hall and renew the YMCA-vision while we are playing, let us improvise the music so it can serve the young people of today.

God bless us all!