**"Poland and the World
at the Dawn of 2010"**
Report of a Listening Post
held on 13th January in Krakow

Encouraging The Reflective Citizen

Part 1. THE SHARING OF PREOCCUPATIONS AND EXPERIENCES

In this part of the Listening Post participants were invited to identify, contribute, and explore their experience in their various social roles, be those in work, unemployed, or retired; as members of religious, political, neighbourhood or voluntary or leisure organisations, or as members of families and communities. This part was largely concerned with what might be called, 'the stuff of people's everyday lives', that relating to the 'socio' or 'external' world of participants.

Part 2. IDENTIFICATION OF MAJOR THEMES

In Part 2 the aim was to identify the major themes emerging from Part 1. From several presented these have been drawn together under the following four interrelated themes:

1. The shallowness of relationships as an effect of virtual communication

At the very beginning of the session, the participants were preoccupied with trying to understand new trends in relationships. The huge popularity of Facebook was widely discussed. Facebook's role as a medium for social networking is vital: "If you are not on facebook you don't exist". It helps people to stay in touch with old friend, meet new people and even strangers. However those relations are increasingly accidental. There is a confusion of levels of intimacy: some use Facebook to present a lot of very personal detail, others use it to build image of success. *Everybody is focused on one's own exceptionality, ego, ambitions and attracting the attention/curiosity of others???*. Internet networking activity also creates opportunities for revealing / renewing / reviving and continuing previous relationships, which are not otherwise part of *everyday life* (e.g. girlfriend from secondary school). People spend more and more time in the front of computer screens. This results in contrary attitudes:

On the one hand, they lose patience for regular social activity and experience anger in such situation as waiting in the cue, visiting post office. Everything seems to be easier to manage via Internet so they have little understanding for those who do not use it, and prefer old-fashioned ways of dealing with everyday life.

On the other hand people recognize and resent the superficiality of contacts, and are also concerned about the safety of their personal data.

2. How to live together? — a growing gap between people

Building relationships, and understanding others is complex both between generations and within peer-groups. People seem more diverse, less similar and it is more difficult to find common ground. Distrusting each other's intentions complicates relationships.

Participants discussed their family life and close relationships. They claimed that there is growing diversity and individualism which makes life feel more solitary and isolated. The young people complained how difficult it is to find a partner and maintain long-term relationships. When difficulties spring up, it is often easier to break up and look for someone else, than try to solve problems. People are less interested or prepared to invest in the difficult process of building a stable relationship. It seems more convenient to live alone and buy a pet as something to love. (not here, may be there; potential possibilities of new relationships makes people less careful of what they already have)

The ties between generations are also weakening. Young people care less about parents, grandparents, parents-in-law. At the same time they feel guilty for not sustaining contacts with their elders. It was observed that it is more and more difficult to try to cooperate with somebody who lives by different values and attitudes. So it is often easier to cut the relation than to repair it. Young people feel that they are alone in their searching for answers about life's important questions. While in part welcoming that solitude, at the same time, they crave guidance and support.

Poland has been witnessing something of a baby-boom: a lot of children were born in the recent years. Participants observed, that babies are treated as having priority over everything else. One participant told a story about feeling alienated at Christmas, when she couldn't find a place for herself in her parents' home, because of her brother's son, who seemed to be in charge. Everything and everybody else came second.

Participants noted the great control over children, who are constantly subject to parental or institutional supervision. The growing number of psychological interventions in schools is observed. On their own, children have difficulty to build relations with each other, or resolve their conflicts. When left to themselves, they quarrel and fight. As they find no resources to deal with conflict, they look for professional help. So more and more schools organize communication and integration workshops. In this connection, the Swedish model of parenthood was mentioned: children in Sweden are brought up in a stress-free and unconstrained environment. Yet they grow up into responsible citizens. The participants expressed their anxiety about the intervention of the state in the family, e.g. the possibility of suing one's parents.

3. Torn between social roles
Participants were discussed life-work balance issues. Mainly women expressed emotions and frustration in face of being mother and professional and want to join those two areas.

- The media feed us with images of 'perfect people', also our friends keep up this image, they appease everything; they can, not me. You have to be original, special, have an exceptional hobby. There are so many oportunities to choose, so you have feeling of freedom, but it is superficial — you can not be involved in everything.

- Splitting your life between family and work, inability to appeal to both of the realities; work and development ambitions versus the parenthood ones, the feeling that I'm 'hopeless'.

- Since I think highly of myself, I accept the challenges in every possible area, responsibility for all the roles; perfectionism, the 'all or nothing' principal, a strong competitive environment.

- Loneliness, being torn apart and fear is the outcome of the globalization process (internet, fast networks of information); people are not prepared for comprehension of all the information (travels, career), we aren't prepared for reacting so fast.

4. Surfeit, rush and need of 'let it go'

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