

NOBODY IS EXPECTING THEM AT HOME

A photo report from the Reformatory Colony for boys in Lipcani, Moldova.

Five high school journalists from the Youth Media Centre in Chisinau, Moldova, visited on 17 June 2004 the Colony in Lipcani.



Reformatory Colony from LIPCANI town.

„He who doesn't remember the past, has no future” – was the answer of one of the colony guardians to our question „Why the Soviet State Emblem on the frontispice of the penitentiary palace of culture?”

That's how the windows of the colony school look like – with metal-mesh fence.

There are three classes here with the teaching in Russian and another three in Rumanian (grades 7-9). There are pupils of 18 years old who only now learn to read.

The school desks and chairs look very nice, though they haven't been painted for 10 years. There are no inscriptions on them, not a single scratch. “Discipline”, said harshly the headmaster, “every child is responsible for his place of study”.



They march and sing a song in Russian when they go to mess. The day we visited them they had red-beet soup and boiled peas for lunch. “Since Easter we haven't had meat”, the boys told us later.

“Vitalie asked me to be frank and answer if I was afraid of them”



At the first meeting with the young journalists, the boys in Lipcani lined up in two lines, looking mistrustfully at “the guests”. Every boy introduces himself and those from Chisinau try to make a more sincere discussion. They ask them if they would like to listen to some radio programmes made by boys and girls of their own age or whether they would like to make radio programmes together with them. The answers come later, when we discuss in smaller groups and the boys become more open to their peers from the capital city.

“After the visit to the Colony in Lipcani I’ve changed completely my attitude toward the word “detainee”. We were almost the same age and put up rather well. At the beginning I was scared: I was supposed to meet people that committed offences: they stole, they killed. Later I realised that they were, actually, some young people as many

others. They didn’t get into the penitentiary due to a good life. The ones I met had had a far from happy childhood and come from families with problems. Some of them don’t even have a family, nobody pays them visits. There’s nobody waiting for them at home.

Vitalie asked me to be frank and answer if I was afraid of them. Dima wanted to know what “free people” think about detainees. I tried to explain that the public opinion is superficial regarding this topic being influenced by films on prisons and the idea that many young people are capable only of killing, robbing or using drugs”.

Sanda Cojocaru, 17 years old

„We have nothing more to tell each other”



Maxim tells about a day of his life: “Nothing new, the same every day. We have nothing to tell to each other”. Anatol adds: „We wake up at 6.00 a.m., and go to bed at 10.00 p.m., go to classes, work, watch TV, clean up, and play football on the stadium from time to time”.

“Many of the young people of the Colony in Lipcani are from poor families, that during the hearing didn’t have money to pay for a defence counsel, and the counsel from the office was not very interested in the young defendant’s faith. They didn’t enjoy a happy childhood or normal

development conditions. This is why they shouldn’t be regarded as lost people that don’t have chances to a full life. Like all the young people, the boys from Lipcani dream of a FUTURE and, especially of a united family, because that’s what they have never had.

Many of the young boys from here expect nervously the meeting with their parents. They are offered this possibility only six times a year, 2-3 hours each meeting, and 4 times they are given one-two days”.

Daniela Vidaicu, 17 years old

„They are different: some of them study English, others don't know to read their own names”

Dumitru Ciorici discusses with the boys about their faith. Some of them have regrets, others don't, but all of them dream of LIBERTY, though many of them are not expected by anybody there.

“When I entered the Colony I thought it was really a prison there were detained bad boys who were ready to shed blood and mock at us. Discussing with them I realised it wasn't like that: they are divided in different categories. Some are more educated, study English by their own, others don't know how to read their own names either don't know to read the Latin alphabet.

Pavel says he got here but he is not guilty – he assumed responsibility for his cousin's deeds. He didn't even think he would get here. His cousin lied to him saying he would not be punished since he was a minor. The lack of information brought him behind bars and made people think he was a bandit.

There are still many boys like him at “liberty” who due to the lack of information and life skills become victims of negative influences.

The boys were open and willing to communicate and learn what the news were in the country. “I've heard you are from Chisinau, from Botanica district. Tell me, what's new there”.

These young people are not lost, we need to support them so that when they are free they would not be ignored by the society and could start a good life.

Dumitru Ciorici, 17 years old



Behind bars God has a different value from the one at liberty. “I don't fear anything, only God”, most of them say.

A church dedicated to the Great Moldovan Prince Stefan cel Mare was opened in one of the buildings of the Colony from Lipcani. There are services Every Sunday here.

They told us a lot, and asked many questions about our lives “at liberty”. Though they were wearing white shirts – the uniform they always put on when someone comes on a visit – the meeting with us was a special one because we are YOUNG like THEM.