

# “You have NO position — you have NOTHING”\*

“Independence, mobility, actuality are the most important inherent characteristic of informal education”, — Svetlana Koroliova thinks.

*Perhaps, without it is not an exaggeration to call Svetlana Koroliova history patrimony of Belarusian public youth movement. She conducted pioneer creation of the first truly youth public association in Belarus “Next Stop — New Life”, she was among those who established Rada — Belarusian Union of Youth and Children’s Public Association. Today, Svetlana Koroliova came to work to Rada again as the Chairperson of the Presidium. Natalia Riabova talked with Svetlana Koroliova about the past and the present of Rada, about youth policy and youth informal education.*



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**N.R. Having returned to youth policy and to Rada after a significant break how can you evaluate the changes happened?**

**S.K.** It is a brief excursus to history for the beginning. First of all, I should say that it began in a quite different time frame. An idea to establish the National Council emerged in 1994. That time we first heard about an idea to lobby interests of youth organizations to the State. Significant uniting of youth organizations took place in Belarus in 1997. It was a unique event as at the exact same time the Belarusian Patriotic Youth Union was being created. As youth organizations did not want to enter that strange union with a clear ideology orientation, Rada was a consolidating alternative for them. In 1997 Rada defined three directions to follow: interactions with the state institutions, international policy and educational programmes. And all these were very interesting as that time it was impossible to talk about youth policy as such. That time there was no definition and clear mechanism of such policy in the state. We stood at the cradle of starting a dialogue with the state structures and we learned how to make this dialogue.

That time one of the most interesting educational programmes in the Rada was the programme “Tuteishia”. Its goal was to create national regional councils. It consisted of 4–5 day seminars, where we organized panel discussions with the representatives of the state establishments responsible for youth policy. It was application of theoretical knowledge got at the seminar. We trained youth leaders who could set this dialogue. These discussions each time differed. The state committees on youth policy said how they perceived public associations and in the same way youth organizations said about their perception of the state bodies. Both sides got clear stereotypes about each other. But it was very interest-

ing and useful experience. I think that “Tuteishia” was one of the most successful programmes of Rada although it did not achieved the goals announced: not so many regional councils were established (only in Grodno region — “Rada 23”).

At that time in 1996–1997 the European School for Youth Leadership conducted by the Council of Europe was transmitted via Rada. Three such programmes took place in Belarus, youth leaders openly discussed the following questions: **What is Europe? What is position of Belarus in Europe? What are democratic values? What is leadership? How are decisions made? What is lobbying?** These were very interesting projects, after these international educational events many contacts were set. At that time we spoke a lot about the youth, youth policy and perspectives. That time a specific “ferment” was being created, which did not manage to transform into something more serious, because of the further state policy. It was different time, different opportunities. That time Rada was much stronger than the BRYU in terms of membership, of international contacts and motivation.

I think that changes started already in 2003. External situation has changed. And organization sharing European democratic traditions and values, which suppose **legal state; game rules; pluralism; lobbying channels; dialogue; laws** after all could not any long fulfil its goals. We did not invent this model, we just wanted to use it in Belarus. Rada was created according to such principal and acted basing on these pre-conditions. And when the BRYU was created with intrigues the youth public associations started to be closed down, Rada established with a purpose to protect interests of the youth organizations did not know how to protect them but moreover in general did not know **what to do**.

\* Нет позиции — значит, нет ничего. Интервью со Светланой Королевой // “Адукатар”, №2(5), 2005 — С. 2–6.

The past and present Rada differ significantly. Two years already it was obvious that Rada had not fulfilled its mission and not played its role. The organization has started to spin wheels, and its activity became non-efficient, as it could not achieve the goals declared.

Why did it happen so? A complete rotation of the Presidium has happened, it was not ready to such political situation. Abrupt decrease in number of organizations' members resulted from inertia for 2-2,5 years. The most terrible thing was that Rada did not have its own position. You have no position, you have nothing. Rada can not be neutral, invisible which it tried to be as it had a quite different mission – to protect, to dispute, to lobby interests of youth organizations, international policy. These goals are very sound. Because these goals were not achieved many quit, they thought that the state could to close down Rada easily. And I think that closing Rada down would be the saddest result for the youth movement and youth policy in Belarus.

**? N.R. Is it worse then Rada lost its face?**

**S.K.** It is worse, as any organization can be altered, modified and brought back to life. Rada has not only national but international statues. It has been waiting for 7 years until it became a member of the European Youth Forum. The Ukrainian Rada has not yet entered the EVF. We have proved that we are a good partner – coherent and reliable. It is a very important aspect. Unfortunately, at the present time Rada has become fundamentally different. We have altered mission and goals. We have extracted interactions with the state structures out of our strategic directions. Why should we knock at the closed door? It is completely senseless.

The second moment is that we want to alter the Statute so as not only republican but city and regional organizations could be members of Rada. Currently, national status just limits our activity. We would like that any organization, which agrees upon the principal that a person has the right to freedom of association, could consolidate with us.

**? N.R. What is your current mission?**

**S.K.** The mission was stated after a long process of discussion and agreeing in the strategic planning. The statement we agreed upon sounds honestly and is given for a short-term period (one year):

**In 2005 Rada sees its mission in asserting priority of association and of assembly via consolidating youth and children's public associations of Belarus around Rada.**

We unite with the associations, which agree that any person has the right to participate in any association he/she wants to participate in. Whether we are able to consolidate, the end of the year 2005 will show. It is obvious that the aim is ambitious but it is the only mission which allows us to express a position that a young person has the right to freedom of association. It is a problem in our country, we defined it and our mission is aimed at its solution. Of course, I do not think that this problem is able to be solved in a year, but under political instability we made a decision to make strategic planning only for a year. We cannot make any long-term plans.

**? N.R. What status do educational programmes have in your mission, in your strategic plans?**

**S.K.** It is one of the most important strategic directions. Youth politics should be made by young people, for exam-

ple, my engagement in it is temporary and enforced. Thus, Rada's goal is to train young leaders. The youth should get knowledge, experience to be able to speak common language; to gain thinking experience on youth politics and the role of a young person in the society. First of all, it is needed to reflect, to shape thoughts and afterwards to offer some actions. It requires a definite experience and skills, at which shaping our educational programmes are aimed. When I returned to Rada I saw that this aim – education and training of young leaders, who are able to think about youth politics, to state problems and necessities of the youth, to act together, to make dialogue with all parties concerned is missing. It turned to be that people working at Rada and those with whom Rada works are missing experience. But it is a matter of time. It is one of the reasons why nowadays education of one of three priority directions. We wish to create systematic education. Exactly this distinguishes our current programmes from those that the organization started with. By "systematic education" we mean an accurate cycle when a person undergoes sequentially all needed stages and afterwards gives a feedback. Fixation and analysis of the results gained and transition to a new development stage. Within our training system young leaders should study all subjects of the course, then train skills in a simulation game, and only after this they will be able to work at the local level as enlighteners or organizers. These people are ready to get engaged in national or international politics. Our educational project "The Academy of the First", which is being implemented by Rada in association with the International enlightenment association "AKT", is based on this idea.

In this project the participants get along from identifying themselves in the world to identifying their organizations, society, our position in Europe, etc. We go along from the small "ego" towards more global things and problems. And this is not only a discourse, this is knowledge and skills which our participants get in discussions at the seminars. As I have already mentioned we develop the simulation game for all theoretical courses, it will help to work out skills on self-identification, decision-making, teambuilding in practice.

The participants of "The Academy of the First" are highly motivated people. We got 64 applications for 25 vacancies. It shows that the project was claimed. But what amazed me at the first seminar was deformed definition of objectives and value system of young people. It is a question of acceptance of values forced by the state (stoup and cracknels). A flat, career, wife (husband), car are dreamboat of a modern young Belarusian. We honestly discussed at our meetings – **what do you need all these for?** What is a career, what for? Either for buying a flat and gaining a footing or for being an expert – economist, banker or teacher – does not matter, being a phenom. **"I want to have..."** It is a mixture of ideology of consumer society blindly accepted caused by longing for beautiful inaccessible west life and dependent ideology which is being forced by our state system. **"I want to have"** and saying it you do not know what you want and what you will give instead or you do not care. "Social direction" the state must take care of you but as it cares very poorly then the rest you will have to wrest in a dead-set fight. At the beginning when a group of participants reflected these stereotypes characterizing our young people I got a fright. People are values lost. And we openly discussed it. This is a matter of a personal mission. Either you live to earn as much money as possible or to realize yourself and to do something important demanded in the society (money and acknowledgement are resulted from it).

**? N.R. What stage does this project at and do you get feedback from the participants?**

**S.K.** Two cycles have already taken place, and we get feedback and see results — people think, learn to shape their needs. Still it is just thinking and reflecting. It is impossible to gain skills or other kind of sustainable result within a three-day course. Nowadays we are developing a simulation game. We even thought to have an organizational-activity game but still rested on the simulation one. The goal is to create all prerequisites and conditions to enable our participants to “live” the situations regarding definition of objectives, motivation and conflicts. Such a game will be a concluding event after three theoretical cycles. Besides theoretical and practical courses we forward our participants to internships and keep close contacts to them. We train people who are able to speak to us the same language and be our partners.

**? N.R. Who are your participants?**

**S.K.** They are young leaders of youth organizations and initiatives, members of coordinating board — people who make decisions.

**? N.R. How will you evaluate the programme efficiency?**

**S.K.** We think that if there are 4 leaders from 25 people and 10-12 course participants are able to implement their ideas into life — we fulfill our task.

**? N.R. You told that Rada in its educational programmes has transformed to more systematic approach. Do you think that it is a natural “evolutional” process of informal education development?**

**S.K.** It is needed for Rada because it helps us to achieve our goals. Rada has continuity and we should train people who move to the national level from local organizations. Exactly systematic approach to education helps to ensure training of these people.

**? N.R. Some authors of our magazine viewed an idea that informal education certainly must get system attributes, that occasional seminars on these and those subjects do not good and do not achieve the goal. I even heard a remark toward educational events of the third sector which sounded as follows: “You play the dickens with immature mind”.**

**S.K.** I think that charm of informal education is that there is diversity, initiative and fantasy. Informal education will always alter, change subjects, forms and techniques. Especially it regards youth public associations and educational projects for the youth. The youth is more inclined to innovations, creativity and generating new ideas. Partial system and random seminars in any way help participants to get liberated, to learn how to shape their opinions, to work in groups, to persist on their opinion, to get new contacts. I think that both ways should be. Closed, formalized system is called “marsh”.

**? N.R. How do you define informal education, its meaning and aims?**

**S.K.** Myself, informal education is optional but important subjects, various forms and techniques. Formal education is approved subjects, programmes and techniques afterwards approved by diplomas and certificates. Informal education is intended for not useless entertainment, it educates. But its

main objective is to introduce a person into knowledge field, which is needed for an exact action. It differs from formal education which also declares practical succession of knowledge but it does not ensure it. Having got a certificate or diploma testifying theoretical knowledge we get job to learn “life practice”. Informal education is acquired via self-cognition first of all and secondly it gives knowledge needed at the moment to make a necessary action in the situation. A product got as a result of such education does not belong to a teacher, it belongs to a participant. This product is created together with participants and belongs to them.

**? N.R. As far as a technique is concerned, it comes out that when the state educational establishments widely apply techniques allowing participant to comprehend their experience and create knowledge for themselves, then a difference between formal and informal education vanishes?**

**S.K.** It regards not only a technique which allows participants to create knowledge themselves and adopt it. It regards also accuracy and efficiency of knowledge and skills gained. For example, seminar on fundraising is a “short-life product”. This year these funds operate and they have these requirements, next year — quite other. It regards youth politics or course for the unemployed. All these are done in proper time and on urgent subjects and help a person to use knowledge got in real time. Two always-altering factors which are poorly taken into consideration by formal education (and does not follow the changes) and to which informal education is responsive — 1) changing environment and 2) changing requirements and customer needs. A person will never participate in seminar if it is not interesting to him/her or useless. Certainly if a person is not self-determined, he/she can turn into a “permanent participant” — sustainable development today, PR tomorrow, woman rights the day after tomorrow, then leadership, then fighting AIDS, etc. But when a person defines himself/herself with interests he/she starts clearly choose what he/she needs for further self-realization. If such self-realization has not taken place, it means that a person needs to return to the very first level — definition of objectives.

So, the main characteristic of informal education is mobility, accuracy, using of innovations and truly customer's demand. And another important feature: it is not the state education, it is independent.

**? N.R. What subjects do you think to be the most important in informal education of young people?**

**S.K.** I think that the most important subject especially in education of young people is leadership. I think that a task of leader education can be fulfilled only by informal education. First of all, it cannot be done as mass education. The state system of education does not have possibilities to make it within the frames of its regular curriculums scheduled in subjects and class hours nor yet aimed at it. For it another state model is needed. Although, it is basically possible.

The most popular subjects among young people are leadership, motivation and resolving conflicts. Thematic or volunteer summer camps are on demand. What I consider to be the most important is clear understanding of the aim of educational event and a possible result. Any group which takes money for conducting educational seminar must have a clear idea what it wants to achieve and have feedback with the participants after the seminar is completed.