

UPF Event

Helsinki, Finland, 5. March 2014



Since the collapse of the Soviet Union 25 years ago up to 70'000 Russian speaking people have immigrated into Finland, constituting by now the biggest foreign language minority.

Thus UPF-Finland had an event on "The integration of Russian-speaking people into the Finnish society".

First speaker was Mr. Stan Marinetz, the director of the Federation of Russian-speaking associations in Finland. After an overview of historical and present situation of Russian immigration, he described some prejudices that commonly exist towards each other on both sides, Russians and Finns. He encouraged us to know each other better in order to overcome barriers from the past.

In the second presentation Dr. Toivo Flink, representing the Ingrians, the ethnic Finns from Russia, said that in fact up to 70 or 80 % of those Russian-speaking persons in Finland are ethnically Finns, who have repatriated from Russia having lived there for several generations. They were heavily suppressed in the Soviet Union, as ethnic minorities generally were, and when they moved to Finland they were, surprising to themselves, seen as Russians by many people. Therefore they have had some identity struggles.

Mr. Flink suggested that the Finnish society should see the Ingrian immigrants as an asset due to their language and cultural know-how of Russia. They could be mediators in commercial and cultural exchange between these two quite different nations.

Introducing the organizer UPF, Mr. Hannu Hassinen proposed that we need not be prisoners of history. Families, schools and NGOs are to be the pioneers of mutual understanding. Reconciliation is not the job of only governments and diplomats.

A mindset of peace begins with the recognition of the value of each human being.

As one practical example he reminded of the "Bridge of Peace"-programs carried out by the Women's Federation for World Peace.

In a commentary Dr. Tauno Tiusanen shared his experiences as an economic and social analyst on Soviet Union predicting its disintegration since 1980s. He consistently held on to honesty and transparency in assessment. His views were uncomfortable for politicians and he was outmaneuvered from public influence. Consequently he worked for many years as a professor in UK, Germany and Austria, later on also in Finland.

Mrs. Olga Silfver, of Ukrainian origin, a planner in immigration services in Finland, and a mother of two small children, expressed her commitment to raise them bi-lingual. She is missing the financial support for language education in day-care and grammar schools, that authorities have professed to do.

From the audience a person brought up that through soccer and other sports young people commonly get together.

Over 40 persons attended with keen interest in presentations and continued with browsing at the book-table and sharing over tea and traditional buns.