

## Evaluation of IAF seminar "Liberalism Today – Freedom First", May 2010

I participated in IAF seminar "Liberalism Today – Freedom First" which was held between May 2<sup>nd</sup> and May 13<sup>th</sup>. Before the seminar I had an excellent experience with the FNF staff in Jerusalem. Anne Cohen-Koehler informed me about the nomination process and updated me about my status. She was in contact with me all the time, answered all my questions and prepared my travel arrangements. I also had the opportunity to meet Dr. Hans-Georg Fleck. We had an interesting talk about Israeli politics and about the FNF, in which I received valuable information about the activity and goals of the foundation.

The seminar itself was beyond my expectations. It was perfectly organized in almost every aspect. The academy building in Gummersbach offers both convenient learning and living conditions. We had rooms with everything we needed. The administrative staff was very nice. Meals quality was very good and the food was varied and suitable to a large scale of cultures and tastes. There was a constant effort to make us feel at home.

Most of the seminar we discussed Liberal issues like Rule of Law, free market economy, secularism and Liberal solutions to social issues. Also we learned about the ideological differences between Liberalism, Socialism and Conservatism. This knowledge is important to me as an Israeli, since the political map in Israel is very different from the European one. It helped me to sharpen my ideology and to put myself in a more accurate ideological position. Also, as a member of the Meretz Party, which is a social democratic party, I was exposed to Liberal economical ideas. In this issue, unlike other Liberal issues that I completely identify with, I had many disagreements. Nevertheless, I talked about these issues as an insider and not as a rival opponent. This gave me some thinking material about the ways of bridging the gap between the two ideologies and taking the successful ideas from each of them.

The seminar was very general. We discussed about the Liberal ideology in all of its forms. This was an advantage, but also a disadvantage. I learned a lot about Liberalism in general, but couldn't go deep and focus on specific subjects. I would focus less on economical issues. Some of the lectures and visits we had in economical institutes outside of Gummersbach were unneeded for my opinion in this kind of seminar. We had less than two weeks, and I wanted to focus more on human rights, rule of Law and state and religion issues.

One of the most important subjects we discussed was the secular nature of Liberalism. I found that I shared the same ideas with people from very different countries, including Muslim countries. The cultural differences seemed minor when we agreed that our most important problem is the lack of separation between state and religion.

Another experience, which was difficult but important, was watching the film "Paradise Now". This film shows Palestinians suicide bombers on their way to kill Israelis. I watched it together with other participants, some of them from "enemy" countries. We had an unforgettable discussion after the film has ended, in which we shared our thoughts and experiences about terrorism and about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

I was very satisfied with the seminar facilitators, Dr. Stefan Melnik and Dr. Emmanuel Martin. They were very interesting and showed enormous knowledge about Liberal issues,

as well as surprising knowledge about participants' home countries. I had fascinating talks with them also between and after seminar sessions, and I learned a lot from them. They had good dynamics between each other and were perfectly coordinated. Also they were open minded and friendly. The interaction between the facilitators and the participants was very successful. They found the right places to participate in the discussion and provided useful information, including references to relevant books.

The language and cultural barriers were not a problem at all. We found a common language because of our common ideology. The Russian participants communicated with the help of their interpreters, Anna and Veronica. I was surprised to see how easy it can be to communicate using the help of interpreters. It was easy and fast. The interpreters were successful not only in translating from Russian to English and the other way, but also in delivering the emotions and humor of the Russian participants. They were an integral part of the group, also in our excursions and our free time. At the times we had no interpreters, usually in the evenings, we found that we don't need a lot of words in order to communicate with the non-English speakers.

I think the most valuable thing I earned from the seminar is my worldwide connections with Liberal activists around the world. We're in contact on a daily basis and there are already plans for international cooperation. I have to mention the high personal quality of the participants. They are all very interesting people, who hold positions in economical institutions, NGOs and political parties. Together we form a network that seems to have a promising future potential. We already had some detailed and deep discussions about news topics, including the recent Flotilla incident.

I also learned a lot about Liberal ideology. The seminar gave me knowledge about the place of Liberalism in politics and its relations with other ideologies and political parties. I was also exposed to some questions I face in Israel, like the relations between Liberalism and religion, Rule of Law in politics and other common disputes around the world. It was interesting to see the global Liberal struggles that unite us all together and to have conversations that gave me a perspective about Israeli society and political system.

One of the difficult experiences for me was to face an audience with a Liberal economical ideology. I come from a Social Democrat background and have many disagreements with Liberals about free market ideology, but I discovered we can overcome many of our differences. We couldn't agree about everything, but we talked and listened. It was easier to listen to different ideas because of the respect we had for each other. When the other side is not a political rival the atmosphere is pleasant and listening is easier.

I found the international forum more productive than other groups I had participated in the past. It allowed a free discussion, without involving emotions towards other political parties or groups in the same country.

I hope this seminar was only the beginning. I would like to participate in more FNF seminars in the future and deepen my knowledge about Liberalism. I will be more than happy to cooperate with the FNF in future political and educational programs.