



## OUR TRIP TO TURKEY

Turkey was the first destination of a two years' journey, which will also include other five European countries, such as Bulgaria, Hungary, Poland, Spain and Italy. The trip was part of an Erasmus+ project, namely a strategic partnership Action KA2, called "Volunteering is our job".

Volunteering was the central theme in most of our activities, during our week's stay in the Turkish city of Sivas.



We learnt about national NGOs and local charities, volunteering service with disabled people, mistreatment and cruelty to animals; we also visited a street animals' shelter. Obviously, our trip to Turkey was much more than this. It was a week full of activities, experiences and great emotions.

First of all, we were greatly impressed by the people we met.

Everybody of us will remember the warm welcome and the friendly hospitality of Turkish people. Both the families that hosted our students and the Turkish teachers who organized the event were always kind and ready to help us.

Food was their best way to express hospitality and creativity. Since breakfast, they liked to prepare a lot of delicious homemade dishes, all made of fresh, genuine ingredients. The generous, attractive courses were placed all together on the table, since, as they say, "First, you eat by your eyes, then by your mouth". Traditional kebab and sweets, like the typical "baklava" could be easily found in many places of the city.





With its 300,000 inhabitants, Sivas is a fairly large city. It is located on a high tableland of central Turkey at an altitude of about 1,200 meters.

As a consequence, it is a very cold town in winter and hot and dry in summer. We found it completely covered in snow, with icy roads and freezing temperatures (minus 10 degrees); yet, people did not care about that and the streets were always full of

busy people and cars.

Sivas is a quite lively city, with new shops and buildings, but ancient, historical monuments are also present. The Madrassah with the Twin Minarets, dating back to the 13<sup>th</sup> century, is its symbol. It is an old Islamic seminary, lying in a modern square in the heart of the city. From the nearby mosques, you could hear the muezzin's ritual chant calling the Muslims to prayer, five times a day.



Music is another aspect of Turkish culture that impressed us. It is a kind of music that mixes ancient, traditional sounds and typical instruments to contemporary style pop songs. It conveys you a mixture of positive sensations: joy, energy, sensuality. Folk dances are still alive and we were shown some at the school gym. After admiring the dancers' skill, we were involved in dancing, as in a great party. Our Italian students danced, embraced

and had fun with Turkish, Bulgarian, Spanish, Polish and Hungarian students, all sharing the feeling of being as one

Actually, we spent a week living side by side with people from different countries, using English as our common language. We worked in the laboratories, tried to learn the basics of Turkish language, had lunch at the same table, went out together in the afternoon.





The Turkish teachers, on thanking us and saying goodbye at the final meeting, said “Remember that you will always have a family here in Sivas”. We felt as we were at home , even though we were miles away from our home town.

I think the projects “Volunteering is our job” has successfully achieved its goals: a cultural bridge through different cultures has been built and our

foreign language skills, especially in English, have been improved.

I hope my colleagues and the other students who are leaving for the next destinations, can fully enjoy their experience and make the best of it. I am sure it will set a positive approach to European countries and every meeting will represent a step forward for the development of peace and tolerance among cultures.



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