

FEAMC. BERLIN, 2011.

REPORT FROM THE FEDERATION OF EUROPEAN MEDICAL ASSOCIATIONS (FEAMC)

We arrived in Berlin a few days early (and a few minutes late) at the Hauptbahnhof, or central station, and found our way to the Berlin Tourist Office to get a 'run about' travel ticket for the next few days.

Accommodation had been provided for us at the Don Bosco Centre, in what had been East Berlin, just half an hour on the S-bahn from Hauptbahnhof. We booked ourselves in there, and then went the famous Olympic Stadium. The weather had turned hot and sight seeing was hard work! Returning to the centre we walked down Friedrichstrasse and along the Unter den Linden, before having our supper at a restaurant in the Gendarmenmarkt.

Next morning we saw the Gemäldegalerie (Main Picture Gallery). As well as the main paintings we learned about one of the originators of the Secession (Art Nouveau) [Olbricht]. Then to lunch at KaDeWe, a famous department store, where the top two floors are given over to food, sold by a variety of 'boutiques'. We patronised a fish restaurant where the meal was prepared under our eyes, and proved surprisingly inexpensive. We returned via Friedrichstrasse to get the S-bahn to our hostel and put our feet up, taking with us bakery produce from KaDeWe for our evening meal!

Next day we, with a few other delegates who had also arrived early, were shown round the Don Bosco centre and learned of their work for teenagers with difficult backgrounds, not only in Berlin but throughout Germany. The Nicolaiviertel (an old quarter of the City) took up the rest of the morning, with lunch at one of the cafes in that area. Then to the enormous Jewish Museum, with its deliberately confusing architecture (Liebeskind), full of interesting relics but somehow rather disappointing.. That evening the Don Bosco Centre provided supper to welcome the delegates for next day's FEAMC Bureau. (Council).

Saturday was given to the Bureau itself. Much of the meeting was devoted to planning future events, particularly the meeting at the European Parliament and of our Bureau in Brussels in October, and plans for a congress in Rome in November 2012. Reports from the various member associations led to some discussion, and I tried to emphasise the need to interest younger people in ways that appealed to them. As on the last occasion it was evident that ageing membership was a problem for all the member associations.

We finished in good time and went to St Hedwig's Cathedral for the Saturday evening Mass (7pm), offered for FEAMC. The lessons were read in German and English, but the sermon only in German – which was more difficult! After that our German host took us to Clärchen's Ballhaus for dinner. This was a most memorable event! The front garden and the main hall were packed with people and the music was of very high volume, initially taped, but later provided by a group. Amidst the apparent chaos waiters and waitresses rushed hither and thither serving food and drinks. We were in a side room, somewhat quieter, and had an excellent dinner. When it came to leave it was almost impossible to move because of the dancing throng: Goodness knows how the staff coped with trays, glasses etc! Leaving after 11pm we found the staff were outside recovering, as we walked to the nearest S-bahn station. As in London, the S-bahn was 'up' for repairs and we had to change to a bus for the last part of the journey. There was no delay, however, in the bus replacement service, which apparently ran all night.

Most delegates left on Sunday, but we had decided to have another day. The Hauptbahnhof had put on a display of old trains to mark their 5th anniversary. This is an amazing building, with five

storeys, trains going north/south on the lowest and east/west on the topmost levels. Among the trains were some from the 1930s of which I had only seen pictures in railway books. A visit to Spandau Citadel and town, with supper at a Hauptbahnhof restaurant, completed our day.

Travel next morning did not go entirely smoothly. The weekend 'works' had finished alright, but there had been an incident – not clear whether it was vandalism or sabotage - at the Ostkreuz, a major junction for the S-bahn. Trains were running infrequently and, although we got one eventually, it took us over an hour to reach the Hauptbahnhof. Fortunately the Deutschebahn trains had also been delayed, and we caught our intended train westwards as it, too, was half an hour late.

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