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Seminar on

“How to teach controversial and sensitive issues in  
history in present day secondary schools”

Baku, Azerbaijan,

10 – 11 May 2000

**Report by**

**Dr Roger AUSTIN  
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## **1) Introduction**

This seminar was part of the so-called 'Tbilisi Initiative' which is a contribution to the development and consolidation of democratic stability. It follows the seminar held in April 1998 on 'the reform of history teaching in Azerbaijan; curricula, textbooks and teacher training' in Baku.

The aims of the Seminar were to:

- discuss new methods in teaching history in secondary schools;
- analyse how controversial and sensitive issues in history should be taught in present-day secondary schools;
- discuss with authors and publishers the preparation of history textbooks for present-day secondary schools.

The list of participants can be found in Appendix II.

## **2) The opening session**

The seminar took place in Baku State University and was opened by Dr Mesir MARDANOV, the Minister of Education for Azerbaijan and Dr Abel MAHARRAMOV, the Rector of Baku State University. The Minister stressed the political importance of co-operation with the Council of Europe and emphasised the importance of the reform of history teaching in secondary schools of Azerbaijan. Dr MARDANOV appreciated the input of the Council of Europe in this reform emphasising the importance of the expertise on history curricula which was provided by the Council of Europe and he stressed that co-operation with the Council of Europe in education should be continued and extended. The Minister of Education especially highlighted the importance of the "Tbilisi Initiative" Project which is aimed at the development of new approaches in teaching the history of neighbouring countries in present-day secondary schools. This should help the young generation to obtain such skills as tolerance, the ability to find compromises and to respect different points of view.

In her opening remarks, Ms Tatiana Milko drew attention to the considerable work which had been carried out in Azerbaijan since the start of the Council of Europe's involvement in 1997. She commented on the new history textbooks that were now being published on the Caucasus region and how the inclusion of science, music and architecture was not only important in giving a balanced interpretation of the past but would be an important antidote to the views held in the west that tended to see the Caucasus as a region marked mainly by war and conflict.

Professor Abel MAHARRAMOV, Rector of Baku State University, commented that history had been one of the subjects which had suffered most during the Soviet era and that new textbooks should reflect patriotism and secularism. He claimed that history textbooks and programmes in Azerbaijan placed national history in a wider international context, free from narrow party political influence. He expressed the hope that the Council of Europe could assist the development of history teaching through striving for a common methodology and in encouraging historians and history teachers in the west to take a greater interest in the history of the Caucasus region.

Mr Asker GULIYEV, Head of the publishing department in the Azeri Ministry of Education, also touched on the difficult issue of how to balance the need for history textbooks to promote positive images of the nation while also respecting the values of neighbouring countries. A spirit of internationalism and a respect for universal values were essential in all countries; he talked of the problems that arose when neighbouring countries did not play this game and ignored the experiences that had helped countries in Europe to gain a better understanding of each other.

### **3) Presentations**

#### **The role of publishers in textbook preparation**

##### **(Address at the seminar on the project for publication of new history textbooks)**

*Rafik ISMAILOV*

Director of the “Eni Nesil” Printing and Publishing Centre

Success in publishing modern textbooks can be achieved by joint efforts by the author, the teacher-reviewer and the publishers. It is difficult to say who plays “first fiddle” in this “ensemble”, but there can be no doubt that publishers become the co-ordinators of this process after the manuscript has been submitted to the publishing house, and a large share of the responsibility for the quality of the book rests with them.

The work of the publishing house involves editing and proof-reading the author’s text, preparing the illustrations, designing the cover and the page format, preparing the layout of the book and organising the print run. However, all this work must be carried out in permanent liaison with the author and with teachers.

I do not wish to give an assessment of our textbooks from the publishing viewpoint in this paper. One does not have to be a professional publisher in order to understand that these publications are open to criticism both from the artistic layout viewpoint and as regards printing quality.

I should like to give an account of the organisation of a publishing house involved in a project for publication of teaching aids. Any publishing house with the necessary equipment and technical resources and highly professional staff can handle this task if it arranges its work correctly, because publishing a textbook has certain peculiarities.

The structure of publishing work in textbook preparation.

### **Editing**

Since the profession of historian comes under the humanities, the narrative language of historians is usually correct and attractive. Nonetheless experience shows that any text should be subjected to editing from the point of view of language and style; this does **not** imply in any way that the author is illiterate. Therefore, an experienced editor must be involved in the textbook publication project. It should be stressed once again that the issue here is language and stylistic, as distinct from scientific, editing.

For example, it was stated in the text of one of the textbooks on the history of the Ancient World submitted to our publishing house that: “The Phoenicians set up their colonies on islands in the Mediterranean and on the shore of the African seaboard”. The expression “the shore of the African seaboard” is tautological. The in-house editor, therefore, altered this phrase as follows: “The Phoenicians set up their colonies on the African seaboard and on islands in the Mediterranean”.

The slightest inaccuracy in the language of a textbook may distract the pupil and make it difficult for him/her to grasp the substance of the material.

### **Illustrations**

From their earliest years, people perceive the world about them empirically – through visual images. Words and sentences replace the visible realities in their consciousness only after a certain time. Only people with powerful intellects and powers of abstract thought are capable of grasping new concepts and absorbing information solely by way of words and speech. The importance of visual examples is still very great in the perception of the world and of history by children of 12 or 13 years.

Usually, the illustrations that accompany the text in history textbooks help the child to get a better grasp of particular concepts (ancient peoples’ clothing, household goods, weapons, means of conveyance and so on) by giving them substance.

When choosing an artist to participate in a textbook publishing project it is necessary to take account of his/her experience in the publication of children’s



books. His knowledge of history, skill in assessing child psychology and a child's perception of graphic art and how (s)he (the artist) perceives criticism coming from a publisher, an author or a teacher are very important factors.

*Our publishing house chose the artist Mazakhir Avshar for the book on the History of the Ancient World. A historical theme (the history of the ancient Turki) is a key element in his creative work. Several years ago, he was commissioned by our house to paint portraits of 10 Azeri rulers for the book "Senin babin kim odub" (Who was your grandfather). This book was very well received by the pupils, and it can be confidently stated that many Azeri rulers were seen by the children exactly as painted by Mazakhir Avshar.*

The artist for history books and teaching aids must be objective and must not give in to emotions, especially in depicting historical personages. Caricature and the grotesque are inadmissible in history books.

## **Design**

Previously, we referred to this work as artistic editing. In principle, the design of a book means the placing of illustrations and text in a particular space – on the page or cover. This means exercising a high standard of artistic taste, where illustrations and text form a unified artistic whole and contribute to a better grasp of the topic (material).

In some cases, the artists who made the illustrations do this work in publishing houses. However, we must not forget that book design is a profession in its own right, calling for much experience and special skills. Selecting the font for the book and the percentage relationship between text and illustrations is also a matter for designers and here they must seek the advice and heed the opinion of the teacher-reviewer. A conflict between the rational and the irrational comes into play here. On the one hand, good design may call for large sectors of the page area to be assigned to illustrations, whereas on the other this increases the size of the book and also its cost. This is an important factor for a country such as our own.

The principal target set for a publishing house is maximum assimilation by the pupil of the information presented. Therefore, the designer has to solve two basic problems with the aid of the author and the reviewer:

- i. the choice of font form and size;
- ii. the relationship and artistic integrity of visual and textual material.

Design experts in the publishing of teaching aids recommend 11-point Times or Helvetica fonts.

It is difficult to find any ready-made solutions for the relationship between illustrations and text. At times the author and the artist suggest too much visual material for a particular paragraph. In such a case, it must be cut as necessary. Basic criteria can be prepared for the choice of visual material according to the extent to which it is necessary: a) how vital is the information in that material, b) are there references to the illustration in the text, c) which illustration is difficult to express in words, and so on.

Visual material can, therefore, be divided into illustrations of primary and secondary importance. Historical maps, portraits of historical personages, ancient alphabets and so on fall into the first category. Artistic illustrations depicting domestic and battle scenes may be rejected when there is an excess of visual material, although they contribute to a better grasp of the topic.

It is sometimes the case that there is a clear lack of illustrative material for the text. In this case, the artist should produce these illustrations with the help of the author.

The following page structure is widely used in history textbooks: the page is divided into three or four columns, one of which is used for illustrations and comments and the remainder for text. At times, an illustration may “occupy” a text area. If this is done with taste, no harm is done to the design; on the contrary, it gives the page a measure of freedom. Thus the relationship of text to illustrations is 60 to 40 or 70 to 30 in favour of the illustrations.

This page structure makes it possible to:

- i. separate the text from ancillary material;
- ii. place the ancillary material – illustrations and comment, explanation of concepts and questions and assignments alongside the text that relates to them.

### **Page make-up**

In skilled hands, modern desktop publishing systems and publishing programmes make it possible to produce marvels on the page. The design and make-up of textbooks on history is quite difficult (especially if the book is in full colour) and calls for long experience and special skills on the part of the page-maker. Sometimes, it may take several working days to produce one historical map on the computer. Therefore, the specialist in computer page-making must have a complete command of several publishing programmes – QuarkXpress (or Page Maker), Corel Draw, Photo Shop.

## **Printing**

The work of the author, the editor, the artist and the designer may come to nothing if printing and binding are of poor quality. Accordingly, the publisher must have the necessary knowledge of printing for a proper choice of printer for the run. There are few printers in Azerbaijan with all the requisites for long printing runs of full-colour textbooks to a high standard. It is sometimes necessary to use the services of two or even several printers for the run.

Of course, publishing new teaching aids is quite expensive. Those implementing this project hope that the textbooks they produce will not become museum pieces and will be popular and accessible to all pupils.

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**Secondary-school teaching of controversial subjects that require a special approach**

(based on the subject: culture of the Turkic nations)

Radical changes have taken place on the political map of Eastern Europe and Central Asia in recent decades. Following the collapse of totalitarian regimes, many nations, including Turkic-speaking nations, have embarked on the creation of national States. Unfortunately, this has not been an evolutionary process; with rare exceptions, it has been painful, involving much disruption.

As a result, tendencies to revise history have become apparent, the number of regional conflicts has increased, international law is being flouted, and aggressive action has been taken with a view to re-drawing existing frontiers. All these factors have led to a deterioration in the economic life of the states that have become independent. Millions have become refugees, losing homes and property, and tens of thousands have been victims of military conflict. Azerbaijan has also suffered: the standard of living of the population has declined dramatically. In spite of the difficulties, the creation of the new system of education is one of the most important activities of the Government of Azerbaijan. Thanks to the efforts of the Ministry of Education, the search is under way, and various projects for the creation of teaching programmes and the production of textbooks summarising the experience of European countries are under discussion.

A new philosophy, a new view of the world about us, is taking shape in society. In these circumstances the production of new textbooks on history and the teaching of the subject become matters of particular urgency. Extraordinary self-sacrifice and psychological preparedness are required of secondary-school history teachers. It is very difficult to tell children who do not have their own homes and are being taught in tents and caravans about values common to all humankind, about the world and about free democratic society.

Today, the principal aim of those who direct our research and teaching staff is to provide teaching aids for both pupils and teachers. The first step in this direction has already been taken, and textbooks for classes 6-11 on "The history of Azerbaijan" are now being used by our schoolchildren. Teachers are grateful to the authors of these books, in spite of some shortcomings. However, the problem of textbooks is still pressing. This shortfall also exists in countries with many years' experience in solving such problems.

In a word, the times and the situation call for constant improvements in the education system and in the training of new teachers. We (a group of teacher-testers representing the Association of Independent History Teachers of Azerbaijān) have been working for a year on general history textbooks and teaching aids (a History of the Ancient World for class 6 and a History of the Middle Ages for class 7). There are two teams of nine: four authors, four teacher-testers and a methods specialist. Without claiming to solve all the outstanding problems, we undertook the task of studying textbook preparation technology. During the year, there were about 10 training seminars and exchanges of views, with the participation of leading experts from Euroclio, the Georg Eckert Institute for International Textbook Research (Jan Makkelaar, Evaldas Bakonis, Magda Telus, Richard Morris and others). Members of the authors' group attended conferences in Portugal (Lisbon), Scotland (Edinburgh), Russia (Moscow), Georgia (Tbilisi) and other countries and gave papers. The academic visit to Germany (Braunschweig) to the Georg Eckert Institute for International Textbook Research and the exchange of views and gathering of material on the production of textbooks there, especially on the Turkic world, were especially important.

The History Programme approved by the Ministry of Education was taken as the basis for textbook production. The book will also include topics not taken into account in that programme but which may be of interest to the student, eg the Byzantine empire, the Uigur state, the organisation of ancient Turkic society and so on. Unified dimensions were set for all paragraphs. The paragraph titles correspond to the approved programme, but titles that may arouse pupils' interest are used in sub-headings. Figures and illustrations account for 30-40% of each paragraph. Supplementary sources in addition to the author's text are indicated, to make the topic more comprehensible. For example, the following additions are proposed on the topic "The European Hun state":

- i. The conditions in the Konstanz agreement of 434;
- ii. The 6<sup>th</sup> Century Gothic historian Iordan on Attila;
- iii. The Hun ruler's palace through the eyes of the Byzantine emissary, Priscus;
- iv. The historian Lev Gumilev on the friendship of Attila and Aetius;
- v. "The death of Attila" – an excerpt from a science-fiction novel.

The paragraphs were ready by the beginning of the last academic year and were tested in schools. The teacher-testers, F. Babaev, A. Allakhverdiev, and others conducted a special poll among parents and pupils, heard their views and re-worked the texts on the basis of the data collected. Sixteen hours are assigned to the history of the Caucasus and the Turkic nations in the programme "History of the Middle Ages" for class 7. Both pupils and teachers were in favour of this innovation. Incidentally, these topics are new to the teachers.

While teaching these topics, the teachers often encounter painful historical nuances that give rise to controversy and call for a careful approach.

The basis of this is the biased attitude to the history of the Turkic nations and to Turkic culture in Soviet historiography. From Ibn Haldun (14<sup>th</sup> Century) until the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, the Turki are referred to in researches as a nomadic people incapable of creating any cultural values. As a result of this view of the early medieval history of the Turki, there are different readings forming a basis for disputes. Which topics and nuances are contradictory and call for a special approach by the teacher in the process of instruction? We will point to some of these:

- Who are the Turki? Is this a creative or a destructive nation?
- How is the Hun campaign in Europe to be assessed? As a clash of states or a clash of cultures?
- Reasons for the merging of Chinese and European cultures – Turkic history and culture through the eyes of Russian and European researchers;
- Tolerance among the ancient Turki – tolerance of other religions;
- The attitude of the ancient Turki to women (the gender issue);
- The election of khans among the ancient Turki and their laws – democratic government in embryo?
- Islam in textbooks in Western Europe and so on.

How, and with the aid of what, is the teacher to explain these issues to the pupils? In our view, textbooks illustrated with examples of material cultural values and historical documents will be the best aids for teachers. The early Middle Ages was a period of awakening, both for the Turki and for many other nations, for example the Germanic peoples, the Arabs, the Slavs and so on. This was a period of chivalry and self-assertion. The threat of being swallowed up by great states (China, Sassanid Iran or Byzantium) forced the ancient Turki to unite and create khanates.

Attila completed the westward campaign of Balamir, the founder of the West Hun state, in the middle of the 5<sup>th</sup> Century. At first glance, this campaign gives an impression of destruction, but historical sources relating to the Huns and questions that force the pupils to analyse give room for an alternative idea – the basis of the conclusion that the Turkic nations' mission was creative. The sources reveal the reasons that impelled two childhood friends, two great military leaders who divided Europe into two parts, their essential nature and historical role. The beauty of the Hun palace is also evidence of creativity. Reports by a Gothic historian, a Byzantine emissary and others make it possible to move away from the traditional approach to the Hun campaigns and to take another view: Attila, although he had every opportunity to do so, does not destroy a Rome rich in historical and cultural monuments. Not only Huns, but also many European peoples come together under Attila's banner. Perhaps this

idea also is debatable, but Attila's campaign can be viewed from another angle. A new European society was being created in the early middle ages in a very troubled situation. If we take the new religion (Christianity) as a starting point, the second starting point that spurred the nations of Europe on to struggle and move was the Hun campaigns.

Of course, we do not try to nudge the pupils towards these ideas in the textbooks; we are only trying to make them think by means of open questions. The great Turkic khanate (the first and second Turkic state) occupied territory from China to Eastern Europe in the 6<sup>th</sup> to the 8<sup>th</sup> Century. Before this period, the flourishing cultures of China and Europe were developing in isolation from each other. The Turkic khanate acted as the bridge between them, guaranteeing the safety of economic links between east and west.

The Turki of the khanate were afraid of coming under the influence of the strong Chinese culture and strove to preserve their traditions and customs in every possible way. However, they did not deny other cultures. This nuance can also be brought to the pupils' notice on the basis of primary sources, not in the author's text. A stone book on the Turkic scholar and statesman Tonyukuk states: "I was brought up in a world of Chinese culture and education. This had no adverse effect on my upbringing".

There was much interest in China also in Turkic culture, customs and traditions. This also can be brought to the pupils' notice by using Chinese sources. In describing the advantages of the yurt, the poet Po Chu-i, who lived and wrote during the golden age of Chinese poetry, writes: "Chinese nobles put up yurts in the grounds of their houses and move into them for the winter". In referring to the yurt as blue, Po refers to the symbolic colour of the Turki. Prince Li Chten, who was very fond of the Turkic clothing and language, dreamed of becoming the chief adviser of the Turkic khan. Turkic clothing with green lapels and a belt was the normal dress during the Tang dynasty.

Tolerance of other religions is not a particular feature of the early Middle Ages. However, the fact that the Turkic khan greeted a Buddhist monk with great respect on his arrival organised a reception in his honour and gave him guides as far as China is evidence of Turkic religious tolerance.

In contrast to many other nations, the ancient Turki treated women and mothers with particular kindness. The rights of women, who were treated as divinities, were governed both by custom and by law.

The election of the khan was accompanied by a complex and solemn ceremony. The khan, like all the people, was subject to the law – the Tura.

The Russian and European scholars who have collected and published historical texts on the Turkic peoples and have made an enormous contribution

to the study of ancient Turkic history deserve high praise. Apart from the names of Champollion and Grotofen, pupils should also know of V. Thomson, the Danish linguist and distinguished student of the Orkhon-Yenisei Letters.

Sometimes illustrations are also an important factor in settling debatable issues affecting Turkic history. For example, silver goblets with engraved hunting scenes and terra cotta figures in the Hermitage Museum (St. Petersburg) are often erroneously ascribed to other peoples, not to the Turki. The sources referred to in the textbook show that they belong to the Turki.

The coverage of the topic "Islam" in the European textbooks obtained by us with the aid of Euroclio has attracted our attention. When we showed an interest in the teaching of this topic in German schools, they turned to us to find out what we thought. Paragraphs touching on Islam in textbooks printed in the Baltic States have been discussed at a seminar in Baku and our teachers have told the authors what they wanted. It has been decided that when textbooks about the East are printed in European countries that are members of Euroclio, reference will be made to specialists from Azerbaijan for expert appraisal. We in turn will seek advice from western specialists when we are working on topics relating to the history of Europe. This exchange of views will certainly help to resolve disputes in historical topics.

There was an interesting discussion with colleagues from Lithuania and Estonia on the production of national textbooks and programmes. The fact that Anu Rouldsep, the author of teaching programmes for Estonia, decided to include the topic "The first democratic republic in the East" in the national teaching programme may be regarded as resulting from that discussion. The recent admission of the Azerbaijan Association of History Teachers to Euroclio (in Lisbon) will give our history teachers the opportunity to exchange views with their colleagues from European countries and with the authors of teaching aids, to cooperate closely with them and to give them facts about Azerbaijan. This is yet another factor in the integration of our republic into Europe on the eve of its admission to the Council of Europe.



**Summary of a paper by Professor Isag Mamedov,  
Baku State University, on:**

**“New approaches in preparing and publishing history textbooks and  
teaching programmes for secondary schools in Azerbaijan”**

A great deal of work has been done in Azerbaijan, which gained its independence nine years ago, to reform education and to move forward to the level of world standards. The preparation and publishing of history textbooks and teaching programmes for secondary schools is a step in this direction. This has been done having regard to the existing realities and the national specificities of the country, and making use of experience in world practice. Thus:

- the history textbooks and teaching programmes are now free from any social (class) approach in describing historical processes such as existed in Soviet times, and from Bolshevik utopian dogma. Objective historical information is taken as the basis in the coverage of various issues;
- the content of old textbooks has been re-worked in the programmes and textbooks, taking national traditions and specificities into account;
- this also made it possible to free ourselves of the stereotypes and atmosphere of Soviet times;
- special attention is given in the programmes and textbooks to national and moral values and to the method of historical comparison and correlation. This in turn will make a contribution to bringing up the younger generation in a spirit of respect for national values and values common to all humankind;
- a special place in the programmes and textbooks is assigned to the study of world and national culture. This is because of the need to bring up a younger generation with a high standard of culture and high moral values;
- the programmes and textbooks are rich in material free from artificially linked stereotypes of internationalism, and educate the pupils in civic spirit, national patriotism, humanism and respect for other nations;
- the amount of material in the programmes and textbooks reflecting topics connected with human rights has been increased. In this respect, the future preparation of a programme and textbooks in the

languages of smaller nations would be a clear example of respect for human rights;

- the programmes and textbooks give extensive coverage of historical world events, particularly in the history of countries in Europe, Asia and America, which have influenced the historical development of our country;
- the programmes and textbooks cover East-West and North-South relations and their historical correlation.

Historical facts presented in the past in a subjective light or too closely linked to the current situation have been taken out and the material enriched with objective historical information.

An example of the non-traditional approach is the fact that a section on “The Turkic world and the nations of the Caucasus” has been introduced in programmes and textbooks on “General history”. This section presents the history of the Turkic nations (excluding Turkey, Central Asia, Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan) which lived and still live in territories extending from Northern China to Europe, but which have been forgotten and sidelined from the point of view of coverage of their history.

Attention should also be paid to improving the printing when the textbooks are published.

We take the view that the new history textbooks for secondary schools will play their part in forming a new generation free from ideological ambitions, free-thinking and objective.

**Summary of a paper by the Head of the Publishing Department,  
Ministry of Education on: Advances in the preparation and publication of  
new textbooks on national and regional history  
for secondary schools in Azerbaijan.**

**How controversial and sensitive issues are reflected in history textbooks.**

1. When independence was gained in 1991, this was a historic opportunity for a radical reform of the education system, in particular the content of education, and for its de-ideologisation. The restrictions and prohibitions on the objective and complete study of national history that prevailed under the Soviet regime and communist ideology were overcome. For the first time in the history of the education system in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, it has become possible to teach national history in secondary schools in a systematic and all-embracing form. The opportunities for teaching national history in classes V-XI and world history in classes VI-XI have been increased. New history teaching programmes have made their appearance. In the recent past (1991, 1995, 1996, 1999), teaching programmes on the history of Azerbaijan and world history have been prepared, and these programmes have been supported by Council of Europe experts.

Seven experimental textbooks on national history (classes V-XI) were published on the basis of these programmes in 1993-1996, and six of them translated into Russian (classes VI-XI). Work has begun on preparing a textbook on world history for publication.

2. An "Educational Reform Programme" was adopted in Azerbaijan in 1999. "State standards and basic teaching plans for general education" were approved by the government for the first time in accordance with this programme. The programme of reforms and basic teaching plans devote much attention to the teaching of history, and in-depth study of national and world history in secondary schools is being brought to the forefront. In accordance with this programme and the new teaching plans, all subjects including history at general school level are being taught using the latest principles in world practice, ie taking the inclinations, ability and wishes of the pupils into account. National and world history teaching programmes have been prepared on the basis of these requirements and approved by the Ministry of Education, taking the views of international experts into account. These programmes will be used in secondary schools as from the 2000/2001 academic year.

3. A "Textbook programme" is now being devised and will be submitted for approval; this programme will resolve issues arising in the preparation of new textbooks, their publication and supply to teaching establishments. In accordance with this programme, the production of new textbooks on national and world history is being brought to the forefront, and work is now in progress on the preparation of textbooks on the history of Azerbaijan for classes 10-11.

The following conceptual issues take priority in the production of history textbooks:

- the requirements and recommendations of the Council of Europe regarding the teaching of history will be taken into account;
- historical distortions are unacceptable, material must be historically authentic and covered objectively;
- the treatment of issues connected with national statehood, national traditions, national culture, the national mentality and national ideological principles must be indissolubly linked to the teaching of world values common to all humankind in a spirit of respect for such values; propaganda for fascism or nationalistic ideas is unacceptable in history textbooks;
- the treatment of sensitive issues that might harm national or international relations should be avoided;
- there should be extensive coverage of the history of eastern and western civilisations;
- history textbooks should be free of politics;
- substantial space should be made available for material connected with the protection of human rights.

Our principal task now is to produce textbooks that conform to international standards. The Council of Europe could give us useful aid in completing this task in two areas.

1. More world history than national history is now being taught in Azerbaijan (in the proportion of 60 : 40). However, there is very little serious literature and material on world history. We think that the Council of Europe could help us with new literature on world history.

2. It is clear that there are enough controversial and sensitive issues connected with the history and culture of neighbouring countries in textbooks on regional and national history.

In this connection, I wish to ask the Council of Europe to form a group of independent experts to assess history textbooks being published in countries in the Caucasus region. This would help to avoid obvious contradictions.

#### **4) A case study from Northern Ireland**

Dr Roger Austin, from the University of Ulster in Northern Ireland, presented a paper on 'How to teach controversial and sensitive issues in present day secondary schools: the example of Northern Ireland'.

In describing the context of education and history in Northern Ireland, Dr Austin explained that Northern Ireland was the place where the cultures of Great Britain and Ireland meet. He reminded the participants in the seminar that Ireland had been partitioned in 1921 into Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, that Northern Ireland, with a population of 1.5 million was still part of Great Britain and that recent estimates put the population at roughly 54% Protestant and 44% Catholic.

### **The School Context**

Over 90% of pupils currently attend schools with co-religionists but the 'integrated' sector of schooling, where Catholics and Protestants are educated together, is growing steadily.

Education is compulsory from the age of 5 - 16 and the majority of pupils stay on to the age of 18. There is a selection procedure at the age of 11 with some 30% of pupils continuing their education to grammar schools and the remainder attending high schools

### **The history curriculum in Northern Ireland**

Until 1988, schools could select their own content for pupils aged 5-14 and there is some evidence that this meant that Protestant children tended to study British history while those in Catholic schools were more likely to study Irish history. From 1988, a 'common curriculum' from 5-14 was introduced throughout the United Kingdom but the content of history in Northern Ireland differed from what was taught in England. What was 'common' was an acceptance that learning history involved the acquisition of both skills and knowledge and that this should be reflected in the assessment schemes.

### **Handling controversial topics; some principles in Northern Ireland**

Since 1988, all children in Northern Ireland follow an agreed core of history, which has an Anglo-Irish dimension as well as a European one. All schools are expected to incorporate the cross curricular themes of Education for Mutual Understanding and Cultural Heritage. These themes embrace a set of ideas that include respect and tolerance of others and a willingness to look at issues from different perspectives.

### **Selecting the core of common knowledge, 5-14**

The principles which lie behind the selection of content that all children study begin with the importance of looking at the experiences of settlers **and** natives, (generally the native Irish). For example, pupils study the arrival and impact of the Vikings, (age 9-10) the Normans (age 11-12 ) and then the English and Scots in the 17<sup>th</sup> Century (age 12-13). In other words, successive waves of

settlers are studied, each of whom had their own motives for coming and left their own distinctive traces.

The second principle of selection is to try to ensure that all pupils study the roots of the present conflict in Northern Ireland by studying both unionism and nationalism.

The third principle is to ensure that what the pupils study is set in the wider context of Europe to avoid any sense that violent conflict is a peculiarly Anglo-Irish issue.

### **Principles of handling controversy in history, 5-14**

There is broad consensus among history educators and teachers that history is centrally concerned with understanding motives and causes; it is NOT about making moral judgments from the present. It is also concerned with seeing the situation from the perspective of the time when an event took place. Finally pupils' study of the past is based on **evidence** and requires pupils to understand a range of perspectives.

### **History at 14-16**

Many students choose to drop their study of history at the age of 14; for those who continue there is an optional two - year course leading to external examination, the General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE). The content of this course includes Nazi Germany, Super Power Rivalry and either...

- v N.Ireland, Ireland and the United Kingdom, 1935-1955; **or**
- v **Anglo-Irish relations 1965-1985.**

### **Principles of curricular design 14-16**

The content contains a national, European and world focus; for those who choose to study the recent history of Ireland and Great Britain, a study of the most controversial issues, eg 'Bloody Sunday' 1972 is expected. Overall, at this stage, students are expected to develop skills in handling evidence to include 'representation and interpretation'. In other words, they might look at recent films of the period they are studying and evaluate their accuracy and reliability as historical evidence.

### **History at A (advanced ) level 16-18**

Some students choose to continue their study of history into their final two years in school. A new syllabus in advanced level history means that schools in Northern Ireland do either 'mostly British and/or Irish history with some European history', or 'mostly European history with some British and/or Irish history'.

At this level of study, students are required to consider recent research by historians in their work and to consider in depth the purposes of writing and learning history. This might include discussion on historiography and whether there can be ever be anything which we can call the ‘truth’ in history.

### **Developments using Information Communications Technology (ICT)**

Information Communication Technology (ICT) allows pupils in Northern Ireland, across the border to the Republic of Ireland, the rest of the United Kingdom and further afield to do the following:

- v take part in on-line discussions on historical topics where they can work with schools from different backgrounds to their own;
- v design web pages together based on their joint study of some aspect of history, eg ‘This Island we live on’, which linked schools on each side of the Irish border (<http://www.ulst.ac.uk/thisisland/>).

We believe that contact between teachers and students from different communities and backgrounds can lead to greater understanding provided that such links are well managed.

### **Developments in citizenship**

The growing interest in human rights education has led a number of people to ask if Education for Mutual Understanding (EMU) is a strong enough framework to address values education and citizenship. In other words, is it the best means by which to address controversial issues? It seems likely that a new framework will emerge as part of the overall review of the curriculum in Northern Ireland and will create a set of principles that have currency not only in Northern Ireland but also in the Republic of Ireland and in the rest of the United Kingdom.

### **Resources for teaching**

As in most countries in Europe, there is no set text for teaching history approved by the Department of Education but, instead, teachers use a wide range of teaching and learning resources. In the case of teaching about Northern Ireland, some schools use the BBC CD-ROM, ‘A State Apart’, locally designed textbooks, local TV programmes from Ulster Television, Channel 4 and the BBC and increasingly, material on the internet. The Northern Ireland Network for Education (NINE) is part of the United Kingdom’s national grid for learning and has a growing body of resources available for the teaching of history (see <http://www.nine.org.uk/>).

This variety of resources is seen as an important part of accepting that there is not one single interpretation of the past and it stimulates new resources such as Ben Walsh's challenging textbook, 'The Struggle for Peace in Northern Ireland' ( John Murray, 2000), designed for 14-16 year olds in Northern Ireland and the rest of the United Kingdom.

### **The role of pedagogy**

Effective handling of controversial issues in history also requires suitable classroom methods of teaching which allow pupils to feel comfortable about discussing difficult issues and expressing opinions that may not be shared by the rest of the class. We have actively encouraged the use of role play and hot seating (where pupils assume the role of a historical character and are asked to explain their actions by the rest of the class) and defining rules of debate so that it is clear that listening is seen as being as important as talking. All these techniques are designed to promote self-esteem by pupils since they are more likely to respect others if they have a positive self-image. In general, teachers are asked to consider styles of teaching that stimulate openness; this means that conventional methods of teaching where the emphasis is on pupils being passive are unlikely to help create the right classroom atmosphere for debate and discussion.

### **Conclusion**

- √ The content of the Northern Ireland history curriculum underlines common experiences as well as points of conflict.
- √ Recent conflict is handled by older pupils who are more able to make sense of the issues.
- √ Pedagogy, the way the subject is taught, is vital.
- √ The core philosophy of history, based on evidence and perspectives is essential.
- √ Cross curricular themes, such as Education for Mutual Understanding, have played a key role in enabling teachers to address sensitive issues with pupils but may need to be transformed via education for citizenship.
- √ ICT offers significant potential for inter-cultural education both now and in the future.



6) **Publication of new textbooks and the presentation of sensitive issues by Mr Andrzej CHRZANOWSKI, an educational publisher from Poland**

**The publishers' role in textbook development and provision**

Mr CHRZANOWSKI explained that publishers working on textbooks depend on curricula and authors, that they are a part of the education system and their field of freedom depends on external factors. However, he also made it clear that publishers should not remain passive and, in his view, should discuss in detail the textbook concept with authors not only from a financial point of view but also to share with them the knowledge and expertise of teachers' expectations and needs.

Drawing on his experience, he said that publishers involve teachers in textbook development and make use of schemes of textbook assessment based on its class use. He also said that publishers should accept and promote textbook competition as a way to be more independent from the government and have better business opportunities.

**Textbook design**

Mr CHRZANOWSKI suggested that textbook design should include the balance and relationship between text and illustration (photographs, maps, - drawings, diagrams, ie. the layout and the page-planning), the style of narrative suitable for a particular age group and the role of both open and closed questions. Attention also had to be paid to the ways that original historical sources were used and the role the book played in encouraging further study.

**Publishers' influence**

Mr CHRZANOWSKI commented on the ways that individual publishers can extend their influence through being part of a national association of publishers (Polish example of the Chamber of Books and its Textbook Committee) and involvement in national legislation on education or in establishing other rules crucial to publishers' performance. He also referred to the importance of co-operation with teachers' associations and other national educational institutions and organisations. This cooperation also has an international dimension through links to organisations such as the European Educational Publishers' Group, EUROCLIO, the Georg Eckert Institute for International Textbook Research, the Open Society Institute etc.

## **Controversial issues in history**

Mr CHRZANOWSKI said that history is a narrative of conflicts and controversies (political, ethnic, religious, cultural etc.) and that we must find ways and methods intellectually and didactically to approach hot and difficult problems. He pointed out to the concept of tolerance and mutual understanding since war proved not to be a solution to any basic dispute; nuclear war was a direct way to the destruction of humanity.

He claimed that teaching controversial issues is more to do with classroom methodology than content; he stressed the need for acceptance of different values and positions, and the need for a pluralistic democracy in internal and in external relations with equal rights for big and small. Controversial issues should be presented from a historical perspective and as values and skills that require practice and commitment

Where there are continuing conflicts or memories of conflict between nations, bi-lateral commissions of historians from each country had worked together to present their own version of events, to hear how the other side explained the position and then to prepare a set of recommendations for their colleagues. Mr CHRZANOWSKI explained that this had happened in geography as well as in history and cited the examples of such commissions between France and Germany, Germany and Poland and Russia and Poland.

Teaching controversial issues embraces much more than the style of textbooks, other printed materials and using the right methodology: it is mainly to prepare teachers to be open and ready for discussion, and it is to overcome the communist legacy that there is only one truth based on black and white choices.

### **7) Group discussions reports**

In addition to the presentations made by guest speakers, an important part of the conference involved participants in two group discussions; the following section contains the key questions which each group was asked to consider and the summary of their deliberations.

## **Working Group N°1**

### **"New history textbooks for secondary schools"**

**Chair: Professor Isah MAMEDOV, Azerbaijan State Oil Academy**

**Rapporteur: Mr Asker GULIYEV, Head of Publishing Department,  
Ministry of Education of Azerbaijan**

**Resource person: Mr Andrzej CHRZANOWSKI, Poland**

- i What are the differences between older textbooks and the new history textbooks in regard to world and national history?
- ii Do new history textbooks for secondary schools respect the following principles:
  - ◆ the presentation of information using comparative methods;
  - ◆ multiperspective approaches;
  - ◆ the main accent not being on the amount of knowledge but on pupils' skills;
  - ◆ continuity in presentation of teaching materials;
  - ◆ taking into account the experiences of other countries when preparing new history textbooks (or is the national experience enough?);
  - ◆ class use of history textbooks.
- iii How is the history of the Caucasian Region presented in curricula and in history textbooks for secondary schools in Azerbaijan?
- iv What are the most urgent needs of secondary schools as regards the preparation of history textbooks?
- v What methods should be used while teaching the history of neighbouring countries?

### **Recommendations and conclusions of the discussions**

1. Sensitive and controversial issues should be taught in secondary schools and should be reflected in history textbooks. Pupils should know the historical facts. It is important to teach about these complicated issues because if not, controversial issues will increase.

2. Controversial and sensitive issues can be connected with territories, borders, historical monuments, as well as with historical figures. These issues should be discussed with pupils in the form of debates to enable them to try to find solutions on their own.
3. While teaching history in secondary schools, we should not falsify historical facts. The history of the Caucasian Region should be taught in the context of world history. It is important to organise seminars and to have an exchange of views on how to teach Caucasian history.
4. Teaching about the neighbouring countries in the Caucasian Region is a sensitive issue itself. One should be careful while doing it. A history teacher should have a lot of patience and present to his or her pupils different points of view on the same facts and events.
5. It is important to use the experiences of European countries in teaching controversial and sensitive issues. While preparing new history textbooks for secondary schools in Azerbaijan, authors should:
  - reflect the history of neighbouring countries from an objective point of view;
  - present controversial and sensitive issues in a way that will be understandable for pupils;
  - give different points of view on the same facts;
  - use a variety of illustrations and sources.
6. Historians of Azerbaijan are interested in developing co-operation with their European colleagues. It is important to continue co-operation with the Council of Europe through seminars, because, only through the exchange of views between historians from different countries, will it be possible to find answers to the most difficult questions.
7. It should be taken into account that the preparation of history textbooks is a great responsibility because history textbooks may help to build confidence in the region but on the contrary could provoke conflict.

## **Working Group N°2**

### **"How to teach controversial and sensitive issues in history in secondary schools"**

**Chair: Professor Yagub MAKHMUDOV, Baku State University**

**Rapporteur: Professor Suleiman MAMEDOV, Baku State University**

**Resource person: Dr Roger AUSTIN, Northern Ireland**

- i      Should controversial and sensitive issues be touched on while teaching world, national and regional history in secondary schools?
- ii     What methods should be used while teaching controversial and sensitive issues in history in secondary schools?
- iii    How should these controversial and sensitive issues be presented in history textbooks for secondary schools?
- iv     What are the publishers' criteria of selection of history textbooks for publication?
- v      What methods should be used when teaching the history of neighbouring countries?
- vi     How could the experiences of other European countries be used when preparing new history textbooks in Azerbaijan?

### **Recommendations and conclusions of the discussion**

All the participants of the working group considered the Seminar on controversial and sensitive issues in teaching history in secondary schools to be useful and fruitful.

During the discussions in the working group, it was stressed that there is a big difference between the old history textbooks and the new ones. This difference can be seen first of all at the level of the interpretation of facts and historical events.

New history textbooks in Azerbaijan are free of ideological influences of the soviet period which presented historical events which were falsified in their real historical context.

It should be stressed that new history textbooks in Azerbaijan exist only for Azeri history; at the same time, in schools in Azerbaijan, old history textbooks on world history are still being used. These are now being supplemented by new materials for teachers on world history which are used in secondary schools in Azerbaijan.

The most urgent task for historians of Azerbaijan is to prepare new textbooks on world history for secondary schools.

All the participants agreed that while teaching history in secondary schools, a teacher should use different methods, such as the comparative method, which gives a possibility for pupils to compare facts and to draw conclusions on their own.

The participants of the working group highlighted that, while teaching history in schools, a teacher should use multi-perspective approaches.

While preparing the new history textbooks on national history in Azerbaijan, the authors have already made an effort to put the accent not only on the amount of information but also on pupils' skills such as ability to think and analyse facts on their own and critical thinking. But this approach should be more developed while preparing new textbooks on world history.

More attention should be also paid to illustrations, tasks and questions for pupils which will help to develop the above-mentioned skills.

All the participants agreed that, in new history textbooks for secondary schools, the main focus should be on skills rather than the amount of historical information.

The participants of the Seminar stressed that, in new history textbooks, historical events should be given in chronological order with explanations on their causes.

In curricula on history for secondary schools in Azerbaijan, the history of the Caucasian region plays an important role. The information is given in chronological order. Political themes are combined with themes on economy and culture.

At the same time, the participants of the Seminar proposed that the expertise of history textbooks used in Azerbaijan must be provided by independent experts of the Council of Europe to find out what themes could be interpreted as nationalistic and could separate the peoples of the Caucasian region and these themes must be excluded from new history textbooks. History textbooks of neighbouring countries, such as Armenia and Georgia, would also benefit from this expertise.

Therefore, the participants of the Seminar consider the work on the preparation of a textbook on the history of the Caucasian region to be important and this work should be carried out by experienced historians from the region and under the auspices of the Council of Europe.

While preparing new history textbooks, the main accent should be on those facts which give a possibility to develop such skills as respect for European and national values as well as patriotism, taking into account that one of the main aims in teaching history is to develop respect for the one's own country.

One of the main tasks now for Azeri historians is to start the preparation of textbooks on world history, because the textbooks which are still used in secondary schools in Azerbaijan come from the Russian Federation. Therefore, the participants of the Seminar would like the Council of Europe to provide support for teaching world history drawing on the experience in European schools and to ask the World Bank to provide the financial support.





Seminar on

New approaches in teaching history  
in secondary schools in a regional context

Kislovodsk, Russian Federation,

13-15 September 2000

**R e p o r t by**

**by Dr. Vadim TREPAVLOV,  
Director of the Center of History of Ethnic Relations  
Institute of Russian History  
Russian Academy of Science**



## **1) Introduction**

1.1. A seminar on “New approaches in teaching history in secondary schools in a regional context” was held in Kislovodsk (Stavropol Region, Russian Federation) from 13-15 September 2000. It was organised by the Council of Europe together with the Ministry of Education of the Russian Federation, the Ministry of General and Professional Education, Stavropol Region, and the Institute of Initial and In-service Teacher Training, Stavropol Region.

1.2. The seminar was attended by representatives of education boards, teachers and lecturers of secondary and higher education institutions from 11 territories of the Russian Federation making up the North Caucasian region, seminar officials of the Ministry of Education of the Russian Federation, of the “Prosveschenye” publishing house and of the Institute of Russian History, Russian Academy of Sciences (RAS).

The Council of Europe was represented by Ms Alison CARDWELL, Administrator of the Directorate of Education, Culture, Youth and Sport, Environment, and Ms Tatiana MILKO, Programme Officer.

Invited to the seminar were the experts: Mr. Andrzej CHRZANOWSKI (Poland) and Mr. Arild THORBJORNSEN (Norway).

1.3. The seminar was organised within the framework of “The Tbilisi Initiative” involving scholars and educational specialists from Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia and the Russian Federation under the aegis of the Council of Europe. In the context of this project, the seminar in Kislovodsk was one of the seminars held annually in each participating country.

1.4 The aims of the seminar were to:

- (i) inform educational specialists from the North Caucasian region of the activities of the Council of Europe in teaching history;
- (ii) inform the participants of the tasks and the conception of the “Tbilisi Initiative”;
- (iii) study how regional history is taught in the North Caucasian territories and how to introduce in it the new textbook which is being developed under “The Tbilisi Initiative”;
- (iv) exchange opinions on prospects, positive experiences and weaknesses in the teaching of regional history in the North Caucasian territories and in the Russian Federation as a whole;

- (v) work out recommendations on the problems under discussion.

1.5 Special attention was given to the following subjects:

- (i) the correlation between new and traditional approaches to teaching regional history in secondary schools,
- (ii) the conceptions, the volume and content of the school course on regional history,
- (iii) the correlation between this course and the federal course on the history of Russia,
- (iv) the criteria for selecting sensitive and controversial issues for the regional history course,
- (v) methods of teaching these issues;
- (vi) particular aspects of developing and teaching regional history in the North Caucasus.

1.6 The seminar programme included:

- (i) welcoming speeches and presentations in plenary sessions;
- (ii) a round table session on “Teaching local, regional and national history in secondary schools in the Russian Federation” with two principal topics for discussion: “History textbooks and other teaching resources” and “How to present controversial and sensitive issues in teaching history in secondary schools”;
- (iii) discussions in the working groups; developing recommendations and presenting them to the closing session.

1.7 The opening session was addressed by the representatives of the administration and education boards of the Stavropol Region.

- (i) Ms Alla ZOLOTUZHINA, Deputy Head of the Administration of the Stavropol Region, welcomed the participants and wished them success on behalf of Mr Alexander CHERNOGOROV, Governor (Head of the Administration) of the Stavropol Region. She emphasised the significance of solving the problems under consideration for such a region as the North Caucasus, mentioned that various views should be presented in the textbooks and stressed the need to develop further methods of presenting them,

appealed to teachers and scholars to use foreign methods of teaching history carefully.

- (ii) Mr Nikolay BOUTENKO, Minister of General and Professional Education, Stavropol Region, said that the concepts of regional education worked out in the Stavropol Region were in general agreement with the recommendations of the Council of Europe. In the local education policy and teaching practice, priority was being given to:

- developing and using the regional educational standard in correlation with the federal one;
- keeping a balance between regional, Russian, European and world history courses;
- using principles of cooperation in training teachers;
- working out regional textbooks and teacher editions;
- devoting special attention to the history of the nations of the region.

Due to the positive influence of this approach, teachers used various textbooks and, while presenting historical material, neither blackened nor idealised the past.

The main strategy in teaching history was, on the one hand, to maintain the Russian national dignity and, on the other, education on the traditional culture of all the nations of the region.

- (iii) Ms Tatiana KOULIKOVA, Head of the Education Department, Kislovodsk, greeted the participants on behalf of Mr. Viktor Beketov, Head of Kislovodsk Administration, and told them about the history and current problems of the city.

- 1.8 Dr Vladimir BATSYN, Deputy Director, Department of Regional Policies, Ministry of Education of the Russian Federation, spoke about “The Tbilisi Initiative” and, its aims and principles. He said that the seminar was an important part of the project implementation since it would contribute to exchanging opinions and experience in teaching the history of the Caucasian nations and to forming positive ideas of the neighbouring nations among students. He also mentioned that historical myths, stereotypes and prejudices, traditional for historiography, could sometimes be found in federal and regional textbooks. And finally he said that those facts could cause negative attitudes toward some nations and threaten the rise of international conflicts.

- 1.9 Ms Alison CARDWELL, Administrator, Directorate of Education, Culture, Youth and Sport, Environment, on behalf of the Secretary General of the Council of Europe greeted the participants and thanked the organisers of the Seminar. She stressed the importance of the meeting of the North Caucasian republics for discussing principal issues under “The Tbilisi Initiative”, and informed the participants of the international initiatives of the Council of Europe in history education, including “The Black Sea Initiative” and of the Regional Conference of Ministers of Education (Tbilisi, March 2000), she spoke in particular about “The Tbilisi Initiative” - the preparation and publication of a history textbook devoted to the history and culture of the Caucasian countries. She emphasised that the main aim of the project was to help teach history so as to develop positive and friendly attitudes toward neighbouring nations among students who would be the future citizens of democratic states.

She expressed the hope that the meeting with the representatives of the North Caucasian territories would help to determine their most pressing problems and form the basis for future cooperation with the Council of Europe.

- 1.10 Ms Tatiana MILKO, Programme Officer, Council of Europe, spoke of the Council of Europe’s experience in cooperation with various organisations of the Russian Federation in teaching history schools, and presented the main activities of the Council of Europe in that area:

- (i) working out new educational standards and programmes in history. With this aim, the Council of Europe has organised discussions and workshops, their key issues being the purpose of teaching history at school and the balance between regional, national, European and world history in school courses;
- (ii) writing new textbooks in history, emphasising sources and illustrations instead of the author’s wording, in close cooperation with the Moscow publishing house “Prosveshenie”;
- (iii) retraining secondary school teachers, informing them about new teaching methods. The seminars organised by the Council of Europe greatly contributed to this process, because each of them enriched the range of pedagogical techniques and made them available to a large number of educationists through the publication of seminar presentations and reports.

## **2) Presentations**

2.1 Professor Alexei KROUGOV, Stavropol State University, pointed out that the Caucasus region is in a difficult situation. Of deep concern are the following issues: the growth of provincial nationalism; the growing estrangement among nations, often rooted in their history (e.g. Adighe-Turkic confrontation); considering the Chechens as the enemy etc. Therefore, the initiatives of the Council of Europe to improve teaching history in this region are most opportune.

The concept of ethno-cultural pluralism appears to be fruitful. According to it, people should be brought up in the spirit of their national culture and, at the same time, with due interest in, and respect for, the culture of other nations. The task of schools should be to form skills of intercultural communication.

The Stavropoul Region is taking some steps in this direction, for example, introducing courses in regional history at schools, colleges and universities, and holding ethnic festivals. At the same time, the regional component in education should be made more widespread, since some teachers and schoolchildren do not realise its importance. (There are a few reasons for this attitude, for example, too many subjects in the curricula; the fact that regional aspects are not included in the programmes of college entrance examinations; etc.)

2.2 Mr. Gamidulah MAGOMEDOV, Director of the Pedagogical Research Institute, city of Makhachkala, Republic of Dagestan. Some federal instructions concerned with teaching history require more accurate specification and improvement. For instance, the letter of instruction of the Ministry of Education of the Russian Federation "On the New Principles in Teaching History" (1993) suggested the modular, or integrated, approach to teaching the subject instead of the linear one after the 9<sup>th</sup> form. This recommendation is not taken into account. Another example is the letter of the Ministry of 1997, which allowed local education boards to devote up to 10 % of the schedule to the regional component. In practice, this time is often given not only to history, but also to local languages, literature and culture.

Local teachers question the quality of federal textbooks, which contain lots of events and dates but pay no attention to many Russian regions, e.g. Dagestan. Besides, some authors present facts without taking into consideration the historical objectivness and national feelings. One of the reasons for this is lack of competent examination of so-called alternative textbooks.

The organisation of regional history education in Dagestan has resulted in a course called "The Culture and Traditions of the Peoples of Dagestan". The general principle of courses and editions in the Republic, namely, positive description of the history and culture of the local nations, is also worth bearing in mind for federal textbooks.

2.3 Ms. Lida SHADIEVA, a Gymnasium teacher, Nazran, Republic of Ingushetiya

The main purpose of teaching history is to stimulate the self-development of a socially and culturally oriented personality. The teacher of regional history and culture should develop a love of national culture in students and help them understand the culture of other nations.

Ingushetiya is a young republic, therefore, many elements of the state system including education are only now being developed. The schools are faced with many problems, for example, the lack of schoolbooks and teachers. Besides, there are no textbooks on the history of Ingushetiya at all and archives were destroyed during armed conflicts.

Nevertheless, teachers try to be creative even in this difficult situation. For example, the Nazran Gymnasium has established a class of humanities and a students' learned society, consisting of 18 subject circles and publishing its works. These activities contribute to encouraging children to become interested in the history of the Republic.

2.4. Mr. Alexander KALKAEV, Director of Gymnasium, Nevnomysk, Stavropol Region

Textbooks in general and those on regional history in particular should be understandable for children. This must be the main criterion in textbook writing. Unfortunately, now moral and ethic principles of teachers, authors and schoolchildren often contradict each other, which put obstacles in the way of the educational process.

A cross-cultural approach may be suitable for teaching regional history. This means the priority of cultural achievements and cultural development of nations over the political history. This approach is of particular importance for a textbook on the Northern Caucasus.

2.5. Ms Olga MATVEIKO, Gymnasium teacher, Maikop, Republic of Adigheya

There are no serious inter-ethnic conflicts in Adigheya because the different nationalities of the Republic have long been sharing their cultural achievements and living in mutual tolerance. However, general politicisation of society influences the people, and teachers of regional history pay more attention to political aspects rather than to cultural ones.



There are no textbooks on the history of Adigheya, so teachers have to give classes on the subject and try to use different materials on regional history as part of other historical courses while dealing with different periods in Russian history. This situation requires the writing of a comprehensive textbook on the Northern Caucasus, which will not impose the author's point of view on children and will not provoke international strife by glorifying or denigrating certain nations.

2.6 Professor Lydia MOUNCHINOVA, Rector, Institute of Initial and In-service Teacher Training, Elysta, Republic of Kalmykia

History education is given much attention in Kalmykia, and President Kirsan Ilymzhinov is making a contribution to the process. For example, a presidential project is being developed, which aims at writing a two-volume schoolbook called "The History of Kalmykia". Many people are playing an active role in these activities. For example, conferences of parents have applied to scholars and teachers and asked them to make a comprehensive study of Kalmyk history and to help schoolpupils understand it.

Within the framework of this project, various activities have been organised, such as continuous seminars "The Modern Textbook on the History of Kalmykia" attended by Academy historians, and an International Conference on "The Languages and Culture of Ethnic Minorities" held in Elista.

2.7 Professor Sergey RIMSKIY, Rostov State University

The Ministry of Education of the Rostov Region is not ready to take responsibility for writing textbooks on regional history because of the lack of financing for this work. Neither can it control the quality of the numerous books by different authors sometimes used by teachers. Besides, the Ministry has not worked out a standard for teaching regional history as it has done for other subjects. However, the general principles of this standard are quite clear: the regional textbook should be based on the federal one and dwell on subjects that are not specified or not mentioned in the federal standards.

2.8 Mr. Alim TETOUEV, First Deputy Minister of Education and Science, Nalchik, Republic of Kabardino-Balkariya

Federal textbooks do not concentrate on the history of regions, and the regional ones, in their turn, lack information on Russian history in general. These shortcomings cause bias for national consciousness, so the main task in developing the regional component of education is to coordinate the work of federal and local education boards and research institutes. This coordination could be organised in the following ways:

- i. by regional representatives participating in writing federal textbooks;

- ii. by federal representatives (those from the Ministry of Education of the Russian Federation, the Russian Academy of Sciences, etc.) participating in writing regional textbooks;
- iii. by organising a review of federal textbooks in regions.

Besides, an end should be put to closing local branches of the Institute of National Problems of Education, which is now the usual practice justified by lack of funding.

2.9 Mr. Rouslan BZAROV, Deputy Director, Institute of History and Archeology, Vladikavkaz, Republic of Northern Ossetia-Alaniya

Many suggestions under discussion concerned with teaching history were first put forward a few years ago, during Perestroika. For example, the lack of information on the history of the peoples of Russia was mentioned in the late 1980s, and the idea of a textbook on the Caucasian region was first introduced in the early 1990s, at the First Congress of Caucasian peoples.

These initiatives have not been taken up yet for methodological reasons. Federal and especially regional and national, history should be clearly defined. It is particularly difficult to work out and teach courses on the national history of the Northern Caucasus republics. We should realise that such courses will not just be of educational value. Objectively, they will promulgate certain ideas. A school course cannot be apolitical; this may be characteristic of history as a branch of knowledge. Our task is to develop courses and textbooks based on positive and humanistic ideas. This approach is due to the present situation in the country and in the region, and characterised by the natural social and cultural revival of peoples in Russia, where some extremes cannot be avoided.

2.10 Ms Elena SMORODINA, Gymnasium teacher, Krasnodar

Regional studies can be defined as studying the history of a region and aiming at encouraging students to become interested in the history and culture of local nations.

In the Krasnodar Region, there exists a programme to develop seven textbooks for this course and some of them have already been published. While working on such textbooks, the authors should take into consideration the students' ability to assimilate the material. Unfortunately, some works of historians are too difficult for children to understand.

The methods of teaching the regional component require much more attention. Probably, a module system is most appropriate, since it allows the teacher to combine related topics from the courses in Russian and regional history and provides the students with the opportunity to study a lot of material themselves.

2.11 Ms Valentina SERCHEVA, School Director, Grozny, Republic of Chechnya

Two wars have totally destroyed education in the Republic. In this situation, the measures taken by federal and regional authorities to restore the system and to re-train teachers are of great importance.

The Chechen intellectuals are especially interested in developing a textbook on the history of the Northern Caucasus. It is obvious that this textbook should highlight the culture of nations instead of the political or military events in the region. In such a case, it will help teachers educate children to be tolerant towards neighbouring nations.

2.12. Mr. Boris BEGEULOV, Deputy Minister of Education, Cherkessk, Republic of Karachaevo-Cherkessky

The Republic is in the process of developing a school course on regional history. In 1998, a textbook for the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> forms “The Peoples of Karachai-Cherkessia, their History and Culture” was published, in 6,000 copies. At first, the authors planned to issue a few books, each devoted to a particular nation (the Abkhazians, Karachais, Nogaians, Circassians (Cherkessians)), but then they changed their minds to present the material in the form of one book. That was a crucial decision for the period of political confrontation in the Republic. It should be said that readers criticised the way of interpreting the material and mentioned errors of fact, which was quite normal for a first experience of this kind. The editorial board had itself asked for such criticism. All these remarks will be given due attention during the work on the second edition.

2.13 Ms Larisa SOKOLOVA, Head of the Editorial Board, Publishing House “Prosveshenie”, Moscow

The publishing house has developed some new history textbooks. All of them are of the federal status and the work on regional courses is in progress now. For example, a pilot issue of “The History of Countries and Nations” has been introduced in Moscow and there are plans to develop a school course “The History of Peoples in Russia”.

2.14 Mr. Andrzej CHRZANOWSKI, Consultant, Director of the Publishing House “Muza Szkolna”, Poland

Elements of the European model of education and textbook writing may be useful in teaching regional history. The model stipulates that clear standards and requirements to a subject should be worked out and become the basis for developing a textbook and other editions (workbooks, readers, and syllabuses). The principle of competition enables the teacher to choose the set of materials

s/he likes. Since there exist a lot of approaches to presenting historical material, of great significance is the qualification of the teacher. Institutes of in-service teacher training form an important element of the European model and their system is well developed. Still, considerable decentralisation of education is necessary, i.e. minimisation of the number of regulations and official organs to control it. And, of course, the European model is characterised by the absence of ideology at school. In general, the philosophy of education consists in teaching practical skills and careful selection of material to avoid overwork.

2.15 Mr. Arild THORBJORSEN, Consultant, Board of Education, Norway

Contradictions in interpreting historical problems are caused, first, by the fact that historians have different opinions, estimations and approaches to various events; second, by a tendency to manipulate the history of a nation, wars, particular facts, etc. depending on their interests. Variations in opinions of historians are natural since historical studies in general are based on interpretation and provide new knowledge. The danger is in the attempts of politicians to influence the teaching of history, and this should be taken into account in writing textbooks and training teachers.

In Norway, the principles of teaching history are based on a general curriculum and syllabuses. The general curriculum states that the main purpose is to bring up independent, open-minded individuals, capable of critical thinking and of taking ethical responsibility. The syllabuses claim that students should get some idea of basic conceptions, terms and methods of history and learn to estimate historical phenomena. In teaching sensitive issues, the aim is to get students to understand past events. The approaches to these issues could be roughly divided into two models: first, treating history as an amount of facts and personalities and second, treating history as a way of thinking. Most historians and teachers work somewhere between these two interpretations.

Teaching history at school should mostly be based on the second model and consist of the following elements:

- i. the way of stating important questions;
- ii. the method of selecting and presenting information;
- iii. the art of formulating answers;
- iv. the way of interpreting events.

An example of this approach in Norway is the interpretation of the history of World War II and, in particular, of the ideology and policy of Nazism in school courses of history.

### **3) Working Group Sessions**

3.1 The participants formed two working groups:

(i) Working Group I

Chair: Mr. Alexander KALKAEV

Rapporteur: Ms Valentina NAUMENKO

(ii) Working Group II

Chair: Dr. Alexei KROUGLOV

Rapporteur: Mr. Vasiliy ANIKEEV

The Chairs presented the reports on the work of their groups at the closing plenary session.

3.2 The Working Groups dealt with the following questions:

- What approaches to teaching history could be considered as new in present-day secondary schools of the Russian Federation?
- How is the regional component presented now in your regional textbooks?
- What historical issues could you consider as controversial? Give examples to illustrate your point of view.
- Should controversial and sensitive issues be dealt with in teaching world, national and regional history of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century?
- What should be the criteria for choosing topics to be included in present-day school textbooks in history?
- What approaches and methods should be used in teaching the history of neighbouring countries?

3.3 While discussing these questions, the participants of both working groups gave various opinions and made a lot of suggestions.

3.4 The working groups recommended the following:

- i. the development of an integrated programme of unified national and regional component in education and the introduction of some of the subjects from this component into the compulsory part of the basic curriculum.
- ii. the use of modern pedagogical techniques in teaching regional history.

- iii. the expansion of the parts devoted to the history of culture and peoples and the reduction of those on political history in regional history textbooks.
- iv. the development of a set of teaching resources (a textbook, readers, work-books, teachers' books, etc.), the production of computer and video encyclopaedias, video films on the history of the Caucasian peoples and regional history.
- v. the development and introduction of a course of "The History of the Peoples of Russia".
- vi. for the authors of regional textbooks – the development of prospectuses of already available editions as the basis for writing a textbook "The History of the Caucasian Peoples";
- vii. for history teachers – the organisation of out-of-school and research activities of students aimed at studying the history of their families, clans, settlement, region, etc.
- viii. the use of regional museums, museums of art, regional archives and those of local newspapers in order to develop students' skills of independent learning, to meet their requirements in knowledge and to apply modern techniques to teaching.
- ix. the use of various forms of interaction between teacher training organisations in order to exchange experience and to improve teachers' qualifications.
- x. for the ministries of education of Southern Russia - the organisation of in-service training for teachers of the region who teach national history.
- xi. for the boards of education of the Russian Federation territories – the development of an effective mechanism of providing information on the realisation of the project on teaching regional history.
- xii. for teachers of regional history – special attention to moral and ethical culture which contribute to forming individuals.

#### **4) Closing Session**

4.1 The closing plenary session was addressed by Mr. Alexander KALKAEV and Dr. Alexei KROUGOV, who presented the reports of their working groups, by Dr Vladimir BATSYN (the Ministry of Education of the Russian Federation) and also by Mr. Arild THORBJORNSSEN and Mr. Andrzej CHRZANOWSKI, the speakers invited by the Council of Europe.

4.2 Dr. Vadim TREPAVLOV, the rapporteur and Head of the Department, Institute of Russian History, Russian Academy of Sciences, summed up the work of the seminar.

Both the number of representatives from the regions of the Northern Caucasus, and their active participation in the discussions showed the significance of the problem under consideration. The main achievements of the Seminar were the exchange of opinions and suggestions concerned with teaching regional history in the south of Russia, and the opportunity for its participants to become acquainted with some European methods of school education. The initiative of the Council of Europe to develop a textbook on history for the whole Caucasian region received wide support, which proved that the Council's strategy was right.

The reports and discussions showed that local educationalists realised the need to introduce regional history into school curricula. Some territories had already worked out programmes and published textbooks (Dagestan, Karachaevo-Cherkessia, Stavropol and Krasnodar regions and others). All the authors of these editions based their work on the same methods and presented the history and culture of territories instead of particular nations, which was considered essential for the multinational Northern Caucasus.

The participants of the Seminar suggested various forms for a regional history course. They were:

- a regional textbook;
- a supplement to the federal textbook;
- a new subject "The History of the Peoples of Russia";
- a textbook for the whole region of the Northern Caucasus (with optional sub-regional parts).

During the discussions, the following requirements to the regional schoolbook were worked out:

- i. it should be based on the subject matter of the federal one and expand the topics presented briefly;
- ii. it should be brief;
- iii. its authors should be representatives of both federal and regional boards;
- iv. the participation of methodologists in textbook writing is essential.

It should be stressed that these parameters were in line with the requirements of the Council of Europe to similar textbooks.

The fundamental recommendation of the seminar was the need for a socio-cultural (or, according to different participants, *culturological*, *civilisational*, etc.) approach, i.e. a focus on the history of culture instead of political history.

The aim of this approach is to teach students to understand the culture of their nation and be ready to assimilate the cultural experience of other peoples. This approach is especially important in the present-day situation where there is a need to remove negative stereotypes about Caucasian peoples in the country.

4.3 Ms Alison CARDWELL said, in her closing address, that the suggestions of the Seminar participants fall into line with the “Tbilisi Initiative” concept, particularly the focus on culture, trade and the development of civilisation instead of wars and conflicts. A number of initiatives should be supported, including the following:

- The establishment of regional associations of history teachers (similar to those in other countries);
- organising exhibitions of regional history textbooks;
- organising seminars on teaching regional history.



## 5) Working Group Reports

### Group I

**Chair: Mr. A.A. Kalkaev**

Rapporteur: Ms V.P. Naumenko

There were 20 speakers at the session.

#### **New approaches to teaching history in present-day secondary schools in the Russian Federation**

Ms E.I. LOUNINA (Ministry of Education of the Rostov Region) suggested that history should be considered as part of the unified general regional component. She *recommended* that an integrated programme of a unified educational regional component should be worked out, some subjects of that component should be introduced into the invariable part of the basic curriculum and new educational methods should be used.

Ms I.S. HERASKOVA (Gymnasium 25, Stavropol) said that the new methods should be socio-cultural, i.e. focused on people, and that the approach to regional history should agree with the generally accepted approach to national history. She *recommended* that local history studies should be a compulsory element of the invariable part of the basic curriculum.

Dr V.K. BATSYN (Deputy Director, Department of Regional Policies, Ministry of Education of the Russian Federation) emphasised the importance of a clear statement of intention when developing a new approach to teaching history at school.

Ms D.N. IDIGOVA (Republic of Chechnya) and Ms L.D. MOUNCHINOVA (Republic of Kalmykiya) stressed the need to study regional and national history at the same time.

Dr S.V. RIMSKIY (Rostov State University) mentioned that, in teaching regional history, the role of a particular region in the history of Russia should be defined on the basis of modern estimations of events and phenomena.

Ms L.A. SOKOLOVA (Head of the Department of Publications in History, Publishing House “Prosveshenie”) emphasised the importance of division between history as a branch of knowledge and history as a school subject.

Ms O.I. MATVEIKO (history teacher, Republic of Adigheya) said that a humanistic approach to teaching history contributed to the education of literate personalities.

While discussing the presentation of the regional component in regional schoolbooks, Mr. G. MAGOMEDOV (Republic of Dagestan) informed the session that, in his Republic, regional standards had been developed and textbooks published which were considered quite satisfactory.

Ms V.P. NAUMENKO (Senior Lecturer, Department of Humanities, Institute of Initial and In-service Teacher Training, Stavropol) said that the Stavropol Region had worked out a national and regional component of the federal educational standard, published textbooks and teaching resources, articles on methods of teaching regional history, optional courses “The History of Russian Chronicles”, “Decembrists in the Caucasus”, etc., and had prepared for publication “Stories about the History of Cities and Villages in the Stavropol Region”.

Ms O.I. MATVEIKO (Republic of Adigheya) and Ms L.D. MOUNCHINOVA (Republic of Kalmykiya) informed the session that regional history textbook competitions had been announced in their Republics.

“Contradiction” in history.

Mr S.I. ZHIROV (Budenovsk, Stavropol Region) suggested using the term for disagreement in the presentations of the same historical event by different authors.

Dr S.V. RIMSKIY suggested two levels for treating this term:

- i. one based on the world outlook, when students’ views disagree with the estimation of historical information;
- ii. The empirical level, when settled estimations of historical facts disagree with new interpretations of these facts.

Mr A.A. KALKAEV (Director of the Gymnasium, Nevnomysk, Stavropol Region) specified the term as disagreement among interpretations or estimations of facts that may cause antagonism between nations.

All the participants of the working group wanted to include controversial and sensitive issues in teaching world, national and regional history of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. They emphasised that, providing teachers and authors did not dwell upon these problems, students would deal with them, but, in this case, at the empirical, instead of research, level. Of particular importance should be the positive role of teachers and textbook authors in the interaction among teachers, students and schoolbooks. According to the contributors, the main criteria in selecting sensitive issues to be included in present-day textbooks should be the following:

- their objectivity (Mr. A.A. KALKAEV);

- their urgency for the nation, region and the country (Mr S.I. RIMSKIY);
- historical accuracy, i.e. presenting historical facts without any estimation (Ms E.A. MOURATOVA, Kislovodsk);
- richness of information, meeting students' requirements (Ms E.I. LOUNINA, Mr A.A. KALKAEV);
- simplicity of interpretation of historical events (Ms E.I. LOUNINA, Ms V.P. NAUMENKO);
- the significance of events for the history of nations (Mr A.A. KALKAEV);
- the psychological health of students (Ms L.A. SOKOLOVA).

### **Teaching the history of neighbouring countries and peoples**

1. The presentation of sensitive issues of national policy should be accompanied by a note that the events mentioned resulted from the activities of officials, not peoples (Mr. A.A. Kalkaev).
2. A careful estimation of events should be given instead of idealising the history of a particular nation. (Mr. G.I. Sarakov, history teacher, Kislovodsk).
3. The interrelation and interdependence of cultures are the main factors in teaching history (Mr. G.I. Sarakov, Dr S.V. Rimskiy).
4. National and state interests are priorities in teaching history (Dr S.V. Rimskiy).

### **Recommendations of Working Group I**

The participants in Working Group 1 made the following recommendations which are to:

1. work out an integrated programme of unified national and regional component in education and introduce some of the subjects from this component into the invariable part of the basic curriculum;
2. use modern pedagogical techniques in teaching regional history;
3. expand those parts devoted to the history of culture and peoples and reduce those on political history in regional history textbooks;
4. develop a set of teaching resources (textbook, readers, work-books, teachers' books, etc.) and produce computer and video encyclopedias, video films on the history of the Caucasian peoples and regional history;

5. develop and introduce a course on “The History of the Peoples of Russia”;
6. for the authors of regional textbooks – develop brochures of currently available information as materials for writing a textbook “The History of the Caucasian Peoples” based on a socio-cultural approach;
7. for history teachers – organise out-of-school and research activities of students aimed at studying the history of their families, clans, settlements, region, etc.;
8. use regional museums, museums of art, archives of regions and of local newspapers in order to develop students’ skills of independent learning, meet their requirements in knowledge and apply modern techniques to teaching;
9. use various forms of interaction between teacher training organisations in order to exchange experience and improve qualifications of teachers;
10. for the ministries of education of Southern Russia together with AKIPKRO (Mr Nikitin) – organise in-service training for the educators of the territory who teach national history;
11. for the education boards of the Russian Federation territories – develop an efficient mechanism of providing information on the realisation of the project on teaching regional history,
12. for the teachers of regional history – pay special attention to moral and ethical culture, which contribute to forming well-balanced individuals.

## **Group 2**

The participants of Working Group II consider that, when teaching regional history, the following requirements should be met:

- It is important to develop and improve teacher training in the institutes of in-service training and higher education establishments of the Northern Caucasus. Colleges and universities should expand their curricula in the history of the Northern Caucasus, of particular regions and republics.
- Schools should be provided with teaching sets (textbooks in regional history, teachers’ books, readers, etc). These sets could be prepared by joint efforts of regional education boards, teachers and experts in Caucasian studies. This task can be achieved only with financial support from the state.

- The cooperation of teachers of various subjects, e.g. integrated lessons and the correlation of subjects is also important. Besides, in order to extend students' knowledge of local culture and history, teachers should use various out-of-school activities.
- The interest and support of parents is very significant when studying the history of a student's native region, city, village and family. They provide intellectual communication and cooperation among like-minded people. This will help children not only understand but also sense the history of their native land.

It is recommended that regional history courses should be introduced gradually, in stages: familiarisation with concepts and programmes; teacher training; syllabus design; providing teaching resources; introducing the courses themselves starting with the elementary school. An hour a week should be set aside for the regional history course.

While teaching regional history, teachers should use various techniques, e.g. archaeology, ethnography, etc. and various resources, e.g. museums, archives, etc.

In order to form a humanistic outlook in children, it is necessary to demonstrate the links among times, peoples and cultures of the Caucasus.

Teachers do not agree with the tendency to unify education and introduce an invariable regional educational standard. It is a purely administrative decision, which does not take into account the real situation in present-day school. A unified standard will not suit the wide range of educational establishments, such as school, lyceums, gymnasiums and colleges.

Further consideration is necessary for the problem of correlation among world, national and regional history.

Some regions have already made progress in modernising history education and in introducing the regional component into school practice. For example, experts from Stavropol State University have developed a teaching set. It consists of the textbook "The History of the Stavropol Region from Ancient Times to 1917", three schoolbooks "The Stavropol Region in the History of Russia from the end of 19<sup>th</sup> Century to 1997" and "The Workbook in Local History Studies". They include tests in regional history, quizzes, contests, folk holidays and programmes for the basic and secondary schools (the programmes have been tested in schools of the region).

A reference book "The History of villages and cities of the Stavropol Region" will soon be published by the Stavropol Publishing House. This fundamental

edition of 80 sheets is to come out in November or December and will become a rich source of information for the region's teachers.

Much work in developing regional schoolbooks has been done in Dagestan, the Republic of Northern Ossetia, the Republic of Karachaevo-Cherkessia, the Rostov and Krasnodar Regions.

Mr R.S. BZAROV mentioned that the Caucasus was an area of continuous research and discoveries which are of value for all humankind. The gap in continuity of studying the problems in the Caucasus demanded a revision of traditional methods and approaches in terms of modern civilisation and geopolitics. The speaker dwelt upon the effectiveness of the research in the Caucasus and the influence of this research on the people and the situation in the region. It is the needs of society that should define priorities in investigations.

A lack of finance for research has cut down the number of research trips and contacts among experts on the Caucasus, and prevented libraries and researchers from buying new editions. These were the reasons for the low quality of the most recent schoolbooks on the history of the Caucasus. The speaker was in favour of the development of scientific contacts and for research projects that would join the efforts of cities, regions and republics of the whole Caucasus.

Present-day secondary schools in Russia and in the Caucasus in particular should consider the problems of the Caucasian civilisation, relations between Russia and the Caucasus, the Caucasian War and the consequences of joining the Caucasus to Russia, as well as the problems of the formation of intellectuals in the Northern Caucasus. The specific character of national cultures and current peculiarities of economic relations and economic independence of the region should be highlighted.

Ms Mariam POGOEVA expressed deep concern about the growing social and political instability in the Northern Caucasus resulting from the Chechen War. She stressed that, in order to solve the problems of the region, the intellectuals of the Northern Caucasus should actively participate in social and political events and make investigations about the regional problems when contributing to writing new regional textbooks.

The speaker emphasised the importance of regional history education and drew the audience's attention to the factors determining specific features of teaching history in various territories. They were: the location of schools, student bodies, teacher qualifications, school resources, the personal attitude of teachers towards the subject of regional history, etc.

Teachers should make an unbiased interpretation of social, political, economic, historical and cultural reasons for the current situation in the Northern Caucasus. In cooperation with researchers, they should develop measures to stop this negative process in the Caucasus and to start integration and stable development.

The recommendations of Working Group II were in line with those of Working Group I.





Seminar on

“How to teach controversial and sensitive issues  
in history in present-day secondary schools”

**Yerevan, Armenia,**

**9 – 10 October 2000**

**Report by**

**Mr Asle SVEEN  
Norway**



## 1) Opening of the Seminar

In opening the seminar, representatives from Armenia welcomed the co-operation with the Council of Europe in the creation of new and more objective history textbooks for Armenian secondary schools - both national and world history. Academician *Vladimir Barkhudaryan* underlined the fact that, after the fall of the Soviet Union, it was impossible to use the old ideologically biased books. In those books, class struggle was the only driving force in history. A new set of books was published in the early 1990s. The national history now also deals with Armenians living outside Armenia in the Diaspora, and the world history is no longer just a translated Soviet world history. In the new books, the massacres of Armenians in the first decades of the 20th Century are now included and explained.

He mentioned some weaknesses concerning the new textbooks. Most importantly they are still not pedagogically adapted to pupils of different age-levels. A new combined Armenian and World History is planned for the 9th and 10th grades. In producing these books, it is important for the authors to co-operate with teachers and have their advice on methodological and pedagogical issues.

In welcoming the participants to the seminar on behalf of the Council of Europe, *Alison Cardwell*, stressed the importance of "The Tbilisi Initiative", the co-operation between Armenia, Georgia, Azerbaijan and the Russian Federation on a common regional history textbook. The aim of this book is to see the history of the region in a more positive light and to encourage the future citizens of democratic states to learn to live together. This Initiative in the Caucasus is also a part of an overall programme to reform history teaching in other areas such as South East Europe, the Black Sea region and the Russian Federation in which the Council of Europe is involved.

## 2) Presentations from the Council of Europe specialists

*Asle Sveen* spoke about how controversial and sensitive issues are dealt with in Norwegian secondary schools. He warned that history has frequently been misused for nationalistic purposes in Europe - with the Balkans during the 1990s as a recent unfortunate example. One definition of a nation is that it consists of people who are united by the same misconceptions of the past and a mutual hatred of their neighbours. This is a negative interpretation of national identity, but it carries some truth for most countries because, during some years, national identity may have been built around national myths which do not correspond to the realities uncovered by new historical research. Even if the killing of such myths is controversial and sensitive, Mr Sveen stressed that it is the task and duty of historians and history teachers to do so, not to nurture them.

He then gave examples of national myths about Norwegian history which are still alive among the Norwegian people. In older history, these myths falsely portray Norway as the home of all Viking adventures and later as a victim of Danish and Swedish aggression. These myths were partly created by historians in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century who participated in the so-called “nation-building” of the modern Norwegian State.

In modern history, there are lot of myths connected with the German occupation of Norway during the Second World War - making the Norwegian resistance much more heroic than it really was - and giving the suffering of the Norwegian population an unrealistic dimension compared to what happened in other occupied countries.

Many of these myths are very hard to correct, and the most sensitive in the classrooms are the ones from the occupation history - due to the fact that many of the people who experienced the occupation are still alive - both people who, in 1945, considered themselves as victors, and people who ended up on the losing side.

Mr Sveen stressed that myths about the Second World War are alive all over Europe - usually nurturing chauvinistic nationalism. In Norway, the curriculum in history is meant to counteract this by stressing independence and critical thinking among pupils and to make them work with contradictory sources and views on history.

He underlined that curricula and plans are not sufficient because what really counts is what goes on in the classroom. Both teachers and textbooks have to be updated on new research, and teachers have to be trained in new teaching methods.

He also pointed to a regional history initiated some years ago by the Nordic Council in which historians from all the nations gave their views on controversial and sensitive matters in Scandinavian history. This gave teachers and students an opportunity to discuss other viewpoints than are found in the more traditional national textbooks.

Finally, Mr Sveen warned that, even if new information technology creates opportunities for students to get alternative information, they will also find all kinds of propaganda and falsifications of history - and he stressed that this makes it even more important that the teachers really know their subject and are updated on historical research. They must explain to their pupils that the only way to establish historical truth goes through critical minds and proper historical research methods.

*Andrzej Chrzanowski* presented “How to present controversial and sensitive issues in history textbooks for secondary schools.”

He pointed out that, all over Europe, the curricula, standards and the amount of time devoted to history teaching is the framework for publishers when they plan textbooks. There is fierce competition in the market and, in most European countries, the teachers decide which textbooks should be used.

Mr Chrzanowski stressed that teachers are the main factor in the educational process and, therefore, they should be reasonably well paid. To-day, low wages are a problem in most countries. He warned against too much ideologisation of the teaching process and stressed that textbooks in particular should be free of it. This, of course, did not mean that a discussion of different views should not be encouraged in classes.

Mr Chrzanowski also underlined that it is important to reduce the amount of facts pupils have to learn and concentrate more on how to learn. The road to this is through good teachers' guides, additional sources and other additional material. He said that teaching history is not only about the past, it is also a training of pupils in democratic values. The teaching of the past must be an instrument for discussing the present and the future.

When discussing controversial and sensitive issues, it is important that textbooks and teachers also show the results of war on the civilian populations. They must not concentrate only on battles and military and political results - but also on the suffering and destruction brought about by war. History shows that wars seldom solve controversies and complicated problems between States.

In Mr Chrzanowski's view, textbooks should show the argument from different sides when dealing with disputed and controversial matters - and the books must not be written in such a way as to offend religious feelings or the national pride of other nations. This put a lot of responsibility on the shoulders of the authors, who nevertheless must be allowed to work independently - and on the publishers because they have the power to choose the authors.

Despite the importance of the textbooks, Mr Chrzanowski declared, that the teachers are the most important factor in education. They must have knowledge and empathy. He stressed the importance of teachers from different nations coming together - because even if one agrees upon basic facts - there are always different interpretations to discuss.

Mr Chrzanowski finally underlined the importance of “The Tbilisi Initiative” because such a regional textbook may counteract and correct misunderstandings between the Caucasian nations.

### 3) Discussion

After the presentations by Mr. Sveen and Mr. Chrzanowski, there were discussions which dealt with the problems of writing objective history and presenting different interpretations for pupils. Several Armenian representatives felt that the history of the massacres of Armenians at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century and during the First World War is not properly recognised and presented in history books in Europe.

They were of the opinion that Armenia, as a newly independent nation, has to find its own identity and values and that knowledge of the past is an important factor in this process. This does not, however, mean a chauvinistic history because Armenia is better prepared than any of the neighbouring states to accept the results of critical research on the historical sources. Some voiced their disagreement with the concept of "The Tbilisi Initiative". They thought it unrealistic that the Russian Federation should participate and were against going with the wishes of the Council of Europe if this meant that countries had to be presented without their proper national identity.

Programme officer, **Tatiana Milko**, answered on behalf of the Council of Europe. She stressed the importance of writing objective history because the pupils are influenced by their textbooks and teachers for the rest of their lives. In her view, the key word was stability. To obtain peace in the region, stability is a necessary factor. A regional history such as the one planned in "The Tbilisi Initiative" will promote a better understanding among the peoples living in the Caucasus and this should contribute to stability and peace.

### 4) Group work

In the afternoon, the participants were divided into two working groups. Group no. 1 discussed: "New history textbooks for secondary schools" and group no. 2 "How to teach controversial and sensitive issues in history in secondary schools."

### 5) At the opening session of the second day

Before the reports and discussion, the Chair of History of the Middle Ages at the University of Yerevan, informed the participants of his concern about the regional history in "The Tbilisi Initiative". In his view, there will be far too little space in the textbook to present Armenia as a country that used to be powerful in the region in the past. It would be impossible to give sufficient information about the origin of the Armenian Church and its democratic traditions.

## 6) Plenary session

Instead of summing up the discussions in the individual groups as planned, there was a plenary session where reports from both groups were presented and discussed simultaneously. In this discussion, the participants stressed that historiography is closely connected with politics. Some wanted a clear definition of what a controversial question really is? It was agreed that whenever there is more than one interpretation, a question is controversial. A lot of examples were mentioned: the controversy about the genocide of Armenians, border disputes with neighbours, the value and position of past cultures. There was general agreement that it is important for new history textbooks to avoid extreme and negative vocabulary when describing neighbouring nations. However, controversial history should only be taught in the 9th and 10th grades. Before that, pupils are too young.

**Several teachers** voiced their opinion about the newest history textbooks. Generally, they were of the opinion that the new books were a great improvement when compared to the books used in the Soviet times. But they criticised the large amount of facts, the rather dry and academic style in which the books are written - even for the lower classes - and the lack of pedagogical adaptation to the different age groups.

Some also meant that it was wrong not to mention the class struggle at all. After all, it was one of the driving forces in history. They also wanted more information about the new political parties and their ideology.

Others wanted a new curriculum with better progression for the different grades so that the pupils did not have to deal with the same topics over and over again.

One teacher said that the textbooks should not hide negative aspects of Armenian history and that it was important that the books did not create hatred towards Armenia's neighbours. Ideally, the viewpoints of all three Caucasian peoples should be presented in the textbooks. For the regional textbook of "The Tbilisi Initiative", the aim should be consensus with the neighbours. There should be enough space for each country to present itself in depth.

One teacher pointed out that it seems as if the textbooks are basically written for the 12 % of the pupils who go to university. They must be better adapted to the majority. The textbooks must be neither extremely European or Asian - but a midway which takes Armenia's geographical position into proper consideration.

## 7) Closing remarks

The Council of Europe specialists, **Mr Chrzanowski and Mr Sveen** and Ms **Alison Cardwell** underlined the importance of trying to be fair and objective when it comes to picking source material for history textbooks and additional material. It is inevitable that history will be used as a political tool, but schools should try to teach it as objectively as possible. It is true that smaller nations such as Armenia usually have little space in world histories - although Armenian culture in the Middle Ages and the genocide of the 20th Century are usually mentioned. However, it is the fate of most small nations to have little attention paid to them in books on world history simply because there is not enough space for everyone.

Armenia will benefit from “The Tbilisi Initiative” because a regional history translated into English could counteract the lack of knowledge of the country’s history. It should give valuable information about the great variety in a region little known in western countries if the book is sold in Great Britain, the USA and other countries. It is also hoped that it will be possible to produce a teachers’ handbook to this regional history at a later stage.

They all stressed that good textbooks are important but that the real key to better education in history is the training of teachers.

The Dean of the Faculty of History of the University of Yerevan, **Babken Harutyunyan**, and the co-ordinator of “The Tbilisi Initiative” in Armenia, **Yuri Navoyan**, made some final remarks. They both voiced their support of “the Tbilisi Initiative”.



Seminar on

“How to teach controversial and sensitive issues in  
present-day secondary schools”

Tbilisi, Georgia,

13-14 November 2000

**Report by**

**Ms Susan BENNETT**  
**United Kingdom**

## **1) Introduction**

This seminar, held in Tbilisi in November 2000, was one of a series organised by the Council of Europe as part of its mission to support member states in promoting democratic values and tolerance. Because our histories shape the way we perceive both our neighbours, and ourselves, the Council has endorsed the need for all member states to reflect on how history is taught to young people. At its best, history teaching can enable young people to see how their own lives can draw fruitfully on the history and traditions of their locality, and country as well as on the culture and history of Europe and the wider world. History teaching can also help young people develop a respect for evidence and truth as well as critical thinking skills and compassion for others. At its worst, history teaching can engender xenophobia, blind nationalism and prejudice – all causes of instability and violence. Understanding how history can best be taught is thus important if Europe is to build a future based on peace, democracy and respect for human rights. Of particular importance in this respect is the teaching of controversial and sensitive issues, the main subject of the Tbilisi seminar.

## **2) What are sensitive and controversial issues in history?**

The terms sensitive and controversial are often used interchangeably, although it may be useful to distinguish between them.<sup>1</sup> Historical scholarship and indeed the study of history are full of controversies. This is because historians may interpret evidence in different ways, emphasise different aspects of an event or discover fresh evidence to challenge old orthodoxies. Controversies where there are different opinions can be productive and stimulate research and interest. Not all controversial issues are sensitive but most sensitive issues are controversial.

The issues that are the most sensitive in history are those that relate to identity and which profoundly affect what people believe about themselves and their rights. Those aspects of a country's or group's history, which are about national or group pride and pain, are the ones most likely to be both sensitive and controversial. All nations and groups have such controversial and sensitive issues in their histories because history defines people as individuals and as members of national, cultural, religious and ethnic groups. These issues are not just the preserve of historians but often engage the government, the media and society in debate. Controversial and sensitive issues can relate to relationships with other countries, to groups within countries or to particularly painful, tragic, humiliating and divisive moments in a country's history. Periods of conquest and glory can also be sensitive since they can define attitudes to neighbours in ways that may not promote tolerance and peace. Knowing why some aspects of the past are controversial and sensitive is an important first

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<sup>1</sup> See Bob Stradling "The initial and service training of history teachers in South East Europe", Athens, Greece, 28-30 September 2000, Council of Europe

step in clarifying how to teach about them. This was one important aspect of the seminar in Tbilisi.

### **3) The context of the seminar**

Dr Alexander Kartoza, Minister of Education of Georgia, opened the seminar and welcomed participants. He stressed the importance of the meeting for the development of history teaching in Georgia. In her opening address, Ms Alison Cardwell, Administrator, Directorate General IV, Education, Culture, Youth and Sport, Council of Europe set the seminar in the context of the Council's Tbilisi initiative. This project, which draws together historians and history educators from Armenia, Azerbaijan, the Russian Federation and Georgia, will culminate in the publication of a Caucasian textbook designed to enable students to find out about the histories of their neighbours and to understand some of the common themes that link the history of the Caucasus. The book is designed to promote mutual understanding, respect and tolerance. The Tbilisi initiative is itself part of a wider Council of Europe programme involving the countries of the Black Sea Basin, South East Europe, and the republics and regions of the Russian Federation. This programme is focused on the need to teach history in a balanced way, and on helping pupils to see issues from different viewpoints and encouraging them to find out about the past for themselves.

The seminar in Tbilisi drew together academic historians, teacher trainers, textbook writers as well as representatives of the Open Society Foundation Fund – Georgia and experts from Poland and the United Kingdom. The discussions were lively and wide-ranging. Topics were treated in no particular order and some sensitive and controversial issues were debated at different times during the two days: each occasion enabling topics to be explored at greater depth. I have, therefore, not tried to reproduce the comments of the speakers. Rather I have drawn together some of the main themes and reflected upon them. The report is thus a starting point for further discussions and designed to provoke debate.

The report concentrates on the Georgian context but the difficulties of teaching sensitive and controversial issues are not unique to Georgia. I have, therefore, used the experiences of Poland and the United Kingdom as ways of sharpening the analysis and suggesting approaches to the problems and challenges. Teachers throughout Europe have acknowledged the difficulty of teaching sensitive issues and this suggests that no country has the answer but that all are engaged on a quest for solutions. The Council's work is to enable solutions and difficulties to be shared. Although other people's experiences may not be directly transferable because mentalities differ between countries, they do suggest new perspectives and methodologies.

#### **4) Changes in history teaching in Georgia since the Soviet period**

As one of the participants commented, Georgia is still in a state of transition between the old world of soviet ideology and the new identity it is creating for itself. In the past, historical studies and history teaching were deeply suffused with Marxist and Soviet ideology. There was an emphasis on the inevitable unfolding of progress and on Marxist dialectics and historiography. Real history was working class history and the Russian experience was at the heart of the curriculum. The individual and the nation were neglected. Thus the secondary school history curriculum contained only 30 hours of Georgian history. History and history textbooks came ready made from Russia and everything was translated from Russian. 'Old soviet textbooks' were biased and infused with ideology. Moreover Georgians were prevented from having their own history textbooks that reflected the unique Georgian experience.

Since independence the history curriculum and teaching have changed. The curriculum is still structured around the cyclic study of world, European and national (Georgian) history common in Central and Eastern Europe. In the 9<sup>th</sup> grade pupils study national history, prehistory and the middle ages, together with the history of civilisations. In the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12th grades pupils study Georgian history again but at more advanced levels. Georgian history is now taught for 340 hours. There is also more emphasis on personalities and on the influence of the kings of Georgia. However, despite the benefits of these changes, some of the teachers at the seminar commented that the curriculum contains too much factual material and that it is impossible to teach everything required in the time available. The new textbooks too are overloaded with facts and are conceptually too difficult for pupils.

This development of school history needs to be set in the context of changes to the study of academic history. In Soviet times historical scholarship was also not open to influences from the West, where the nature of historical scholarship has evolved rapidly over the last 50 years. Professor Tedo Dundua commented that historical studies in Georgia have just emerged from the constraints imposed by soviet historiography. 'The last 10 years have seen a greater focus on Georgian history and on the study of personalities as well as reinterpretations of Russian/Georgian relations. There has been an enhanced respect for objectivity and a desire to let the facts speak for themselves.' This has influenced school history. However, another commentator stated that, since independence, Georgia has been flooded with new historical materials but little has been translated. New interpretations of history and historical methodology have thus not necessarily filtered down to schools.

As in other ex-Soviet and Eastern Block States, changes to the history curriculum in Georgia have been influenced by wider changes in society. Many states that have undergone the same transition have faced similar problems and have re-written their curricula and textbooks several times over the last decade.

It might be useful for Georgian curriculum developers and textbook writers to look at how similar countries – Poland, Romania, the Baltic States - have developed their approaches.

### **5) Why do we teach history?**

Decisions about the structure of the curriculum, the nature of textbooks and teaching methodology are all influenced by the aims and objectives of teaching history. These were implicitly referred to in the seminar. As one participant commented: ‘We live in a changing world with new values and we cannot base history teaching on old ideological values. We need to define what a citizen should be like’. Helping young people prepare to be future citizens of Georgia and Europe is a vital element in history teaching but the values may need to be made explicit. One way of doing this might be to ask different sectors of society – employers, parents, academics, teachers etc – to define the values, which should underpin education.

History teaching has in the past concentrated on the transmission of information, information which pupils passively learnt and replicated. Throughout Europe this model is being replaced by one which emphasises the need to teach knowledge and skills. In part this is because historical accounts are dependent on the interpretation of available evidence but also because citizens of democratic societies need to evaluate evidence and make democratic choices. Young people need to be taught these skills. In the United Kingdom, history teaching has for a long time emphasised the development of critical thinking. Pupils are taught to:

- extract information from sources of evidence;
- analyse language, detect bias, stereotypes and distinguish facts from opinions;
- weigh and consider evidence, looking for gaps and limitations in arguments;
- understand that events can be interpreted differently and that history is complex and that simplistic stories rarely do justice to the reality of the historical past;
- understand that historians and other people, such as journalists create interpretations which may or may not be based on evidence and that it is necessary to evaluate these interpretations;
- make judgments and support arguments with relevant and substantiated information.

These are the skills of the historian but they are crucial skills for the support and protection of democratic values and a democratic society.

It will be important for Georgia to decide whether and how these skills can be developed through the Georgian history curriculum and textbooks. As Tamaz

Tatishvili, Deputy Minister of Education said a key issue is how can we ‘help pupils evaluate historical truth, shall we give only facts, shall we evaluate facts, shall we help pupils evaluate facts?’.

## 6) **Historical truth?**

Throughout the course of the seminar many delegates touched on the issue of historical truth and the need to teach objective history. Dr Kartoza commended the approach in science where the researcher first ensures that he has an adequate description of the phenomena and then an adequacy of interpretation from which forecasts can be made. Professor Asatiani stressed that authors must only include objective facts and that pupils should be taught the truth about events.

The desire of Dr Kartoza and Professor Asatiani to ensure history is free from ideology and bias are important statements and would be endorsed by all present at the seminar. However, it is also important to understand the nature of historical study. History is based on the study of source material. In some instances there may be insufficient material to come to anything other than a provisional judgment about what happened in the past. In other cases, the sources may be biased or conflicting. The historian thus has to evaluate sources in context before he or she can use them. Historical accounts will also blend narrative, analysis and description. This blending, together with the choice of words, will not only create an interpretation but also place a filter between the reader and the past event. History uses words to communicate and words can be interpreted in many different ways. In many countries current historiography, therefore, stresses the constructivist nature of history, i.e. that history is an interpretation based on facts and that interpretations will change as new ideas, new sources and new facts emerge. This is not to support a relativist position: historical interpretations must be based on factual evidence but interpretations will always have a degree of provisionality.

Debates on the nature of historical truth are not unique to Georgia and this issue is one that has emerged in recent Council of Europe seminars, for example in the seminar on history teaching in south-east Europe held in Athens in September 2000. In his report of the seminar Bob Stradling<sup>2</sup> stresses that historians deal with historical evidence rather than historical truth. More often than not that evidence is incomplete and provisional and therefore:

- there may not be one correct version of events;
- it may be that the same piece of evidence can be interpreted differently by different historians depending on their perspective, the

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<sup>2</sup> See Bob Stradling “The initial and service training of history teachers in South East Europe”, Athens, Greece, 28-30 September 2000, Council of Europe

time when they were writing and the connections they seek to make between that piece of evidence and other evidence;

- it is certainly the case that many sources of historical evidence (official documents, statistics, archives, eye-witness accounts) are far from objective and impartial;
- and above all, it is clear that the same apparently clear and unambiguous statement can still have very different meanings for people depending on their particular situation.’

This view of the nature of the study of history accords with some other comments made during the seminar. For example, it was suggested that for many periods in Georgian history, there are insufficient sources to enable a completely objective view of the past. Moreover, ancient sources are also biased and not always fair. Thus objectivity is difficult to achieve.

In England helping pupils understand the provisional nature of history is seen as a central aspect of the history curriculum. Pupils are required to be taught:

- how and why historical events, people, situations and changes have been interpreted in different ways;
- to evaluate interpretations.

The highest level of the standards for history requires pupils aged 14 “to make balanced judgments based on their understanding of the historical context about the value of different interpretations of historical events and developments<sup>3</sup>”. Throughout the process of developing the English national curriculum, this emphasis on importance of helping pupils understand interpretations was seen as the most important defence against the possibility of history being used to convey ideology. In other words understanding the provisional nature of history protects the subject against manipulation.

## **7) Sensitive and controversial issues in Georgian history**

Throughout the seminar, a number of specific historical topics were discussed. These fell into three main types: historical themes and topics that can help to convey positive images; controversial issues; and controversial issues that are also sensitive.

Several participants stressed that sensitive issues relate to relations between countries, disputes about frontiers and issues of national identity. Some commented that medieval history has such issues but that modern history contains more sensitive issues than earlier periods. Controversial and sensitive

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<sup>3</sup> History: The National Curriculum for England. Department for Education and Employment/Qualifications and Curriculum Authority, London 1999 ([www.nc.uk.net](http://www.nc.uk.net))

issues were seen as problematic for the teacher but as one participant said: “History is a permanent discussion and we must not avoid sensitive issues”.

### *Historical themes and topics that can help to convey positive images*

During the seminar, participants commented that Georgian history exemplifies the benefits of tolerance and diversity. For example, when Georgia was at summit of glory as a Christian country the royal court was tolerant. Christianity did not suppress other religions. The king was a patron of Muslim poets and he visited the mosque and listened to Muslim clergy. At some periods, participants said, that non-Georgians had more rights than Georgians as well as freedom of religion,

Georgian history also contains positive images of women, particularly St Nino, illuminator and baptiser of Georgia, and Queen Tamar. During Tamar’s reign, the death penalty and torture were banned. After Tamar’s reign, women played a less significant role and are hidden from history. However research could illuminate the positive role they played, for example during the deportations and persecutions of the Soviet period.

### *Controversial issues*

Several controversial issues from Georgian history were discussed during the seminar. One participant raised the issues of Tamberlane (Timur). Tamberlane is a controversial figure. In Europe he is seen as positive because he captured the Turkish Sultan and saved Europe from invasion. Asian historians portray him positively because he built Samarkand and because the Mongol empire stretched from Pacific Ocean to the borders of Europe. But Tamberlane killed thousands of people and laid waste great areas of land. He invaded Georgia eight times and, although he could not destroy Georgia, the area never really recovered.

It was also apparent during the seminar that issues that appear non-controversial to some people may be highly controversial to others. For example, during the seminar it was said that a defining aspect for Georgian history was the country’s relation to its nomadic neighbours. These nomadic neighbours (who were defined in the translation as backward people) tried to invade Georgia in a search for pasture. The struggle against the nomads it was said was thus a struggle for culture, a struggle for progress. This comment raises two important issues. The first is about the portrayal of the other in history. This is a common problem. The second is the issue of the inevitability of progress and the treatment of early civilisations. Nomadic cultures are, and were, culturally rich. Should we introduce pupils to the study of nomadic cultures in their own right not necessarily as people who were “discovered”, subjected or repelled by others?



## Sensitive and controversial issues

One sensitive and controversial issue that was discussed was the integration of Georgia with Russia in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. This is a seminal moment in Georgian history. Different interpretations of this event were put forward. On the one hand it was thought that the treaty of 1801 with Russia brought stability, and economic development after the loss of land and demographic instability caused by invasions from the East and South. On the other hand it was suggested that Russian imperial policy and the treaty of 1801 had a negative affect on Georgia and that it turned Georgia into a colony even though the invasions ceased. It was also suggested that Georgia lost independence not only through Russian aggression but also through Georgian weakness.

Participants suggested that the most controversial and sensitive issues were 20<sup>th</sup> Century ones. Sensitive topics included the evaluation of Stalin as a leader and the effects of Stalin's policies on Georgia and its people, in particular the deportations to the Gulags. One participant raised the issue of how to teach about dictators such as Hitler and Mussolini. It was, she thought, difficult to explain how Hitler could have been elected in a democratic society.

All European countries face challenges in teaching about such sensitive issues. Some countries have produced guidance about such issues particularly about how to teach about the Holocaust. Many participants thought that the most sensitive issues were the events of the last 20 years. This raised the question of including very recent history in the curriculum.

### **8) Should we teach very recent history?**

In his remarks, Dr Kartoza pointed out the difficulties of teaching the recent past and suggested that the current situation is not history. His views were very similar to those of the English Secretary of State for Education 1991 when the first national curriculum for history was introduced. The Secretary of State said that teachers should not be required to teach the history of the last 20 years. They could choose to do so, but did not have to. Because the period between 1971 and 1991 included the years of the Thatcher government and the United Kingdom's war with Argentina over the Falklands, it was thought to be a particularly sensitive and controversial period. Revisions to the national curriculum have subsequently dropped this requirement. This is because current issues are covered in the mass media. Young people will learn about them outside school so it is now thought better that the teacher covers them in a balanced way.

## **9) Abkhazia**

Perhaps the most sensitive and controversial issue covered in the seminar was Abkhazia. It is difficult for an outsider to write of this. Participants said that teaching about this issue was particularly problematic because of the presence of refugees from Abkhazia. As one participant said: "Our reality is bitter". Another commented that they supported the desire for peace but that in these circumstances it was very difficult to evaluate from two points of view.

The issue is not just a 20<sup>th</sup> Century one since throughout the seminar there were discussions about the history of the Abkhars, about their origins and about the development of scripts in Georgia and Abkhazia. The issue will thus inevitably occur at school level. How can this sensitive issue be tackled? Whatever textbooks and materials are provided, it will be important to look at the long-term implications of the portrayal of the problem. Will it help build peace or reinforce division?

## **10) Teaching about religion – is it an issue?**

The other sensitive issue that surfaced during the seminar was the teaching of religion in schools. The 1921 Church-State Treaty separated church and state. In Soviet times aspects of the history of religion were taught as part of cultural studies. This is because, in Soviet countries, such as Poland, the main emphasis was on undermining religion because faith was thought to be something that should be destroyed. Recently, the Georgian Orthodox Church has raised the issue of whether confessional religion should be taught in school and whether prayers should be said in lessons.

Several participants said that the history of religion should be taught but that this was not about teaching faith or confessional religion. Young people needed to know about Orthodoxy in order to understand Georgian literature and culture. Dr Kartoza said that it was unacceptable to have prayers in a secular school and asked about the situation in the United Kingdom and Poland.

It was pointed out that the situation in England was not directly comparable since there are state funded religious schools - Church of England, Roman Catholic, non-conformist, Jewish and Muslim - as well as secular schools. All state schools, religious or secular, are required by law to have a daily act of worship from which parents can choose to withdraw their children. (The reason for this requirement is because of the complex history of the English education system.) However evidence from inspections of English Schools suggests that not all schools obey this requirement and that religious assemblies in English schools are often focused on ethical issues rather than worship. In all state schools, religious education is compulsory but it is taught as an academic subject not as a matter of belief. Religious education is mainly Christian but other faiths are taught. The balance of time spent on each faith depends on local

circumstances, for example in an area with a large Muslim population more time would be spent on Islam.

In Poland all grades are taught about religion. Catholicism is strongly linked to Polish identity and was at the heart of Polish resistance to Soviet ideology. Religion is now taught as confessional religion but schools must provide other teachers for non-believers and appropriate courses such as the study of ethics. In primary schools parents decide if their children attend religious classes and in secondary schools students choose if to attend them or not. The daily act of worship is not practised in schools. The teaching of religion in state schools is however a subject of debate. Mr Chrzanowski pointed out that teaching religion in school does not necessarily strengthen faith. In Poland the clergy and nuns often teach religion but as they are not trained teachers the lessons can be dull and thus alienate pupils.

### **11) How can sensitive issues best be taught?**

In his presentation, Professor Tedo Dundua identified some of the ways that sensitive issues are taught in Georgia. Different textbooks give different interpretations. For example, the integration of Georgia within the Russian empire is a part of the 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> Grade syllabus which covers the history of Georgia from Ancient Times to the 19<sup>th</sup> Century when the Georgian kingdoms and principalities were put within the Russian Imperial system. In the 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> grade textbook, integration is regarded as profitable for Georgia "...there have been no more invasions and dissensions; Georgian territorial integrity was restored at last...economics recovered..." (M. Lordkipanidze, N. Astatiani). In the national textbook for the next grade, which covers the period 1801-1918, the author (P. Lomashvili) is doubtful whether unification of Georgia under the Russians compensated for the loss of independence.

Several of the participants felt that, in teaching about sensitive issues, it was important to avoid tensions and that Georgian/Russian relations should be shown from both sides. Another commented that students enjoy studying controversial issues since they have a value for present-day life.

Specific techniques for teaching sensitive issues debated during the seminar included the use of sources. In many countries history education includes a substantial focus on source analysis. Pupils are taught how to analyse a source; how to appraise its value, reliability and usefulness. In several countries source evaluation is a key part of the examination system. Some participants felt that this approach offered an important way forward. They stressed that it was important to choose appropriate sources and for the teacher to present alternatives and to help students reach their own conclusions. On the other hand some academics felt that sources were obscure and biased and thus too difficult for pupils. Tatiana Milko pointed out that the argument that source analysis is too difficult for pupils has been put forward in many countries but

all the evidence suggests that pupils are capable of sophisticated source analysis. Many teachers have successfully introduced this approach: an approach that allows pupils to learn to evaluate materials and make judgments for themselves.

One teacher reported how he used a controversial figure to develop pupils' ability to handle sensitive issues. Pupils studied the life of Georgi Saakadze 1683-1729 and looked at whether he was a traitor or national hero. In their researches pupils explored both interpretations. The debate culminated in a mock trial. This approach is similar to some used in England where pupils study different interpretations of key people. One example cited was of Michael Collins, a fighter against British rule in Ireland, the first leader of the Irish Free State and leader of one side in a bitter civil war in Ireland. Here the emphasis is on helping pupils realise the complexity of the past. The author of one textbook about the division of Ireland tells pupils that the "causes of the split are so complicated that you will not be able to make your own fair interpretation of why Ireland was divided ...but you will be able to show why it is so difficult to make fair interpretations in history".

Tatiana Milko described an approach used at an international symposium in Cambridge where pupils from different countries took part in a simulation of the Treaty of Versailles/Peace of Paris. Pupils took on the role of different countries (not of course their own), learnt about the viewpoints of that country and renegotiated the Treaty (not necessarily with the same outcomes). The exercise gave these pupils a real understanding of the issues and the difficulty of coming to an agreement.

The common factor in all these approaches is that the pupils are engaged in a process. The teacher is not just transferring knowledge; he or she is providing information and structuring the learning to help pupils to make progress. The pupils have to make up their own minds about the issue and give reasons for their views. History teaching here is about the development of skills as well as the acquisition of knowledge. This sort of teaching requires new tools and new textbooks. It also requires an understanding of how children learn and clear focus on teaching and learning objectives. Textbooks for this approach need to understand pedagogy as well as history.

## **12) The role and production of textbooks: the Polish experience**

Andrzej Chrzanowski showed how ex-soviet countries have improved textbooks. In these countries history has been de-politicised and the focus is now on factual accuracy, tolerance and plurality. This approach, together with changes in curricula and in the examination requirements, has changed the nature of textbooks. Mr Chrzanowski stressed that it is important to have a variety of books, including supplementary books. In many countries there is also a free market in textbooks, although in some countries teachers have to

choose from lists of approved textbooks. Teachers do, however, need training in how to select the most appropriate books for their pupils.

Although many different ways of structuring the history curriculum are found throughout Europe, most use the concentric approach to history. However in many countries the standards include not just knowledge but also set out the skills to be taught. Both the knowledge and the skills determine the content of textbooks and most textbooks now focus on helping pupils to think independently. Textbooks often contain multiple interpretations of events as well as sources and activities. Supplementary books are often available for teaching national minorities. For example, in Poland, the Ukrainian, Lithuanian, Belorussian and Slovak speaking populations have their own history textbooks, or are developing them. However as in many countries books are expensive. To address this, school principals in Poland organise sales of second-hand books at the end of the school year and there is a growing amount of money in the government budget to support school library orders.

Poland has just successfully started reforming its education system and the situation for teachers has improved greatly. In Polish textbooks, world and national history are combined in the same book. There are about 6-10 books available for each grade and these take different approaches to the periods covered. Textbook authors try to take an unbiased approach to controversial issues. For example, in 1795 Poland disappeared from the European map. Russia had already become a factor in Polish internal relations – because the last king took decisions under the influence of the Russian government. In 1794 the Polish-Russian war brought the last partition of Poland and there was a bloody battle in Warsaw (the so-called Prague battle). Russian and Polish historians dispute the scale of killing of civil population. The Russians claim not many people died, but in the past Polish historiography took a different view. Now, because new evidence has become available some historians have concluded that not that many people were killed in relation to the standards of behaviour in wars of that period.

More sensitive are aspects of the history of World War II, particularly Polish – German and Polish - Soviet relations. One sensitive issue concerns the Soviet – German Pact of August 1939 and the Treaty of Friendship of September 1939 and its consequences for Poland's fate at the beginning of the Second World War, as well as some post-War settlements: border and political changes etc. Stalin's mass execution of 15,000 Polish army officers, all of whom were prisoners of war is highly sensitive as are the mass deportations of the civil population from annexed Eastern territories. Now that most documents have been made public, the factual evidence is available. There are bilateral government commissions: Russian - Polish, Ukrainian - Polish (there was an earlier experience of a German – Polish commission which looked at school history and geography). The commissions include historians who debate controversial and sensitive issues and try to come to conclusions about them

and then recommend how authors might treat them in history textbooks. Because of financial restrictions and lack of political will on all sides, the commissions do not work as efficiently as the complexity of issues under discussion requires. There is also a need for a new approach in writing about the Jewish Holocaust in history textbooks in Eastern-Central Europe.

The Polish method of bringing together historians and teachers from different countries to discuss sensitive and controversial issues might prove a useful model for Georgia and indeed is the approach being used in the Tbilisi Initiative.

### **13) The role of textbooks: the Georgian experience**

During the seminar there was a lot of discussion about the role of textbooks in Georgia. Georgian textbooks have changed since the end of the soviet period. Professor Tedo Dundua identified some of these changes: 'The textbooks of the Soviet and post-Soviet periods differ solidly as the former are packed with evaluative moments, while the latter mainly concentrates on primitive narrative. The best lies in the middle'.

Some teachers commented that many textbooks, for example the 7<sup>th</sup> grade book, are overloaded with facts and are too abstract and difficult for pupils. The teachers present felt that textbooks written by academics, who do not have experience of schools or the needs of young people, are often inappropriate. Ideally teachers should be directly involved in the writing of books. Authors must recognise that it is impossible to put everything into a book, what is included must be tailored to the time available and the age of pupils. It was felt that a textbook must assist in maintaining discussion and help pupils listen to other people's ideas As well as textbooks there is need for auxiliary material, including Georgian, Greek, Latin and other sources

For many countries the cost of developing new textbooks is problematic. In Georgia, the Open Society Foundation Fund is helping to develop textbooks through a competition. In 1999 they helped to produce nine books, in 2000 18 and they hope to produce a further 55 next year. Each textbook must have a teachers' guide.

### **14) Pre and in-service teacher training**

Throughout the seminar the key role of the history teacher was stressed. As Alison Cardwell said: "The history teacher is the single most important element in the classroom". It is important that teachers are trained in new ways of teaching history. As one participant said, if a teacher has not rejected the soviet mentality, he or she cannot acquire new values. There is thus a need to retrain teachers because, without help, they may reject critical reasoning. In-service training is thus crucial if teachers are to be helped to use new methods and

approaches. The Georgian History Teachers' Association has helped to begin this process. They give teachers practical ideas and encourage them to write parts of textbooks. The role of EUROCLIO in helping to train teachers was thought to be important.

These concerns, Andrzej Chrzanowski reported, were similar to those in Poland where many teachers needed retraining. This was done through meetings of teachers to discuss new methods. Colloquies of teachers were established. Teachers not only met with other Polish teachers, they also debated issues with teachers from Lithuania and the Ukraine. In Poland too there is an enhanced realisation that meetings of school history teachers and students to discuss controversial issues and sensitive relationships are very effective in promoting understanding of different interpretations of the past.

One participant said that in-service courses might be necessary for academics and teachers in higher education, as some are not trained in the analysis of sources. There may be a need to change programmes at the pedagogical university. There is also a need for new textbooks for students at this level.

## **15) Conclusions and recommendations**

Four significant issues were raised during the seminar.

First, participants raised the issue of the nature of history as a discipline and the issue of historical truth and historical evidence. If teaching about sensitive and controversial issues is to develop, then this issue probably needs to be probed in greater depth. This will need to involve both epistemological and pedagogical aspects.

Second, participants identified some sensitive and controversial issues in Georgian and world history. The teachers present suggested some interesting ways of approaching these issues. This suggests that Georgian history teachers need to draw upon expertise within Georgia, as well as ideas from other countries and create a range of examples to illustrate how to teach sensitive and controversial issues. These new approaches need to be incorporated into textbooks and teacher guides.

Third, there is a need to look at the nature of textbooks, including how they should be structured so that pupils can understand them, who should write them, and how they can cover sensitive and controversial issues. A checklist for the production of textbooks would be a useful aid.

Fourth, as in Poland, groups of teachers and teacher trainers need to work together to learn how to use these new approaches. This may involve practical hands on workshops.

Future Council of Europe seminars might address these issues.





