



OBSERVATORY
ON HISTORY TEACHING
IN EUROPE



A FUTURE WITHOUT
HISTORY TEACHING?



A FUTURE WITHOUT
HISTORY TEACHING?

A FUTURE WITHOUT
HISTORY TEACHING?

1-2 DECEMBER 2022
STRASBOURG

CONFERENCE REPORT

 @CoE_Education

 @OHTECO

#HistoryAtHeart

Conference Report

At a time when tragic events that were thought to belong to the past, such as pandemics and war, are once again at the heart of European concerns with history education becoming a key issue. More than ever, history teaching must be seen as a means of promoting peace and democracy in Europe. The Observatory on History Teaching in Europe (OHTe), set up in 2020 by the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe, has the task of providing a clear picture of the state of history teaching in Europe through the publication of thematic and regular reports. The OHTe 2nd Annual Conference "A future without history teaching?" was held 1-2 December 2022 in Strasbourg, France.

With #HistoryAtHeart, participants from the 16 member and 2 observer states shared their views on history teaching and its impact on the future - reinforcing the view that a future without history teaching is neither possible nor desirable.

The thoughts and perspectives of the Conference's title were discussed by the participants alongside the presentation of the OHTe's first Thematic Report "*Pandemics and Natural Disasters as Reflected in History Teaching*". These discussions, and particularly the report's presentation, provided the first suggestions that there is a need to adapt history teaching to current challenges. In the eyes of the participants, the OHTe is an ambitious and highly useful tool for advancing the Council of Europe's action in the field of history education and democracy. During the Conference, the participants themselves reaffirmed that the essential purpose of history teaching is to ground democracy and as such, history must remain a science with multiple perspectives. Ministers from the participating states presented their vision for the future direction of the Observatory and expressed their pride in being among the founding states of the OHTe, encouraging other member states to join.

With #HistoryAtHeart, participants from the 16 member and 2 observer states shared their views on history teaching and its impact on the future - reinforcing the view that a future without history teaching is neither possible nor desirable.

History teaching for peace. For over 70 years, the Council of Europe has been working on preserving history and memory through education. Mr Joao Marques da Costa, Minister of Education of Portugal, highlighted the necessity of history teaching in developing democratic citizens to enable world peace: "the development of curricula must train the citizens of today and tomorrow" and "the hours devoted to history teaching at school or university make it possible to develop informed citizens". These hours help to develop their critical thinking, which can lead to achieving a "historical awareness which becomes a democratic culture", according to Ms Tamar Taliashvili, Permanent Representative of Georgia to the Council of Europe. Ms Evis Kushi, Minister of Education, Sports and Youth of Albania suggested that observing and analysing the quality of history education allows for the improvement of democratic cultures in societies, and "strengthens the foundations of citizenship".. The further enlargement of the Observatory by gaining more member states is "the guarantee of sharing good practices on a European scale", recalled Mr Alain Lamassoure, Chair of the OHTe Governing Board.

The Observatory, an essential space for studies and dialogue. Its importance is measured considering the digital age in which we live, and the resurgence of pandemics and war in Europe. Today, the fight against disinformation and the manipulation of history appears essential to renew our means of guaranteeing "history as a vehicle for peace" - in the words of Mr Firmin Edouard Matoko, Assistant Director-General of UNESCO. Therefore, it is essential that through learning we are better equipped to anticipate crises to better prevent them. For Ms Mary Kaldor, Professor of Global Governance at the London School of Economics, we are witnessing a historical turning point which requires a rethinking of the paradigm of history teaching in Europe. In this sense, the debates that took place led to the following conclusions: co-operation in history

teaching, which the Observatory promotes, is essential, as is going beyond the national or transnational framework of analysis in favour of a scientific and historical approach that brings people together.

Teaching history, grounding democracy. History teaching, a cornerstone of democracy, is a major contributing element of resilience for Europe. "Ignoring our past makes us prisoners of it", said Evis Kushi, highlighting that teaching history allows us to better understand our present, identify our vulnerabilities, and build a better future. History is a powerful vehicle of identity, fulfilling the need for belonging, pride and purpose: "Without history we don't know who we are", said Alan McCully, teacher and education researcher at the University of Ulster and member of the Scientific Advisory Council of the Observatory on History Teaching in Europe. Good history teaching needs to integrate the plurality of narratives, in a multi-perspective approach. Therefore, ensuring dissemination of a "national narrative that is not nationalistic", said Mr Alain Lamassoure, and acts as "the best remedy against populism", said Mr Joao Marques da Costa. To carry out its mission of peace, the history taught must be "a history of co-operation and not of conflict", said Mr Mikhailo Minakov, Senior Advisor to the Kennan Institute and Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars.

History is a powerful vehicle of identity, fulfilling the need for belonging, pride and purpose: "Without history we don't know who we are", said Alan McCully, teacher and education researcher at the University of Ulster and member of the Scientific Advisory Council of the Observatory on History Teaching in Europe.

A first report welcomed by all participants. Announced at its 1st Annual Conference, the OHTE thematic report on the teaching of pandemics and natural disasters in Europe was presented to the participants. Mr Raul Cârstocea, Lecturer in European History at the University of Maynooth and Vice-President of the OHTE Scientific Advisory Council, concluded the presentation with the statement: "teaching a history that goes beyond political history will allow us to assess our global vulnerabilities in order to better ground democracy". Among the conclusions, we can retain the following points:

1. Pandemics and natural disasters have a peripheral role in history curricula. Within compulsory education, there is minimal or sometimes no coverage of pandemics and natural disasters in lessons. This mirrors a persisting focus on political and national history.
2. Pandemics and natural disasters are taught more extensively in other subjects, but with limited historical dimension. Pandemics and natural disasters are currently taught primarily in: Geography, in Civic and Moral Education, Citizenship Education, Science and Technology, Life and Earth Sciences, Biology, Language and Literature, the Arts and Classics.
3. Many state schools and history teachers have the autonomy to be creative, innovative, and responsive to current global challenges and their importance for students.
4. Though little attention is given to these topics in national curricula, over 75% of teachers report that they do teach them at primary and post-primary level. Based on teacher survey results, at primary level they are more likely to teach about natural disasters than about pandemics.
5. For teachers in all OHTE states, teaching the historical dimension of pandemics and natural disasters is crucial. They would like to see these topics better represented in the national curricula.
6. Over 93% of teachers believe that teaching these topics can deepen students' understanding of the global climate crisis. Over 95% of teachers believe that teaching about pandemics and natural disasters allows children to read the world as global citizens and to think about the future of the planet.
7. When teaching about pandemics and natural disasters, important issues such as scapegoating and multiperspectives are often left aside, despite being considered important by.

Being the first thematic report of its kind has demonstrated the Observatory's ability to fulfil its role in a limited timeframe and provided essential data for rethinking the teaching of pandemics and natural disasters.

Adapting history teaching to current challenges. Throughout the Conference, the participants shared their concerns about the current situation of history teaching in Europe, mentioning the main challenges it faces. The need to include history teaching in multiperspective, multi-dimensional and interdisciplinary approaches was a particular concern for the audience and the panellists in each session. Furthermore, for Mr Raul Cârstocea, a "bottom-up" approach to history is necessary. It would allow for the reintegration of "forgotten" versions of history, as Ms Mary Kaldor put it, and to move beyond teaching based exclusively on national histories and narratives, as Mr Alan McCully advocated. Particular emphasis was placed on the conditions and means of teaching that teachers must have at their disposal. In this respect, the use of new technologies and innovative practices in schools is particularly encouraged. This is the challenge and the mission of the "Transnational History Education and Co-operation Laboratory - HISTOLAB", a Joint Project of the European Union and the Council of Europe, which was presented to the participants during the conference by Ms Aurora Ailincăi, OHE Executive Director.

History must remain a science. Throughout the Conference, the importance of considering history as a science was consistently highlighted. Ms Tamar Taliashvili, recalled that "history must be based on historical ethics". According to Ms Ann-Laure Liéval, Professeure agrégée d'histoire and Vice-President of the EuroClio Board, such a practice of history allows us to reconcile different historical approaches, as long as they are based on facts and reliable sources which have been rigorously verified. Such a historical approach avoids the manipulation of history and its instrumentalisation in the service of extremist narratives. In this respect, Mr Georgiy Kasianov, Head of the Laboratory of International Memory Studies at the Maria Curie-Skłodowska University of Lublin, also demonstrated the need to consider history as a science, taking the instrumentalisation and manipulation of history by Russia in the war in Ukraine as an example.

Throughout the Conference, the importance of considering history as a science was consistently highlighted. Ms Tamar Taliashvili, recalled that "history must be based on historical ethics".

What is the future for the Observatory? At the closing session of the Annual Conference: Ms Marja Ruotanen, Director General of Democracy and Human Dignity; Ms Evis Kushi, Mr Joao Marques da Costa, Minister of Education of Portugal; Mr Firmin Edouard Matoko, Assistant Director-General of UNESCO; and Mr Pap Ndiaye, Minister of National Education and Youth of France (via video message) all stressed the essential role of the work of the Observatory on History Teaching in Europe. They emphasised the need for history teaching to form well-rounded citizens and to break down the walls between nations and disciplines. Stressing that history must identify past mistakes in order to avoid repeating them, these distinguished guests defended the need to teach a peaceful, empathetic and multiperspective history. Finally, encouraging the Observatory to continue its work - which is essential in pursuing the objectives of promoting democracy, human rights and the rule of law - they called on other Council of Europe member states to join them.

Drafted by Mr Simon DERIEUX--BILLAUD and Ms Aurore MADELAINE-DUPUICH, International relations students at Sciences Po Strasbourg.