



**DGIV/EDU/HISTDIM (2007) 01**

Strasbourg, 13 March 2007

**Project “The Image of the Other in History Teaching”**

**Seminar**

**"Contact and interaction: the image of the Muslim world  
in history learning in Europe"**

**(Strasbourg, 9-10 October 2006)**

Summary of the discussions

Document prepared by the Secretariat



## **1. Purposes of this document**

This document summarises the discussions held during the seminar. The proceedings provided a wealth of information, which cannot be fully conveyed here. Some of the papers submitted by certain participants either before or after the seminar are therefore included in a separate document (DGIV/EDU/HISTIM (2007) 02).

Twenty-seven experts attended the meeting. To comply with the Steering Committee for Education's desire to ensure the broadest possible approach to history learning, the Secretariat invited not only representatives of the educational world as such, but also experts from the media, museums and the cultural sector in general, as well as specialists in non-formal and out-of-school education. Representatives of international organisations active in the relevant field and members of the North-South Centre and of the Youth Directorate also contributed to the discussions.

The list of participants can be found in Appendix 1. The agenda appears in Appendix 2.

## **II. Background and context of the seminar**

The Steering Committee for Education of the Council of Europe has decided to implement, from 2006 to 2009, a project entitled "The image of the other in history teaching". This project forms part of the Council of Europe's organisation-wide activities to strengthen and develop intercultural dialogue, which will be the subject of a White Paper on intercultural dialogue now in preparation. The White Paper will take account of all the work done on this theme by the various Directorates General and bodies of the Council of Europe.

These activities were launched on the initiative of the Third Summit of Heads of State and Government of the Council of Europe (Warsaw, May 2005) and in the wake of the Declaration on the Council of Europe's Strategy for Developing Intercultural Dialogue adopted at the Closing Conference of the 50th Anniversary of the European Cultural Convention (Faro, October 2005).

The Project also forms part of the follow-up given to the activities concerning history teaching carried out by the Steering Committee for Education for many years now, in particular Recommendation (2005) 15 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on history teaching in twenty-first-century Europe.

The Project has three aims, namely to:

- draw up proposals for general guidelines on history teaching policies in the context of intercultural dialogue;
- propose strategies, methods and instruments enabling these general guidelines to be translated into practice;
- make proposals for the training not only of history teachers but also of other parties involved in history learning.

To tackle the range of issues connected with history learning in contexts that are becoming increasingly diversified in cultural, social and religious terms, three main avenues of work have been identified:

- multiple images, shared destinies, learning about history in a multicultural society;
- images of others and ourselves in the context of globalisation;
- the image of the other in conflict situations: learning different histories as a means of rebuilding trust.

Three European conferences will be held in 2007, 2008 and 2009 in order to take stock of the work and studies on each of these three themes.

The first theme - multiple images, shared destinies, learning about history in a multicultural society - will be covered by the conference to be held in 2007.

Two restricted expert seminars are being held in preparation for this conference: first, the present seminar entitled "Contact and interaction: the image of the Muslim world in history learning in Europe", and second a seminar to be held early in 2007 on "Diversity of origins and respect for memory: learning about the history of diversity and diverse histories".

In early 2007 the conclusions of the seminars will be submitted to the Project Group, which will take the final decisions on organisation of the conference. Besides experts per se, the conference will be attended by representatives of the various institutions and international organisations active in this field.

The present seminar had a three-point programme:

- a general discussion on concepts and strategies;
- the image of the Muslim world in the school context;
- the image of the Muslim world in the context of cultural, out-of-school and media activities.

### **III. Summary of the discussions**

#### **First session: general discussion of concepts and strategies**

This session was introduced by statements from Mr Schoefthaler and Mr Jean-Michel Leclercq.

In the opening address she gave beforehand the Director General, Ms Battaini-Dragoni, also made some observations about the general framework of intercultural dialogue in the Council of Europe context, as follows:

From the outset the Council of Europe's work in the field of education and culture in general was dominated by the question of intercultural dialogue, primarily within the European world. The following principles and observations can be derived from this work:

- No culture exists that is not the outcome of contacts, encounters, interaction and mixing with other cultures. Interaction between cultures is not a secondary factor in their development, but rather the driving force and condition for their creativity and dynamism.
- Cultural diversity is therefore not a new phenomenon or concern. Nevertheless, awareness of and sensitivity to the multicultural nature of European societies has today become more common both in daily life and in politics.
- Intercultural dialogue within Europe and between Europe and other parts of the world is an essential component of the promotion of human rights, democracy, the rule of law and social cohesion. It entails an interdisciplinary approach and co-operation not only between the Organisation's member States but also with partners outside Europe and representatives of civil society.
- With specific regard to history teaching, in the Council of Europe's work this field has always been considered a means of opening up specific cultures, rather than closing them in on themselves, thus avoiding a reinforcement of the opposition between "us" and "the others". The "other" is not a stranger but someone who makes us progress.
- In other words history teaching must be disarmed and turned into an instrument of co-operation and dialogue. The "other" contributes to the development of our individual identities, and the common historical heritage is not a danger to those identities but the condition for their dynamism.
- In the specific case of relations between the Muslim world and the European world it has been pointed out that the Muslim world has played, is playing and will play a role in the development of European thought, culture and society in general, of which people should be made increasingly aware. Strictly speaking, therefore, it is not a world that is foreign or external to Europe.

***Regarding the terms and concepts:***

The following points were raised in the ensuing discussions on intercultural dialogue in general and on dialogue between the Muslim world and the European world in particular:

- Terms and concepts can have not only different definitions depending on who is using them, but also and above all implicit connotations or meanings that can lead to errors, frustrations or misunderstandings.
- Themes/words/concepts such as civilisation, culture, religion, cultural identity, personal identity, mixing of cultures, images or representations, stereotypes, notions of who is the other/us, etc., need to be clarified and should be studied as

part of this Project. The aim is naturally not to arrive at single definitions but rather to clarify polysemic terms and connotations as far as possible, and also to underline the need to be aware of such terms and of the difficulties posed by their use.

- While it is necessary, as part of a dialogue, to deconstruct stereotypes, care should be taken to avoid replacing them with others. The key is to deconstruct the stereotypes and create conditions conducive to a dialogue, construed as an ongoing process and exchange. This particular aspect of dialogue - permanent deconstruction and construction - was considered essential.
- Emphasis was laid on the need to avoid simplifying certain terms such as the Muslim world or European world. Expressions such as Muslim world, Arabo-Muslim world and European or Western world embrace extremely diverse realities, which must be clarified in order to avoid misunderstandings both in dialogue itself and within the worlds in question.

***Regarding strategies:***

This Project is of course aimed not at developing a ready-to-use strategy but at identifying a number of fundamental principles regarding the methods to be applied in both debate and field action.

Here, two points were made in particular:

- The need to take account of the overall background to the issue of the image of the Moslem world in history learning in Europe. The way in which the problem is expounded and approached today obviously differs from the position that might have been adopted 20, 30 or 50 years ago. Account must be taken of the general context at world and regional level. However, one should also bear in mind the historical or contemporary particularities that make it possible to address the problem in appropriate terms in the different Council of Europe member States. The origins, forms and structures not just of cultural diversity but also of social and economic diversity and of past relations with the Muslim world are extremely varied.
- The complexity of the situations and contexts in which the issue is approached must not be ignored; the various aspects should be clarified without oversimplifying matters.
- Any action taken in this field must have regard to the evolving and changing nature not only of the context but also of the various reference entities. Over the past few years the European world has undergone rapid changes to the same extent as the Muslim world. Internal tensions, contradictions and even conflicts are not exclusive to either side.

***Regarding intercultural dialogue in general:***

- Regarding the conditions for dialogue, it was stressed that dialogue primarily takes place between individuals; cultures, civilisations and religions as such do not indulge in dialogue.
- Intercultural dialogue is based on the founding principle of equality between those participating in the dialogue and their cultures.
- It is important to bear in mind the emotional or affective dimension of a dialogue dealing with subjects that may pose serious questions for individuals, for example not only the image of the other but also one's self-image.
- In battling against stereotypes, it is necessary to avoid creating others, even with the best intentions.
- Dialogue entails an attitude of modesty from the outset; anyone may be wrong or right at certain times.
- What may seem to be a contradiction or a clash is not necessarily so, hence the need for continuous clarification and explanation.
- Regarding the image of the Muslim world conveyed in history teaching in Europe, it should not be forgotten that the Muslim world has long been an integral part of the European world. Although the circumstances have changed or evolved, the fact remains that contact and interaction throughout history and contemporary sociological and cultural realities make it a now intrinsic part of the world of European culture and civilisation.
- Several speakers also stressed that, with regard to the cultural diversity of European States, while the specificity of the Muslim dimension must be given its full importance, it must not be forgotten that this is just one element of diversity among others and that numerous other cultures and civilisations contribute to this diversity. The situation naturally varies according to the country concerned; mention was made, for example, of the importance of the contribution and presence of South American and African cultures, not forgetting linguistic diversity and the different cultural and ethnic situations prevailing in each of the member States.

***Regarding history learning:***

- Even if history learning primarily means learning in school, more comprehensive strategies involving not only other ways of learning but also other disciplines should be developed.
- History learning has often been - and still is - used as an instrument for achieving an aim, usually a political one. The debates and recommendations referred to in the course of the discussions were consistent in this respect with the principles and purposes of history teaching in Europe as set out in Recommendation (2001) 15 on history teaching in twenty-first-century Europe.

The aim must be first and foremost to train active, tolerant citizens, capable of critical analysis and of thinking for themselves. The ultimate objective is to build a future in which cultural diversity, freedom of thought, mutual respect and trust form part of the process of building and developing a pluralist democratic society.

- Consequently, the aim is not to develop a sole vision but rather to highlight and win respect for diverse approaches to given events or specific eras. This is a perfect example of application of the concept of multiperspectivity, as devised over many years in the Council of Europe's work on history teaching.

### **Second session: the image of the Muslim world in school textbooks**

A presentation was given of some comparative research, already completed or ongoing, into the content of school textbooks. Mention was made, in particular, of the programme being conducted jointly by the French and Moroccan National Commissions for UNESCO and the Georg Eckert Institute. Other work on the analysis of school history books in France, Bulgaria, Spain, the Russian Federation and Morocco was also presented.

- It was pointed out in general that, although a growing number of other sources are used by or available to teachers, school history books remain an important, extensive area of study.
- Analysis of school textbooks makes it possible to form a, generally synoptic, idea of the vision that a society has of the other but also, through a mirror effect, of itself.
- Analysis of school textbooks can thus reveal a society's collective memory - or its alleged collective memory - at a given time.
- Attention was also drawn to the gulf between learned or scientific knowledge - which on the subject of the Arab world is extremely rich in Europe - and the knowledge conveyed and transmitted in school curricula and textbooks.
- Historical knowledge as presented in history books can be seen to change or vary according to the needs it must satisfy. Redefinition of the knowledge to be transmitted - or inculcated - entails clear determination of the ends being pursued and of the overall values governing those ends.
- Reciprocal analysis of school textbooks (the image of the Muslim world in Europe and vice versa) would be not only an instrument of dialogue but also a means of enhancing our perception of the other by being aware of the image that the other has of us; this would include, and perhaps mainly comprise, the consideration of stereotypes, prejudices, errors, failings and omissions.
- School textbooks are frequently found not to give a clear definition of the terms used, thus providing scope for considerable misunderstanding. For example, is it appropriate to talk about the Arab world, the Muslim world, the Arabo-Muslim world, the Muslim religion, Muslim culture or the history of interactions?

- Depending on each European country's past, a tendency can often be observed to reduce the Muslim world as a whole to a single country, a given area or a particular moment in history.
- In many European school textbooks the image offered of the Muslim world frequently serves to reinforce the distinctiveness of national history (who are we?), the Muslim world being used to define the other (what we are not).
- Relations between the European world and the Muslim world are often confined to areas of confrontation, particularly in military terms, and tend to disregard the interaction and encounter aspects.
- Greater emphasis should be placed on these interactions, for example in the fields of daily life or the history of science, not only because they existed in fact but also because they can be used to demonstrate what the two cultures have in common (what constitutes their joint heritage) as against what divides them.
- Reference was also made to the issue of the knowledge possessed by school textbook authors themselves. It can often be seen that authors copy ideas and theories from earlier schoolbooks.
- Mention was also made of the difficulty inherent in giving an objective picture of a culture as rich, complex and diverse as that of the Muslim world in just a few pages, or paragraphs, of a history book covering large geographical areas, very long periods of time and myriad events. Technical difficulties and/or production constraints were involved here and should not be overlooked.
- The benefits of developing and using sources additional or complementary to school textbooks should accordingly be paid particular attention.
- Training of teachers, and in particular authors of school textbooks, is therefore a key issue as regards both substance (including access to reference documents compiled by specialists) and teaching methods and practices.
- A comparison of the images of the Muslim world, and of its place, as portrayed in different European history books would be particularly useful. The presentations concerning the image of the Muslim world in French, Spanish and Balkan books were particularly enlightening.
- Enriching the image of the Muslim world with positive and/or non-conflictual aspects does not mean that the conflictual aspects should be excluded from the teaching process. The focus should rather be on showing the use that has been made of these events in history teaching at certain times and for certain ends.
- More generally, the question was also raised of the limitations of history books proper as regards acquisition of the skills and attitudes (tolerance, respect for others, critical thinking, curiosity, etc.) that constitute the ultimate goal. How can pupil participation and a positive attitude to diversity in the classroom itself be encouraged when teaching history?

### **Third session: history and the image of the Muslim world in out-of-school activities**

The third working session of the seminar was devoted to activities conducted outside the school framework as such (including via the media, museums, cultural centres and non-formal or out-of-school activities). The subject was introduced through a series of presentations concerning the exhibition "Discover the Muslim Heritage in the World -1001 Inventions" (United Kingdom), projects being run by museums in Cyprus and Slovenia, the experience of the Institute of the Arab World in Paris and television programmes shown on the ARTE channel.

#### ***Regarding activities implemented in the museum context and related activities:***

- Museums can help with the deconstruction of stereotypes and prejudices, the development of open-minded attitudes and discussion about the world to be built in future.
- Like activities carried on in the school environment, informal cultural activities can serve as an instrument both for change and for the development of new dynamics; however, unlike in a school context, it is not easy to gauge the effects and impact of activities in the cultural sphere.
- Activities carried on in the context of major museums, cultural centres and exhibitions possess the common feature - and this distinguishes them from purely scholastic activities - of being targeted at an ill-defined, extremely diverse audience, pursuing widely differing objectives.
- There was unanimous agreement about the need to ensure that the various parties involved in these operations receive training in matters connected with intercultural dialogue, its pedagogic implications and the specific difficulties encountered in this type of activity.
- A distinction was drawn between activities carried out by museums in close co-operation with schools (in this case the museums' actions complement school education, particularly school textbooks) and activities targeting the public at large.
- Activities carried out in the context of museums or cultural centres are frequently non-recurring in nature, varying in duration, without any particular follow-up and not part of an overall strategy.

Other activities such as the "1001 inventions" exhibition have opted for an intricate mix of the "exhibition" aspect with the creation of a web-site that can be permanently consulted by teachers, among others, and the publication of a reference work.

#### ***Regarding the media:***

- The field of history in general has taken on considerable importance in the major specialist and non-specialist media and attracts a broad audience.

- Nevertheless, the media are hedged around by various general constraints, namely:
  - the production of history programmes, particularly elaborate ones taking account of the diverse approaches, requires heavy investment;
  - programmes are usually restricted to a time frame that does not always allow subjects to be covered in depth or making due allowance for all the different approaches, and with even less possibility of integrating them in a longer-term project;
  - programme designers and producers do not possess all-round skills and must therefore employ experts or consultants;
  - all the media are now required to boost their audience figures and this has an impact on the choice of topics, their presentation and programme production;
  - by definition, the mass media are aimed at a very wide range of audiences and expectations;
  - attention was also drawn to the difference between the role the media could play in recounting the history of relations between civilisations, here with the Muslim world in particular, and their role in providing information on current affairs. These two aspects are not distinct from the viewpoint of their public impact;
  - in this field too, there is a need to take account of the contextualisation of history teaching and learning, which may sometimes result in connotations which are unexpected or even the opposite of those intended;
  - although the question of use of the Internet was not discussed in depth, it was nonetheless pointed out that training in use of this new medium was necessary. How can pupils be taught to select information, criticise it and assess its quality?

***Regarding the out-of-school or non-formal framework:***

Activities within a non-formal or out-of-school framework were not discussed in depth. However, the following comments were made:

- The non-formal or out-of-school approach enables the questions raised during this seminar to be addressed pragmatically where they most directly affect pupils' daily lives (neighbourhoods, cities etc).
- The approach to the other, in this case the Muslim world, in real social contexts where discussion of the relations between the Muslim and European worlds is one element of cultural diversity among others. This approach is a particularly

complex one but makes it possible to address the issues from many different angles, not only at the cognitive level but also more informally through study of ways of life and different forms of expression and the highlighting of common elements. It also enables identification of the common challenges faced by all sectors of the community concerned and how they help shape responses to current difficulties and the development of a shared future.

- Specific activities concerning the Muslim/European world cannot be envisaged without taking account of the wider actions and campaigns implemented on the subjects of cultural diversity in general, recognition of the right to diversity and the need for tolerance, dialogue and respect for others. The informal approach makes it easier to pinpoint common perspectives, clarify minor differences between individual and collective images and reach a better understanding, albeit with great difficulty, of the relative places of religion, daily life, artistic expression, lifestyles and world-views, including non-religious views. This is also a level at which tangible learning of the skills needed to resolve differences and even conflicts is perhaps difficult but nonetheless particularly necessary and fruitful.
- As in the case of the other main avenues of work tackled during this seminar, training of activity leaders and of the staff of local associations (particularly but not only of a cultural nature) can be seen to be essential.

#### **IV. Conclusions**

The seminar turned out to be more productive, and the discussions to cover a much larger area, than originally expected. The presentations as a whole and the ensuing comments and discussions cannot be summarised without sacrificing much of their substance.

However, with an eye to subsequent work on the project "The image of the other in history teaching" and particularly to preparations for the conference on "Multiple images, shared destinies, learning about history in a multicultural society", the following conclusions can be drawn:

- The problems raised by the image of the Muslim world in Europe in particular and more generally by history teaching in a multicultural society are highly complex. The terms and concepts used must be clarified, and account must be taken of obviously interlinked elements of the social, economic and political contexts, whether local, national or international. Simplifying the problems would lead to conclusions and measures that could bring unexpected, unwanted results, possibly even counter to the desired objectives.
- Real and authentic dialogue simultaneously implies respect, open-mindedness and an ability to take account of the opinions, positions and feelings of others on the basis - taken as a given - of the equality of cultures and civilisations.
- Such dialogue however entails that all the partners share a number of common principles. On this point it was agreed that these common principles could but

be tolerance, respect for others, protection of human rights and the need to conduct dialogue against a background of pluralist democracy.

- All activities, projects, programmes and measures should be undertaken with an eye to the long term. The deconstruction of stereotypes and the construction of new perceptions of the other is a slow, arduous and non-linear process, which cannot be conflict and tension free.
- The approach to any question concerning relations between the Muslim and European worlds should be based on multiperspectivity, i.e. on exposure to - and consideration of - different perceptions, viewpoints and positions without any preconceptions.
- The discussion on the school context and the role of the media, museums, cultural action in general and out-of-school and non-formal activities led to the conclusion that it was necessary for all those involved to receive training in the conditions, means and techniques of intercultural dialogue. Those concerned include history teachers, authors of school textbooks, designers of exhibitions and cultural projects in general, local cultural and social activity leaders, programme designers for the mass media and journalists.
- More thought should be given to the interactions that could be generated between activities in the formal school framework and out-of-school activities.

#### **V. Follow-up to the seminar**

The conclusions of this seminar will be forwarded to the Project Group responsible for organising the conference "Multiple images, shared destinies, learning about history in a multicultural society" concurrently with the conclusions of the second preparatory seminar to be held at the beginning of 2007.

Some of the outcomes of the debate may be addressed in a more specific activity on the image of the Muslim world, implemented as part of the Council of Europe's general work on intercultural dialogue.

As regards the conference's proceedings, and the preparations for it, the following recommendations could be made:

- the conference programme might include an in-depth debate on the problem of the terms and concepts, as defined at the beginning of this seminar;
- in the organisation of the conference stress should be placed on interdisciplinary and cross-disciplinary aspects;
- the various parties concerned (representatives of the different worlds, cultures and civilisations and leading figures in schools, the media, cultural action in general, out-of-school and informal organisations, etc.) should be involved in the conference proceedings ;

- reference should be made to multiperspectivity as the basis of all methods and teaching approaches in the most general sense so as to permit concrete action in the field.

With specific regard to the follow-up action to be taken on relations between the European and Muslim worlds beyond the scope of the conference:

- It came to light during the discussions (note by the Secretariat: and also during several meetings on the subject of textbooks held in forums other than the Council of Europe) that much work has already been done and/or published on the image of the Muslim world in Europe and the image of Europe in the Muslim world as portrayed in school textbooks. A summary of this work could be particularly fruitful even before any fresh studies are undertaken in this field.
- It has been shown that interactions between the Muslim and European worlds cannot be envisaged without taking account of their great diversity and accordingly the diversity of the particular historical experiences of the different parts of those worlds. The very concept of interaction may likewise refer to numerous different dimensions. Apart from the aspects linked to political and military conflicts (whose religious dimension was often played down during the discussions), there are many interactions at the level of science, technology, the arts and multiple aspects of daily life. They are often unwitting or scantily known. It might be suggested that more in-depth work on this last form of interaction be carried out in coming years.

## ANNEX I

## PROGRAMME OF THE SEMINAR

**Monday 9 October**

- 09.30 am - Opening of the seminar and general introduction by Ms Gabriella Battainin-Dragoni, Director General, Directorate General "Education, Culture and Heritage, Youth and Sport"
- Presentation of the Project "The Image of the Other in History Teaching" and of the seminar by Mr Jean-Pierre Titz, Head of the History Teaching Division

10.15 **First Session : General discussion of concepts and strategies**

To clarify the nature of the problems raised by the theme and highlight difficulties or misunderstandings connected with the use of certain key concepts, the participants will be invited to discuss, on the basis of their own experience, the definition of concepts and problems of interpretation and comprehension which they raise in various contexts, the connotations of some of them, the strategies and methods likeliest to create the conditions needed for genuine dialogue, and difficulties which this dialogue may encounter.

- Dr Traugott Schoefthaler, Executive Director, Anna Lindh Euro-Mediterranean Foundation for the Dialogue between Cultures will make an introductory communication
- General Discussion: all participants are invited to contribute to the discussion. Representatives from the International Organisations, UNESCO, IRCICA and ALECSO might wish to present their experience and the lessons learned. Mr Jean-Michel Leclercq has prepared a Note on "La confrontation des spécificités et l'acceptation des métissages dans le dialogue des cultures"

11.00 Break

11.15 - General Discussion

13.00 Lunch

14.30 **Second Session : The history and image of the Muslim world in learning history at school**

The second working session will be devoted to specific examples of images of the Muslim world in history teaching in schools. Discussion

will focus on the curriculum proper, history books, methods and strategies, successes and problems.

- Some participants proposed to shortly present their work notably MM Georgieva, Choppin, Del Moral, Jonker, Kussaibi, Krugov, Paez-Camino, Rodriguez del Pozo, Saaidia
- Discussion

- 16.15 Break
- 16.30 Discussion resumes
- 18.00 End of the Session

### **Tuesday 10 October**

#### **09.30 Third Session : The history and image of the Muslim world in out-of-school activities**

The third working session will be devoted to activities conducted outside the school context proper (e.g. connected with the media, museums, cultural centres, etc.) and aimed at making pupils aware of the various ways in which the Muslim world has contributed to European history and culture.

- MM Cornuel, El-Gomati, Rihter and Zabbal have proposed to make a short introduction on their experience
- Discussion

- 11.00 Break
- 11.15 Discussion resumes
- 13.00 Lunch
- 14.30 Fourth Session : Recommendations and Conclusions for the Project Group**
- 17.30 Conclusion of the Seminar by Mr Gabriele Mazza, Director of the Directorate of School, Out-of-School and Higher Education

**ANNEX II****LIST OF PARTICIPANTS**

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