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History and History Teaching in South Eastern Europe

The Graz Process Workshop

Jointly organised by KulturKontakt, the Council of Europe and the Centre for the Study of Balkan Societies and Cultures (CSBSC)

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THE GRAZ PROCESS

Task Force South East Europe

Proposals for an Action Framework: History and History Teaching in South East Europe

Preamble

On October 1/2, 1999, under the auspices of the Graz Process, Task Force South East Europe, a workshop on '*History and history teaching in SEE*' was held in Graz. This was organised jointly by Kulturkontakt, the Council of Europe and the Centre for the Study of Balkan Societies and Cultures (CSBSC) at the University of Graz. The main aims of this workshop were:

- to take stock of recent and ongoing bilateral and multilateral initiatives within South East Europe which had particular relevance for history and history teaching;
- to assess the potential for building on these initiatives and incorporating them into future developments;
- to identify the potential scope for and direction of new regional initiatives and projects in history teaching across all educational levels;
- to identify the potential constraints on future developments;
- to develop a strategic framework for action, including feasible short-, mid- and long-term objectives;
- to begin the process of establishing a network of organisations and individuals across the region able and willing to co-operate in initiating and implementing future proposals.

The following proposals for an action framework emerged from the discussions held at the workshop.

The Need for Action

In arguing the case for history and history teaching to be at the heart of any planned programme of educational co-operation in South East Europe it is worth reminding ourselves that the process of mobilising history to forge a public sense of national identity and national loyalty or to reinforce a regime's political legitimacy in a time of change and modernisation, or to unite a people in time of war or de-stabilisation is not a new, post-1989 phenomenon. The emerging nation-states of Europe in the 18th and 19th centuries; the modernising states of the late 19th and early 20th centuries; the states created and re-created in the post-war reconstructions of 1918 and 1945; and the post-colonial states in Africa and Asia also thought it necessary to seek to mobilise history in this way. History and the nation are inseparable and, in a very real sense, as Homi Bhabha has observed, nations are like 'narratives' which tell themselves and

others stories about who they are and where they have come from and what distinguishes them from others¹.

The characteristics of this mobilising process are familiar. There is a tendency to present the nation's history as if it was a seamless continuity linking the present to a long-distant past. Any historical discontinuities are presented as aberrations. The uniqueness of the nation is emphasised rather than the heritage which it shares with others. Homogeneity (of people, culture, language and heritage) is emphasised and cultural and ethnic diversity is overlooked. There also tends to be a strong focus on conflicts - both those which highlight glorious victories and those which justify continued fear, defensiveness or hatred - rather than on periods of peaceful co-existence and mutual co-operation.

However, although the use and abuse of history in this way may help to engender national identification and lend legitimacy to the specific policies and actions of a new regime it can also serve to perpetuate atavistic myths, hatred, fear or distrust of 'outsiders', and negative stereotypes regarding other nations and ethnic groups which, in their turn, act as barriers to peaceful coexistence and stability in the region.

Within the general context of greater European integration and co-operation and, more specifically, within the context of the "Stability Pact for South-Eastern Europe" and the "Graz Process" for educational co-operation in the region to promote peace, stability and democracy, it is clear that there is scope for a range of new regional educational initiatives, within the broad field of history and history teaching, which are aimed at:

- encouraging greater mutual understanding;
- providing more knowledge of the history of the region as a whole;
- providing a wider range of perspectives on the history of the region;
- providing academic historians and postgraduate researchers with opportunities to do historical research in other countries within the region and to collaborate with colleagues from other countries in developing joint teaching and research activities;
- encouraging bilateral and multilateral co-operation in the development of new teaching materials and resources;
- providing training for history teachers (and those responsible for their professional education) in teaching regional history, teaching history from a comparative perspective, incorporating a multiplicity of historical perspectives on significant events and developments in the region into their teaching; using pedagogical approaches designed to help students to adopt a critical attitude to historical facts and evidence and to apply those thinking processes which are central to historical awareness and interpretation.

¹ H. Bhabha (ed), *Nation and Narration*, London, Routledge 1990.

Several, as yet relatively small-scale, projects and initiatives aimed at putting some of these aims into practice were discussed at the Graz Workshop on history and history teaching and other possibilities for practical co-operation also emerged in discussions. Participants were agreed that developments of this kind had the potential for making an important contribution to mutual understanding and civic education in South East Europe. However, it was also recognised that:

- i. These are essentially long-term objectives involving profound changes in educational provision and practice. Most of the educational systems in the region are experiencing severe financial constraints and human and material resources to support such developments would be limited.
- ii. A unified project or set of projects is unlikely to be the most effective approach. The educational systems of the countries within the region are based on diverse traditions and are at different stages of post-transition development. Some are highly centralised, others have moved towards a more devolved system where local and municipal authorities, universities and pedagogical institutes and even individual schools exercise considerable autonomy. Some have worked closely with international organisations and NGOs while others have developed in relative isolation. There are also major differences in the circumstances and problems facing the educational systems in those countries which have been riven by war compared with the rest. Therefore any framework of action which is adopted will need to be flexible enough to encompass these different needs and circumstances and address the different priorities of the different countries and the different educational sectors within these countries.
- iii. A strategic approach will be needed that will initiate a range of suitable pilot projects, evaluate them, ensure that objective information is made available to decision makers, and provide new or make use of existing mechanisms for the dissemination of good practice to historians, textbook writers and publishers, teacher trainers and history teachers.

General Principles for future development

Given the specific context of the Graz Process, future initiatives and activities related to educational co-operation in the field of history and history teaching should be guided by the following principles:

- the action framework needs to be flexible so that it can be responsive to a diversity of local needs and circumstances;

- the approach should be an inclusive one which facilitates the active involvement of all the countries of South East Europe and all the linguistic, cultural and national minorities living in the region;
- new developments should seek to co-operate with or complement those programmes which have already been initiated within the region. This could include, for example, the relevant elements of the United Nations Programme of Action on a Culture of Peace, the Council of Europe's Black Sea Initiative, the Bansko Historical Anthropology Workshop, the Southeast European Joint History Project, the Shared History Project, and the activities of NGOs and other international organisations such as Euroclio, the Georg Eckert Institut and the Aspen Institute. In this respect it is vitally important that any new initiative or action plan emerging after the Sofia Conference in November, 1999 does not seek "*to reinvent the wheel*".
- priority should be given to activities, projects and other initiatives based on cross-border, other bilateral and multilateral co-operation and to co-operation between communities within national borders;
- whilst it is vital that future initiatives are responsive to local needs, are managed locally and make extensive use of local experts and expertise it is also recognised that co-operation with experts and organisations from outside the region can be useful, cost effective and help to broaden the range of options and choices open to local teams and organisations;
- regional initiatives in the teaching and learning of history are needed at all levels of education including schools, in-service and pre-service teacher training, the training of teacher trainers, the teaching of history in Universities, the training of postgraduate research students. It is also important that steps are taken to ensure the sharing and cross-fertilisation of ideas, expertise and experience across these educational levels and not just within them;
- within the action framework efforts need to be made to encourage co-operation and synergy between initiatives and projects. This will necessitate a structure for networking and the exchange of information and experience;
- to maximise the long-term impact of the action framework it will be necessary to incorporate an evaluation and dissemination strategy from the outset.

Framework for Action

The following proposals were formulated during the Graz Workshop:

- 1. The development of a *flexible* Framework for Action through which a wide range of projects, initiatives and other activities associated with history and history teaching in the region could be identified, supported and implemented.**

The need for flexibility has already been identified under the heading of General Principles for Future Development. Flexibility is necessary in order to respond effectively to the diversity of circumstances and educational systems and practices across the region. A flexible framework will also provide enhanced opportunities for cross-fertilisation of ideas and pooling of expertise and experience between projects and activities which may be individually supported by different intra-governmental institutions, international organisations, NGOs, foundations, national governments, locally and regionally-based institutions and private bodies. The workshop identified four priority areas for development and support:

- i. The pre-service and in-service training of history teachers.** Essentially there are two related aims here. First, to explore ways of effectively broadening history teachers' knowledge of the history of the region as a whole, the histories of neighbouring countries and the histories of ethnic, cultural and linguistic minorities within nation states. Second, to explore ways of introducing history teachers to new thinking about the pedagogy of their subject, including teaching from a comparative perspective, using multiple perspectives on the same event, using active learning and enquiry-based approaches and helping students to use primary and secondary source material. Possibilities for action here could include:
 - Seminars and workshops for potential 'multipliers', i.e. teachers, teacher educators and textbook writers who could then play a key role in disseminating the outcomes of these seminars and workshops to other groups of history teachers using a 'cascade' model of dissemination. The Council of Europe and Euroclio have used this approach successfully elsewhere in Central and Eastern Europe and the Russian Federation. They are now considering jointly running a series of similar workshops and follow-up activities in Southeast Europe. At present the Bansko Workshop and the Joint History Project cater for academic historians and postgraduate research students. However, the topics covered at these workshops would also be relevant to history teachers and the organisers of both are now considering how their target groups of participants could be extended.

- Training workshops and seminars for those who have responsibility for the professional education and training of history teachers using similar models to the one outlined above for history teachers.
 - Resource packs on history teaching for the pre-service and in-service training of teachers. Discussion at the workshop focused on the need for packs on specific topics and themes of central importance to the history of the region which would include both teaching materials for use in classrooms and teachers' guides on how to use them to develop the students' skills and ways of thinking about history.
 - Exchange programmes for history teachers and teacher trainers.
- ii. **The development of teaching resources for history teachers.** Although there is some interest in the possibility of initiating multilateral co-operation to develop a textbook on Balkan history it is not, as yet, clear who the target readership would be or whether it would comprise a set of national histories or attempt to offer a genuinely regional history. Other multilateral attempts to produce regional or continental histories have not proved very satisfactory. Criticisms focus on the inevitable omissions and few national or minority communities are satisfied with the coverage of their own people's histories. The preference at the Graz Workshop was for packs or units, developed by bilateral and multilateral teams which would focus on specific themes and issues. Discussion identified four main focal points for such packs:
- Experiences, problems and aspects of everyday life shared by most communities across the region; e.g. the history of the family, childhood, education, agricultural life, common cultural traditions, etc. (this is the approach adopted by the Bansko Workshop)
 - Sensitive and controversial issues examined from a cross-border, bilateral or multilateral perspective, e.g. the Cyprus question, the Macedonian question, the Ottoman legacy in Southeast Europe, etc. (this is the approach adopted by the Southeast European Joint History Project)
 - Specific events and developments which have or have had significance for different countries within the region, e.g. the Balkan Wars, the reconstruction of Europe in 1918, the break-up of the Soviet Union, etc.
 - Periods of peaceful coexistence in the region.

If there was support for resource development then in the short-to-medium term priority ought to be given to the development of materials which might serve as exemplars which groups of history teachers could use for

developing resources on other themes and topics. In the long-term there is a strong case for developing a resources bank relating to the history of the region which teachers could access.

iii. **The Development of a support infrastructure for history teaching.** This could involve, for example, the extension of national associations of history teachers into all countries in the region, the future development of local and regional associations, the extension of links between these associations and Euroclio; the development of specific measures to disseminate new ideas and examples of good practice to history teachers working in schools located in the more remote rural areas; the development of a periodical tailored to the specific needs of history teachers and history students in Southeast Europe which could disseminate new thinking about history teaching and provide teachers with access to information about the latest historical research; and, finally, the greater use of new technologies to facilitate networking of historians, researchers, textbook writers, publishers, teacher trainers and history teachers.

iv. **Developments in history teaching in Higher Education.** To date in this area consideration has been given to:

- Exchange programmes for historians and postgraduate research students to work for a fixed period of time in the history department of a university located in another country within the region.
- Joint teaching projects which could take the form of identical history courses taught in two or more universities in different parts of the region, or team teaching of specific topics and themes by historians drawn from different parts of the region, or a carousel approach in which the same historian teaches the same topic or theme in two or more universities across the region.
- To explore the potential for credit transfer for history students and future history teachers who choose to take all or part of their history degree or teaching qualification in another country.

2. **The establishing, under the auspices of Task Force South East Europe, of a co-ordinating group of experts drawn from across the region with additional representation from bodies directly involved in supporting or implementing initiatives on history and history teaching.**

The co-ordinating group would have the following functions:

- to identify priorities for the development of pilot initiatives within the Framework for Action;
- to establish a network of individuals and organisations across the region;
- to provide a mechanism for liaison between project teams and supporting intra-governmental institutions, international and regional organisations and NGOs, and potential donor organisations;
- to facilitate cross-fertilisation of ideas and the pooling of expertise and experience across the different initiatives and projects;
- to ensure that each pilot initiative is evaluated;
- to facilitate the wider dissemination of information and good practice.

3. Strategy for implementing the Framework for Action

- It is recognised that changes of the kind envisaged in the “Graz Process” are profound, fundamental and far-reaching. It will take a considerable time before the kinds of changes outlined above could be embedded in the educational systems and practices of all of the countries of Southeast Europe. It is proposed therefore that the most appropriate, and cost effective, strategy would be for the co-ordinating group to:
- Select a range of relatively small-scale pilot initiatives within each of the four areas for action (teacher training, resource development, support infrastructure and history teaching in higher education);
- Establish with each project team the aims, objectives, intended outcomes and timescales for each pilot initiative;
- Put in place a system of peer evaluation for each pilot to appraise the outcomes of each initiative, identify any problems and constraints encountered, assess the solutions adopted and evaluate the likely transferability of the approach or project to other groups, circumstances and educational contexts;
- Ensure that steps are taken to disseminate good practice emerging from the pilots;
- Ensure that project teams make provision for initiatives to become self-sustaining if it is intended that they should continue beyond the pilot phase.

4. Short-, medium and long-term objectives for the Framework

Immediate objectives:

- Set up the co-ordinating group under the auspices of the Task Force
- Begin the networking process
- Identify priorities for development

- Identify project groups and pilot initiatives within each of the four areas for action.

Short to medium term objectives:

- Develop a peer evaluation strategy
- Initiate selected bilateral and multilateral pilot projects
- Establish mechanisms for ensuring cross-fertilisation between pilot initiatives and bridge building between the different educational levels
- Develop and implement appropriate dissemination strategies
- Develop a strategy for mobilising the agents of change who can help to ensure that good practice emerging from the pilots and subsequent developments can be embedded into curriculum planning, teacher training and textbook development across the region.

Medium to long term objectives:

- Assess the results of peer evaluations
- Examine the potential transferability of pilot initiatives
- Implement strategy for mobilising agents of change

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