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Teacher Training Seminar on

“New approaches in teaching history
in secondary schools”

Iasi, Romania,

12 – 14 November 2001

Report

Strasbourg

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Report by

Cheryl STAFFORD

United Kingdom

The opinions expressed in this work are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the official policy of the Council of Europe.

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I. CONTEXT

The Seminar on “New approaches in teaching history in secondary schools” in Iasi was organised in co-operation with the Council of Europe and the Ministry of Education and Research of Romania as part of the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe. The theme of the Seminar was “New approaches in teaching history in secondary schools”. The participants in the Seminar from Romania and Moldova included:

- officials from the Inspectorate responsible for history teaching;
- authors of textbooks;
- curriculum specialists;
- teacher training specialists and teachers.

II. AIMS AND PROGRAMME OF THE SEMINAR

2.1 The aims of the Seminar were to consider:

- the process-oriented approach to teaching history: active learning methods and sensitive and controversial issues;
- new approaches in the interpretation and use of sources;
- exchange of good practice amongst curriculum specialists and teachers.

2.2 The programme of the Seminar included:

- reports and discussions in the plenary sessions.

2.3 The Seminar was opened by Doru Dumitrescu, General Inspector, Ministry of Education and Research and Research of Romania, Valentin SOROCEANU, Deputy Prefect of Iasi, Alison Cardwell, Administrator, Directorate of Education, Culture and Heritage, Youth and Sport, Council of Europe.

III. PLENARY SESSIONS

3.1 Professor Valentin SOROCEANU, Deputy Prefect, stressed the need for exchange of information and experience of good practice in history teaching throughout Romania during the seminar. He recognised that history teaching is a very sensitive field not just for Romanians but for all Europeans. In order to create a unified Europe, he emphasised the need to balance unity and diversity with a respect for all traditions. He suggested that the new political ways of Europe can affect the traditions of Romanians and the new trends in history

teaching across Europe should influence the programmes of study for history in Romania. History has a great opportunity to display the wealth of our culture, promoting knowledge of national traditions and important events in the past. He hoped that the seminar would enable the dissemination of positive developments in the teaching of history in Romania.

3.2 Mr Doru Dumitrescu stated how that reform in the teaching of history had brought the publication of alternative textbooks which offered a range of interpretations and representations of events in the past. It is important to learn our own history and the history of others in order to promote mutual respect with each other. He posed two questions which he hoped the seminar would provide opportunities to explore:

- i. Should each people have their own history? Or
- ii. Should we have a history of Europe in which the role of the Romanian is addressed?

3.3 Alison Cardwell, Administrator, Directorate of Education, Culture and Heritage, Youth and Sport, Council of Europe, informed the seminar that the questions posed by the General Inspector were addressed through the recent Council of Europe initiative 'The teaching and learning of history of Europe in 20th Century' and participants could explore the issues addressed through the handbook and resources published as a result of this project. She highlighted how the Council of Europe has had a long history of work in the field of teaching history but the work took on a new importance with the changes in Central and Eastern Europe in the early 1990s. At the request of new partners, a range of programmes have been introduced covering issues such as new textbooks, initial teacher training, "The Tbilisi Initiative" to publish a joint Caucasian textbook. It would be a supplementary textbook for Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan and the Russian Federation.

The Council of Europe was asked two years ago to co-ordinate the work on history in the Stability Pact. This involved the co-ordination of a working group and the implementation of activities. A first conference in the "history" part of the Stability Pact was held in Athens in September 2000 on "The initial and in-service training of history teachers in South East Europe". It tackled the issues of methodology and the content of a history curriculum in a regional context which this seminar will also address.

At the end of 2001, the Council of Europe and the Stability Pact Working Group on History will be evaluating the projects undertaken and continue to look to the future for the development of history teaching. Recommendations that emerge from this seminar will not be implemented overnight but they will help the Ministry of Education in its plans for reform. The key to any changes in history education is, of course, the teachers, who are responsible for what is

taught in the history classroom, how it is taught and the skills and attitudes their students develop. Teachers need as much support as possible and it is vital that the teachers present at this seminar disseminate the good ideas to their colleagues.

3.4 Doru Dumitrescu, General Inspector, Ministry of Education and Research of Romania gave a chronological overview of the reform of history teaching since 1989 (see Appendix III). After 1989, there was a need to remove the ideological bias in history teaching but curriculum reform focused on content rather than addressing how history should be taught. The 1999 curriculum has brought some significant changes:

- i. the curriculum is learning - focused. Teachers are asked to consider what did my students learn in my lesson rather than what did I teach?
- ii. teaching and learning is focused on developing transferable skills such as problem solving, decision-making and communication;
- iii. there are flexible educational options to allow schools to meet the individual needs of their students;
- iv. there are better links between content of the curriculum and real life showing students the relevance of what they are learning;
- v. there is new criteria for judging the quality of what is taught rather than focusing merely on the content.

The new curriculum has sought to include social and cultural history and the role of individuals rather than merely concentrating on political and military events. The constraints of time, however, have made it difficult to integrate minority history as well as national history. In assisting with the implementation of the new curriculum, examination guides have been published and seminars have been organised for teachers by the National Council, various departments of the Ministry of Education and local school authorities. Romanian delegates have also attended seminars organised by the Council of Europe. Some weaknesses in the examination structure have been identified and standards are currently being set to change the structure of examinations to incorporate formative assessment.

3.5 Laura Căpiță, Department of Curriculum, Institute of Educational Sciences, posed two key questions to the seminar:

- i. How flexible is the National Curriculum/History curriculum to allow the incorporation of active learning?
- ii. What has to be done in the future to make active learning more accessible?

She emphasised how the framework of the National Curriculum set guidelines and influences the development of the curriculum in practice more than any

other document. Within the framework of this document, the following principles are promoted:

1. students learn in different ways according to their particular learning style;
2. continuous investigation, effort and self discipline;
3. learning develops attitudes and attributes which contribute to the acquisition of knowledge;
4. learning has to start from relevant aspects of life for the personal development of the student and this is essential to promote a person's inclusion in social life;
5. learning is achieved through individual and group activity.

These principles need to underpin the development of textbooks because textbooks are the vehicles for developments in learning. A number of evaluation schemes for textbooks have been adopted by the Institute of Education. These evaluations seek to establish how much a textbook promotes active learning, independent learning, differentiated resources for a range of students and interesting teaching and learning materials. The curriculum documents may have good intentions but the challenge is the hidden curriculum. What are individual teachers actually teaching with individual students? Is active learning being incorporated?

Learning can be viewed in three phases: formal learning in schools; non-formal learning in schools e.g. extra-curricular activities; and informal learning as part of daily life. We are moving towards viewing learning as a process rather than just a product and we are all engaged in the process of lifelong learning. When knowledge is viewed as a product, there can be rapid consensus; it is cheap in terms of materials and teacher costs; and it can enable top down reform. When knowledge is viewed as a process, consensus needs to be agreed; it requires high teacher costs and material costs; it needs multi-perspectivity in viewpoints and can only be promoted through grass roots reform.

3.6 Professor Alois Ecker, University of Vienna, gave a presentation on "The process-oriented approach to teaching history". He emphasised how we as teachers and educators are working in the long term, not knowing if our efforts will bring results. Education will only get a chance if there are political systems which promote respect for human rights, liberty and solidarity. At the beginning of the 21st Century, we have to double our efforts to teach the history of the troubled 20th Century. We have the chance to write and teach a history that does not turn nations to fight each other but to teach a history of mutual tolerance and respect.

History teaching is taking place in an era of accelerated change and these restructurings have a strong impact on the educational sector which is coming under increasing pressure. Teaching and learning strategies are no longer

unquestioned and relationships between students and teachers have changed. What is needed in the classroom are complex and integrated methods of teaching. Such methods will not only give the learner concrete knowledge but social competences and a move towards the process-related acquisition of knowledge. As teachers, we need to ask ourselves in a more profound way, what are we doing in our history classroom?

When teachers know a lesson has gone well, they realise they have achieved the emotional consent of the students as well as the cognitive consent. Teachers need high competences as they are working in highly complex social situations. The history lesson is a social system and the history teacher must focus on the social dynamics of the learning group. Misunderstandings on the social plain will cause problems on the cognitive level. The didactic triangle (see appendix) shows that the view of the subject held by a student depends on the relationship between the teacher and the student. Such a model is simple but its repercussions are vitally important.

In the hierarchic model of history teaching (lecture style), only the teacher is speaking and so there is only one-way communication. Students are forbidden to speak and they are regarded as disturbants. This model is useful for giving information. If you want, however, to develop critical and analytical skills, you need other forms of communication. Researchers have shown that students will only retain 10% of the information they are told. If, however, they discuss the information, they are more likely to retain 40-50% of the information.

History is not fixed, it is constructed and thus students need to engage with constructing history. In the constructionist approach, it is vital that the teacher gets feedback from the students and that communication is not one-way. The teacher becomes the manager, co-ordinator of the work but the students do the work. In active learning, the teacher becomes more dependent on the students for the level of content. In order for there to be effective labour division between the teacher and students the teacher requires the emotional consent of the pupils that they want to work. The illusion of the hierarchic model is that teachers assume that what they have taught students is all they know. In the student-centred model, a teacher has more idea what the students have actually worked out for themselves. The social structure in a classroom is a very important factor in the learning and teaching of history.

3.7 Dr Alexander Platon, Faculty of History, University of Iasi, addressed the seminar on the use of historical sources in higher education and the problems encountered when dealing with the archives. He sought to explore the current situation of the publication of historical sources in Romania showing how what historians publish directly influences history teaching in schools and how access to sources in schools could be enhanced.

Romania is the only European country not to have published its internal sources. The only documents published to date are those preceding or from the 17th Century and most of the surviving documents are from after the 17th Century. The sporadic publication of regional documents in local archives that took place in the past has almost ceased. Future publication of sources will be slow because of the lack of dedicated personnel for the work. Specialists required for the editing and binding of source collections are scarce and training in the knowledge of the old languages takes a long time. Lack of personnel, funding and proper cataloguing are hindrances to the work of publishing sources. There has, however, been a lot of effort devoted to the collation of archives of oral history and the communist oppression.

In higher education, the emphasis on teacher training is not always compatible with a training focused on research or specialist historians. There is a need to create a new generation of academics trained in the use of primary sources. In order to improve this situation, it is necessary to give our students a minimum training in the use of historical sources by reducing the amount of information to be attained to allow time for the development of skills and techniques in using sources. In the 3rd and 4th years, students tend to work mainly with sources, developing their knowledge from the sources at their disposal. Colleagues at the University of Iasi are adopting the same approach in their specialist fields and the use of sources is becoming predominant.

The use of primary sources in the history classroom is crucial because they enable students to perceive historical events much better. Direct use of sources is very important for the intellectual development of students especially with regards to critical thinking and the ability to develop a personal viewpoint of the world in which we live. Such viewpoints are not prevalent in our society today. Access to sources facilitates student centred learning and this access needs to be advanced. The publication of the alternative textbooks began the increase in access to historical sources but there is a need for the editing of source books for teachers. Relative scarcity of source books explains why there is such limited access to sources in schools. If historical sources are to be used accurately and effectively in the history classroom, their historical context needs to be known by teachers.

3.8 Cheryl Stafford, Advisory Officer for South Eastern Education and Library Board, addressed the seminar on the use of sources in Northern Ireland. She emphasised that primary sources are the key to reconstructing and interpreting the past. Using primary sources in the history classroom will promote active learning and development of critical thinking, reasoning and problem solving. As pupils work with primary sources, they have the opportunity to do more than just absorb information; they can also analyse, evaluate, recognise bias and contradiction and weigh the significance of evidence presented by the source. Primary sources enhance the learning process by allowing students to construct their own understandings of people,

events and ideas. Pupils can uncover, discover and reflect on content and their conceptions of such through enquiry, investigation, research and analysis.

In Northern Ireland, teachers are always trying to embrace the widest range of sources available as possible to show the multi-perspectivity of our history. Given the range of abilities that teachers currently have to teach, the widest range of genre as possible is needed - written, visual, physical and oral - to capture the imagination and motivation of pupils. It is important, also, that pupils are aware of the wealth of evidence available about the past.

The questions asked of sources are very important to ensure that pupils interrogate the sources in the correct way. In classrooms, teachers encourage pupils to ask the following questions addressing the reliability of evidence:

1. Who wrote the source?
2. When was the source written? (primary or secondary?) Was the writer an eyewitness?
3. Why was the source written? Has the source survived by accident, or was it intended to be left as a record?
4. Is there more fact than opinion in the source?
5. Has the writer/artist exaggerated or distorted details in the source? Does the writer have any reason to be biased?
6. Is there any supporting evidence that might enforce the reliability of the source?

These questions are used with pupils aged 11 - 14. The questions result in a more rigorous analysis and interpretation of the sources rather than mere comprehension.

Pupils, however, can experience problems with sources because over exposure to the same tasks will result in boredom. There is a danger that sources are taught almost exclusively by repetition of practice of exam questions. Teachers, however, can adopt a range of strategies to engage pupils such as the layers of influence chart, interpretations line or the language bag analysis of sources.

Recently there has been a development of internet resources for pupils studying history. This has provided a vast range of contemporary Irish history sources on the worldwide web, which pupils can download and investigate. It has, however, brought the need for the development of critical thinking in using sources in history. It is essential that pupils are encouraged to think about the language used to conclude whether or not an interpretation is valid. Just as

when using written sources, pupils have to consider who wrote them and when, pupils are encouraged to see who produced the website and why.

The current generation of students is a video generation. This makes film and video a powerful pedagogical tool. Visual media also addresses different learning styles, making material more accessible to visual and aural learners. The very qualities that make film and video so popular present problems as well. They can reinforce the passive viewing and unquestioning acceptance of received material that accompanies growing up in a video environment. History teachers need to promote, amongst their students, critical viewing skills.

Types of questions to be asked of films:

- 1) How has the producer decided what content has been included?
- 2) How might the personal, political, religious background of the producer have influenced the film?
- 3) How was the film received at the time of its production? What factors influenced its reception? Has the reception changed over the years?

Oral history is a stimulating classroom activity and an exciting process which increases student involvement and understanding of the history of Northern Ireland. Pupils can understand that the history of Northern Ireland is not simply a series of events in a textbook, but rather it is composed of life experiences and memories of many people just like themselves.

Through the study of sources in history, pupils learn the complicated nature of history and to look at current political situations in a more complex way noticing that rarely is one side right and the other side is wrong. If the current troubles in Northern Ireland are to be truly solved at a grass roots level, pupils need to be provided with the necessary skills and knowledge to debate current political developments. History teachers are viewed as some of the best teachers equipped with the necessary skills to promote and provoke genuine enquiry, analysis and debate.

3.9 The following points emerged from the discussions with the participants:

- many teachers remain focused on the content of history teaching and the importance of passing exams. If the aim of education is merely the exam system then the real scope of education is missed. A more flexible examination system which rewards communication skills and a wide range of aptitudes is needed;
- new ideas can be promoted by Inspectors and Advisers but, in the classroom, the priorities of exams and getting through the content remain and parents are supportive of these priorities;

- implementation of active learning strategies will take time. The process-oriented approach to history teaching is a social structure which takes time and it is not easy to push students into these areas easily. The role of the teacher is changing and it takes time for the teacher to change and adapt to the new methods. This is why it is so important to train teachers in new methods and to show them how to reflect on the processes in which they have been involved;
- working with sources in an effective way takes time, but time spent on active learning can be considered a luxury by teachers. Active learning methods tend to require a lot of resources such as photocopying or overhead transparencies which are scarce;
- university teaching tends to be more conservative than school teaching and there needs to be a re-evaluation of teaching and learning methodologies in higher education to assist the process of the reform of history teaching;
- textbooks must reflect the new teaching and learning strategies but they must be accompanied by effective training in the use of new teaching and learning strategies.

3.10 A number of the participants gave presentations on developments in history teaching in their schools. The following examples of good practice were shared:

- optional courses in Moldova using oral history have resulted in the emotional and rational involvement of the students in history and the promotion of social skills amongst pupils;
- internet access has increased the range of opportunities available to the history teacher. For example, a project was devised focusing on memories of the Communist era because pupils who were born after 1989 are unaware of life before then. Pupils were given checklists to help them devise a series of questions to ask their interviewees and the findings from these interviews were published on a website. Pupils felt motivated because it was they who were constructing history and not the teachers. The website also contains sections on personalities, special places, music and folklore of Lithuania, Belarus, Azerbaijan and Romania. There is also a section on the Holocaust;
- it is important to allow time in the history classroom for pupils to analyse the making of history in their time by discussing contemporary events and how viewpoints can be manipulated by the media.

IV. CONCLUDING REMARKS

4.1 The Seminar in Iasi was invigorating and informative in exploring the range of issues facing history teachers in Romania and Moldova. The sharing of good practice reinforced the existence of many worthwhile principles promoted by history teachers. The key successes of the Seminar were:

- the excellent work of the organisers of the Seminar in Iasi;
- the interesting theme of the Seminar and the active discussions of the participants;
- the high quality of the presentations during the plenary sessions;
- the dynamism and spirit of professionalism of the representatives of the local administration and teachers attending the Seminar to share their good practice.

4.2 Ms Alison Cardwell closed the seminar by referring to the range of programmes run by the Council of Europe which teachers can attend and the documentation available on request from its documentation centres. She expressed thanks to the Romanian and Moldovan participants, the Ministry of Education, the speakers and the local authorities in Iasi.

APPENDIX I

LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

GENERAL RAPPORTEUR

Ms Cheryl STAFFORD, Advisory Officer for History, South Eastern
Education and Library Board, Grahamsbridge Road, DUNDONALD BT 16
2HS, Northern Ireland

Tel: +44 289 05 66 359

Fax: +44 289 05 66 266

E-mail: cheryl.stafford@seelb.org.uk

SPEAKER

Professor Alois ECKER, Institut für Wirtschafts und Sozialgeschichte,
Universität Wien, Dr Karl Lueger Ring, A – 1010 WIEN, Austria

Tel: +43 1 4277 41320

Fax: +43 1 4277 94 13

E-mail: alois.ecker@univie.ac.at

PARTICIPANTS

Moldova

Dr Anatol PETRESCO (State University)

Dr Nicolaie CHICUS (Pedagogical University)

Ms Nadejda VELISCO (Ministry of Education)

Ms Galina GAVRILITSA (Ministry of Education)

Ms Valentina HAHEU (Ministry of Education)

Romania

Mr Doru Dumitrescu, Ministry of Education and Research, Bucharest

Dr Alexandru Florin Platon, “Al. I. Cuza” University, Faculty of History, Iasi

Mr Carol Capita, University of Bucharest, Faculty of History, Bucharest

Ms Laura Capita, Institute of Educational Sciences, Bucharest

Mr Mihai Dumitriu, Local educational authority, Iasi

Ms Elvira Rotundu, Local educational authority, Iasi

Dr Liviu Burlec, National College “Emil Racovita”, Iasi

Ms Maria Ochescu, Local educational authority, County Valcea

Mr Vasile Pascu, Local educational authority, Bucharest
Mr Doru Vilhelm, Local educational authority, County Botosani
Ms Viorica Grigorie, Local educational authority, County Bacau
Dr Liviu Lazar, Local educational authority, County Hunedoara
Ms Verona Lazăr, High School for Arts, Alba Iulia, County Alba
Ms Lucia Copoeru, National College “Gheorghe Șincai”, Cluj
Ms Florina Șerbu, Secondary School no. 1, Eforie Nord, County Constanța
Ms Dorina Drexler, Secondary School “Spiru Haret”, Piatra Neamt, County Neamt
Ms Bety Illyes, High School Odorheiu Secuiesc, County Harghita
Ms Cristina Niculescu, National College “Mihai Viteazul”, Bucharest
Ms Ecaterina Stănescu, National College “Mihai Eminescu”, Bucharest

COUNCIL OF EUROPE

Ms Alison CARDWELL, Administrator, Educational Policies and European Dimension Division, Directorate General IV - Education, Culture and Heritage, Youth and Sport, Council of Europe, F - 67075 STRASBOURG CEDEX, France
Tel: 33 3 88 41 26 17
Fax: 33 3 88 41 27 50/ 27 56
E-mail: alison.cardwell@coe.int

APPENDIX II

PROGRAMME OF THE SEMINAR

Monday 12 November 2001

Arrival of the participants

Reception by the General inspector, Local educational authority, Iasi country

Tuesday 13 November 2001

09.30 – 11.00 **Plenary Session**

Opening of the Seminar by:

- i. Mr. Doru Dumitrescu, general inspector, Ministry of Education and Research of Romania
- ii. Mr. Valentin Soroceanu, vice-prefect, Local Authorities of Iasi, Romania
- iii. Ms Alison CARDWELL, Educational Policies and European Dimension Division, Council of Europe;

Presentation on the situation of history teaching in Romania by Mr Doru DUMITRESCU, General Inspector, Ministry of Education and Research of Romania

11.00 - 11.30 Break

11.30 - 13.00 **Plenary Session on “The process-oriented approach to teaching history:**

- **active learning methods;**
- **sensitive and controversial issues”**

- i. Ms Laura CAPITA, Romania;
- ii. Dr Alois ECKER, Austria

Discussion with all the participants

- 13.00 – 14.30 Lunch
- 14.30 – 16.00 **Plenary Session on “Working with sources”**
- i. Dr Florin-Alexandru PLATON, Faculty of History, University of Iasi, Romania
 - ii. Ms Cheryl STAFFORD, Northern Ireland
- 16.00 - 16.30 Break
- 16.30 – 18.00 **Plenary Session – discussions with all the participants on the two topics**
- 20.00 Dinner

Wednesday 14 November 2001

- 9.30 - 11.00 **Plenary Session on:**
- The contribution of the Stability Pact – to the reform of history teaching in Romania and Moldova**
- New trends in history teaching in Romania and Moldova**
- This session was animated by Mr. Doru Dumitrescu, general inspector, Ministry of Education and Research, Romania, and the participants from Romania and Moldova were invited to contribute to the discussions
- 11.00 - 11.30 Break
- 11.30 - 13.00 **Continuation of the Plenary Session**
- Closing speeches of the Seminar by:**
- i. Ms Alison CARDWELL, Council of Europe;
 - ii. Mr. Doru Dumitrescu, Ministry of Education and Research, Romania
 - iii. Mr. Mihai Dimitriu, Local Educational Authority, Iasi, Romania

Departure of the participants

APPENDIX III

CHRONOLOGICAL OVERVIEW OF THE REFORM

OF HISTORY TEACHING IN ROMANIA

Changes in history teaching in Romania after 1989

(Summary of the paper presented by Doru Dumitrescu, History inspector, the Ministry of Education and Research)

Educational reform in Romania is now at a crossroads. Several developments that occurred in the last decade can now be better evaluated; the impact of the new legislation on classroom practice is now under scrutiny by various agencies.

One of the elements that has been to a certain degree neglected up to now is the development of educational decision-making relating to the process of curriculum change and textbook approval. Although several analysts have considered that the “true” educational reform only started in 1997-1998, the process actually started in the early 1990s.

Briefly stated, the stages are the following:

- *1990-1992: the first transitional phase:* the old study plans and textbooks were kept in use after the ideological dependent contents were eliminated; it was a compromise between the need for new educational materials and study plans and the lack of time;
- *1992-1995: the second transitional phase:* the drafts for the new curricula (for compulsory education) were developed as a basis for the production of new textbooks;
- *1995-1999: the development of the new curricula:* adopted in 1995 (for compulsory education) and 1999 (for High School), the new curricula evolved gradually to a body of educational documents able to co-ordinate the ensemble of the educational system, completing the provisions of the Education Law (first adopted in 1995, revised in 1998);
- *1995-2000: introduction of new textbooks:* in 1995 Parliament voted a new Education Law (modified in 1998), and the government signed an agreement with the World Bank, thus providing part of the necessary funding for the publication of new textbooks for compulsory education (the first textbooks appeared in 1996, for history in the school year 1997/1998) and High School (starting with 1999); the period was also a period of

institutional innovation, since various agencies were established to coordinate and control the elements brought about by the educational reform (such as the National Council for Curriculum, the National Service for Examination and Evaluation, the National Council for Textbook Approval etc.).

This brief chronology is, of necessity, rather sketchy. Nevertheless, it demonstrates a special mixture between a long-term perspective (implied by the institutional change) and a medium-term perspective (the textbooks and curriculum policies).

What are the latest (i.e. 1998 up to present) developments in the field of history teaching?

First of all, a new perspective on the National Curriculum was accepted. It is now considered to be composed of the framework of reference, the curriculum-frameworks, the subject curricula, the alternative textbooks, support materials (handbooks, guidelines). All these documents were introduced during the last years, and were developed in accordance with several principles: cultural selection and hierarchy, coherence, equality of chances, decentralisation, relating to social life, etc.

The curriculum-frameworks organised the subject matters into seven curricular areas, History – together with Civics – being part of the area “People and Society”. At the same time, a special subject matter for the national minorities living in Romania was introduced. Called “History and the Traditions of the Minorities”, it has one hour per week in Grades VI and VII and is taught in schools and/or classes for the minorities.

The changes are more obvious when focusing on the curriculum. Several points are, of interest. First of all, the learning processes were introduced in the centre of the schooling activity. Second, teaching focuses now more on the development of attitudes, problem-solving abilities. Third, a greater flexibility of the educational offer from the part of the schools (via the school-based curriculum). Fourth, a greater link of the content of the education to the daily life of students. Fifth, and possibly the most important, the use of new criteria for the selection and organising of the content; based on the principle “not much, but good quality”, the new History curricula propose a focus on the history of ideas and mentalities, on social history. It also tries to focus on the out-of-school life of the students, and also to present the controversial aspects of our history. Although the curriculum might suggest that Romanian History is a totally different subject matter than History (i.e. World History), the curriculum is integrated; that is, elements of Romanian History are presented in an European setting in the curriculum for History, and the European and wider context is strongly represented in the curriculum for Romanian History.

As regards the new textbooks, as previously stated, they were introduced in the schools during the years 1997-2000 for compulsory schooling, and in 2000 for the entire High School (grades IX to XII). After their approval by the National Council for Textbook Approval (NCTA), they are introduced in schools in accordance with the choice of teachers. If the curriculum changes (and this happened several times), the publishers have to update the textbooks in accordance to the changes and to obtain a new approval from the NCTA.

At the level of the individual schools, the recent developments included several significant features. First of all, the schools were able better to use local educational resources (in terms of educational opportunities, teaching staff, even logistics) via the school-based curriculum. Second, the major focus after the introduction of the curricula and the textbooks was the training of the teachers and of the local school authorities in order to cope with the new tasks presented to them. Stress was laid on counselling and guidance, as well as on on-site training seminars. The local school authorities also organised a series of training seminars and meetings. At the same time, and using the results of the various meetings with the teachers, the National Council for the Curriculum started to develop additional materials for teachers (especially implementation guides on curricular areas). Not to be ignored is also the increased participation of Romanian history teachers in international programmes (either teacher training meetings, or projects oriented towards the exchange of positive experiences, networking, or the production of teaching materials).

