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National Seminar on

“History textbooks for minorities, multiperspectivity,
the use of textbooks and ICT”

Lake Palić, Serbia
17 – 18 May 2004

Report

Strasbourg

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Report by

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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. OPENING OF THE MEETING

This seminar was held in a beautiful and peaceful location on the shores of Lake Palic, north of Belgrade, in the region of the Vojvodina. It was the fifth in an on-going series of discussions about the reform of history teaching in Serbia. Participants came from a wide range of backgrounds: from elementary and secondary schools, from big cities and small village schools, teachers and textbook authors, the president of the Historical Association of Serbia and a teacher working with EUROCLIO, the European Conference of History Teachers' Associations. Minority groups were also well represented: there were teachers who acted as spokespersons for Hungarian and Bosnian groups, for Albanians and Ruthenians, from Montenegro, one member of the National Council of Romanian Educators, another who had large groups of Roma pupils, and one describing himself as: "100% Hungarian and 100% a citizen of Yugoslavia".

The meeting was opened by the Deputy Minister of Education and Sport, Ms Milka Andrić, who affirmed the hope of harmonising educational standards with those of the European Union countries by producing textbooks in minority languages and incorporating them into teacher-training.

Representing the Council of Europe, Ms Alison Cardwell expressed pleasure at being back in Serbia working on the issues of history education together with the OSCE and Ms Biljana STOJANOVIC from the Ministry of Education and Sport. The Council of Europe had worked on history education in many countries since 1954. Contemporary projects included work on The European Dimension in History Teaching focusing on Key Dates and Events in European History. Symposia had already been held in Braunschweig on 1848, at Yalta on the settlement of 1945, and recently in Budapest on the events of 1989. The results of these meetings, reflecting a comparative perspective, would be available on CD Roms for use as teaching aids across Europe. A second project reflected regional cooperation, with several countries cooperating on the *Black Sea Initiative on History* which has come to an end with the publication of the Teaching Pack.

Important publications of the Council of Europe had been translated into Serbian, for example the Recommendation (Rec (2001)15) on *Teaching History in the 21st Century*, on which all member countries had agreed. Of importance for this seminar was the Handbook written by Dr Robert STRADLING on: *Multiperspectivity in History Teaching: A Guide for Teachers*, which was also available in Serbian.

For the OSCE, Ms Maria AGNESE GIORDANO, Education Programme Manager, described how they had recently began work in education while Mr Oliver SCHMIDT-GUTZAT, Office of the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities, said that the OSCE began by concentrating primarily on the protection of national minorities which should have linguistic and educational recognition and the right to participate in decision-making. Cooperation with the Council of Europe was valued.

Alexsander STOJANOVIC passed on greetings from the Belgrade office of the Council of Europe. He was a legal advisor not a historian, but now realised the importance of history for civil society and wished the seminar well.

II. THE KEYNOTE PRESENTATION ON: *MULTIPERSPECTIVITY IN HISTORY TEACHING AND LEARNING*

The Keynote Presentation on: *Multiperspectivity in History Teaching and Learning* was given by Ann Low-Beer from the United Kingdom. The idea of multiperspectivity in looking at historical events has developed in recent years within a context of other changes in the practice of history teaching and learning. These new approaches to the subject have grown in schools in many countries across Europe.

New Approaches to History Teaching

The first part of the talk explored some of the reasons for the changes in history teaching. Since the late 1980s, there has been revision of the conceptualisation of school history, firstly because of a growing awareness that nations and societies are diverse: internally, they contain minorities and encompass ethnic, religious and linguistic diversity. Externally, nations do not exist in isolation; they are enmeshed in relationships with neighbours, within a region, in Europe and with the world. This has become clearer on the one hand because academic histories have paid much more attention to the different layers of society – the life of the poor and of women for example, not just the history of the leading groups of a nation. But it is also because of modern communications which give a greater sense of an increasingly global and inter-communicating world. Secondly, it is clear that in modern history, especially that of the 20th century, there are many controversial and sensitive topics – events about which there are disputed views raising painful and difficult memories. How are these to be conveyed to the next generation? There is not one agreed version of them, there are frequently a range of different and unreconciled views. There are difficult legacies in many countries. One could take the example of post-World War II Germany, and then Germany again with the unification. History of this kind can only be taught by looking at events on a multiperspective level.

Two other things have affected history education. One is modern communication technology which makes it much more possible for a range of different source materials to be available both to teachers and for pupils. And pupils now gain much of their information about past events from many sources outside school, including the media and the internet. Teachers are increasingly aware of the need to help pupils to develop the historical skills of assessing a variety of information on a topic, from many different sources. Secondly, modern psychology of learning suggests that learning is both more interesting and more profound if pupils have to construct their own understanding of material, not just accept it ready-made for them in the textbook. Working from a range of sources, new methods of teaching and learning history have developed in response to all of these changes. The second part of the talk looked at

practical examples of how new methods particularly using a variety of source materials can be developed in classrooms.

Multiperspectivity

Using a variety of sources allows pupils to look at events from a range of different perspectives, and the idea of multiperspectivity is partly based on methods using a range of sources when studying a particular historical event. The concept of multiperspectivity, when looking at historical events, has developed particularly within the work of the Council of Europe. The idea of developing multiple perspectives has developed in a number of countries but is not always thus called. In England, it is a requirement that pupils should learn about different *interpretations* in history. In France, it is the introduction of a *comparative*, European perspective on aspects of national history. In Northern Ireland, it is an aspect of the curriculum which is called *education for mutual understanding*. Elsewhere, especially in areas with historically changing borders it may be known as *inter-cultural understanding*. All of these are ways of approaching and teaching events from more than one perspective.

Multiperspectivity in national history

The concept of national history itself can be considered in relation to the idea of multiperspectivity. There have been several other seminars in the Balkans supported by the Council of Europe which have explored the issues of viewing national history with greater multiperspectivity and not in a “nationality-bound monoperspective” which has been the tendency in the Balkans since the fall of communism. The reports from these seminars are available in Serbian and there are excellent examples in them of how other European countries have begun to think of national history in new ways. How are local and regional history presented in relation to the national history? How are minorities included? Is it possible to introduce a comparative perspective at times?

Moreover, there is an excellent *Multiperspectivity in History Teaching: A Guide for Teachers*, by Dr Robert STRADLING which has also been translated into Serbian. It contains many practical examples of ways of introducing multiperspectivity into history teaching: for example looking at the crusades from the Muslim as well as the Christian point of view. Another example is to study the storming of the Winter Palace in October 1917 starting by giving pupils six eye-witness accounts of what happened that night. Teachers as well as pupils need to develop techniques for handling a range of varied source material. To begin with, it may be easiest to work on small case-studies of uncontroversial topics. Pupils need to practise analysis of several sources, looking at where they agree and where not, searching other evidence including a textbook, to arrive at their own conclusions on what really happened and why sources may differ. It is useful for teachers to work together in thinking out topics where developing multiple perspectives might be tried. In the workshops perhaps participants can suggest examples from their existing curricula where multiperspectivity could be developed in classrooms.

III. PLENARY SESSION 1: MINORITIES IN HISTORY

Mr Martin SACHSE presented a paper on: *Minorities in History Education, the example of Germany*. He came from the Munich State Institute for School Quality and Educational Research, a part of the Bavarian Ministry of Education. He gave a brief introduction to the German education system, a devolved and regional system which varied in each Land. There was a new history curriculum in Bavaria which emphasised pupils learning the skills of handling varied historical material as well as acquiring knowledge. Yet history was in the curriculum not just for its own sake, but because understanding the past and differing views about it was an important aspect of the general knowledge which a citizen of a democracy needed to have. It was important to encourage frank and open dialogue between the different groups in a democracy. The diversity of modern societies meant making a positive educational effort to develop tolerance and understanding of others in the next generation. The history curriculum included a series of selected and detailed topics on minorities and outsiders in history – and this was true in other German Länder too. Pupils should be able to recognise and understand the diversity of historical experience and recognise that there were multiple perspectives in most historical events. This was also pursued in relation to European history – studying minority groups in Europe under a theme on “Do you know your neighbours?”

Ms Danica STEFANOVIC, Director of the Pedagogical Institute in Novi Sad, spoke about *Minorities in History Education in Serbia*. She essentially reported some gloomy findings from her research work into the attitudes of youth in Serbia. All minority groups wish to maintain their own language but the numbers of those who know a language other than their own are diminishing. They are mostly the children of mixed marriages. Few expressed any desire to learn another language and 61% spoke only their own. In the same survey, levels of intolerance have increased too, especially amongst Serbs who do not want contact with “others”. Moreover, from a number of surveys, levels of violence amongst the young are growing too – but this is a generation who have grown up with violence in the society around them. Ms Stefanovic has been personally involved in this research and much of it has been published. She has discussed with some of the NGOs working in the area the problem of what could be done to change or reverse these trends. Answers to such problems are scarce and, meanwhile in daily life, there are accounts of antagonisms and violent attacks on minority groups resulting in the space between groups growing ever wider.

She has lived and worked most of her life in Vojvodina, which is a good area in which to experience diversity with its 26 ethnic groups and six spoken languages. The older generation were concerned about the culture of violence amongst the young and would like to eradicate it but, what should be done?

Ms Biljana STOJANOVIC discussed *Minorities in History Textbooks in Serbia*. She has helped to set up a committee, a group of teachers and educators, working with academic historians too, to produce a textbook which would be more inclusive of minorities. They worked with a private publisher on textbooks for the 8th grade

produced in both Serbian and Hungarian; these were far from perfect but were at least practical.

The fundamental problem is that Serbian history is thought of as the history of the Serb nation, of ethnically Serb people. There is little idea of the history of the Serb state and the different peoples who have lived and are still living there. Few local sources are available to fill in the details about the lives of the different groups and translations are often poor. There is a general view that each minority should have its own textbooks in its own language. School history is generally very political and male-oriented and the experience of women, or of minority religions, is rarely mentioned. But definitions of what counts as a minority are sometimes nebulous, and the Roma for instance are scarcely mentioned. Some groups are allowed to use textbooks imported from their land of origin, but this is not really a satisfactory solution. There are serious problems about thinking through a more inclusive view of history.

The group working together on new textbooks had begun to do this, but the recent change of government has resulted in the cancellation of educational reforms which began last year.

IV. DISCUSSION

A lively and dynamic discussion followed these presentations. A number of minority groups were well represented at this seminar and important points were put forward very clearly.

There was first of all a strong feeling that statements offensive to others should be avoided but this, unfortunately, is not always the case. For example, the statement that “the Turks will never be forgiven”, when as the speaker said “all of us in the Balkans are a little bit Turkish”. Or the idea that Bosnians were really just converted Serbs, which is in textbooks but is rejected by the Bosnians. Even in towns and schools where Bosnians are a majority, they have to teach a history which comes from Belgrade and is “not their own”. The importance of religion is underplayed in textbooks. This speaker, like a number of others, admired the German route as it had been presented, ie. trying to encourage real tolerance, “it is the only way forward and it is not too late to take this route. The History of Serbia must include the histories of all the people in Serbia”.

Another speaker stressed a different influence; he wondered to what extent tolerance was a result of poverty and a feeling that opportunities are lacking amongst the young. He taught in a large multi-ethnic city and had daily contact with most minorities. From a study in which he had been involved, he also believed that tolerance was decreasing amongst the young.

V. 2nd PLENARY SESSION ON: MULTIPERSPECTIVITY AND THE USE OF TEXTBOOKS

Ms Mette MOLLAND made a presentation on *History Textbooks and Multiperspectivity*. This was timely as she brought along some very recently published books on a new concept in history teaching and works for the largest publishing house “Gyldendal” in Norway. She explained first of all that the term multiperspectivity is not used in Norway, but the concept which they were trying to introduce in these books was related and was a new one in Norway. Traditionally, national and world history are taught as separate courses; however, the new books combine the two and this was a challenge to the traditional way of thinking about history in schools. In Norway, quite a substantial amount of time is allocated to history teaching, in fact, three or four hours per week. The publishers had done research amongst teachers before launching the new books. They thought some teachers would not like the new approach, but younger teachers with a more global outlook would be interested. They knew that teachers liked to have a strong chronological basis to their teaching and a clear and workable text, so that their text was in that sense fairly traditional. They thought that their new approach would work well and be popular with pupils from both ethnic Norwegian and immigrant groups.

The main aim was to put Norwegian history into a context of regional and sometimes global history. This often showed that historical developments in Norway were typical for the period and region. One result of this is that “our” historical icons and special symbolic events are seen to be less unique and special than perhaps we thought. They tried also to put different perspectives into the text, and to raise issues where there were debates by putting in special quotes to stimulate discussion. The text was not fully multiperspective but it was novel in the Norwegian context.

Marko SUICA spoke about *History Textbooks and Multiperspectivity in Serbia*. He was part of a small group who have been working over the last year and a half with Biljana STOJANOVIĆ and the Ministry for Education and Sport to try to develop textbooks with greater multiperspectivity. Unfortunately, with a change of government, further plans have been cancelled. Nevertheless, the group have pursued ideas about how to introduce multiperspectivity into textbooks. For the moment, introducing this idea in Serbia must rely on the initiative of teachers in classrooms, and clearly it would be helpful to have books which supported this approach.

Why is multiperspectivity important? Educationally, it is a matter of helping pupils to learn to think critically and carefully about their past for themselves. It may help them also to understand controversies about their past, especially in their recent past. It is misleading if the past is always seen in terms of the present. Then it is essential to recognise all the citizens of the state, and this is an aspect not just of history education but also of civic education if they are all to live tolerantly in the same state. Multiperspectivity is advocated for a variety of reasons – and Mr SUICA urged participants to read and digest the documents, in Serbian, brought by the Council of Europe – and not just to put them in an unread pile.

Current textbooks are full of detail which often does not make much sense as no proper historical selection has been made. They are authoritative, and pupils merely learn the information without a real understanding of it since most books are not written at a suitable level for pupils. And they are usually ethnocentric. Even though minorities have textbooks in their own languages, the books are simply translations of the Serb texts. They are not about the histories of particular minorities – for this, it would be necessary to have authors from the communities. Some resources for teaching a more varied and local history are available, for example there are good archaeological sites near almost every town. Teachers need to have more freedom of choice within the curriculum if they are to be able to use local resources and select the history which is most appropriate for their pupils.

What is needed are history textbooks which include something about the origins and histories of the minorities. This is needed for all pupils, not just for the minority groups themselves so that they can all recognise the multiperspectivity which actually exists in the country.

Working Groups

The seminar then split into two working groups to discuss the issues raised during the day. Care was taken to see that members of the seminar from the minority groups were spread between the working groups.

Once again, there was an extensive and candid discussion and a considerable degree of support for the views of the last speaker. Textbooks needed revision and some discussion revolved around how best to include minorities. It was agreed that teachers need to write textbooks as they know best what may interest their pupils; however, help from historians is also required as, in many cases, good histories from minority groups are not easily located.

The working groups met on both days and summaries of their discussions were presented at the Final Plenary session.

VI. 3rd PLENARY SESSION: HISTORY TEACHING AND ICT

This topic was introduced by Mr Terry HAYDN from the University of East Anglia, United Kingdom, who had been a history teacher for many years in a large multi-ethnic school in a big city before he studied the use of ICT. He was able to present a lot of material and some of it was both amusing and interesting.

His teaching career began before ICT was available and he recalled the importance of using first television and then videos. For the first time, the teacher was really able to use pictures in teaching and this was a wonderful new teaching technique. Nowadays, politicians promote the use of ICT in education but they tend to see it as an educational petrol pump, ie. just a way to push more knowledge into children.

ICT is however much more varied than this and its use depends on the nature of the subject as it is necessary to think about what you are trying to do when you teach history. He then proceeded to demonstrate different ways of using ICT in the classroom, as well as ways in which its utilisation has been abused.

Emphasising the idea of a word “processor”, Mr HAYDN showed how basic information could be put on the screen and with simple exercises pupils could learn to select and sort information, picking out economic information for instance, deciding which were the most important bits of information in a given text. This kind of exercise, essentially sorting and analysing information, could be used with a writing frame to help pupils improve the organisation of their own writing. He demonstrated some inter-active games which, although children might enjoy, do not provide a great amount of information. It was more valuable to show, in picture form, two versions of an event and then ask pupils to explain how there could be two versions. It was useful to build up sets of photographs about important people in contemporary life and pupils could sort and organise them and then assess why the images changed. The internet was an invaluable resource where the teacher could find not only pictures but statistics, quotations and many kinds of source material which could be useful in working with pupils. He gave an example of three different reviews of a film on a historical topic which could then lead to pupils discussing and analysing the interpretations in the film. Teachers could build a database of material on their teaching topics whilst pupils could learn how to access information from the internet. Learning how to obtain and then assess material from the internet was a useful universal skill which they would also develop.

VII. FINAL PLENARY SESSION

Summaries of the discussions in each of the working groups were presented and some of the discussion continued in this final meeting of the whole seminar.

New Conceptions and Multiperspectivity

The concept of multiperspectivity attracted a good deal of interest. It clearly entails new methods of teaching in which pupils are presented with more than one view of events. Some approved of the general idea and indeed saw it as the only way forward to encourage tolerance and peace in a society with many minority groups. Yet how in practice to do it, to introduce it in classrooms, was not very clear, especially as it was not yet presented in textbooks. The speakers from Germany and the United Kingdom were asked bluntly how far it was a reality in their societies and teaching?

This discussion was entwined with uncertainties about how to include the history of all the minorities. Both are issues of some complexity. The definition of what counted as a minority was raised more than once. There is a long-standing legal basis to such definitions but this applies only to what one speaker called our “indigenous” minorities. The rights which they have are not extended to more recent immigrant

groups, for instance the Chinese. There was general agreement that textbooks should not contain language and images which were offensive to minority groups. Some of the established minorities clearly wanted history teaching which conveyed their own history in their own language, and felt they did not yet have it. Others pointed out that there had certainly been long periods of shared history, which at the moment tended to be neglected. Their histories were not altogether a series of separate stories; there was a history of mutual interaction as neighbours with a common historical experience and shared cultural influence. The traditional syllabus is chronological and largely a history of political events and of wars and conflicts. Some felt that a greater emphasis on social and cultural history would convey more of the shared historical experience of all the peoples of the area.

The tension between the ideas of a Serb history or a history of Serbia surfaced in several contexts as did the view that people were ignorant about the history, custom and religion of other groups. In many cases, existing histories of different groups were inadequate. There was much discussion about how to put the histories of all the minorities into a common history. Equally, the question was raised of what the majority should know about these varied histories and backgrounds? Local heroes and leaders were not known to the majority of the population. There needed to be some freedom and flexibility in the curriculum for teachers to make choices suited to their pupils.

A further implication of the above discussion was a concern for the civic implications of the way in which national history was conveyed to the next generation. Some form of inter-cultural education, of multiperspectivity had civic implications. But introducing such ideas would require some training of teachers.

Textbooks

Some members of the group were already involved in creating new textbooks, and meeting the difficulties of attempting to implement new approaches in a practical way. Participants were interested in how to put new methods of teaching into textbooks in a general way and on uncontroversial topics. But there was also concern about how far it was possible to do justice to all minorities in a common textbook. Textbooks should be written by groups of authors rather than one author in isolation. It was suggested that some books might be smaller supplementary books. Indeed one way forward might be to produce manuals of supplementary sources and materials for all teachers to use in classrooms.

The last national seminar and regional workshop, held in Belgrade in November 2003, focused on textbooks. The report for the Council of Europe of those meetings (DGIV/EDU/HIST (2003) 14) contains a helpful and more detailed discussion on the production of textbooks.

Conclusions

Ms Biljana STOJANOVIC brought the seminar to a close by emphasising that everyone should take back to their own area the issues discussed at the seminar and she would report back to the Ministry.

The aim of the group was to initiate work on new concepts for a common core curriculum. Discussion at all levels would contribute towards this. It was useful to think of the kind of results which were hoped for and these would influence the kind of history which was valuable in school. Recent changes mean that the Education Law no longer follows that kind of approach but the group would continue to meet and to develop ideas and perhaps books in this direction.

Ms Alison CARDWELL, on behalf of the Council of Europe, thanked everyone for their participation and affirmed that the Council of Europe will continue to work in Serbia and that it might be possible to help with the development of textbooks. The publications on multiperspectivity had been translated into Serbian and duly distributed to participants. It was suggested that perhaps a further seminar might be held on practical classroom approaches to multiperspectivity.

**APPENDIX I
AGENDA OF THE MEETING**

Monday 17 May 2004

08h30 Breakfast
09h30 – 10h30 **Plenary Session**

Opening of the Seminar by:

- Ms Milka ANDRIĆ, Head of Curricula Department, Ministry of Education and Sport
- Ms Alison CARDWELL, Head of History Education Section, Council of Europe
- Ms Zorica NOVAKOVIĆ, Office of the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities
- Ms Maria AGNESE GIORDANO, Education Programme Manager, Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe
- Mr Oliver SCHMIDT-GUTZAT, Office of the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities
- Mr Aleksander STOJANOVIC, Legal Adviser, Council of Europe Office in Belgrade

10h30 – 11h00 Coffee break

11h00 – 13h00 **Plenary session** on Minorities in history

“Minorities in history education: the example of Germany” by Mr Martin SACHSE, Germany

“Minorities in history education: the example of Serbia” by Ms Danica STEFANOVIĆ, Serbia

“Minorities in history textbooks: the example of Serbia” by Ms Biljana STOJANOVIĆ

Discussion

- 13h00 – 14h00 Lunch
- 14h00 – 15h30 **Plenary session** on Multiperspectivity and the use of history textbooks:
- History textbooks, multiperspectivity and ICT: the example of Norway by Ms Mette MOLLAND, “Gyldendal” Publishing House
 - History textbooks and multiperspectivity: the example of Serbia by Mr Marko ŠUIČA
- Discussion
- 15h30 – 16h00 Coffee break
- 16h00 – 18h00 Working Groups on Multiperspectivity and history in the textbooks and minorities – to be animated by the Serbian specialists with one of the specialists invited by the Council of Europe
- Official Dinner

Tuesday 18 May 2004

- 09h30 – 11h00 **Plenary session** on history teaching and ICT by Mr Terry Haydn, University of East Anglia, United Kingdom
- Discussion
- 11h00 – 11h30 Coffee break
- 11h30 – 13h00 Working groups on the use of ICT in history teaching in Serbia to be animated by Serbian specialists with one of the specialists invited by the Council of Europe in each group
- 13h00 – 14h30 Lunch
- 14h30 – 16h00 **Plenary session**
- Summing up of the results of the group discussions by the rapporteurs of each working groups
- Around 16h30 Closing of the seminar
- Departure of the participants