



**DECS/EDU/HIST (99) 64**

**Activities for the Development and Consolidation  
of Democratic Stability (ADACS)**

Seminar on

**"Teaching controversial and sensitive issues in  
history education for secondary schools"**

Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina,

19 - 20 November 1999

**Report**

Strasbourg



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

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## I. Introduction

All nations contain within their histories controversial and sensitive issues. How to teach about them to the next generation, or indeed whether to teach them at all, always raises uncomfortable issues for those involved in education. The Council of Europe was founded in the aftermath of the Second World War and the way history is taught in schools across Europe has always been an important part of its work. Given this background, it was decided at this time to hold a seminar in Sarajevo in Bosnia and Herzegovina on these difficult issues. Participants were cantonal Ministers of Education, historians, curriculum experts, teacher trainers, textbook authors and teachers. The seminar was co-organised with the Office of the High Representative as a part of the programme of activities for the development and consolidation of democratic stability

The seminar was opened by *Ambassador Johnson*, the Deputy High Representative of Bosnia and Herzegovina and *Mr. Ivo Luzanski*, the President of the Federation. Both congratulated organisers and participants at the seminar for tackling these difficult issues and hoped they would find something useful to take with them from the contributions of the speakers.

At the opening session, *Mr. Asaf Dzanic*, *Counselor to the Federal Minister of Education, Culture and Sport*, hoped the seminar would help to move forward a process of understanding. *Mr. Mladen Kvesic*, *Counselor to the Deputy-Federal Minister of Education, Culture and Sport*, reminded the group that the point of the seminar was to help the children of the next generation. *Dr. Nenad Suzic*, *Minister of Education of the Republika Srpska* suggested that it was impossible to abolish the history of the war of 1992-95, or like the ostrich to bury heads in the sand. But it was equally difficult to teach objectively a history of which one was still subjectively a part: "because of the lack of historic distance there is a real danger that each side or each nation transfers its anger, bitterness and hatred into textbooks and thus poisons the young generations". A better way forward had to be found, and this was the purpose of the seminar.

For the Council of Europe, *Mr. Gabriele Mazza*, Head of the Education Department, reminded the seminar of the links between the Council's work on Human Rights and its work in education. Future plans for work in education had been discussed a week earlier at a meeting in Sofia as part of programmes for democratic renewal. History teaching in schools was an important part of democratic renewal within societies.

*Ms Alison Cardwell* outlined some of the recent work of the Council of Europe on the reform of history teaching. It was the first time that a seminar of this kind had been held in Bosnia and Herzegovina, but some of the individuals present had attended Council of Europe seminars in other places. The Council had worked in many countries on curriculum and standards, textbooks, and the training of teachers. She drew attention to seminars in Ukraine recently, where specialists from Spain and Germany had shared

their experience of teaching controversial issues. In the Caucasus a supplementary textbook written by authors from several countries was nearing completion. The Council of Europe provided an umbrella which made such activities possible, even though at the time, two of the three countries were still at war with each other. Similarly, the Black Sea Initiative on History involved people from several countries working together to a) prepare a pack for teachers and b) create a network of schools. Two schools from each country were put in touch with each other and exchanged information on projects they were doing. During the year 2000, the Council of Europe would do further work on teacher-training. Ideas from all of these projects might be of use in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

### **Two Case Studies**

Sharing ideas on ways of teaching history and learning from experience in other countries are two of the purposes of Council of Europe seminars. In Sarajevo, two case studies were presented from countries which in their different ways, had tried to find ways of teaching about controversial and sensitive issues in their history.

*Ms Christina del Moral* spoke about: **Teaching the Franco period in Spain.** The experiences of the historical period from the 1930s to the death of Franco in 1975 left a bitter and highly debated legacy, particularly because of the experience of civil war, still well within living memory, which had affected the lives of many adults. Differences in views about this period still persist to the present day, as *Ms del Moral* illustrated from memorial advertisements taken from newspapers that week: they are part of the present as well as the past.

This period is taught three times in Spanish schools. Pupils first get some general knowledge about recent Spanish history in the last year of primary school at the age of 12. It is then studied in depth by all pupils at the age of 16, and some students may study it further in upper secondary school.

Great attention is paid to history in the Spanish education system and it is the one subject which is common in all the different branches of upper secondary education. This attention reflects changes in society: historical education is an important part of explaining recent changes to the new generation. Spain has moved from a dictatorship to a democracy, and the education system encourages participation in democratic institutions. It has moved from being a Catholic and conservative country to one which is secular and liberal, with the influence of the military reduced. A new Constitution in 1978 created a decentralised administration with 17 autonomous communities, five of them bilingual. At the same time, by joining the European Community, Spain became part of a supranational organisation and much less isolated than it was. There is a need to teach pupils both about the variety of cultures within Spain, and about the history of other countries.



The Education Reform Law of 1991 gives great autonomy to schools, and allows teachers to select the themes they teach and decide how much time to spend on particular topics. But there was widespread discussion and consultation on the curriculum. There is no censorship or control of textbooks by the education authorities. Local education ministers have some freedom to select the syllabus, although it is generally agreed that about 45% of content will be on Spanish history.

There are, however, common practices in the ways Spanish teachers tackle difficult and controversial issues. Most teachers had never studied this period, so many seminars and study groups were arranged and methods of teaching were widely discussed. All teachers were encouraged to gain up-to-date knowledge of the period and learn how to teach it impartially and without ideology. Above all there is broad agreement on the purpose of the history curriculum and the skills, attitudes and values which it sets out to teach.

Gradually new methods of teaching have developed:

- a focus on social history and the history of everyday life in this period, rather than more contentious political history; the use of oral sources; the history of the "silent" groups such as women, workers, peasants; or studying fascist monuments, art and architecture;
- placing the Franco period in Spain within a broader historical context: to discuss German and Italian fascism too; to look at the whole of the Second World War, or the Cold War; or to compare developments in Spain with the development of democratic liberation in Portugal and Greece;
- often teachers draw parallels with another period in Spanish history, for instance the time of Fernando VII;
- teachers have learnt to teach history by new methods using many different kinds of source material including pictures and cartoons, rather than just one textbook. Pupils are presented with a range of historical documents reflecting the differing ideologies of the period, so that pupils can see for themselves the different versions of events from a variety of points of view.

Taken together all these new methods allow Spanish teachers to teach a controversial period in ways which are not ideological and can be historically truthful, but which present to pupils a more complex and varied picture of the period. This is an approach which pupils also find more interesting. In a recent study Spanish pupils had fairly positive views of their history lessons.

*Mr Alan McCully* provided another example of dealing with a controversial history when he spoke about **Teaching History in a divided community – the example of Northern Ireland**. He explained the background of conflict in a small country with a population of less than two million, a paramilitary police force, the presence of the British army, and three thousand deaths over the last 30 years. The divisions within this society are real: political, social and cultural, as well as religious, although there are many who reject the extremes of either view. Most young pupils have personal experience of the conflict. On both sides a very selective and incomplete version of past events is used to strengthen sectional loyalties. The education system is divided, and 95% of pupils are in separate schools, reflecting the two main traditions. Before the introduction of a statutory national curriculum in the 1990s history tended to be taught in a selective and biased way – Catholic schools teaching an Irish nationalist interpretation of events, Protestant schools tending to teach British at the expense of Irish history.

From the outbreak of the present conflict in 1968-69, many people had felt that formal education had an important role to play in countering the prejudice and violence in society. There have been three main responses:

- integrated schools have been created: 45 have been set up since 1982, providing for 3-4% of the school population;
- cross-Community contact, aided by government funding, so that now 60% of schools have some links with a school from the "other" community, perhaps through sporting or artistic activities, or through a local history project;
- special curricular themes were developed called "Education for Mutual Understanding", and "Cultural Heritage". These themes are not formally taught but underpin the whole of the curriculum and it is expected that they will be reflected in the work of all teachers. They have four aims: fostering respect, teaching pupils to understand conflict, and to appreciate interdependence, as well as to develop cultural understanding.

History was seen as a subject which could make a major contribution to fulfilling the aims of these common themes in the curriculum. However in Northern Ireland it was recognised that at the heart of the conflict in society there were contested national histories and identities. No common history curriculum could tell "the nation's story". There was not one common history, there were two stories.

The present Northern Ireland history curriculum was finally decided in the 1990s by a working party which broadly represented the interests of all of those involved, but drew on earlier developments in the 1970s and 1980s. Academic historians had challenged both Irish nationalist and British imperialist interpretations of the past. Teachers of history began to use new approaches to teaching the subject, based on the idea that

pupils should learn the methods of historical enquiry and the processes of historical reasoning when interpreting historical material. History for pupils becomes a process of enquiry. They must learn to use the key concepts and skills of the discipline and apply them to understand the Irish situation and place it in its British, European and World context. Such skills may in turn be useful for understanding contemporary issues and conflicts. All students should have the opportunity to develop:

- chronological awareness;
- range and depth of knowledge;
- interpretations;
- historical enquiry;
- organisation and communication of ideas.

This enquiry approach to learning history is not only built into the curriculum, it is assessed in the examinations and used in all textbooks. *Mr McCully* had brought with him examples from textbooks showing the use of the new methods. As in Spain, there is no government control of textbooks and teachers can choose the books which suit them. A few textbooks are written jointly by authors from both sides. But all of the textbooks follow the curriculum and support teaching through enquiry methods. *Mr McCully* made it clear that much of the content of the curriculum is common and uncontroversial. The textbook examples he brought however, were both about highly controversial events, one in 1641 and one in 1972, in which lives were lost. Pupils are not told one version of the story, but are given several different accounts of how the events were seen, both at the time and by later historians. They are then asked to assess the different sources for themselves from all of the information they have. This section is called "Examining the evidence", and pupils must make decisions about how reliable different pieces of evidence are. In both of the examples some of the evidence which pupils must assess comes from very partisan, present day, memorials and commemorations of the events. The history is connected to contemporary life.

These approaches have provided history teachers in Northern Ireland with ways of teaching history which allow them to acknowledge to pupils that there are sharply contested views about some events in their history. History teachers from both sides have been prepared to work together in committees and working groups to establish the new approaches. The Ministry of Education actively supported new initiatives, backed in turn by the government.

There are difficulties with these approaches, not least that the influence of the school may often be less powerful than the influence of family and community. Indeed, some pupils seem to carry two versions of history in their heads: the rational analysis encouraged in school and useful for passing exams, and the partisan loyalty valued outside school. There are limits to how far teachers feel able to link the past with immediately current events. In this community history is not just a rational subject; the central dilemmas around major controversial events arouse powerful emotions for both teachers and pupils. Some teachers have found it helpful to work together with teachers from the "other" side, in order to clarify their own prejudices and commitments before trying to bring up such issues with pupils. Sensitivity in handling the emotions of others may be a necessary part of training for the teachers.

The Northern Ireland Curriculum is currently being reviewed, as the Peace process leads to a new power-sharing government. Education for Citizenship and Democracy seem likely to be major additions to the curriculum, and history teaching will be linked with them. The curriculum must continue to develop.

## **Definitions**

In the Working Groups it was clear that members of the seminar found these two presentations from Spain and Northern Ireland of great interest. There were clear parallels with the situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina. It had been stressed that these examples were not presented as ideal models, but were examples which might help to promote discussion and suggest some useful routes into teaching controversial and sensitive aspects of history in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

1. Some broad issues about the nature of history emerged in the discussion. Amongst many participants there was a view that eventually specialist historians could arrive at a scientific, objective and authoritative account of any historical events, even those which were currently controversial, and that this was what pupils should learn. This conception of the nature of history is fundamentally different from the view that historical study frequently produces a range of interpretations or explanations of major events, and that pupils should learn to understand this and acquire the skills of looking at a variety of sources. From time to time the remnants of yet a third, Marxist, conception of history emerged too. Underlying epistemological differences of this kind will influence conceptions of school history too.
2. Discussions were initially confused by the agreement signed in Banja Luka in July 1999, whereby "objectionable" material must be obliterated in school textbooks, or annotated with a stamp marking certain passages as "containing offensive or misleading material". The process of doing this was underway in schools at the time of the seminar. It was necessary to make it clear that the controversial and sensitive issues with which the seminar was concerned were more basic and different from the offensive or objectionable material of the agreement. History everywhere is full of

controversial topics, as well as some which are less so and generally agreed. Controversies arise when there is more than one interpretation of the meaning of historical events with several fundamentally different explanations. This does not necessarily involve the use of offensive words, although this may occur. Historical controversies become sensitive and difficult to teach in school when they are part of the personal beliefs and values of different groups of people living in present society. They are sensitive because particular meanings of the past are an integral part of the lives and experience of the present society – in the families and communities from which pupils come. Such controversies about the meaning of recent history were illustrated in the examples from Spain and Northern Ireland.

## II. How teachers are taught to teach controversial and sensitive issues

### 1. Why controversial issues cannot be avoided

This topic was introduced on the second day of the conference by *Ms Joke van der Leeuw-Roord*. She began by noting that teachers of history in all countries cannot avoid controversial topics. 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Century history including recent or contemporary events is now taught in schools in most European countries. The consequences of the break-up of the Soviet Union for countries in east and central Europe have led to revision of history courses and textbooks. But these recent events have also affected the rest of Europe and indeed the whole world. Many European countries have revised the history curriculum to take account of these momentous events. Finally, surveys of large numbers of pupils show they have a clear preference for learning about modern history and the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. There is a growing belief that one of the functions of history in school is to help young people know and understand the world in which they live.

Controversies cannot be avoided in history. Historians argue about what happened, why it happened and the significance of events. This can be purely an academic controversy: historians can interpret the same evidence in different ways. But especially in recent history, within living memory, even academic historians cannot avoid dealing with controversial and sensitive issues. As is well known in Bosnia and Herzegovina these issues divide groups and whole societies, because people have been personally involved in the events.

As educators history teachers in schools cannot wait until academic historians have sifted through all the evidence. There are young people in their classrooms who experience a present totally different from the childhood of their teachers and parents. Pupils want to explore questions about these changes and why the last 15 years has seen such turbulence in their society. Pupils experience the direct effects of a controversial past at home, with their friends, and in their communities. They come to school already with some knowledge, and often strong feelings, about what happened in the past, which they have not studied through the disciplines of an academic subject.

These are difficult issues for teachers to manage in classrooms, but it is equally difficult to avoid them entirely. Recent events may change the way the past is interpreted, and there may be new knowledge which the teachers were not taught about when they studied at the university. The 20<sup>th</sup> Century is full of examples of terrible and controversial events, not only in the Balkans, but also in many parts of the world. Even the language used to describe events may be controversial: are these freedom fighters or terrorists? is this an occupation or an annexation?

## 2. How teachers can be trained

Both teachers and those who train them find life easier if they do not have to deal with controversial topics. Consequently there is a tendency to avoid them both in classrooms and in the training of teachers. Teachers without training will find it more difficult to deal with recent and controversial history. **A Handbook for History Teachers** is being prepared by Dr Robert Stradling for the Council of Europe, and it should soon be available. *Ms Joke Van Der Leeuw-Roord* drew on some of the ideas gathered for this book in the suggestions she made on ways of training teachers.

The first key point made was that teachers of young people need to look to the future, for this is what concerns their pupils. As teachers of history they hope to bring the past alive but also need to consider the kinds of thinking about the past which may be useful to pupils as future citizens.

### Pupils need knowledge and information about the past.

Pupils need to understand that gathering all the facts will not reveal the truth. Historians, authors of history textbooks, journalists and producers of documentaries are not simply reporting; they try to interpret, explain, select and arrange the facts. Pupils need to be able to distinguish facts from opinions, to detect bias, prejudice and stereotypes, and understand that the same historical facts can be used for different purposes with different outcomes. They need to recognise that several perspectives, causes and consequences are usually possible.

### Pupils need to adopt critical attitudes and thinking.

Teachers must train pupils in certain skills and ways of looking at controversial issues if they are to develop critical attitudes and the ability to think for themselves.

### Critical analysis

Pupils should learn:

- that many issues are complex, with multiple causes;
- to identify relevant information and to look for gaps and limitations in their information;
- to discriminate between different kinds of argument, and recognise relevant and irrelevant arguments;
- to be able to find similarities and differences in accounts of the same issue;

- to handle conflicting materials.

### Asking Questions

Pupils need to learn and practise asking all sorts of questions about historical material, for example:

- what motives might people have for this point of view?
- what information has been omitted and why?
- why are certain points emphasised and others down played?
- what sort of assumptions are made and how justifiable are they?

### Analysing Language

Pupils need to become critically aware of the way language is used in historical accounts, and to recognise:

- the use of false similarities;
- the use of stereotypes;
- accounts appealing to the emotions without giving evidence.

### 3. Teachers need training in specific strategies to handle controversial issues in classrooms

Controversial issues can arouse strong emotions in classroom discussions, there are some strategies which help:

- study comparative or parallel events with the emotive ones. This strategy was used in Spain and helps to give a distance and perspective to the controversial issues;
- or approach difficult issues at first through a period further back in time;
- the teacher can use compensatory strategies, presenting the other side, highlighting contradictions in pupils' views or de-mythologising popular but partial beliefs;



- empathetic strategies and role-play by pupils can help them to see the other side. Discussion groups can make lists for and against a particular explanation;
- it may be valuable for students to work in small groups and to develop rules for discussions: listen to each other, do not interrupt, but have a time limit for each speaker, so that everyone can put their views.

#### 4. New Textbooks for New Teaching Methods

Two examples of how controversial issues were treated in modern textbooks were handed round. One topic was on the bombing of civilians in World War 2, another on the peace settlements in 1918. Both books gave a range of different sources for pupils to work from. Accompanying the extracts were exercises for pupils, often raising questions, such as: why might this view be biased? was this settlement fair? what were the strengths and weaknesses of the new Czechoslovakia? compare the explanations in these two sources. New ways of thinking in history require new materials – the one authoritative account of the traditional textbook does not help a pupil see a range of evidence and points of view. A good modern textbook is more like a workbook than a reading book, and gives tasks for pupils so that they may begin to develop skills in thinking critically in history.

Textbooks of this kind, and other resources such as pictures and maps, are essential equipment for a modern classroom. Care and thought are needed in devising tasks for pupils, especially when dealing with controversial and sensitive topics. Good textbooks encourage good teaching. Such materials are needed in all European countries, but especially in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

#### **Examples of Controversial and Sensitive Topics in History Textbooks**

*Ms Haike Karge*, who gave this presentation, has been working at the **Georg Eckert Institute for International Textbook Research** at Braunschweig in Germany. Founded in 1951, this is the leading institution for textbook research in Europe and has acted as the textbook centre for the Council of Europe since 1965. It has a long history of expertise in this field, working with many countries in a number of subjects including history, and publishing the work of scholars in the field of textbook research. *Ms Haike Karge* knows some of the languages of the Balkans and has been studying textbooks from the region. First, however, she looked at how the Balkans appear in current German history textbooks. Generally they appear in the context of the Balkan Question or the Balkan Wars, or the shooting in Sarajevo which triggered the First World War. They are viewed from a fundamentally Western European point of view, as an arena of extended Great Power politics and conflict, and little light is shed on individual countries with their own histories and interactions. She pointed out that no textbook ever

tells "the whole history", but one point of interest in analysing textbooks is to see from what point of view they are written, what is included and what is omitted.

Almost without exception the history of Bosnia and Herzegovina is seen in national terms. Textbooks are committed to a certain concept of national identity, based on old inherited borders and old grounds for conflict, together with the violence of wars and the sufferings of the nation, which constitute its collective greatness. Curiously these concepts reflect and confirm the stereotypes of outside observers, the image of a "violent Balkan region", where "national passions are continually being rekindled".

It is an old tradition in many countries to see history textbooks as a key instrument for fostering national identity. The nation is of course a basic historical fact, but if the history of people is presented only from a political and national perspective, then many other things are omitted. Identity is fixed in one frame, non-national identities are denied. But it is well known that identities are fluid and can be exchanged or altered, and orientation towards a national identity occurred historically quite late. Historical conflicts between the people living in Bosnia and Herzegovina have not always been ethnic or national, as presented in the textbooks, for there have been social and economic conflicts too. The challenge for textbook writers is to develop an awareness of multiple historical identities, often with fluidly changing frontiers between them.

A second characteristic, common to most post-Yugoslavian textbooks, might be called the principle of "fragmented memory". This can be seen in textbooks of the Tito era when a particular approach was chosen to represent the situation of a multi-ethnic society. It was a kind of "numeric Yugoslavism": with a little bit of "my" history, and a little bit less of others" and a little bit of Yugoslav history. The concept attempted to cover the history of all Yugoslav people, without paying any detailed attention to different interests and traditions, minimising national differences as pathological. It was a sanitised version of the real history of the area.

Now, post-Yugoslavian textbooks are still producing a sanitised version of history, but in the other direction: suppressing the common history. In almost all textbooks the period of Yugoslav history is treated from the perspective of the role of one's own nation. It is not seen as a common history which all Yugoslav nations shared for a time. Beyond the bare political union no common experiences are reflected. Croatian textbooks, for instance, reduce the history of socialist Yugoslavia to a history of permanent national oppression. No textbooks suggest a diversity of developments within the framework of the former common state.

Thirdly, textbooks dealing with 20<sup>th</sup> Century history are all written from the perspective of the experience of violence and war in the 1990s. Current textbooks try to present a positive image of their own nation. The fragmented memory operates so that the suffering of one's own side is shown; cruelties are perpetrated by others. The picture given is one in which only one's own nation has been a victim of aggression from

outside. The suffering of people from all sides in a war is not mentioned. The use of violence in defending one's own national interests is accepted unquestioningly - but not for the "other" side. Of course it is difficult to step back and attempt to examine one's own history critically; but *Ms Haike Karge* suggested that perhaps the only way to deal with history is to reflect unconditionally on one's own hurting past.

Finally, the concept of history itself, in all of these books, is closed. What is presented is a finished historical national portrait. The final goal of all historical development is one's own nation-state. Pupils can only learn these ready-made pictures, and nothing is open for critical discussion. With no room for looking beyond the perspective presented, no view can be found from the outside in, and if no other view is possible, the picture is finished.

#### Future Possibilities for Textbooks?

1. The problems arising from controversial memories of history are an important theme for the entire post-Yugoslav region. Perhaps the difficulties culminate in Bosnia and Herzegovina, a country working with three different curricula along three ethnic divisions. It is hardly possible to have discussion on constructive ways forward so long as the didactic aim of the textbooks is to impart and encourage an ethnocentric national identity which excludes acceptance of others.

2. The Georg Eckert Institute has a long experience of resolving conflicts through transnational discussions. A German-Polish round of discussions on textbooks finally succeeded in formulating bilateral conceptions and ideas of shared responsibilities in textbooks, and similar talks have taken place between the French and the Germans. Difficult and controversial passages may be tackled in a series of intermediate stages where sources from both sides can be exchanged. Sometimes third party material is useful to give the view of events as seen by "onlookers". It does however take time, perhaps 15 years.

3. Ms Haike Karge suggested that it is possible to think of history in a much more integrated way, without denying the existence of different experiences and perspectives. Perhaps it could start with the Ottoman period. In this field there are new approaches and source materials which have been developed in Greece and Bulgaria. They are used in schools today and already the history of that period can be seen as much more differentiated and integrated. Achieving this view of history is one of the challenges facing many European countries, although the controversial issues may differ: integrating immigrants; the integration of East and West Germany. As well as differences there have always been significant overlappings of territories, languages, customs and beliefs, and such overlappings are neglected and denied in most post-Yugoslav textbooks.

4. There is a sense in which a process of catching-up is needed in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Many countries have had to think about ways of integrating a range of perspectives into their history. Only by doing this can textbooks encompass a democratic and real historical consciousness. In Bosnia and Herzegovina the whole concept of history textbooks needs revision. They deal with historical facts but in no way seek to develop a critical historical consciousness in pupils. History perceived as facts without thought is hardly a subject for academic study. Open academic debate, with historians and others involved in creating textbooks, and an interdisciplinary approach, could encourage new views. This would require political willingness to cooperate on the part of the decision-making elites in each country.

### **III. Discussion, Conclusions, Recommendations**

The issues and presentations were initially discussed in three workshops, but on the second day were continued in plenary session. Misunderstandings and different definitions complicated some discussions. Those from outside Bosnia and Herzegovina learnt much about the present situation and the complex educational organisation in the country. The four presentations were valued and used in discussions. Gradually conclusions emerged.

1. It was acknowledged that there were controversial and sensitive issues in the histories of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and in the school textbooks. Participants had found the presentation on their textbooks realistic and valuable – indeed some had been fascinated to see themselves so clearly in the mirror of an outside observer.

2. Examples were given of topics which are sensitive and controversial:

- a) the early origins of people in the area;
- b) the different treatment or interpretation of the expansion of Islam in the medieval period;
- c) the different treatment and interpretation of the Austro-Hungarian period;
- d) the causes of the fall of the former Yugoslavia.

For each of these topics there is not one agreed historical view but at least three. The recent war, which is most sharply controversial and sensitive, is not really taught about: "5 lines in the textbook, with dates, nothing more". There was a general view that greater historical distance is needed before this topic can be tackled. The example of Northern Ireland suggested one way of approaching controversial history. Perhaps the way to start in Bosnia and Herzegovina is to recognise that there is not one common history of the area, and then consider how this can best be conveyed in schools. This might well mean rethinking conceptions of history which rely on the idea of a scientific and authoritative account.

3. Conversely another suggestion was to begin to look first for agreed and common areas of their history, neglected in current accounts. The example from Spain was rather more like this approach. In Spain it was accompanied by a devolved and local educational administrative structure, and this seems to be happening in Bosnia and Herzegovina. In Spain there is flexibility in the choice of content but widespread agreement on the aims of teaching history and the methods and approaches used.

4. It was felt that it would be easier to take these matters further with international support, perhaps in the context of a seminar like this one and in the presence of "onlookers" from other European countries. This framework created the possibility of dialogue between the various local groups. Such dialogue was valuable in itself, for discussion lessened the sense of difference and distance. More than once the dialogue over the two days, together with the presentations, was described as "inspirational".

5. Teacher Training has been neglected because of the tragic events here over the last decade. It now urgently needs renewal. There is an organisational structure for teacher training. Initial training is in the universities and pedagogical institutes. Within the schools there is a network of mentors and counsellors who supervise practical training.

The realities of teacher training are, however, very poor. Someone gave a graphic description of the difficulties of doing real training in the schools. With not enough mentors there was barely enough time to visit even briefly all the teachers he was supposed to inspect. He had to examine them orally in just a few minutes. Time was taken up with endless written reports. Classrooms lacked equipment. There was no access to literature on modern methods. Libraries had been devastated and journals for teachers and books on teaching methods could not be found. Someone else, from a pedagogic institute, said he knew about modern methods of teaching and had seen them in practice in the USA. and in Switzerland. He told teachers not just to lecture and re-tell what was already in the textbook. He wanted to encourage group work and pupils working from problems – but there were few resources or books from which to develop this. Many teachers have had no practical training, but simply have to pass exams in methods and didactics. It was an area not highly regarded in the universities. The approach to education was altogether too theoretical with little attention to what was empirical and practical. Radical change was needed in the whole approach to methods and didactics.

6. The problems of Textbooks were mentioned in different contexts: new textbooks might help to solve the difficulties of trying new methods or training teachers in them. Modern textbooks include some of the new methods, and could show teachers how to handle controversial issues with pupils. It was possible to envisage books which pupils might find interesting, even stimulating and inspiring, because of the methods and approaches in them. New approaches cannot be conveyed without concrete and practical examples.

Textbooks are commissioned by Ministries of Education and paid for by parents. Authors must work to guidelines. There was a widespread view that they could be improved, but not agreement on how to do it, except that further discussion was needed, and work with people from outside who knew about such books. The possibilities of creating alternative textbooks were mentioned, and the idea that textbooks might be developed on a market basis, with competition between texts. This would give parents and teachers some choice of books. Financial aid is needed to make any of this possible.

7. At certain points in this seminar the situation in classrooms was described. Teachers are paid very little and work very hard. Some schools work a double shift system. They do not often get a chance to share in the discussion of a seminar. In the classrooms there are few resources, not even maps. Basically teachers have blackboard and chalk and an inadequate textbook. They would like some modern technology, and an overhead projector was mentioned. There may be 40 pupils in a class and some schools have insufficient rooms. It is not surprising that someone said that "the truth is that most pupils find history in school very boring – they hate it".

What is surprising is that people were able to think about something better – that it might be possible to have books which would interest pupils, to rethink didactical methods, even to work out new approaches to content and curriculum and tackle some of the controversial and sensitive issues; "it may take time but we could get there".

8. The Priority Recommendation was to tackle the problems of training teachers but this is connected to the need for new resources, especially alternative textbooks containing new methods. Teachers are the essential mediators of any new approaches to, or rethinking of, school history. In the end, as in any academic subject, new ways of conceptualising history require new mental processes. Resources help, but teachers can only communicate to pupils what they understand in their own minds. Support is needed if they and their pupils are to try to learn about the controversial and sensitive topics in their history.

### **International Aid**

There was general agreement throughout the seminar that international aid of various kinds was needed for real change to occur. Dialogue between the communities in Bosnia and Herzegovina, as in this seminar, is one step in a certain direction. Three possibilities of further and more practical steps, were outlined:

At the end of the meeting a range of future possibilities were proposed:

- a medium term capacity building project, with practical seminars for teachers, curriculum planners and authors to acquire new skills;

- a special partnership with the pedagogical institutes of the three communities, perhaps to prepare a book for teachers on "How to teach History". Or such a group might be able to prepare alternative teaching materials or dossiers, to supplement rather than replace ministerially approved material;
- another possibility was to look at teaching objectives and the levels pupils should reach at different ages, perhaps between nine and 15.

*Ms Joke van der Leeuw-Roord* explained the work of **EUROCLIO**, (the European Standing Conference of History Teachers' Associations), which is a non-governmental Organisation. Started in 1991, there are now 60 History Teachers' Associations which are members of EUROCLIO. Annual conferences are arranged for representatives from all the groups, providing a major forum for the exchange of information and ideas on history teaching. The next one in the year 2000 will take place in Lisbon in Portugal. It requires effort to form a history teachers' group, but such an organisation has value precisely because it is not political or organised by governments, being organised by teachers themselves. Teachers could form History Teachers' Associations in Bosnia and Herzegovina to support each other, circulate material, or join EUROCLIO. EUROCLIO would welcome contacts from this part of Europe.

In the context of the "Stability Pact for South-Eastern Europe" and through the "Graz Process" for educational cooperation in the region, and to promote peace, stability and democracy, **The Council of Europe** is working with other organisations to establish an **Action framework for History and History Teaching in South East Europe**. At a recent meeting in Sofia the training of history teachers and the development of teaching resources were agreed as priority areas for development and support. The programme for the training of teachers has two related aims, to explore ways of:

1. effectively broadening history teachers' knowledge of the region as a whole, the histories of neighbouring countries and of ethnic, cultural and linguistic minorities within nation states.
2. 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 pupils to use primary and secondary source material.

## APPENDIX I

### PROGRAMME OF THE SEMINAR

#### Friday 19 November 1999

10.00 – 11.00      **Plenary Session**

Chair: Mr Chip ERDMANN, Head of Human Rights Department, OHR

Opening of the Seminar by:

- i.      Ambassador PETRISCH, High Representative of Bosnia and Herzegovina (to be confirmed);
- ii.     Mr Edham BICICKIC, Prime Minister (to be confirmed);
- iii.    Ministers of Education of Bosnia and Herzegovina; Mr Fahrudin RIZVANBEGOVIC, Mr Simun MUSA, Dr Nenad SUZIC,
- iv.     Mr Gabriele MAZZA, Head of the Education Department;

Presentation on the Council of Europe's work on the reform of history teaching by Ms Alison CARDWELL

11.00 - 11.30      Break

11.30 - 13.00      **Plenary Session on history curricula for secondary schools**

Chair: Mr Claude KIEFFER, Senior Education Advisor, OHR

Presentations on:

"Teaching the Franco period in Spain" by Ms Cristina DEL MORAL, Spain

"Teaching history in a divided community - the example of Northern Ireland" by Mr Alan McCULLY, Northern Ireland;



Discussion with all the participants

Introduction to the group work by Ms Alison CARDWELL

13.00 – 14.30

Lunch

14.30 – 16.00

**Working group session**

The participants will be put into three working groups. Chairs and rapporteurs will be appointed from Bosnia and Herzegovina. They will be responsible for directing the discussions in the working groups and producing written conclusions and recommendations.

16.00 - 16.30

Break

16.30 - 17.15

**Continuation of the working group session**

17.15 - 18.00

**Plenary session**

Chair: Claude Kieffer

The rapporteurs of the working groups should report back to the plenary session on the discussions of their groups

19.30

Dinner

**Saturday 20 November 1999**

9.30 - 11.00

**Plenary Session on the training of history teachers and the preparation of new history textbooks**

Chair: Alison Cardwell

Presentations on:

"Examples of how teachers are taught to teach controversial and sensitive issues" by Ms Joke VAN DER LEEUW-ROORD;

"Examples of how controversial and sensitive issues are dealt with in history textbooks" by Ms Haika KARGE, Georg Eckert Institute for International Textbook Research.

	Discussion with all the participants
11.00 - 11.30	Break
11.30 - 13.00	<b>Working group session</b>
13.00 – 14.00	Lunch
14.00 - 15.00	<b>Working group session - the working groups should agree on the conclusions and recommendations from their discussions</b>
15.00 - 15.30	Break
15.30 – 17.00	<b>Final Plenary Session</b>

Chair: Mr Gabriele MAZZA

Presentations by the rapporteurs of the working groups on the results of their discussions with conclusions and recommendations for future work

Presentation of the overall conclusions and recommendations of the Seminar by Ms Ann LOW-BEER, General Rapporteur

**Closing speeches**

17.00	Departure of the participants
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## APPENDIX II

### LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

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- Branka STRBAC, Professor
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- Rajko KOLUNDZIJA, Professor
- Milan GARIĆ, Pedagogical Institute of RS
- Gordana NAGRADIĆ, Professor
- Djordje LICINA, Professor
- Lazar GASIĆ, Professor
- Zdravko ZIVAK, Professor
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