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Seminar on

“The teaching of national history in secondary schools
in South East Europe”

Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina,

13 – 15 June 2002

Report

Strasbourg

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secondary schools in South East Europe”

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Report prepared by

Mr Jean-Michel LECLERCQ
France

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

CONTENTS

REPORT

I. The general profile of the teaching of national history in South East Europe	6
II. The place given to national history in existing school curricula.....	8
III. Outlook.....	10

BACKGROUND PAPER

I. The issues	13
1.1 The dilemma of teaching national history.....	13
1.2 The particular situation in South East Europe.....	13
1.3 The need to look for possible compromises.....	13
1.4 How to proceed.....	14
II. Schools, the place where national history is largely created and learnt.....	14
2.1 The significance of national history in school curricula	14
2.2 Resistance to the adoption of a more international viewpoint	15
2.3 National history as a symbol of sovereignty	15
2.4 Obstacles to perseverance with simplistic nationalism and patriotism	15
2.5 The new view of nationhood.....	16
2.6 Looking for a different national dimension and a different national history.....	16
III. The difficulties of national history.....	16
3.1 The common defects of national history as taught.....	16
3.2 Criticism of national history as such	17
3.3 The possibility of viewpoints less foreign to the national dimension.....	17
3.4 The benefits expected from the new perspective	18

IV. From discussion to practice.....	18
4.1 The place of national history in curricula and teaching in South East Europe.....	19
4.2 The quest for consensus in the interpretation of periods and events.....	19
4.3 The anticipated new profile of the teaching of national history.....	20

SOME SELECTED ISSUES ON THE TEACHING OF NATIONAL HISTORY IN FRANCE

Presentation by Mr Jean-Michel Leclercq

I. The purpose of teaching national history	24
II. The peculiarities of the French situation.....	24
III. The move away from positivist, event-based history	25
IV. The profile of current secondary curricula.....	26
V. Civic education, the indispensable adjunct	28

THE TEACHING OF NATIONAL HISTORY IN BELGIUM

Presentation by Ms Marcella Colle.....32

EXAMPLES OF HISTORY CURRICULA IN SWITZERLAND

Presentation by Mr Claude-Alain Clerc.....34

APPENDIX I

SEMINAR PROGRAMME.....43

APPENDIX II

LIST OF PARTICIPANTS.....46

From 13 - 15 June 2002, the Council of Europe held a regional seminar in Sarajevo on “The Teaching of National History in Secondary Schools in South East Europe”. This initiative, launched under the Stability Pact, was organised in association with UNESCO and the Office of the High Representative. It also benefited from the expert input of the Association Francophone d’Education Comparée and funding from the Agence Internationale de la Francophonie. The working languages were French and Bosnian.

The appended background paper sets out the questions addressed at the meeting.

- In all countries, and more particularly in South East Europe, it would seem vital to teach national history in order to provide young people with points of reference that reflect their allegiance to a national community. It is, therefore, no surprise that school textbooks generally still devote considerable attention to this teaching, which is seen as symbolic of the existence of, and respect for, national sovereignty.
- However, both the current geopolitical situation and research carried out into matters such as national character and national culture reveal the difficulties that arise in these areas when statements and positions are accepted without question. In particular, it would not seem viable to persist with the blatant nationalism and patriotism that have so often prevailed. Today, it has been demonstrated that the points of reference implicit in such concepts are far more complex than the evidence usually used to support them.
- For this reason, national history, at least in its more radical and naïve variants, has elicited fierce criticism on account of its lack of objectivity and its tendency to lend support to unfounded myths.
- However, although there has been a growth in dialogue at the world level, this does not mean that local networks of interaction will cease to exist and that no new ones will appear, and there is, therefore, no reason to assume that nations will cease to exist as meaningful levels of exchange.
- The national situation should nonetheless be viewed from a new standpoint. It is necessary to go beyond simplistic certainties and automatic rejection and to help find ways of resolving the many misunderstandings and conflicts caused by the obsession with a particular concept of nationhood, especially in South East Europe. This new standpoint naturally also needs to be adopted in national history teaching – perhaps especially in national history teaching – and it is this area which provided the subject for discussion at the seminar.

More specifically, the aims set for the seminar were to:

- consider how national history should be taught today in secondary schools, without overlooking the requirements of historical methodology;
- identify the particular problems that may be thrown up by the teaching of national history in the countries of South East Europe, given the uncertainty of some sources and the extreme affective significance attached to some events;

- seek new approaches in order to overcome these difficulties and avoid the disputes to which they can lead;
- select a number of dossiers that may be used to apply these new viewpoints in teaching.

These aims were linked both with the aims set by the Council of Europe for the teaching of history in contemporary Europe and with the concerns peculiar to the Stability Pact. As was recently pointed out in a Recommendation by the Committee of Ministers on the history teaching in 21st Century Europe, Strasbourg has long favoured history teaching which banishes ideological manipulation and ultranationalist excess, and is instead “a decisive factor in reconciliation, recognition, understanding and mutual trust between peoples”. In Vienna and Graz, faith is also placed in such a new approach to history as a means of reducing tensions and increasing the chances of understanding between the peoples of the region.

The programme adopted to meet these aims grouped presentations and discussion under the following three themes:

- The general profile of the teaching of national history in South East Europe;
- The place given to national history in the curricula in use in South East Europe and other parts of Europe;
- The changes to be envisaged and the difficulties that these may encounter.

I. The general profile of the teaching of national history in South East Europe

This first theme was addressed by asking participants to answer the questionnaire that was included in the background paper. Although many of the 17 questions in this document touched on sensitive issues, they were treated very seriously and frankly. The answers therefore provided a fairly accurate idea of the profile of the teaching of national history, the difficulties that this might face, and the changes to be envisaged.

The place of national history in textbooks

The space given to the teaching of national history varies widely but averages around 30% of pages in the textbooks used, for example, in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo and Republika Srpska.

The formation of the nation

In the textbooks used, chapters traditionally recount how the nation came into being and certain events that are judged to have been crucial to this process. In Serbia, however, this issue would seem to be too complex to be treated explicitly.

The majority of participants were reluctant to express an opinion on the validity of the descriptions of how the nation was formed. But after the fall of communist regimes, there were attempts at objectivity, in Bulgaria, for example. A similar development seems to have taken place in respect of “national heroes”. These are still regarded sometimes as unquestionably historical figures, but a process of demystification may occur, as is currently the case in Bulgaria and Serbia. A similar move away from national mythology can also be seen in the canton of Sarajevo.

The situation is somewhat similar as regards whether or not the nation is seen as being unitary. The view that the nation is one frequently still prevails in, for example, Albania, Kosovo and Serbia. But there is also a trend towards recognition of the existence of minorities, as in Bulgaria where the nation is now described as plural, and Serbia where, under new legislation, space must be made for minorities.

Relations with neighbours

Changes can also be seen in the way in which nations view their relations with their neighbours. Mention of conflicts with them continues to occupy a significant place in national history. Almost everywhere, however, the emphasis has gradually been put on how to interpret the conflicts and on the need to pay more attention to relations between States. This is no doubt a good means of easing situations, seeing them in the context of international relations that need to be managed more dispassionately. The growth of research into national history is also contributing to this change of attitude.

National identity

Such a shift does not, however, seem fully compatible with the continuing presentation of national identity in textbooks as something patently unquestioned and unchanging. It is still a rarity for national feeling to be seen, as in Bulgaria, as more a matter of personal choice than the outcome of accurate knowledge. Nonetheless, there is a current move towards a more flexible notion of national identity which takes into account the new social and cultural context, the reduction in tension with other countries, and the impact of globalisation. This is a trend that can be seen particularly in Serbia.

National history and the establishment of points of reference

This doubtless explains why national history no longer appears either to take too many liberties with historical method or to offer pupils fixed points of reference that can act as guidelines for their personal lives and for life in the community. Although it may not reflect the differences in interpretation that divide historians, the teaching provided in schools is, notwithstanding the obstacles that impede change, increasingly leading to discussion and debate that do not always produce very clear conclusions. The textbooks used in primary schools are naturally more likely to contain a strong narrative element and therefore to be inclined to draw lessons from the nation’s past. But this is not the general rule. Secondary school textbooks, particularly where they have been revised, are far more concerned with giving information and much less with providing fixed points of reference.

The difficulties faced by teachers

It is not surprising that almost all the countries represented at the seminar report that teachers are encountering difficulties in practising their profession. They are often prey to uncertainty themselves as to the message to be conveyed to pupils. Not only may they wonder about the values to be promoted through the teaching of national history but also, as in the case of Serbia, they may have to teach pupils from different communities, to whom they believe that they cannot always offer the same information and interpretations, in short, the same history. Their working conditions are made more difficult by the lack of suitable teaching materials, whether textbooks or other aids. Curricula are also frequently too full to permit teaching that will develop pupils' curiosity and desire to ask questions, without which it is very difficult to acquire a true capacity for personal reflection.

Desirable changes in the approach to national history

Most teachers therefore wish to see the teaching of national history change direction considerably. Greater emphasis should be placed on the complexity of interpreting national history by, for example, stressing interdisciplinary approaches. But the essential reform that needs to be introduced would, as one of the seminar participants put it, ensure that national history becomes "normal history" dealing with the same decisions and constraints as the study of other happenings. This was the background to the suggestion that it would be appropriate to use a comparative approach to national history so as to provide for identities that were both more relativised and better founded.

II. The place given to national history in existing school curricula

This initial assessment was then explored in greater detail by examining the place accorded to national history in existing school curricula. A particular twist was given to this activity. It was felt helpful to widen the survey to include a number of countries in Western Europe in order to gain a better understanding of the extent to which the issues facing the teaching of national history apply more generally, and then to identify more clearly the similarities and differences in the issues which may be raised by this subject. The situations in Belgium, France and Switzerland that were presented for this purpose proved very revealing in this respect.

The case of Belgium

In Belgium, as Marcella COLLE explained, local, national and world history form three concentric circles. The importance given to each of these varies according to the level of education. In primary schools, the emphasis is on local history, although this must be a starting point for wider horizons. In secondary education, on the other hand, the focus is on world history, into which national history has to be integrated. But the domestic repercussions of federalism and the impact of globalisation do not always make for balanced and satisfactory outcomes.

The case of Switzerland

In Switzerland, as became clear from the presentation of Claude-Alain CLERC, local, national and world history are interwoven, which also makes it difficult to deal with national history. As Simone FORSTER said, old-fashioned nationalist, ethnocentric history should be buried, although the transmission of collective memory, the formation of judgment through comparison of periods, and the awakening of political awareness remain pressing tasks.

The case of France

According to Jean-Michel LECLERCQ, France seems to have escaped doubts about the importance of national history. The country has a long tradition of historians and school textbook authors defining and extolling a national identity and awareness that were regarded as self-evident. Official curricula have naturally long encouraged this point of view and have still not totally abandoned it for reasons that should be explained. These derive from the notion of linking the singularity of allegiance to a particular nation with the universality of the values on which that nation is based – in the form of a republic which symbolises respect for and defence of the rights of all. This view was made possible by one interpretation of the Revolution of 1789, which was seriously questioned in the 1980s, however, by historians such as François FURET. The result today is a far more cautious approach to national history and to its traditional great figures, from Joan of Arc to Napoleon. Although this history is still regarded as indispensable to the education of the citizen, it is increasingly moving away from the myths on which it was based until very recently, and French citizens are having to become world citizens by opening themselves up to the history of other countries and no longer contemplating solely their own.

The cases presented and the contrasts between them

In each of these cases, the place to be accorded, or effectively accorded, to the teaching of national history raises doubts about many of the perceptions that govern it elsewhere. In the countries of South East Europe, as in numerous other countries including the United States and Japan, the subject has been given unquestioned priority. That is not so in Belgium or Switzerland, while the position of France, however peculiar it may be, is not radically different.

Ultimately, the three cases reveal both a desire not to neglect national history and some hesitancy as to the exact place which it should be given, especially in respect of the balance to be achieved between the implicit recognition of its importance and the explicit way in which it is dealt with. This is at all events what is suggested by the structure of the curricula, which do not really focus on national history. In Switzerland, the number of hours devoted to it is consistently very low. In France, in lower and upper secondary school, the number of hours allocated to national history exceeds 50% of the overall average only in one year. As for the number of key dates chosen, which is limited so as not to lose pupils' attention, those drawn from French history equal those drawn from world history in only one year, and in the others they are far less numerous (a ratio of between 1 and 3 to 8, or 6 to 23).

The situation in South East Europe

As had been intended, these three presentations encouraged participants from South East Europe to look again at the current situation and the chances of changing it.

The likelihood of change appears quite good, given the reforms that have already been introduced and others in prospect. In Bulgaria, a considerable change has been made by the introduction of an option of seven hours a week devoted to the history of peoples rather than States, to economic and social history, and to Balkan and European ideas and outlooks. A similar approach has been adopted in the canton of Sarajevo for 35% of pupils. In Serbia, curriculum reform is planned for 2003.

Numerous obstacles remain, however, and these were thought difficult to overcome for reasons that had already been mentioned but were considered worth repeating.

The lack of suitable teaching materials was again raised. Most of the time, old textbooks may still be in circulation and have serious drawbacks, not only because of their content but also because of their approach. They are, for example, often written by university academics with no experience of secondary teaching who do not know how to get through to pupils. The supplementary material that would help to mitigate these drawbacks is in short supply and of mediocre quality, consisting, for instance, of collections of unsatisfactory translations or adaptations of texts.

It should also be remembered that one of the serious difficulties that teachers face in their work is their lack of preparation for putting across a new vision of national history. Their training gives them little encouragement to demonstrate the critical flexibility and curiosity about new information that are needed to carry out the sometimes agonising reassessment of national history that is required. Furthermore, all progress is dependent on prior re-evaluation of the past, which is not helped by the weakness of the democratic tradition. Indeed, recent traumatic experiences may give rise to the feeling, as appears to be the case in Bosnia and Herzegovina, that it is better to rewrite a national history that has been scarred than to seek to take a more objective and distanced approach to it. This explains why, somewhat paradoxically, it is sometimes easier to accommodate new points of view in relation to world history than national history.

Should it be concluded therefore that too much suffering in the past means that there is little chance of achieving openness and a spirit of calm? The testimony of the history teachers at this seminar clearly suggests so, but they also frequently demonstrated their hopes of overcoming this problem and their desire to contribute to a change in that direction. But nor did they hide their feeling that this would be a long and uncertain task.

III. Outlook

When we turn to the outlook for the future suggested by the seminar, it is therefore right neither to overestimate the prospects nor to underestimate the progress to which it may lead. This may be seen in particular in relation to the way in which the modern nation-state and the teaching of national history should henceforward be perceived.

The notion of the nation-state

It is true that there is still a perception of the nation as a political entity, and more particularly as a cultural community that is generally inward-looking and does not welcome outsiders. Some participants refused to greet one another. Nonetheless, there is no doubt that there are the beginnings of a shift away from the defensive model of the nation based on an exact match between one territory, one type of political organisation, one language, one religion and one culture, one history and one tradition of values. People have become persuaded, usually after a series of tragic events, that different communities must inevitably live side by side. This necessarily leads to an acknowledgement of plurality, since a number of different political entities, languages, histories and religious traditions frequently co-exist within the same territory.

It may even be possible to go further and state that there is now a greater appreciation of the relevance of federal solutions. Participation in the seminar by representatives of Belgium and Switzerland led to greater acquaintance with this approach. It therefore ceased to be seen as a recipe for Balkan chaos, as in Yugoslavia or Bosnia and Herzegovina, but as an increasingly widespread practice in a Europe that is in any case definitely moving towards regionalisation.

This probably also explains the interest shown in the notion of belonging to an “ensemble”, which should be the term used to describe the Helvetic Confederation in order to emphasise its flexibility and complexity by comparison with what is generally meant by the idea of national awareness and patriotism. It was also possible to make listeners aware of the difficulties that have invariably been created by attempts to lay down criteria for nationhood and national identities. Similarly, it was only natural to recall that against a background of globalisation, nations are seen less and less as unique entities and increasingly as particular configurations of common elements. It was also the occasion to ask whether the phenomenon itself was not of recent date in Europe, where people have long been familiar with talk of Latin or Germanic language families and “national variants” of the Gothic or the Baroque.

In short, there are hopeful indications of the beginnings of a move away from the notion of a closed nation to that of an open nation, which should certainly have an impact on the relations between the various protagonists in this part of Europe.

The teaching of national history

This also raises the hope that the teaching of national history will escape the drawbacks of which it may be accused.

The ideas that nourish these are indubitably losing ground. The image of the nation as a person is now scarcely more current than that of the nation as a predetermined continuous entity. There is no longer any dispute that we are witnessing a historic change full of events, the nature and causes of which need to be investigated without preconceptions. We are thus well aware of the clichés and unverifiable arguments in which national mythologies are couched, and these are handled with increasing caution even where they are not dismissed.

We also incline towards optimism about the chance of seeing a new way of teaching national history become established, in which teachers will decide, despite all the difficulties facing them, what they want the subject to convey to pupils. It is no longer a matter of edification, or of mere admiration and praise. The teaching of national history, like that of other countries, must inculcate skills such as the ability to interpret events and to exercise critical judgment, skills which are indeed the same as those expected from the study of other disciplines. They are also those which provide the best protection against the aberrations to which some ways of teaching national history may lead. This does not mean, however, that it should not still be expected to provide points of reference. But these will no longer include unsubtle models that are not open to debate.

Against this background, the contribution to be expected from civic education was also addressed. It was realised that this picked up on the teaching of history by preparing young people for life in today's societies, where the exercise of citizenship is of crucial importance.

Follow-up projects

Follow-up projects were proposed in order to give the trends identified at the seminar a better chance of becoming established.

First, an Internet website on national history in South East Europe should be set up to give history teachers in the region easier access to sources and research. This would be an excellent way of remedying the lack of suitable documentation that was frequently mentioned.

Secondly, there was a desire to set up a working group of a number of history teachers in the region, with the following remit. Teaching dossiers would be prepared on events and periods of which there were conflicting versions, to be used by teachers in secondary schools to give pupils more dispassionate and consensual views. This would achieve one of the aims set for the seminar which had not been dealt with, for two reasons. One was lack of time. And the other was that participants needed to take their time pinpointing key issues, which were often spoken about with reluctance. If this project proved feasible, it would allow the initial results of the seminar to bear fruit.

These results are far from insignificant as they have led to changes in attitudes towards matters that are naturally highly sensitive, which is perhaps the most important outcome.

BACKGROUND PAPER

This seminar, organised in association with the Association Francophone d'Education Comparée (AFEC) with the financial support of the Agence Internationale de la Francophonie (AIF), has two aims. First, it builds on the discussions held over a number of years by the Council of Europe on the teaching of history in Europe, which have frequently concerned the question of the attitude to be adopted with regard to national history¹. Secondly, this seminar is one of the activities carried out by the Council of Europe under the Stability Pact, and focuses on the teaching of national history in secondary schools in South East Europe because the problems to which this subject can give rise are particularly acute in that region.

I. THE ISSUES

There is reason to believe that the teaching of national history always raises problems, and that these are likely to be even more marked in South East Europe.

1. 1. The dilemma of teaching national history

The teaching of national history is almost bound to present a dilemma. Because it is frequently concerned with providing exemplary and unquestioned views, it can be accused of ignoring the most basic rules of objectivity by which historical knowledge should abide. However, it can also be argued that national history needs to be taught in order to provide young people with the points of reference that will ensure that they belong to a national community.

1. 2. The particular situation in South East Europe

This dilemma is likely to be felt particularly deeply in South East Europe. The tragic events that have affected the lives of the various nations in the region both in the past and more recently, the cultural diversity found in nearly all of them, and the sometimes unequal power relations between the various entities, to name but a few examples, have far-reaching consequences. In particular, there is a real need to find reassurance in an ardent interpretation of long-past and more recent events, and to defend fiercely points of view that are held to be unassailable, and this may of course lead to misunderstandings and conflicts with neighbours. In these circumstances, it would only be natural for the teaching of national history to be seen as particularly questionable and yet unavoidable.

1. 3. The need to look for possible compromises

While the specific nature of these situations is not in doubt, it should be remembered that the attention given to the teaching of national history raises uncomfortable questions nearly everywhere. In principle, the teaching of national history should be

¹ Particular attention should be paid to the reports on *History and the learning of history in Europe* (Parliamentary Assembly 1996), *Mutual understanding and the teaching of European history: challenges, problems and approaches* (1995), *History, democratic values and tolerance in Europe: the experience of countries in democratic transition* (1994), the Conference on "The initial and in-service training of history teachers in South East Europe" (Athens, 2000) and the handbook for teachers on *History teaching and the promotion of democratic values and tolerance* (1996).

reduced, rethought or even abandoned in favour of a wider and more dispassionate approach. In reality, however, governments and large sections of society still regard it as an irreplaceable part of the education needed by young people who are going to live in a given nation. There are therefore many reasons to ask what compromises may provide solutions. And this no doubt applies particularly in South East Europe. This seminar will therefore be devoted to looking for such solutions.

1. 4. How to proceed

Two approaches are therefore needed in order to clarify the issues. The first must be to look at the reasons that may be put forward in favour of maintaining the teaching of national history in order to find out whether these are unconvincing pretexts or well-founded arguments. The second approach will need to come back to the problems peculiar to national history, given that historical enquiry must be faithful to its own criteria.

Hence there is some hope that we shall decide whether national history should be totally rejected or some accommodation is conceivable and indeed necessary. As might be suspected, the chance of reaching a compromise will therefore lie in the opportunities to make subtle shifts in positions which, at first glance, seem to rule out concessions.

A third approach will be required, however, to discover how these might be put into actual practice in the classroom. This will be attempted using the information supplied in the answers to the questionnaire distributed to participants.

II. SCHOOLS, THE PLACE WHERE NATIONAL HISTORY IS LARGELY CREATED AND LEARNT

It is scarcely necessary to allude to the role traditionally given to education in inculcating civic values. Given that practically all nations have had the ambition to become nation-states, these civic values always have a strong national connotation which associates citizenship so indissolubly with patriotism that they become indistinguishable. Ernest Gellner² has linked the emergence of the nation with the appearance of an industrialised society which “was to be a homogeneous world comprehensible in a language accessible to all”. This required a “common standardised education”³ in a society where, in France for example but not exclusively, a doctorate was ultimately a symbol of State power that meant more than the guillotine.

2. 1. The significance of national history in school curricula

It is therefore not surprising that the place given to national history in school curricula is always the object of considerable attention from governments and large sections of society. In England and Wales, when the National Curriculum was introduced in 1988, the first version of the history curriculum elicited lively criticism because it looked as though the history of the United Kingdom might be neglected. In the same

² Ernest Gellner, *Nations et nationalisme*, Paris, Payot, 1989.

³ Pierre Manent, *Cours familier de philosophie politique*, Paris, Fayard, 2001, p. 92.

period, the French Minister of Education reiterated the importance to be attached to national history right from primary school. A similar view is generally taken in Russian curricula, and was indeed maintained during the Soviet period. In the United States too, there is extraordinary attachment to national history, which is described anecdotally in such minute detail that it accounts for the largest number of pages in even the thickest textbooks. It is still relatively rare for the history of the country only to be treated in the context of the major historical trends of a continent or of the world, as happens in Hungary⁴. Or this may only occur in the curricula of senior-secondary-school classes for young people thought to be already sufficiently immersed in national traditions.

2. 2. Resistance to the adoption of a more international viewpoint

This is why, generally, it is difficult for more international standpoints to become established, despite agreement in principle between the authorities and teachers. In the United States, the *World History* advocated by some people is far from being very attractive. In the European Union, as surveys by the European Commission have shown, there is a strong tendency to regard curricula automatically as European as soon as they mention events connected with other political entities, such as the wars of succession in the age of the grand monarchies or the principal conflicts between States. It is quite obvious, however, that the standpoint remains highly national in such cases.

2. 3. National history as a symbol of sovereignty

It is as though the teaching of national history was naturally linked with the exercise of sovereignty. In the so-called age of nationalities in the 19th Century, when the education systems that the nation-states would later enjoy did not yet exist, the rediscovery of all but forgotten and almost forbidden history was felt to be a form of empowerment. In the former colonial territories, on the other hand, it is common knowledge that the compulsory teaching of the history of the colonial power was shown after independence to be a symbol of quite unbearable frustration.

2. 4. Obstacles to perseverance with simplistic nationalism and patriotism

It is nonetheless certain that profound changes in many areas have made the task of the eulogists of nationalism and the advocates of pure exclusive patriotism more complicated. First of all, nations have been obliged to find their place within geopolitical, economic and cultural groupings in which they are far more open to outside influences and pressures and less likely to be able to trumpet their uniqueness. Moreover, research by sociologists and cultural anthropologists into aspects of the nation that used to be thought fundamental, such as national character and national culture, have produced far from the expected results. These studies show that it is much more difficult to define supposed national identity in terms of a series of completely original features than as a set of elements common to a number of different contexts, somewhat like landscapes that may differ considerably but still contain the same species of vegetation.

⁴ See *National Core Curriculum*, Ministry of Culture and Education, Hungary, 1996.

2. 5. The new view of national contexts

The national contexts which it would be nice to hang on to as the brightest of beacons has thus turned dark and complex, and is only partly decipherable. Where these are used to develop a feeling of belonging to a close-knit, tangible community, this is likely to be less straightforward or effective. We know, however, that people cannot automatically be won round to grand international or European causes. For a long time to come, it will be a more uphill task to commend international understanding or the building of Europe, the defence of multiculturalism or the environment, than to fall back on appealing to national feeling or patriotism. And should this not be taken into account before national visions are abandoned, as these are doubtless unrivalled as means of obtaining a minimum of adhesion, without which society is at risk of dangerous fragmentation?

2. 6. Looking for a different national dimension and a different national history

However, it is highly likely that such values, focusing essentially on the national dimension, will be gravely undermined in unpredictable ways in the very near future because they are out of step with a world based on dialogue and communication. It is therefore time to start letting the values that we need today co-exist alongside these older values, so that a sense of relative individuality is encouraged rather than a sense of superiority, a wish to see oneself in relation to other histories and cultures rather than to shut oneself up in one's own heritage: in short, an ability to find within oneself what others have contributed, in the knowledge that this is enriching rather than some terrible affront. Ultimately, therefore, it should be less a matter of giving up national causes than of suggesting how these may be altered in a way which it should be easy to present as rewarding. As should by now be obvious, the international and world causes that we need henceforward to embrace may be no less lofty and demanding.

The teaching of national history should thus lead the way to other histories that are not so much the histories of other nations as those of partners in a world facing a whole range of problems and uncertainties. This does not mean scrapping the teaching of national history in order to get away from its prejudices, but giving it new importance by relating it to the time and place in which we live.

III. THE DIFFICULTIES OF NATIONAL HISTORY

As the crises of nationality and nationalism that so strongly affected certain periods of the 19th and 20th Centuries have become things of the past, there have been increasing doubts about the intrinsic validity of the teaching of national history itself.

3. 1. The common defects of national history as taught

First of all, the subject frequently refers to matters such as the origins of a nation, its heroes and the periods that have played a key role in its development. To judge by the content of most textbooks, these set out more to celebrate unassailable myths than to discuss events with the kind of distance and objectivity that should prevail in historical enquiry. Metaphors likening the history of a nation to that of a person or a family are frequently used, and these hardly encourage the exercise of much rational

judgment⁵. The teaching of national history, especially in primary and lower secondary schools, where more attention is given to civic education than in the final years of schooling, thus tends towards exaggeration and naivety, which should be dismissed as unacceptable and misleading. A good example of this occurred in 1996, when there was a call in some circles in France, notably in schools, for celebrations to commemorate the 1500th anniversary of the baptism of Clovis, which was said to mark the beginning of Christian France. The proposal led to lively discussion, not simply because this commemoration of a religious rite might appear to be a threat to secularism, but more particularly because it would have lent credibility to a combination of myth and reality, the date of the royal baptism itself being uncertain and the records relating to Clovis few and far between⁶.

3. 2. Criticism of national history as such

Criticism of national history is not, however, restricted to the form which it takes in schools, which might be regarded as almost inevitably debasing the level of knowledge in the subjects taught to young children. Established historians have indeed pointed to the need to abandon nationalist viewpoints⁷. But more fundamentally, the national framework no longer seems viable for historical enquiry, which must henceforward take into account political, economic and cultural factors that do not respect frontiers and, as Edgar Morin has put it, operate on a world-society scale⁸. It is not only the contemporary period that calls for a certain distance, however. Even in the remote past, what might be called the national approach to history can be criticised for having been heavily influenced by sovereigns who wanted to present their actions in the best possible light and, among other things, split up records into national archives⁹. Previously, history had been seen almost exclusively as universal, and God as its architect. Machiavelli was one of the first to write a national history glorifying the Florentine princes, while Bossuet continued in the tradition of universal history. No doubt plenty of examples could be given of an abiding interest in the national approach, since numerous studies devoted to particular nations fill library shelves and readily speak of the national territory, the national situation, national identity, national consciousness and national culture. These terms, however, are seldom defined exactly because, it would appear, they relate to areas that historians consistently feel ill-prepared to explore and which do not in any case seem to them to open up very revealing new horizons. This can be seen clearly in the reluctance among historians to study attitudes and ways of thinking, which might be used to investigate more fully what is rightly or wrongly called national life¹⁰.

3. 3. The possibility of viewpoints less foreign to the national dimension

One may nonetheless wonder whether some of this criticism should not be seen in perspective, given the changes that have come about in perceptions of approaches to

⁵ See for example Suzanne Citron, *Le mythe national – L'histoire de France en question*, Editions ouvrières, Etudes et Documentation internationales, Paris, 1987.

⁶ See the dossier *Clovis, l'Eglise et la République*, Le Monde, 19 September 1996.

⁷ See for example the article by P.M. Kennedy, *The decline of nationalistic history in the West 1900-1970*, *Journal of Contemporary History*, 1973 pp.77-100.

⁸ See the article *Une mondialisation plurielle*, Le Monde, 26 March 2002.

⁹ See P.Veyne, *Comment on écrit l'histoire*, Paris, Le seuil, 1971.

¹⁰ See Geoffrey E.R. Lloyd, *Pour en finir avec les mentalités*, Paris La Découverte, 1993.

history and of the subject-matter of those approaches. Refusal to take into account attitudes and ways of thinking, for example, may easily be attributed to the prevalence of a “scientific” and positivist view of history that has shown its limitations by focusing exclusively on political events to the detriment of other key factors influencing situations and behaviour. If we accept that the nation is a dubious framework for analysis, it is also clear that the contemporary world features both global dialogue and communication, and the survival and appearance of local networks of interaction. Globalisation co-exists with more limited groupings that display strong differences. This is what commentators on globalisation now call *glocal*, combining the terms global and local¹¹. There are good reasons to think that this level of reality may fairly be likened to that of the nation.

3. 4. The benefits expected from the new perspective

Certain precautions must be taken, and a number of misconceptions abandoned, if the national viewpoint is to be given renewed importance. If it is now merely one aspect of a network of relationships on a much larger scale, often at the world level, this viewpoint can no longer claim to be based on specific, unchanging absolutes. National history needs to be demystified and even to some extent denationalised if its true and only possible role is to be discovered. This is probably to be found in a tension between two poles. One pole, naïve realism, regards the nation as an indestructible but more or less unquantifiable being. The other, based on what is essentially a nominalist conception, consists in likening the nation to the events that take place within its framework and in its name, without wondering about their ultimate reality. It is as though one has to accept both that the national exists and that it does not exist or not yet, or, as is so often said, that it is both self-evident and a mystery.

This may be the best way of avoiding potential misconceptions and excesses. It would be equally as excessive to glorify national history unreservedly as to dismiss it out of hand. It would be salutary to bear this awkward fact in mind in preparing ourselves to deal with all the ambiguities and conflicts thrown up by the insidious arguments that may be adduced in connection with nations and their histories, keeping a careful watch on all their implications.

IV. FROM DISCUSSION TO PRACTICE

The above discussion must lead to a closer examination of the practices which can be assumed to flow from the curricula now in use, and of the approaches that teachers actually use. It is this analysis which will reveal the true situation more clearly and will suggest the changes that may need to be envisaged. The best way of obtaining the information required would seem to be to collate the answers to a questionnaire given to seminar participants in advance and returned before the start of the meeting.

It is likely that these answers will throw up many items of great interest, although there will probably not be time to address all of them because they will have to be dealt with in workshops spread over three half-days, the remainder of the timetable

¹¹ See for example Antonio Novoa, *L'apport de l'éducation comparée à l'Europe de l'éducation*, Paris, Institut Epice, 2000.

being devoted to plenary sessions. If this proves to be the case, it will be preferable to concentrate on a few topics only, in order to go into them in sufficient depth.

That being so, it would seem beneficial to focus discussion around two main themes.

4.1. The place of national history in curricula and teaching in South East Europe

The first will be a consideration of the attention given to national history in the official curricula of each country, on the basis of an approach that is both quantitative and qualitative in order to assess these two aspects simultaneously. The former will refer to the time formally allocated to the teaching of national history in comparison with the history of other parts of the world. The latter will look at the degree of openness to external contexts reflected in official instructions and teachers' usual practice. From this, it may be possible to identify changes that would be desirable in order to achieve a better balance between the attention given to national history and that given to other aspects of history. However, the main focus will probably have to be on changing the approaches used by teachers rather than on curriculum reform, which is always slow and difficult. Numerous studies by the Council of Europe have indeed shown that teachers often have considerable room for manoeuvre, without departing from the prescribed curriculum, in order to focus pupils' attention and interest on points not explicitly mentioned or barely touched on in the curriculum. And in any case, greater flexibility in the curriculum would invariably appear to be a more realistic goal than radical reform, at least initially.

4.2. The quest for consensus in the interpretation of periods and events

The second main theme on which to concentrate is the attitudes adopted in each country towards the historical figures and events seen as having played a key role in national development. This may lead to a greater effort at objectivity, to try to show more clearly what is myth and what is an acceptable view of history. The main focus should lie elsewhere, however. The heroes and events which are the foundations of the nation tend to give rise to interpretations that create friction with outsiders, and particularly with neighbours, who have sometimes been the first to feel the need to query these interpretations. When such events are commemorated, interpretations need to be put forward that are acceptable not only in the country of origin. This is not an easy task, but it is feasible, as is evident from an operation carried out under a Council of Europe project on the French revolution¹² in which a common view of events and their consequences was reached by a group of history teachers from a number of European countries. This view was not unanimous, and enabled each teacher to express agreements and reservations. Similar efforts have been made by other agencies such as UNESCO and the Georg Eckert Institute in Germany, and these experiences should provide inspiration. It is they which are best suited to easing a number of conflicts primarily caused by misunderstanding and excessive self-absorption.

¹² See the teaching pack *Pour une présentation européenne de la Révolution Française* produced as part of the project *A Secondary Education for Europe*, 1991-1996.

4. 3. The anticipated new profile of the teaching of national history

It can therefore be hoped that this seminar will lead to a perception of the teaching of national history which, rather than being an inward-looking exercise in glorification or isolated incomprehension, reaches out and involves partners so as to clarify matters and work out new ways of seeing things that will overcome misunderstandings and reduce the risks of confrontation of any kind.

**SEMINAR ON THE TEACHING OF NATIONAL HISTORY IN SECONDARY
SCHOOLS IN SOUTH EAST EUROPE
QUESTIONNAIRE**

COUNTRY.....

1. In the history textbook(s) used in your country, what is the percentage of pages devoted to the history of your country in proportion to the history of other countries?

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2. In the textbook(s) to which you refer, have any chapters a title which alludes directly to the time when the nation was formed or to events of crucial importance in that process?

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3. Do you feel that the account given of these events is entirely satisfactory from a historical point of view?

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4. Does the description of the birth and development of the nation concern the whole population present in the territory or only certain communities?

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5. Is this history presented as the history of one nation or of more than one nation, or as the history of a unitary nation-state?

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6. Do references to relations with other nations, either neighbouring or further afield, focus on connections and possible friendship, or on the dangers of rivalry and conflict? Name the nations concerned where appropriate.

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7. Is there always proof of the actual existence of *national* heroes and heroines, or are they sometimes mythical characters?

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8. Have attitudes to them changed in the light of recent research into national history?

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9. Do you think that the textbook(s) used define(s) national identity as immutable or as subject to change?

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10. Does this change, if any, seem to you to be greater at the present time than in the more distant past, and, if so, why?

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11. Should the teaching of national history always provide young people with the points of reference that they need as guidelines for their personal lives and life in the community?

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12. Do you feel that national history may take liberties with historical method for that purpose?

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13. Are there serious disagreements among historians or in other circles over the interpretation of your national history, and is this reflected in school textbooks?

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14. Do you see any difference in this respect between textbooks for primary schools and those for secondary schools?

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15. What particular points of interest or difficulties do you encounter as a history teacher in your teaching of national history?

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16. What new directions do you think the subject should take?

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17. What other questions would you have liked to see in this questionnaire?

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SOME SELECTED ISSUES ON THE TEACHING OF NATIONAL HISTORY IN FRANCE

Presentation by Mr Jean-Michel LECLERCQ

1. The purpose of teaching national history

The teaching of national history at all levels of education has long been viewed in all countries as an indispensable means of forming, maintaining and strengthening the national awareness and patriotism that are inseparably associated with the existence of the nation-state.

We shall have many opportunities to verify this in relation to the European countries that will be referred to at this seminar. But this is not a purely European phenomenon. It is also strikingly evident, for example, in the United States and Japan. It has often proved easier to require the detail of American History to be taught than that of World History. In Japan, despite the virulent criticism directed against Imperial nationalism from both within and outside the country, the need to devote attention to national history was again widely argued just a few years after the end of the war.

2. The peculiarities of the French situation

In this context, the French situation has some features which are shared with others, and some which are more particular.

Since the time of the Third Republic in the 1870s, the teaching of national history appeared to be an indispensable way of forging national awareness and stimulating patriotism. It was then that “L'école de la République” started to be established, one of the basic tasks of which was to educate citizens to appreciate the merits and greatness of the Republican State as the inheritor and defender of the heritage of the French Nation.

The first history textbooks in this school system focused on the history of France – on a certain sort of French history that glorified the Gaulish origins and the monarchs up to Louis XIV, but not the other origins such as the Franks, who were likened to the Germanic enemy, or the monarchs after Louis XIV, who were set up as symbols of decadent absolutism. The beginnings of the Republic were fragile, and therefore had to be strengthened by a moralising school history backed by scientific historiography that served the same purpose. A good example is Ernest Lavissee, to whom we are indebted for a monumental history of France in the university tradition and for the “Tour de France de deux enfants” (Two children tour France) in the most edifying vein. But the consolidation of the Republican regime did not lead to a rapid decline in this trend. Just before the outbreak of the Second World War, the textbooks of Malet and Isaac used in the lycées and other secondary schools still combined erudition with national and patriotic, if not nationalistic, enlightenment. The “Histoire sincère de la nation française” (True history of the French nation) written at more or less the same time by the historian Charles Seignobos was in a similar style.

However, and this is where we find the peculiarity of the French situation, it was that much easier for this trend to persist because, thanks to the interpretation given to the

Revolution of 1789, the history of France seemed naturally to go hand in hand with the promotion of the universal values still found in the Republican triad of Equality, Liberty and Fraternity. It was as if other nation-states focused on their uniqueness and dissimilarity to the rest of the world when they celebrated their qualities, but when France extolled its merits, it generously opened its arms to all those who wished to associate themselves with its glorious adventure.

Through a mixture of ignorance and misconception, this provided all the ingredients for a superiority complex that took a long time to fade. It was not until almost the final decade of the last century that, thanks to the work of historians such as François Furet, which is still not universally accepted, a different view of the Revolution of 1789 came to predominate in France and indeed in the rest of Europe. Specifically, it meant taking a critical view of the excesses of revolutionary policy both within the country, where the supposed rights of citizens were trampled under foot in the Terror, and outside, where, especially in the Napoleonic era, the liberty of peoples became perverted into conquest and submission to foreign forces of occupation. The “Grande Nation” was obliged to abandon its claims and finally to see itself as simply one nation among others and like others. And that took time. A recent work sets out the arguments “for and against the revolution” over the last couple of centuries: it runs to more than a thousand pages!

3. The move away from positivist, event-based history

The main consequence of these developments was a move away from the event-based history that had largely predominated until then because it seemed the safest way of guaranteeing scientific objectivity founded on historical facts, that is, demonstrable events. This change affected both historical research and teaching in schools, where less importance was given to the mere memorising of dates and the lives of famous people while more attention was devoted to sectors other than political history, such as social and economic history, arts and culture. This was soon reflected in the publication in 1993 of the work “Didactique de l’histoire” (The teaching of history) by Henri Moniot, who regarded history as a “soft science” dealing with situations for which there were generally a variety of possible interpretations.

There were also changes of direction that seemed likely to make the study of history more attractive to young people, whose knowledge of the history of France and foreign countries left much to be desired according to a survey carried out in the 1980s. It was hoped that young people would be more motivated and interested by history taught by exploring major issues and causes, explaining the problem of choice and the nature of the decisions that had been made.

It should nonetheless be observed that some teachers, some parents and above all some political circles found such an approach dangerous because it favoured interpretations of the past that were not fully proven and detracted from the better established analyses generally accepted previously. Those responsible for devising history curricula had therefore to take care not to expose themselves to such criticism by appearing, for example, to give insufficient attention to chronology. That is why event-based history did not totally disappear and why care was taken to ensure that the requisite rigour was applied in interpretations.

4. The profile of current secondary curricula

The curricula currently in force in secondary schools, dating from 1995 and 1996 with a revision in 2001 for upper secondary, reflect these concerns. In lower secondary schools (collèges), the study of documents “must be at the heart of the curriculum”. In upper secondary schools (lycées), as in the preceding period, there is a requirement to “focus on the study of a number of moments in history which were milestones in the development of contemporary civilisation and were often turning points (cultural, political, economic and social)”.

Considerable attention may be seen to be given still to the teaching of the history of France, although this does not prevent openness towards the rest of Europe and the world.

In Year 1 of secondary education, the Ancient world and the beginnings of Christianity are studied, without reference to France.

In Year 2, all that is studied is the Kingdom of France in the 16th Century, most of the curriculum is devoted to Europe in the Middle Ages and its major developments (Humanism, the Renaissance and the Reformation).

In Year 3, on the other hand, considerable attention is devoted to France, with the study of the Revolutionary period.

In Year 4, there is a return to a world perspective for the period 1914-1945, with a single chapter on France since 1945 and its role as a “European and world power”.

In Year 5, the Revolutionary period in France is set in the context of the foundations of the modern world, with attention to “major chronological points of reference” and “demonstrating the turning point represented by this period”.

In Year 6, France from 1848 - 1939 is studied against the background of the Industrial Revolution, national movements of the mid-19th Century and the First World War.

In the final year, the curriculum covers the Second World War and the world since 1945, including France.

This trend can be seen clearly if the number of hours devoted to the history of France is compared with that devoted to the history of other parts of the world.

Year	Annual number of hours History of France	Annual number of hours History of other parts of the world
1		32-39
2	4-6	29-37
3	14-17	20-26
4	9-12	37-42
5	11-13	25-31
6	Not specified*	Not specified*
Final	Not specified*	Not specified*

* A ruling of 2000 abolished annual allocations of numbers of hours (although the weekly timetable of an average of three hours remains)

The same impression of the relative attention given to national history is found in the chronological points of reference set for lower secondary education:

Year	Total number of chronological points of reference	Number of points of reference relating to the history of France
1	8	1
2	8	3
3	11	10
4	23	6

This relatively modest attention to the history of France does not mean that it is no longer expected to help develop national awareness. Hence the curricula for Years 2 and 3 state: “France, the only State studied as such, has a particular place in a curriculum with a cultural and civic purpose. Pupils must acquire a national memory (our emphasis). But this particular role must not interfere with the rest of the curriculum: it is impossible to be exhaustive. For many of the subjects studied in other areas, however, it will be possible to use examples drawn from France (taking the feudal oath, a Renaissance château, an industrial company, etc)”*. An amendment made to the Year 6 curriculum in 2000 states that the crisis of the liberal democracies shall from now on be studied exclusively “by reference to the example of France”. It might also be pointed out as an indicator of faithfulness to the national perspective that study of the Kingdom of France from the 10th - 15th Centuries in Year 2 must make reference to the “manifestation of national feeling, first felt with the rise of Joan of Arc and growing in the years that followed”. This is, however, one of the points where confusion between national history and national mythology has frequently been criticised.

* *Enseigner au collège*, Ministère de l'éducation nationale, Paris, 2001 p. 83

It can therefore be argued that the quantitative reduction in the attention given to national history has not seriously impinged on the traditional role given to it even though, happily, there is now less and less danger of the nationalist excesses that sometimes occurred in the past.

5. Civic education, the indispensable adjunct

Nor should it be forgotten that the teaching of history must be complemented by a subject to which a key role has been given since France became a republic, namely civic education. According to the official curriculum of Year 1 of secondary education, “this shall educate the citizens of the French Republic, within the Europe of today and in a complex international world”.

We are therefore very close to the aims proper to the teaching of history, with quite similar subjects such as nationality, national identity and citizenship, but largely from a legal angle, which might be thought to escape the problems of too national an approach to history. And it should also be pointed out that the concept of civic education has changed in a manner similar to the history of France. The original teaching of secular, Republican morality, and then of civic instruction, both focusing on extolling the merits of a unique Republic superior to all other political regimes, has in fact given way to civic education centred on respect for human rights, the defence of democracy and pluralism in all areas.

There is thus some modification of the frequently made claim that singularity can be equated with universality. However, by seeking to contribute to the education of citizens who will adhere to the values of the Republic, civic education sets out to introduce topics essential to appreciation of the national situation and strengthening of national awareness. The phenomenon is not peculiar to France. In view of the threats to social cohesion, greater attention to civic education is on the agenda everywhere. This was illustrated recently in England, where a curriculum for all compulsory education has been introduced. The “national colouring” of projects of this nature remains to be assessed. Although this may not be excessive in France, it is probable that it remains quite strong.

APPENDIX

OVERVIEW OF HISTORY CURRICULA IN FRANCE

Secondary Year 1

Topics	Annual no. hours
- The birth of agriculture and writing	2-3
- Egypt: The Pharaoh, gods and men	4-5
- The people of the Bible: the Hebrews	3-4
- Ancient Greece	9-10
- Rome: From Republic to Empire	9-10
- The beginnings of Christianity	3-4
- The end of the Roman Empire in the West and the legacy of the Ancient world	2-3

Year 2

Topics	Annual no. hours
- The Byzantine Empire	2-3
- The Muslim world	4-5
- The Carolingian Empire	3-4
- The Church	4-5
- Political leaders and society	7-8
- The Kingdom of France (10 th -15 th Centuries)	2-3
- The birth of the modern age (Humanism, Renaissance, Reformation)	6-8
- European discovery of the world	3-4
- The Kingdom of France in the 16 th Century, the difficulties of imposing royal authority	2-3

Year 3

Topics	Annual no. hours
- Description of modern Europe	3-4
- The absolute monarchy in France	3-4
- The questioning of absolutism in France	3-4
- The major phases of the Revolutionary period in France	7-8
- The transformation of Europe	2-3
- The industrial age	7-8
- Liberal and national movements	3-4
- The partition of the world	2-3
- France from 1815 - 1914	4-5

Year 4

Topics	Annual no. hours
- The First World War and its consequences	4-5
- The USSR under Stalin	2-3
- The crises of the 1930s as exemplified by Germany and France	6-7
- The Second World War	5-6
- From 1945 to the present: growth, democracy, inequalities	10-12
- Economic growth and demographic change and their social and cultural consequences	3-4
- From the Cold War to the world of today	7-8
- France since 1945	
- France since 1945 as a European and world power	6-8

Year 5

Topics	Annual no. hours
1995 curricula	
- The citizen and the city in the Athens of the 5 th Century B.C.E.	
- Citizenship in the Roman Empire in the 2 nd Century	5-6
- The birth and spread of Christianity	4-5
- Map of the Mediterranean in the 12 th Century, the crossroads of three civilisations	4-5
- Humanism and the Renaissance	5-6
- The Revolutionary period in France	11-13
- Europe between Reform and Revolution, from the 1790s to the mid-19 th Century	7-9
1999 curricula	
- The foundations of the contemporary world	
- An example of citizenship in the Ancient world	
- An approach to the Christian religion	
- The diversity of medieval civilisations	
- A new vision of humanity and the world in the Renaissance	
- The Revolutionary period in France as a critical turning point	
- Europe in transition during the first half of the 19 th Century (up to the 1848 revolutions)	

Year 6**Topics****Annual no. hours**

- | | |
|--|--------|
| - The industrial age and its civilisation | 11-13 |
| - Nations and States from the mid-19 th Century to 1914
including France from 1848 to 1914 | 10-12 |
| - From one war to the next, 1914-1939* | 16-18* |

Final Year**Topics**

- The Second World War
- The world since 1945
- France since 1945

* Number of hours not specified from 2000

THE TEACHING OF NATIONAL HISTORY IN BELGIUM

Presentation by Ms Marcella Colle

Three concentric circles have always been superimposed in the teaching of history in Belgium, but the relative emphasis on them has frequently shifted in line with ministerial guidelines and curricula; they are local history, national history and world history.

Belgium became an independent state in 1830, at the time when liberal and national movements were causing upheaval throughout Europe. Throughout the Middle Ages and modern times, the fates of the states that would make up the future “Belgium” were very different. They were not united until they fell under French domination in 1792. In 1815, the Congress of Vienna united them with the Netherlands, from which they separated in 1830. Belgium became a constitutional parliamentary monarchy, which it still is. Since 1970, institutional reforms have put an end to the centralised Belgian State. Belgium has become a federal state, and intermediate strata have come into being: the linguistic and cultural Communities and the economic Regions.

Belgium has also become increasingly integrated into the European Union, and supranational decisions profoundly influence the political and economic life of the country. The teaching of history must therefore take these entities into account if pupils are to be made aware of the new environment. Although that may seem obvious, we are far from achieving it in practice, as we shall see.

The question of the place accorded to history in Belgium may be addressed from two different standpoints. The first is to examine what actually happens in schools. The second is to look at curricula and textbooks. I have chosen the second, which is more easily quantifiable than classroom practice.

In primary education, ministerial circulars and educational institutions have been recommending a local approach to history since the 1950s. Facts and physical remains in a given locality can enable children to reconstruct the past and the experiences of men and women, and to handle the notions of time and space that are so difficult to acquire at that age (“the history of people from here”). Local history is only a starting point, however, and primary school teachers need to guide their pupils towards a wider context and to enable them to discover historical reality on a broader scale. These approaches fit perfectly into current curricula that include teaching requirements such as awakening a spirit of observation, developing the ability to think, and preventing the renewed growth of particularism. How can the teaching of history be turned into the main channel of education for tolerance and citizenship?

In secondary education, after the Second World War, general history was in principle the stated goal of curricula, and national history had to be slotted into it. Although the Second World War dulled the national spirit, the horror into which it plunged Europe and the rest of the world also seems to have reawakened the crisis of nationalism and to have played into the hands of those arguing for revision of textbooks in the interest of greater international understanding. The process of building Europe may also have exercised an influence in this direction. Changes in the discipline of history itself,

gradually cutting back on political history, may have further accelerated the decline of national history. It is noticeable in textbooks since the 1950s that Belgian history has been diluted by European history.

General history largely meant European history, and more particularly that of countries which had had political ties with Belgium. Disproportionate attention was given to the history of France. The history of the other continents was not covered, and the world was studied only through the contacts established between Western Europe and other peoples.

The decline of national history in favour of European history was followed by a rejection of Eurocentric history (a Council of Europe recommendation). In 1970, the world view triumphed. History teaching became diachronic, the aim being to address all chronological and spatial aspects of an issue.

Since 1989, there has been a return to chronological history, from prehistory in the first year to the 20th Century in the final year.

Guidelines are now similar to Council of Europe recommendations: being aware of one's roots not so as to shut oneself away in some form of particularism but in order to open oneself up to the unity and diversity of the world. Although national history remains the backbone of the curriculum, the proportion devoted to other areas is constantly growing. The decision to base the teaching of history on the goal of understanding the modern world is written in letters of gold in all the successive curricula of the various networks, including the new curricula published in 2000.

This goal takes two forms in practice:

- The first derives from the need to equip young people with the abilities and skills required to decode information, and with a lasting knowledge of notions and concepts (education for citizenship).
- The second – openness to diversity, awareness of one's roots before becoming receptive to others – therefore sets out to reintroduce regional history, but it must be observed that this is not as yet widely treated in the classroom. It is not a matter of teaching additional history, but of including it in the national and European dimensions. The Walloon Region (and the Flemish Region in the North) is now a reality and must be studied. Not solely in contrast to Flanders but as a region of Europe.

If we wish to allow our students to understand how societies have evolved, attention must be given to demonstrating relationships in time and space, and regional and European interests may not be neglected. History must be studied in both the local and the world context.

EXAMPLES OF HISTORY CURRICULA IN SWITZERLAND

Presentation by Mr Claude-Alain Clerc

There is no specific history teaching in primary schools. History is covered in classes on awareness of the local environment during which teachers introduce their pupils to various aspects of history with the aid of local resources. A special file for these awareness classes has been produced for grades 1 to 3 upon the instructions of the Inter-Cantonal Public Education Conference of French-Speaking Switzerland and Ticino. It sets out the objectives as follows: pupils must “develop awareness” of the relations between people and places and the bonds that unite human beings, while also understanding their past more fully, focusing on relations between human beings and the environments they live in (introduction). The aim is for pupils to develop an overall understanding of their environment through basic knowledge of history, geography and science. On the basis of known local examples that are easy to use, pupils find out about how men and women lived and worked, as well as what happened in the past. In grades 4 and 5, the teachers can use some topics that are representative of the history of humankind and illustrate them with the aid of local and regional resources. In spite of appearances, the approach is geared towards European and world history.

In grade 6 (ie at secondary school), history teachers have great freedom of choice as to how they treat the subject, although the focus must be on Greek and Roman civilisation. In grade 7, the period from February to April (ie nine weeks) is devoted to the study of Swiss history from 1291 to 1513, including regional issues. The following year is devoted to the period from the 16th to the 19th century. National history is covered in each of the periods here. It is obvious that the time devoted to it is very limited. Work on the history of religious and humanist cultures also involves looking at national history through study of the Reformation.

Here again, the situation seems to vary from one canton to the next, although the realities are often the same. National history is dealt with as part of general history, in other words, European and world history. Regional and national issues can be covered under the main chapters of general history. Although teachers have specific textbooks, the limited time available prevents them from covering Swiss history in depth. According to information from colleagues in several cantons, the history of Switzerland and of their own canton makes up 1 to 15% of the history curriculum. At Lucerne Cantonal School (*Kantonsschule*), the curriculum provides that a quarter of history teaching time should be devoted to Swiss history throughout the six years of the course (*Gymnasium*). The situation seems to be relatively similar in central Switzerland, although the reference curricula date back to 1991 and are now under review.

A point made to me by several colleagues that should perhaps be mentioned here is that pupils are more interested in European and world history than in national history.

For some of the pupils, the last year of compulsory secondary education involves preparation for admission to senior secondaries, for which they have to choose their future options. History is included in a group of social sciences taught together. It is an interesting approach and applies, for instance, in the canton of Neuchâtel (cf grade 9 file).

A further innovation was a colloquy in 1995 that enabled teachers from all primary and secondary grades in French-speaking Switzerland “to ask questions about the purpose of their teaching.” One of the conclusions was that it was necessary to move away from the old nationalist and ethnocentric approach to history that was always taught head on. Teachers had to confront relativity, cultural diversity and uncertainty. Some certainties do, however, remain: there is still an urgent need for the transmission of a collective memory, the development of judgment through comparison of different eras and the awakening of political consciousness (Simone Forster, Institute for Educational Research and Documentation, IRDP). S. Forster also believes that the active method of history teaching “is more suited to our era, which demands critical examination of the subject and re-interpretation of national histories.” At a time when we are having to educate citizens of the world, the question of dimensions arises. Experts are advocating the study of cross-sectoral subjects such as the history of science and technology and of institutions, which “illustrate the journey of ideas, the borrowing and the contacts between civilisations.”

From the same perspective, François Audigier, writing in the newly launched Swiss-French journal on history teaching methods, *Le Cartable de Clio*, stresses the need “to take up and rebuild the link between history teaching and citizenship on the basis of modern requirements.” In his view, it is necessary to work on and debate key issues. For instance, “recognition of the cultural dimension of personal and collective identities means having to pay more attention to diversity” (*Quelques questions à l’enseignement de l’histoire, aujourd’hui et demain* [Some questions about history teaching, present and future], p 73).

The Inter-Cantonal Public Education Conference of French-Speaking Switzerland and Ticino is currently drawing up new framework curricula for French-speaking Switzerland (PECARO), which should be ready in a year or two. These will involve moving away from the traditional approach and towards the incorporation of history teaching into other subjects such as geography, economics and philosophy. It is still too early to say how history teachers will react.

In German-speaking Switzerland, the Conference of Public Education Directors of the North-West (NW-EDK) has developed a project setting out meeting points (*Treffpunkte*) for *history and politics* at secondary level. Here again, national history is well integrated in world history.

There is one chapter in Swiss history that has been the subject of much debate in recent years, namely our relations with Nazi Germany before and during World War II. As you are aware, an independent commission of experts appointed by the federal authorities has just submitted its final report. It is obvious that this is having an impact on teaching about that period and is leading to greater discussion of the role of historians and teachers.

In recent years, I have come to realise that our pupils are still somewhat unclear about the period in question and Switzerland. On the one hand, if we wish to study that period in the classroom, we need to gather relevant material and update our knowledge. With my senior secondary pupils at Denis-de-Rougemont School, I used a duplicated course in which I tried to incorporate the most recent information from the above commission of experts. In addition, we were able to open up a broader debate on the role of historians and journalists with the aid of news broadcasts on the subject by Swiss and foreign television stations. The point I am making could be illustrated with several examples, including the role of memory. That makes it possible to compare other events of the same type at other times in history.

By way of example, I am enclosing some information about the curriculum from Denis-de-Rougemont Senior Secondary in Neuchâtel, where I taught history and helped draw up the syllabus that was launched in 1999.

- content, see pages 4-5,
- fundamental objectives, page 2 (attitudes).

When teaching history as a **complementary option**, national history can be covered through the subject chosen. The syllabus refers to this as: “Introduction to micro-history through a local or regional question.”

In addition, pupils may choose a subject related to regional history or national history for their A-level (*maturité*) projects, for instance, the study of a historic site, a leading figure or a period in history.

BASIC OBJECTIVES OF HISTORY TEACHING

A. Knowledge

- Knowing the most important stages in the contemporary history of the world, Europe and Switzerland in the following areas:
 - political institutions and their evolution;
 - social and economic phenomena;
 - cultural phenomena (arts, religions, sciences etc);
 - opinions and life styles;
- Attempting to establish logical links between these different areas.

B. Skills

- Finding information and arriving at an opinion;
- Distinguishing facts from opinions;
- Recognising and assessing divergent opinions;
- Critically analysing historical sources and placing them in context;
- Identifying the myths and stereotypes of history;
- Understanding the historical dimensions of the present day;
- Appreciating how institutions develop;
- Handling appropriate historical language;
- Conducting small-scale historical research;
- Being able to indicate sources (bibliography).

C Attitudes

- Being open to other cultures, opinions, value systems and life styles;
- Being aware of the traditions of one's own culture, while acknowledging its historical relativity;
- Being sensitive to the European dimension of our civilisation;
- Respecting different theories and contradictory views where these are supported by arguments;
- Being alert to misleading ideological argumentation;
- Gauging the potential of political and social action, while being aware of being one link in a long historical chain;
- Being familiar with the rigour and objectivity demanded by historical method.

HISTORY

CURRICULUM FOR HISTORY AS A CORE SUBJECT

PREAMBLE

In the course of their schooling, pupils will study history from both a chronological and a thematic perspective, from prehistory to the 19th Century. In grade 9, the teaching of history will cover some aspects of the contemporary world, such as the two world wars and the totalitarian regimes. Swiss institutions will be studied systematically at this level. The historical dimension of the contemporary world will also be examined through interdisciplinary activities and analysis of a number of current issues. History teaching at upper secondary level will cover the recent past more systematically and in greater depth, from the end of the 18th Century to the present day.

1st Year

Chronological framework: 19th Century

Issues:

- The nation, nationalities and nationalism
- The age of democracy
- Liberalism and socialism
- The upheaval in economic and social institutions as a result of the Industrial Revolution

<i>Contents</i>	<i>Relevance to civic education</i>
1. The age of revolutions	Human rights
2. The birth of modern Switzerland in the 19 th Century	- Confederation of States and Federal State - The institutions of modern Switzerland; the three powers, peoples' rights - The birth of the 'non-political' parties
3. The Industrial Revolution and its social, political and ideological implications	
4. Europe from 1815 - 1848: liberal and democratic demands, nationality movements	Swiss neutrality
5. National unification (Italy, Germany)	
6. Relations between Europe and the rest of the world; emigration and colonisation	
	• Present-day problems

2 nd Year

Chronological framework: the 20th Century up to 1939

Issues:

- The crisis of the democracies and the new totalitarian ideologies: communism and fascism
- World War
- The strengthening of the role of the State

<i>Contents</i>	<i>Relevance to civic education</i>
1. Origins of the First World War	The policy of plenary powers
2. The 1914-1918 war	- The national strike of 1918 and its political and social consequences - Switzerland and the League of Nations
3. The post-war period: peace treaties, sequels to war and international détente	
4. The Russian Revolution and the Soviet State	
5. Fascist Italy	
6. The crisis of the 1930s	
7. National Socialist Germany	
8. Changes to the liberal democracies	Social tensions and an end to labour unrest in Switzerland
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Present-day problems

3 rd Year

Chronological framework: 1939 to the present day***Issues:***

- The birth of the welfare state. East-West relations
- North-South relations
- The rise of the Muslim world and Asia
- The consumer and information society
- Globalisation

<i>Contents</i>	<i>Relevance to civic education</i>
1. The Second World War	
2. Switzerland from 1939 - 1945	- The election of the General - Neutrality put to the test
3. From the Cold War to the collapse of the Soviet bloc and the establishment of American leadership	The role of the UN and its affiliated institutions
4. Decolonisation: nationalism and independence in Asia and Africa	Swiss co-operation policy
5. The Far East in the 20 th Century	
6. The building of Europe	- The European institutions - Swiss relations with Europe
7. Growth and economic crisis since 1945	
8. Switzerland from 1945 to the present day	The evolution of institutions
	• Present-day problems

HISTORY

CURRICULUM FOR HISTORY AS AN ADDITIONAL OPTION

PREAMBLE

The basic objectives of history naturally apply both to the core subject and to the additional option. In each case, the subject lends itself well to interdisciplinary treatment, particularly with geography in grade 10, with an introduction to economics and law, and with philosophy (cantonal variant) in grade 12. The curriculum of the additional option is designed, in accordance with ORRM (Order and Regulation on the Recognition of Certificates of Matriculation from a *Gymnasium*), as an adjunct to the curriculum of the core subject, focusing less on events and matters of historical fact than on thematic perspectives. It does not go into greater depth. The contents and methodologies of this subject also include openness to other cultures.

By way of the themes covered, pupils will be confronted with different historical methods, with particular reference to the following aspects:

- The questions and methods used by the historian: investigation, research, compilation, synthesis, etc;
- The various sources (books, official and private archives, collective and individual memory, the media, material remains and other documents) and their exploitation.

Teachers teaching the additional option are free to choose the subject-matter addressed, but they must work from the standpoint of thematic history and give due weight to local and regional history. They shall cover at least two of the themes suggested in the curriculum each year.

ASSESSMENT

This shall set out essentially to test skills in a variety of areas: document analysis, handling of sources and interpretations, development of a research question and a research plan, completion of a bibliography, various forms of synthesis that may lead to a small publication or exhibition, etc.

CURRICULUM

2 nd and 3 rd Years

Contents:

1. Introduction to the history of opinions through the study of topics such as:
 - Childhood and youth;
 - The family, marriage and married life;
 - Morals;
 - Attitudes towards death;
 - The situation of women;
 - Mass culture and elite culture;
 - Fear, etc.
2. Introduction to micro-history via a topic of local or regional history.
3. The past seen through the story of one person's life; the biographical approach using a witness who is alive (oral history) or dead.
4. Historical interpretation of artistic events.
5. History as fiction (based on a novel or historical film).
6. Introduction to the history of religions in the world:
 - The evolution of the social and cultural role of the Churches;
 - The relations between Church and State.
7. Examination of a major civilisation outside Europe.

APPENDIX I
SEMINAR PROGRAMME

Wednesday 12 June 2002

Participants arrive

Thursday 13 June 2002

9.30 – 10.00

Plenary session

Chair: Mr James WIMBERLEY

Opening of the seminar by:

- i. Mr Dubravko LOVRENOVIC, Deputy Minister of Education, Sarajevo;
- ii. Mr Ranko PEJIC, Assistant to the Minister of Education of the Republika Srpska, Banja Luka;
- iii. Mr James WIMBERLEY, Council of Europe;
- iv. Mr Philip STABBACK, UNESCO;
- v. Mr Donald HAYS, Ambassador, Principal Deputy High Representative, OHR.

10.00 – 11.00

Plenary session – on the theme of the seminar as presented by Mr Jean-Michel LECLERCQ

Chair: Mr James WIMBERLEY

Discussion

11.00 – 11.30

Break

11.30 – 13.00

Plenary session – Panel forum

Participants will give their reactions to the questionnaire (10 minutes per person)

Chair: Mr Guy-Michel BRANDTNER

Discussion

13.00 – 14.30

Lunch

14.30 – 16.00 **Working groups**

16.00 – 16.30 Break

16.30 – 18.00 **Working groups**

20.00 Dinner

Friday 14 June 2002

9.30 – 11.00 **Plenary session – Round table**

Chair: Ms Alison CARDWELL

Papers on the teaching of national history in secondary schools in:

- France – by Mr Jean-Michel Leclercq;
- Switzerland – by Mr Claude-Alain Clerc;
- Belgium – by Ms Marcella Colle.

Discussion

11.00 – 11.30 Break

11.30 – 13.00 **Plenary session**

Discussion

13.00 – 14.30 Lunch

14.30 – 16.30 **Working groups**

16.30 – 17.00 Break

17.00 – 18.30 **Working groups – drafting of conclusions and recommendations**

20.00 Dinner

Saturday 15 June 2002

Plenary session

Chair: Mr Guy-Michel BRANDTNER

9.00 – 10.30

Discussion

10.30 – 11.00

Break

11.00 – 12.30

Presentation of conclusions and recommendations of the **working group** rapporteurs

Commentary by the experts invited by the Council of Europe on discussions in the working groups in which they participated

Presentation by the General Rapporteur of the conclusions and recommendations of the Seminar

Comments by participants

Closing address:

Mr Guy-Michel Brandtner, History Education Section,
Council of Europe.

Sunday 16 June 2002

Participants leave

APPENDIX II**LIST OF PARTICIPANTS****RAPPORTEUR GENERAL/GENERAL RAPPORTEUR**

- Mr Jean-Michel LECLERCQ, Association Francophone d'Education Comparée (A.F.E.C.), 47, rue Vavin, F – 75006 PARIS France
Tel/Fax: + 33 1 43 26 21 02
E-mail: afec@club-internet.fr

INTERVENANTS/SPEAKERS

- Ms Marcella COLLE, 6, rue de la Gendarmerie, 4170 COMBLAIN-AU-PONT, Belgium
Tel: + 324 369 33 52
Fax: + 328 632 37 37
- Mr Claude-Alain CLERC, 11, rue Longschamps, CH – 2014 BÔLE, Switzerland
Tel/Fax:+ 41 32 84 25 915
E-mail: claud-alain.clerc@net2000.ch

PARTICIPANTS**ALBANIE/ALBANIA**

- Ms Klementina SHIBA, History Teacher in the secondary school of Modern Languages, Shkolla e mesme ajuheve tëhuaja “Asim Vokshi” Rruga Elbasani, TIRANA
Tel: +355 42 57 966
Fax: +355 425 79 66
Mobile: 068 240 71 43
E-mail: klementina1@hotmail.com

BOSNIE-HERZEGOVINE/BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINAFédération de Bosnie-Herzégovine/Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina

- Dr Dubravko LOVRENOVIC, Deputy Minister, Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sport of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Obala Maka Dizdara 2, 71000 SARAJEVO
Tel: +387 33 663 691
Fax: +387 33 664 381
E-mail: fmonks@mail.bih.net.ba

- Ms Rasema PROHIĆ, History Teacher, Pedagogical Institute, Ministry of Education, Science and Information of the District of Sarajevo, ČEMALUŠA 2/II, SARAJEVO
Tel: + 387 33 668 501
- Ms Mirsada BARAKOVIĆ, History Teacher, Pedagogical Institute, Ministry of Education, Science and Information of the District of Sarajevo, ČEMALUŠA 2/II, SARAJEVO
Tel: + 387 33 668 501
- Ms Senija MILISIC, Historical Institute, Alipasina 9, 71000 SARAJEVO
Tel/Fax: + 387 33 471 607
E-mail: celeb3@bih.net.ba

Republika Srpska

- Ms Slavica KUPREŠANIN, Author of history textbooks, Ministry of Education of Republika Srpska, Ul. Iveandrića 11, 51000 BANJA LUKA
Tel/fax: +387 51 301 503
Mobile: +387 65 642 486
- Ms Mira ŠOBOT, Secondary School History Teacher, Ministry of Education of Republika Srpska, Vuka Karadzica 4, 51000 BANJA LUKA
Tel/fax: +387 51 331 423
Mobile: +387 65 653 011
- Mr Samojko CVIJANOVIĆ, History Teacher, DOBOJ
Tel/fax: +387 53 234 864

BULGARIE/BULGARIA

- Ms Maria KIRILOVA TRIFONOVA-BENOVA, Teacher in history from the 9th French Language Gymnasium, Kv. Banishora, bldg. 20, app. 60, 1233 SOFIA
Tel: +359 2 987 87 72 (home +359 2 31 78 51)
Fax: +359 2 987 72 16
E-mail: maria_benova@yahoo.com

CROATIE/CROATIA

Apologised for absence

KOSOVO

- Mr Ragip ZEKOLLI, MA (History Teaching), Director, Municipal Education Directorate, Suhareka/Kosovo Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MEST), c/o Department of Education, Mother Tereza Str., Eximkos Bldg., VI, R. 603 PRISTINA
Tel: +381 38 504 604 3964 (381 29 71 143)
Fax: +381 38 504 604 4668
Mobile: +377 44 184 221
E-mail: conrad@un.org / ragipzekolli705@hotmail.com

SERBIE/SERBIA

- Mr Aleksandar GLAVNIK, History Teacher, Belgrade Gymnasium of Mathematics, 37 Narodnog Fronta, 11000 BELGRADE
Tel: + 381 11 781 561
Mobile phone: +064 21 26 836
Fax: + 381 11 3612-595 (in school)
E-mail: glavnika@yahoo.com

ROUMANIE/ROMANIA

- Mr Doru DUMITRESCU, Inspector General, Ministry of National Education, 9 – 11 Boulevard Energeticienilor, BUCHAREST
Tel: + 40 1 321 20 12 (Home 40 1 330 73 11)
Fax: + 40 1 313 55 47/40 1 312 47 53
Apologised for absence

SLOVENIE/SLOVENIA

Apologised for absence

TURQUIE/TURKEY

Apologised for absence

OBSERVATEURS/OBSERVERS

- Ms Claire PAHAUT, Chargée de mission, DG Enseignement obligatoire, CAE, BLD Pacheco 19, B – 1010 BRUXELLES, Belgium
Private address: 9, rue de l'Etendard, 1000 BRUXELLES
Tel: +32 22 10 69 00
Mobile: 0497 570
Fax: +32 22 10 69 03
E-mail: claire.pahuat@cfwb.be

ORGANISATEUR/ADMINISTRATIVE ORGANISER

- Mr Emir ADZOVIC, Administrative Assistant, Information Office, Zelenih Beretki 16/1, 71000 SARAJEVO, Bosnia and Herzegovina
Tel: +387 33 264 360/61/62
Fax: +387 33 264 360
E-mail: emir.a@bih.net.ba

CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE/COUNCIL OF EUROPE

- Mr James WIMBERLEY, Head of Educational Policies and European Dimension Division, Directorate General IV, Education, Culture and Heritage, Youth and Sport
F - 67075 STRASBOURG CEDEX France
Tel.: +33 3 88 41 26 22
Fax: +33 3 88 41 27 06/27 88
E-mail: james.wimberley@coe.int
- Ms Alison CARDWELL, Head of the History Education Section, 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
- Mr Guy-Michel BRANDTNER, Administrator, History Education Section, Directorate General IV, Education, Culture and Heritage, Youth and Sport
Tel: + 333 88 41 25 80
Fax: + 333 88 41 27 50/56
E-mail: guy-michel.brandtner@coe.int

