

# **Task Force Education And Youth**

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Meeting of Experts on

“The development of history curricula in Albania”

Tirana, Albania,

21 – 22 February 2001

**and**

Seminar on

“Active learning methods and enquiry-based learning  
for history educators”

Tirana, Albania,

23 – 24 February 2001

**Report**

Strasbourg



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**Report by**

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

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## **MEETING OF EXPERTS ON “THE DEVELOPMENT OF HISTORY CURRICULA IN ALBANIA”**

### **I. Opening of the Seminar**

The meeting was opened by Mr. Vaso Qano, the chief of the Minister's Cabinet, for the Ministry of Education and Ms Alison Cardwell for the Council of Europe. As the first meeting on history curricula, it marked the start of this important area of work within the Stability Pact. The Albanian participants came from a wide variety of backgrounds including some from the Ministry of Education, pedagogical experts from Tirana University and the Pedagogical Institute, teacher trainers, inspectors, curriculum experts, teachers, textbook authors and those responsible for examinations. Two of the members came from the Pedagogical Institute in Pristina, Kosova. Some individuals were involved in several of these activities and their combined expertise was considerable. It became clear that they had already been meeting and working together for some time with the aim of improving the history curricula and history teaching within the country. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss the situation in Albania with outside specialists, to see what could be learnt from experience of curriculum development in other countries, and to discuss and clarify future directions.

### **II. Presentation on the Situation of History Teaching in Albania and the Project for the Curriculum Development of History**

Ms Fatmiroshe Xhemali, a history specialist from the Ministry of Education, outlined the background to the current situation. In Albania, the 1990s were a difficult and a dividing period. The first priority was to de-politicise history textbooks, and this had largely been achieved, through the Ministry of Education working with a National Council. New textbooks were produced in 1996. In a second phase, it had become clear that more profound change was needed. Textbooks still did not encourage active learning methods and few alternative texts were available. But the greatest constraint was in the design of the curriculum, which teachers were bound to adhere to, with very exact instructions on what pupils must 'learn'. A number of Albanian teachers and trainers had attended overseas seminars and acquired an understanding of new methods and approaches, and seminars had been arranged to disseminate these approaches amongst other teachers. But there were problems in that teachers were not well trained to begin with and many were over-burdened with very large classes, especially in Tirana. Nation-wide change required a change in the curriculum and support for change from the Ministry of Education. Schooling was organised at a national level through the Ministry, but implemented by local district directorates, of which there were two for instance in Tirana. History and geography were taught by the same teachers, and seen as part of the human sciences. History had a distinct place in the curriculum, and the

present course was a chronological cycle of world and national history, with part of the cycle repeated in senior classes at a more advanced level.

As well as re-designing the curriculum, there was a desire to produce a handbook for teachers, explaining the new aims, methods and approaches. Such a booklet had been produced already for foreign language teachers, and it was clear that the historians felt that such a publication was urgently needed in history too. Meanwhile, the team working with Ms Xhemali at the Ministry of Education and Science had produced a plan for an overall framework for the fundamental reorientation of history teaching and the reform of history curricula. This emphasised the need for coherent rather than piecemeal reform, including reform of textbooks and training of teachers. Such reform would take place in a series of steps, and it was hoped that it would include continuing contact with foreign experts to encourage learning from the experience already gathered in other European countries. One aim of the project was to bring European experience into Albanian history teaching. The phases of the project for reform were outlined, and it was clear that there had already been a great deal of preliminary thought on the matter.

The subsequent discussion revealed a strong desire for change amongst those at the seminar, and that structural change was needed. At the moment, teachers, trainers and inspectors were keen to change but constraints of time and the present textbooks and curriculum made it difficult to do so piecemeal. The writing of textbooks tended to be monopolised by academics who did not understand the needs of teachers and pupils. The curriculum and textbooks did not allow for the history of Albania to be placed in a regional setting, and there was little place for social and local history, and much about war and conflict. Textbooks were overloaded with unsuitable material and there were very few supplementary resources for history. It was impossible to build multiperspectivity without other resources.

The overseas specialist from Spain commented that the question “who writes textbooks?” was important. In Spain, and other countries, it was now usual practice for them to be written by a team, not a single author. The team would include an academic historian and a pedagogical expert, but would also have two or three teachers, and this approach produced good results. Alison Cardwell explained that the Council of Europe was working on a project in the Caucasus involving several countries which had been in conflict, writing a joint textbook and discussing different perspectives on events. The process of collaboration was in itself an effective way of changing mentalities and developing new perspectives.



### **III. Presentations by Overseas specialists**

#### **‘History Curricula in South East Europe.’**

Ms Heike Karge, from the Georg Eckert Institute for International Textbook Research, in Germany, discussed the problems encountered in several Balkan countries attempting to reform their history courses. She suggested that history courses in schools get caught up with ideas of national identity and of legitimising those in power. In South East Europe, there is a tendency to establish self identity in opposition to others. There are problems about including minorities within a country in the history curriculum. Even more difficulties are found in placing national history within a regional context and in relation to neighbours who often shared a common history for quite big periods of time. Basically, these questions lead back to discussion of the purpose of teaching history and the nature of the subject. A critical point in fundamental re-thinking is on the nature of history. The idea of establishing a single true version of past events is increasingly questioned, by historians and others. Truth in history is complex and multi-dimensional, different views and versions of past events have to be considered. These are issues met in many countries. In a democratic situation, it is important to develop ways of helping teachers and pupils to see the actual events of the past in a variety of perspectives.

#### **‘The English National Curriculum for History.’**

Ms Ann Low-Beer described the process of creating the present history curriculum in England. She had been a member of the committee which first developed a common curriculum, introduced into all schools in 1991. The decision to create a national curriculum was made by Mrs Thatcher’s government in 1988. There was a great deal of national discussion as the curriculum was developed, the issues were taken up by the media, and there was finally an agreement that the curriculum would be revised every five years. She pointed out that history is the subject in the curriculum which causes the most public discussion.

Major changes were needed at first because teachers had not been sufficiently consulted. It is easier to manage such consultation in a small country. Revisions have all been in the direction of simplifying what is required and allowing teachers choice over detail. An important decision for all curriculum makers is how much to specify in detail. The English experience has been that too much detail causes problems, broad outline guidance allows teachers and textbook writers to develop the outlines in ways suited to a variety of pupils.

There were certain general features of the English curriculum:

1. The content is broadly chronological but it is not comprehensive or continuous. Certain topics have been selected for teaching in school – which means that some periods are not covered at all.
2. All governments have insisted on a substantial amount of British history – but selected European and world history topics are included at each stage, and local history is a required part of the curriculum. Nevertheless, many teachers think that there is too much British history.
3. The teaching of historical skills is as important as the content of the course. The skills are specified for each age, with increasing complexity. Pupils must for example, learn to extract information from different sources, to discuss a variety of causes, and to recognise several points of view.
4. Assessment at the end of each stage of schooling is an integral part of the curriculum, but is done by the teachers until the national G.C.S.E. examination at 16.
5. The course is developed for pupils from the start of school at age 5 through to age 14. In the last stage of compulsory schooling, pupils aged 14 – 16 choose whether to do history.

Finally, Ms Low-Beer discussed the blurred conception of national identity. The curriculum specifies the teaching of British history. But, in fact, there are separate curricula in history for England, Wales, and Northern Ireland. Scotland has always had separate legislation for education and the Scottish curriculum is significantly different.

#### **‘The History Curriculum in Spain.’**

The situation in Spain was introduced by Ms Christina del Moral who worked at the Ministry of Education on the development of the present curriculum. She pointed out that Spain, like Albania, had emerged from a long period of dictatorship and isolation from neighbours. Spain is a big and diverse country, the advent of democracy revealed the issue of diversity as opposed to centralisation under the dictatorship when there was one language, one history curriculum, and one set of laws. There was a widespread desire for change and a period of considerable discussion and debate between the central government and the regions before final decisions were made in 1985. Teams were appointed to write the new curriculum and there was wide consultation with regional educational authorities, the church and the teachers. Creating the curriculum framework took three years and it was then tried in some schools

and evaluated before general introduction. The whole process of implementing the new curriculum took about eight years.

The present history curriculum consists of a common core of agreed content which is about 55% of the total, whilst 45% of the content is decided at the local level. This means that the curriculum can look very different in different areas of the country. In education generally, the country is not centralised, but nor is it federal, local areas can make autonomous decisions within the broad national guidelines. Four different languages are recognised and schooling may be bilingual. The history curriculum reflects regional perspectives: towards the Atlantic or the Mediterranean seas, the Arab presence is integral in Andalusia but not in Galicia, and each region reflects local heroes. The curriculum is a broad outline, the detail of how it is taught, the actual syllabus, is worked out by teachers.

On the other hand, the teaching of skills and attitudes in history, which include understanding a variety of perspectives, are the same everywhere. The evaluation criteria used to assess pupil performance are also standard across the whole country. Teachers have learnt to handle controversial and divisive topics such as the civil war and the Franco period by developing pupils' skills in looking at material from several points of view, so that they too understand what the different views are.

Democracy led to great changes in school life in Spain. The head of each school is elected by a School Council of representatives of parents, pupils, and all school staff, as well as the teachers, and teachers within each subject group elect their head of that group. The teachers are secure as civil servants and have a lot of freedom to influence the teaching situation. Small teachers' centres were set up all over the country to help teachers, share expertise and provide resources. Textbooks are published on the open market, but in practice two or three major publishing houses tend to dominate. Textbooks are developed by teams of writers, not single authors, in consultation with teachers.

History is taught within Social Studies, at certain times there is a focus on history, at other points it may be on geography or economics. The history curricula pay much more attention nowadays to social rather than political history, and to the history of workers, minorities and women. In the upper secondary school, pupils aged 16-18 choose what to study but four subjects are compulsory for all: physical education, Spanish, a foreign language and Spanish history.

At the moment, certain issues are increasingly debated:

1. There has been a tendency for recent and contemporary history to be emphasised. Now there is criticism of this – that pupils do not learn enough of earlier periods of history and the deep roots of Spanish

culture, although special attention is given in Spain to art history. Overall, the social studies curriculum tends, in other subjects, to deal with recent and contemporary issues. Should there be more emphasis on the humanities?

2. Over the last two decades, world and European history have predominated. Now there is comment that pupils do not know Spanish history and are losing a sense of their own identity.
3. There is the challenge of new technologies which pupils know about but teachers do not always understand so well. Teachers need training and there are programmes to connect schools and pupils in different areas via the new communications.

All of these debates reflect not just changes of government, but changing perceptions and deep changes in society.

#### **IV. Discussion**

Each presentation led to considerable discussion and questions about detail. The presenters agreed that, whilst there were particular circumstances in each country, there were common features too about the history curricula in many countries, for instance: in allowing teachers to determine the detail of teaching, or in the introduction of skills as well as content, and debates about the balance between national, regional, European and world history.

The final discussion focused on what might be the next steps for the development of the history curriculum in Albania. There has already been much preliminary discussion and a series of seminars. Teachers, pedagogical experts, and inspectors feel that further structural change is needed. This requires government support for new initiatives, as it did in the other countries where there has been revision of the history curriculum. The presentations from Spain and England showed that such change is a process through a series of steps all of which may be influenced by pressure groups of various kinds. History teaching in every country was not just about the past but related to present values and goals as well as influencing future hopes. In many European countries, the nature of the history taught in schools had changed in recent years often because of deep changes in society.

The Albanian experts brought up the need for new aims for their curriculum, for example to develop civic values, to strengthen democratic attitudes and discussion, to extend a new awareness of Europe. The aims of the old curriculum had evaporated and left only a vacuum and a sense of muddle, whilst the actual history course was over-burdened with factual detail which pupils simply had to memorise. There was no time for pupils to develop real

understanding of historical issues, and little space for teachers to introduce more stimulating methods.

It was important, meanwhile, that the group in Albania should continue this work and move on to defining their next immediate set of objectives. They had clearly decided that change was needed, it was essential to continue the initiative. Many countries in Europe had experience of processes of change in the history curriculum and consultation with others could be arranged. At the moment, seminars for teacher-training are being organised within the Stability Pact, other things might be possible at a later date, if the need for them was made clear. Above all, the momentum for further development must be sustained.

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**SEMINAR ON  
“ACTIVE LEARNING METHODS AND ENQUIRY-BASED  
LEARNING FOR HISTORY EDUCATORS”**

This seminar was organised under the activities of the Stability Pact for South East Europe by the Albanian Ministry of Education and Science together with the Council of Europe.

The participants in the seminar were largely teachers engaged in active classroom work. A core group came from Tirana, but there were teachers from all parts of Albania. There were also some pedagogical experts, history inspectors, and some engaged in writing history textbooks as well as the two representatives of Kosovo. There was an additional group of unusual participants: eight senior pupils from a nearby secondary school. They were impressive because of their excellent command of English so that they were able to speak with the foreign visitors, and because of their clear and lively views about learning history.

**I. Opening of the Seminar**

The seminar was opened by Mr Vaso Qano, Head of the Cabinet of the Ministry of Education and Science, and co-ordinator for Albania of all the educational projects within the Stability Pact. He conveyed the support of the Ministry of Education for this seminar, for the work already done within the teaching of history project, and for the support given by the Council of Europe and the visiting specialists from other countries. Ms Liri Cuko from the Education Department of Tirana welcomed all the participants including the pupils who, for the first time, participated in such a seminar. She gave a clear picture of the state of history teaching in Tirana. In the last few years, the atmosphere in schools had changed. Communication between teachers and pupils had improved and relationships had become warmer and easier. Teachers did try to use new methods with more group work, questioning and discussion of material. But this was often difficult to manage in practice since classes were very large. Moreover, whilst there had been some reforms, the very centralised and specific curriculum left little space for teacher initiative. The more recent textbooks were over-loaded with factual material and written in language which was not well suited to young pupils. There were few alternative books and a scarcity of other resources such as maps.

Ms Alison Cardwell thanked the Ministry of Education for the support and work put into organising this seminar. It was a great honour for the Council of Europe to be invited to contribute within the Stability Pact and a recognition of the long tradition of work on history teaching within the Council of Europe. This was the first such seminar for teachers, following on from the meeting of the last two days towards developing the history curriculum in Albania. She



introduced Ms Joke van der Leeuw-Roord, the Executive Director of EUROCLIO, (the European Standing Conference of History Teachers' Associations), Ms Gabrielle Bucher-Dinç from the Körber-Stiftung in Hamburg, Germany, and Ms Ann Low-Beer from Britain, who would discuss some of the new learning methods in history teaching, and demonstrate them in the workshops. She informed the participants that the Körber Stiftung was making a substantial financial contribution towards the organisation of the seminar.

Ms Fatmiroshe Xhemali from the Ministry of Education then gave an outline of the situation of history teaching in Albania. Whilst there have been reforms and new textbooks with ideology from the previous regime removed, there are still many improvements needed. Reforms have been delayed because of political difficulties in the 1990s. Now further development is needed. History has a reasonable place and number of hours in the curriculum, but teachers are faced with very large classes, especially in Tirana, with pupils from very diverse backgrounds. The curriculum is still dominated by political history with little expansion into social and economic history. Not all teachers are well trained and there is a need for a handbook for teachers to explain the overall purpose and methods of the new teaching. Some teachers have learnt about new methods from overseas contacts but the current curricula do not really allow for new teaching methods since every unit is specified with no time left for creative teaching. Textbooks are inadequate. They lack maps, examples of documents and sources and other material such as graphs. The didactic elaboration is low, they are not written in a style suitable for young pupils. There are a few additional materials, mostly for primary pupils, but there is a lack of alternative materials for secondary pupils. To orientate history towards more democratic approaches, pupils must be encouraged to be more active and participative in the process of learning, instead they ask why their history books are so boring.

## **II. Plenary Sessions**

The main topics of the seminar were introduced in three plenary sessions which focused on different, but related, approaches to encouraging pupil participation and active learning in history lessons.

Enquiry-based learning using a variety of sources was the first topic, introduced by Professor Qazim Xhelili and Ms Ann Low-Beer.

Oral history and interview techniques were discussed by Ms Elira Caushi whose paper was read by a colleague, and Ms Gabrielle Bucher-Dinç from the Körber Stiftung.

Sources, work with sources; questions and critical thinking was the final focus introduced on the second day by Mr Adrian Papajani and Ms Joke van der Leeuw-Roord from EUROCLIO.

These introductory talks laid out the theoretical foundations for enquiry-based learning in history and for teaching pupils how to reason from a variety of different kinds of source material. The discipline of history as an academic subject was based on scrutiny of a wide range of sources and pupils too should learn something of historical methods. The evidence for the past was not only to be found locked away in dusty archives. There was much historical evidence in the everyday world of the present: there were historical remains in the local environment, in buildings and place-names, in pictures and photographs, in old artefacts. Modern technology made reproduction of materials for classroom use much easier. Oral history meant getting people to tell the stories of their experience, learning how to interview them, and using personal stories to enliven the context of major national events in history.

Learning how to ask questions of sources was discussed in detail as the basic technique needed to develop active learning in the classroom. It helps if pupils can work in small groups and discuss answers together. The last session emphasised questions and critical thinking. Both speakers gave detailed examples from classrooms and textbooks, showing that many questions only required simple factual answers, they did not raise the issues which required real thought. Better questions forced pupils to consider the complexities of many historical events, to place them in context, to consider how to explain actions, and to look at events from several perspectives. Joke van der Leeuw-Roord suggested that teachers needed much more training in the art of asking higher level questions. Textbooks were not usually a good guide, but there were examples in a forthcoming Teachers' Handbook by Robert Stradling, developed within the Council of Europe's project on: 'Teaching and learning about the History of Europe in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century'.

### **III. Discussion.**

The discussion following each session was lively. Albanian participants said that some of these methods were used from time to time in classrooms. One inspector described how she was interviewed by a class as an excellent oral witness to life under the previous regime. Oral history was a live tradition in Albania and village histories of this kind had been collected before 1990. Such methods and sources certainly interested pupils who were keen to learn more social and less political history.

Some problems were raised, particularly the nature of examinations, including university examinations which required only factual recall.

Above all, these approaches needed to be incorporated into the curriculum, and into textbooks. At the moment, although some teachers tried experiments, they were haphazard and extra-curricular. The way forward was to develop a curriculum which was based on the new approaches.

#### **IV. Working Groups.**

The seminar was organised around three parallel Working Groups organised by the three overseas specialists, on each of the topics of the plenary sessions. The speakers circulated to each group so that everyone attended each session. The purpose of the working groups was to go beyond the talks and involve participants in working through examples of the actual methods which can be used in classrooms with different age-groups of pupils. The whole seminar was intended to move beyond ideas and to be practical and useful to teachers.

The school pupils also came to the working groups and they seemed to have enjoyed the practical activities, and their comments were valued. The teachers too found much of interest in the groups, where there was time too for discussion amongst the teachers and with the speakers, on how to use such ideas in Albania.

#### **V. End of the Seminar.**

Before the close of the seminar Ms. Joke van der Leeuw-Roord explained the work of EUROCLIO. The main purpose of the organisation was to facilitate sharing of ideas and support for each other amongst all history teachers in Europe. EUROCLIO produced a Bulletin, material on their website, regular Newsletters, and other publications, to keep teachers up-to-date and aware of what was happening elsewhere. They developed specific projects, and Albania was already involved, with Bulgaria and “the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia”, in one on: ‘Understanding a Shared Past, Learning for the Future’. The representatives of the Albanian History Teachers’ Association would shortly be coming to the EUROCLIO General Assembly in Tallinn. Gabrielle Bucher-Dinç explained the aims and purposes of the Korber Eustory competitions. Material about them was distributed, and participation from Albania would be welcomed. The two organisations often work together.

Ms Alison Cardwell for the Council of Europe, and Mr Vaso Quano and Ms Fatmiroshe Xhemali for the Albanian Ministry of Education and Science, thanked all participants. Ms Cardwell recalled her previous visits to Albania which made her realise how much progress was being made. Albanian history teachers were being drawn into the network of contacts across Europe and there was much which countries could learn from each others’ experience. The Council of Europe would continue to support initiatives in Albania and a regional seminar was planned in “the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia” in May. The Council was grateful for the support from the

Ministry in Albania in carrying forward the reforms of history teaching under the Stability Pact. It was an on-going process in which they were all involved.

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