

“Challenges and Perspectives of Citizenship Education in Central and South Eastern Europe”  
11<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> September 2009, Zagreb, Croatia

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# Report

## Workshop 3

### Citizenship Education and History Learning

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As the title suggests, Workshop 3 dealt with problems such as *how, in what way and to what extent* is the teaching of history related to citizenship education.

In the first part of this workshop, Evelina Kelbecheva gave a keynote focusing on mythmaking and falsification of history, which is maybe the best way to use history (teaching) as a political weapon. Very good examples are issues like Batak in Bulgaria and the Skanderbeg biography in Albania. Explaining her own teaching experiences, she paralleled the “Balkan” approach to history with a Molotov cocktail of nationalism and communism. In other words, after the breakdown of communism, the nationalist approach has succeeded the communist approach. And it has become predominant in this region. In Evelina Kelbecheva’s opinion myths are always more interesting to students (and the public as well) than boring textbook facts. That is maybe the main reason why some intellectuals use myths although they know they are scientifically incorrect. So, it is important to explain to the students how and why specific myths evolved. It is also crucial to encourage students to participate more actively in the process of discussing history (through conversation in the classroom and in the family). One of the questions that arose in the discussion was how to use “nicer” or “lighter” approaches, including films and literature, in order to attract students to debates about citizenship and politics.

In the second part of the workshop, there were two presentations of specific projects: Thomas Strobel, a German historian working with the Georg Eckert Institute for Comparative Schoolbook Research, introduced his current project “German-Polish History Textbook”. An important aspect in the process of developing this textbook is the experience with the “German-French History Textbook” which has already been published. Thomas Strobel mentioned some challenges like the differences in didactic approaches between Germany and Poland and the lack of Polish history in German curricula. His conclusion was that if history education is used as a political weapon it can only be disarmed by accepting and promoting multi-perspectivity. Thomas Strobel explained that this textbook will be used within the regular curricula, not as additional material. He also explained the process of preparing specific chapters: each chapter will be developed by a Polish and a German author. This textbook can be seen as a very strong political symbol. Like the German-French History Textbook, it is meant to show the possibility of international co-operation even in such sensitive matters as memory politics and history education.

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Karolina Ujaković presented the History Textbook “Ordinary people in an extraordinary country” (1945-1990 history of Serbia, Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina). This textbook is the final product of a project initiated by Euroclio ([www.euroclio.eu](http://www.euroclio.eu)), which lasted for more than three years (2004-2007). The members of the project were history teachers from Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia. The project’s aim was to foster the reconciliation process in the region by promoting tolerance as one step towards a civil society. At the same time the project aimed at better organising teachers in the region (eg by founding an association of history teachers in each country), and at improving history teaching with new methodological and didactical methods. The decision of all participants was that the focus in the new textbook should not be on political history but on everyday life, mass culture and ideology. Finally, the textbook became a compilation of material for 20 workshops which could be used as additional input in the classroom. Participants from all national teams worked together on each workshop.

Karolina Ujaković also stressed some challenges and problems: When and how should these materials be used? Due to strict national curricula there is not much time to use these workshops (maybe just once a year!). The second problem was/is the passivity of many teachers! Unfortunately, some teachers do not want to play an active and innovative role in seminars or classrooms. Teachers very often prefer “ex cathedra”, not interactive teaching. In other words, many teachers do not like to have active students. In the discussion, Karolina Ujaković once more stressed the importance of this project in the process of reconciliation and democracy building. Very important achievements are: new networking, fluctuation/ mobility of teachers in the region, topics, including diverse regions and events from different parts of ex-Yugoslavia (not present in their regular textbooks). Those who used these workshops in the classroom report a very good reception. During the discussion some suggestions were made. One was to offer this material to NGOs and to use it in informal education, for example in human rights education etc. One suggestion was to make use of the media in presenting this material and the whole project to the public.

In the concluding discussion all participants agreed that the role of historians and history teachers in citizenship education is extremely important. The first precondition for building a society of democracy and tolerance is to stop the mystification and falsification of history. Another fundamental goal is to motivate teachers to be active in the classroom and in society. Of course, that also means to encourage students to be active in school and to become active citizens. Regarding the role of European partners and NGOs, funds and donors, the workshop participants stressed that paternalism should be avoided and the learning process should be mutual. Actors in the region ask for more support and equal treatment to their EU colleagues – They want to be empowered, not overpowered.

Suggestions and recommendations:

1. Make a short bibliography of books on the history of the Balkan region which present alternative (non nationalist) views on history, This bibliography should be published on the NECE website;
2. Keep improving the regional network of history teachers; try to establish contacts between NGOs and teachers.
3. Put a toolbox of didactical methods for civic and history education on the NECE website.
4. Presentation of the textbook “Ordinary people in an extraordinary country” at civic education seminars and events in the region.