



## **Citizenship Education Facing Nationalism and Populism in Europe**

**Strategies - Competencies – Practices**

# **Conference Paper**

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### GERMAN-FRENCH SCHOOL TEXTBOOK

Some considerations about the origins and the first two volumes  
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The second volume of the Franco-German History Textbook for the period 1815–1945 is now available, two years after the publication of the first volume on the post-1945 era. In the meantime, 80,000 copies of the latter have been sold on both sides of the Rhine; equally, the project's originality and high quality are reflected by its widespread reception in the public sphere. The history textbook is currently even being translated into Japanese and Korean! Transfer opportunities are accumulating. One might ask to what extent the Franco-German project can be used to the benefit of the processes of understanding and peacemaking in the aftermath of conflicts. In the last few years, other projects have evolved in the Balkans, the Middle East and East Asia. In the last few months, a new project between Germany and Poland has set itself the goal of developing a history textbook in accordance with both countries' curricula. Some weeks ago, the Polish Deputy Education Minister and historian Stanowski insisted that the cooperation between Polish and (West-) German historians developed under the leadership of the Georg Eckert Institute since the early 1970s had provided a starting capital that could render the realisation of this joint educational work easier than that of the Franco-German History Textbook! But did he not know that German and French historians had worked together on textbooks in the 1930s? Already in November 1935, French and German historians met in Paris to discuss change to history text books in the two countries. Two years after Hitler seized power, they were still able to formulate 39 directives to remove the poison contained in history text books and provide a common presentation of German-French relations between 1789 and 1925. This paper was a product of the Locarno Era when the two Ministers of Foreign Affairs, Aristide Briand and Gustav Stresemann, tried the first rapprochement between the two countries. But as this paper was a thorn in the flesh of the Nazi Regime, it had no impact on history

lessons in Germany until 1945. When, after the Second World War, historians from both sides of the Rhine established the first contacts, however, this constituted an important basis to continue the dialogue. In 1949, Georg Eckert, future director of the International Schoolbook Institute in Braunschweig, met Edouard Bruley. Both were presidents of their national History Teachers' Associations, and were in search of a point on which to build the future meetings. At the first meeting 11 French history teachers and 26 German history teachers took part. During the second one, a committee of French and German historians, under the leadership of Pierre Renouvin and Gerhard Ritter, adopted the first recommendations, inspired by those adopted in 1935. The post-war German-French textbook discussions should be seen as a component of a pedagogy for peace, where a huge mental divide had to be bridged after an era of confrontation and which was the result of erroneous historical opinions and presumptions. This was a civil society initiative corresponding to Adenauer's spirit and aims and where culture took an essential place in German-French relations so that the textbook debates were supported by politicians. After the terror of the war, the textbook debates were the sign of the civil society's efforts to build international relations based upon a new social and trans-national footing. History became a vector for cooperation and better understanding and, after signing the French-German Cultural agreement on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of October 1954, Edouard Bruley pointed out in "*Le Monde*" that the "French and German historians had not waited for the cultural agreement in order to set out in search of historical truth and fight against emotionally influenced judgements". These debates continued in the 1960s and 1970s and facilitated the achievement of the German-French textbook in 2006.

The idea of this manual was put forward in January 2003 by the French-German Youth Parliament, which brought together 500 school children aged between 15 and 19 from both countries. The Commission for Education formulated the recommendation to write a common textbook, which was unanimously approved by the plenary assembly. At the end of the meeting, President Chirac and Chancellor Schröder visited the youth parliament and were asked to commit France and Germany to carrying out this project. The project had necessarily to be undertaken by the governments and authorities, since they alone were capable of doing so. The German Federal Republic's sixteen Länder, which are sovereign in educational and cultural matters, had to be persuaded to consult each other and to redraft their history syllabuses, and then harmonize them in centralized France and Federal Germany. Carrying out this project required a commitment on the part of both governments and historians. A steering committee was set up. It formulated the specifications for the textbook in October 2004, and the governments started a tendering procedure to find two publishing houses. This procedure raised the following question: Is it a societal project or an official one – in other words a political one? Such a perception may arouse suspicions about the textbook. Those involved were aware of this problem, as can be seen if we compare the two prefaces. In the second volume, the steering committee only mentions the role of young people in the emergence of the project, whereas in 2006 the committee had initially mentioned "the degree of inter-governmental integration and cooperation" and the earlier experience of cooperation on manuals since the 1950s. In giving priority to governmental action, this presentation of the project's objectives had forced the committee to explain that "obviously" it was not an official manual.

Clearly, it was never an "official account" that was "dictated" by politicians. The authors always worked freely and the teachers who chose to use this manual, which is in competition with many traditional manuals, also did so freely. Of course, a reminder of the role played by the Franco-German youth Parliament was not enough to put an end to the questions. Remarks made by government officials since 2006, in both France and Germany, imply that it might have been suggested to the young people participating in the Parliament. But when a project succeeds, doesn't it always have several fathers, as the German proverb says?

To answer this question, a probing analysis of the constitution of the mechanisms of the youth *Parliament* seems necessary. It is certain that this Parliament, which was set up by the Franco-German youth Office, has never claimed to be representative (it was constituted in a “pragmatic” manner with the lycées working in partnership with the *Office*). The young people, who to begin with were divided into fifteen subcommittees dealing with specific subjects, later debated and voted in full committee on each of the fifteen proposals and approved only twelve of them. Some of their demands were not in accordance with what the political authorities wanted. For example, the demand that nuclear power be abandoned was contrary to Paris’s policy, and thus testifies to the reality of the Parliament’s autonomy. The young people themselves were eager to emphasize that all the proposals emerged from their own discussions.

But let’s look inside the new textbook.

I quote :

“Under the title *Europe and the World from the Congress of Vienna to 1945*, this volume deals with a period shaped by three great wars that is particularly difficult for neighbours. When one considers this time of hostility and suspicion, the significance of the trust achieved today and the intensity of German-French relations becomes particularly clear.”

As this press release issued by the Berlin Senate points out, the second volume of this joint textbook, which has been available since spring 2008, was awaited with special interest because of the tragic nature of the period it covers. For a present-day Franco-German team, does dealing with this period present a greater challenge than analyzing the bilateral process of rapprochement, reconciliation, cooperation, and the construction of Europe undertaken in the first volume of the manual? To answer this question, we have to remember that the manual is not a tool in the service of bilateral reconciliation. This experiment of writing such a textbook together is made sixty years after the end of World War II and forty years after the signing of the Élysée Treaty by de Gaulle and Adenauer! In this respect it is fundamentally different from other attempts at joint publications between countries that are “coming out of conflict”. The publication of this genuine *school textbook* was possible only because researchers, teachers and public opinion have been working on the past for decades.

I’d like to present three aspects of this project:

- first, how it reflects recent trends in international historical research;
- secondly, how it tries to cross French teaching practices with German ones;
- thirdly, how it tries to develop “a common historical awareness”.

### 1. Cooperation Reflecting Recent Trends in Historiography

As Pierre Monnet, a French historian, put it, “German and French historians agree regarding the causes that triggered the 1914-1918 war. The thesis of German militarism vs. France as a victim of aggression ceased to be current fifteen years ago.” German and French historians have also reached a consensus over World War II, the Third Reich or Vichy. These tragic periods are no longer taboo.

Fortunately, that does not mean that scholarly controversies have come to an end and that we have arrived at a univocal interpretation of history. But today the debates are no longer between “national” communities of historians. The battle lines now reflect differences between supporters of differing approaches: political, cultural, social, economic, etc. Among the collective of the authors and the members of the steering committee, the discussions focused chiefly on how the subjects were dealt with. For instance, the historian Horst Möller, director of the Institute for Contemporary History and member of the steering committee, deplored the fact that “Picasso and his century” were given as much space as the culture of Weimar Germany and argued that too much emphasis was put on mass culture at the

expense of classical culture. In response, the authors stressed the importance of this popular culture.

The sections on historiography in the second volume are one of this manual's strong points. They show that recent developments in historical research have been taken into account. True, the nineteenth century is neglected, and all of these sections deal with the twentieth century, for example "Fascism: a universal phenomenon?", or "The Role of Hitler as seen by historical research". One would have liked to see other sections, on colonialism or the First World War, for instance. A section on "The Great War" would have made it possible to show that current controversies are not between French and German scholars, but divide French historians into those who emphasize the brutalization of societies and those who emphasize the constraints weighing on people and present them as victims.

### **Crossing French teaching Practices with German Ones**

Far more than the interpretation of events, teaching practices have always been very different in the two countries. This manual seeks to overcome these differences and to create favourable grounds for pedagogical transfers. The sections on historiography can help make students aware of the diversity of possible interpretations. They reflect the clear influence of German teaching methods, in which students have to express an opinion regarding what historians write, whereas in France they comment on "source" texts. Inversely, the format with the lesson to be learned on the left-hand page and the teaching material on the right-hand page is in conformity with French practice, and so are the importance and quality of iconographic representations and maps. Critics may object that the reader is subjected to an absolute *embarras de richesse* on some pages of the book and that only little space remains for the explanatory text. There is no doubt that, here, the Franco-German History Textbook is threatened by the danger that German teachers in particular might only use it as a goldmine for materials. This would be a pity, as the whole significance of the series lies in its particular common Franco-German perspective on European history, which in turn is mostly inherent in the text.

There are many sections on "method" (eg. explaining a text, analyzing a historical map or statistical data, conducting interviews) and they are integrated into specific chapters. One page presents a general analytical scheme for the type of documents or exercises concerned, while the other develops an example. I'd like to present the section dealing with the study of a photograph. The general presentation offers some information about history and the status of photography and offers technical explanations regarding the ways of photographing, reframing, or retouching images before proposing an analytical scheme. In chapter 15, "From Bolshevich Russia to Stalin's Regime", the example is judiciously chosen to show "how photographs were manipulated under Stalin".

### **Developing "A Common Historical Awareness"**

How does this new manual respond to the hope, expressed in the specifications formulated in October 2004, that it might "help create the basis for a common historical consciousness among young German and French people in the process of European unification"?

The manual proposes "Intersecting views", inserts (*regards croisés*) expressing a variety of perspectives. More than in the first volume, the overall structure of the second one reflects the priority given to a European approach. Thus the book opens with a chapter entitled "From the Europe of Princes to the Europe of Peoples?" [*question mark*] and closes with one on "Europe and its Nations: Conflicts and Challenges, 1815–1945", which is devoted to the idea of Europe. The general conception of the book reflects the concern to reduce as much as possible the juxtaposition of national points of view and replace them with transversal analyses. These "national" presentations are found in the first part ("The Age of Nations: 1814–1914"), where the political approach is dominant. However, they are complemented by the chapter "Germany and France: Responses to the Challenges of the Nineteenth Century", which is a resolutely comparative approach. To take just one example,



the chapters devoted to the First World War and the aftermath of the war offer a remarkable fresco of socio-cultural developments crossing all European societies.

This book, which goes beyond the history of Europe to deal with other continents and relations between Europe and the rest of the world, tries to go beyond a Eurocentric approach. For example, the chapter devoted to the Second World War situates the beginning of the movement in the war in Japan's occupation of Manchuria in 1931, and not with fascism and Nazism in Europe.

This diversity is welcome, and the book moves back and forth between a classical comparative approach with the two histories side by side and a multiperspective approach where each one sees history through the eyes of the other, between the history of perceptions and receptions, relations and transfers. It adopts in turn political, social, and economic perspectives, though cultural and anthropological perspectives are the most frequent.

Of course, it must be noted that all is not perfect in this book, with regards to details as well as in a general vein. As was already the case in the first volume, the structure is not always convincing. For example, historical contexts are torn apart without an explicit indication.

To conclude, I'd like to remind you that the Franco-German History Textbook has set itself the ambitious goal of paving the way for a potential European history book that combines 27 'viewpoints'. This project tends to invite scepticism in the light of the current divergence of perspectives and the so-called competition between memory cultures in Europe (the memory of the Holocaust taking centre stage in the West, the memory of the Gulag and other communist crimes taking centre stage in the East). But the German-Polish History Textbook could build a bridge between Eastern and Western Europe, and thus help assess the feasibility of a future European Textbook.