



Citizenship Education Facing Nationalism and Populism in Europe

Strategies - Competencies – Practices

Report

Workshop 2: Cultural Memory and History: How Can National and European History be Reconciled

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The second workshop of the NECE conference concentrated on different ways of writing/constructing national histories, the social, educational, and political aspects of writing and teaching history, and the challenges of inscribing national historical discourses within a larger, unifying or unified, European history discourse. Additionally issues related to history education and its implications for citizenship education were also discussed.

The key questions of the workshop were:

- Has there been a renaissance of national history (resuscitation of national discourse) in Europe?
- Could the different traditions of national history - with their emotional baggage and attitudes – be ‘abolished’ by a European identity?
- How can national history be understood in a new, more self-critical fashion?
- What formats, models and instruments of citizenship education could support this process?
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The workshop moderator, **Ms. Evelina Kelbecheva**, spoke about the history canon and the power of nationalistic myths which can be created by different interpretations of history. She made the point that history narratives should be deconstructed in order to break that canon and the possibility of creating nationalistic myths. The purpose of deconstructing the narrative would also be to account for the rupture between the “high academic history” and the “ideology of history”.

Kelbecheva asked if it would be possible to create not another history canon, but to undermine the nationalistic one through inclusive education. This could happen through the cooperation of historians from the European countries, in reflecting upon their common past.

The first speaker, **Ms. Alicja Pacewicz** talked about the experience of the Polish people in dealing with history and offered some examples of how young people today approach the most difficult events of their national history. She argued that the purpose of history education should be to look for common roots, unifying experiences and a human dimension

in European history. On the other hand, Pacewicz also argued that good history textbooks should offer multiple perspectives to the events described, drawing upon different historical sources. Thus it is necessary to have international – multilateral or bilateral - commissions of historians and education experts writing the common histories of the European peoples. She underlined the need of a new European historical framework that would include the histories of nations from Europe's peripheries. A pan-European historical "Vademecum" developed by experts from all the countries could help to fill the vacuum of a common European history. Some of the educational projects run by the Center for Citizenship Education which Pacewicz represents, are involving Polish schools and schools from other countries. The following projects are considered to provide useful experiences for a new approach to history learning in Europe:

- *Traces of the Past*: with German, Czech and Lithuanian partners,
- *Let's Talk about Freedom*: Anne Frank Zentrum; Erinnerung, Verantwortung und Zukunft
- *Common Past and Common Future: different nations and cultures in Polish history and identity*
- *Righteous among Nations, Righteous among us*: with children of the Holocaust
- *Good People in the Times of Evil*: with The Jewish Foundation for the Righteous, American Embassy and Center for In-service Teacher Training.

The second speaker, **Prof. Levent Soysal**, a professor at the Kadir Has University, Istanbul, continued the discussion of the previous panelists and spoke about nationalism in history. He began by noting an interesting practice – exhibiting the national flag. He asked whether such practice meant a rise in national sentiment, or does that also signify a decline of the charisma of the nation.

He then spoke about the EU as a post-national entity; it is perceived as such, even though the redistribution mechanisms in the community are still structured nationally. To other countries outside of it, it still looks like a nation-state. We need to remember that there is also a world outside of Europe and it affects what is going on in our countries.

Mila Zaharieva-Schmolke, a Bulgarian journalist working in Germany, spoke about an important event in Bulgarian history: the rescue of the Bulgarian Jews during the Second World War, and the story of Dimitar Peshev, who is responsible for this great political act. She argued that this story is not as well known as it should be, in Bulgaria or around the world, nor are the lessons of tolerance derived from it emphasized enough.

Louise Tremel's presentation focused on the role of history for civic education and the new challenges for citizenship education. She argued that there is no resuscitation of nationalist discourse in Germany. What is noticeable, though, is a revived interest of the media and TV for the past – a trend to history learning as entertainment for broader audiences – especially in television.

Tremel outlined three main areas of the significance of history education for citizenship education. It helps to *activate* people and helps them engage with history. It *supplies* people with material to which they don't have access. Third, *problematization*, encouraging reflection upon history in a different way – which is what media cannot do, and this is the role of educators.

In discussing the question how history - a common European history - could be written and taught, the participants in the workshop agreed that:

- history teachers are not civic educators,

- young people today have a more simplified knowledge of history, mediated by media, movies and the Internet,
- we don't need to instill guilt in young people when they study history – we should not conceive of history into a series of some terrible, traumatic events and make them exemplary. Neither should we identify European or national histories with single historical events, such as the Holocaust, for instance.
- We need to teach history in a different way, we need to be *modest* in setting goals for the students of history. We also need to incorporate the approach and success of other sciences, like anthropology, in teaching history to young people.

Finally the participants discussed and listed practical proposals and recommendations for developing citizenship education in a (post)national, European context.

- Education in school is not enough and we need a more integral philosophy of education, reaching beyond and aimed at a wider audience.
- Instead of focusing on a single national history, we should better focus on many intertwined histories - histories of cities, institutions, culture, etc.
- New history books need to show the connections between local and universal, provide comparisons of phenomena, etc.
- Oral history projects should be more encouraged (interviews with people, communities, use of Internet).
- We need to start a common *critique* of European history, to find a balanced perspective to a trans-national history account of the European past.
- We need to work for a better connection between media and schools; explore the ways in which media can supplement history education in schools, without making the process of studying history only a matter of entertainment.
- There is a danger of oversimplifying the content if we choose more entertaining ways of teaching history; we need to decide how much complexity we would like to teach.
- Integrate media and history, formal and non-formal approaches to history and teaching history.
- Encourage cross-border projects – bilateral and multilateral projects on exploring history.
- Find ways to include the specific histories of different groups of immigrants in one society into the main historical narrative of that country and society.
- It was also agreed that despite the introduction of more informal approaches and media in education, we need more reception studies to find out how successful such approaches are and if they encourage young people to become more active citizens of their countries.
- It is necessary to create media collections and resources available on the web supporting education – such as historical media-theque on the web.
- Include more role-plays and simulations in teaching history
- Examine school curricula in different countries and cross-reference national history with European/world history.
- Participants also suggested that we may as well need to question the word “European” itself – would it be possible to write history, the history of a human community, without, for instance, using the words ‘culture, European, immigrant’ – as a way, perhaps, to deconstruct our own experience and learn to be more critical students of history?

The participants in the seminar came to the conclusion, that it is not possible to have a radical distinction and separation between a European history narrative and national histories.

Instead, we should be aiming to provide different perspectives, multiple perspectives upon historical events trying to reconcile particular and universal aspects of dealing with history.