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HISTORY TEACHING AND PEACE EDUCATION IN SOUTHEAST EUROPE

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After the fall of communist regimes, perceptions of the past and the writing of history have been revised. The rewriting of the Balkan countries' history corresponded to major changes in historiography but also reflected changes in collective self-definitions. On the other hand, the wars in Yugoslavia triggered interest and intervention by Western organisations into history teaching. The Council of Europe, teachers' associations, the EU and Western governments, the Stability Pact, NGOs elaborated projects aimed at revising history teaching. All this activity was founded on the belief that history can be used as a tool of reconciliation in a region divided by nationalist conflicts. Therefore, history teaching has been conceived as part of a major project of peace education in Southeast Europe.

In my paper, I am going to analyse the different levels of rewriting the history of Southeast Europe —'inside' and 'outside' the region—, the international tradition of projects of peace education in the 20th century (after the two world wars), the political cultures of intervention in the West, which sustained the process of revision of history teaching in Southeast Europe, and the reactions in Balkan societies themselves.

I. *Rewriting History in Southeast Europe*

1. The Revision of History Teaching

Rewriting history in Southeast Europe started after 1989 and has been a process correlated with:

1. The renewal of European history as regional history (especially after 1989);
2. The rewriting of Balkan national histories after 1989;
3. The revision of history teaching in Europe (both Western and Eastern).

The writing of European history has been dictated by political evolutions in Europe, namely the process of European integration. Many historians have compiled accounts of European past aimed at documenting a common European civilization. However, the dramatic changes produced by the end of Cold War affected the very definition of European identity and resulted into a revision of European history. The question "what is Europe?" has been suggesting a certain interpretation of Europe's past. But the answer to this question has not been obvious. While before the 90s European history was "exclusive" and referred only to the western part of the continent, since the 90s it has been "inclusive" trying to integrate both

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Western and Eastern Europe into a historical continuum (Pok, Rüsen, Scherrer 2002). However, the tension between East and West has not totally disappeared and we may still detect, in Western discourses, a hidden under-evaluation of East European cultural "achievements".

In the ex-communist Balkan countries, the revision of historiography after 1989 has been targeting the "de-ideologization" of history, i.e. the procedure of eliminating Marxist interpretation and putting the communist period into a parenthesis of oblivion or rejection. Revision of Balkan national histories has not been consistent but has followed multiple and contradictory paths. Post-modern studies questioning the validity and objectivity of historical writing appeared simultaneously with the introverted, dogmatic nationalistic history (Brunnbauer 2004).

2. The Lesson Taught by the World Wars

The revision of history teaching has been informed by a multifold process: the renewal of the aims and the methods of history teaching on the one hand and also, on the other hand, the traumatic impact of world wars and interethnic conflicts. Peace education has been one of the major aims of the revision of history textbooks. According to the first paragraph of the Preamble to the Constitution of UNESCO (Lafontaine-Schwarz 2005: 3)

Since wars begin in the minds of men,
it is in the minds of men that the defences of peace must be constructed

After the First World War, in 1925 the League of Nations recommended comparative analysis and revision of textbooks, while in 1937 twenty-six states signed a "Declaration regarding the teaching of history (revision of school textbooks)". After the Second World War, in 1946 UNESCO developed a "Programme for the improvement of textbooks and teaching materials as aids in developing international understanding" and in 1949 it published "A handbook for the improvement of textbooks and teaching materials as aids to international understanding" (Pingel 1999: 9-17). The Council of Europe has also worked in the same direction since 1953 (Stobart 1999). Finally, the Georg Eckert Institute for International Textbook Research, founded in 1951, set as goal textbook analysis and revision and cooperated with UNESCO and the Council of Europe. In its newsletter, *Internationale Schulbuchforschung*, a lot of information on textbook research can be found.

Therefore, already in the 1920s and then in the 1940s schoolbooks were judged and largely found 'guilty' of the wars in the 20th century. Negative stereotypes against neighbours, which were included especially in history textbooks, were identified as one of the causes of world wars. School was found equally responsible for the war. It was thus deemed necessary to revise schoolbooks to eradicate negative stereotypes and prejudice against other peoples, and many efforts were made to this end in Europe (e.g. between France and Germany, Germany and Poland, etc.)[1].

[1] In the 70s, French and German history teachers took the initiative to discuss the content of their respective history textbooks, while a similar procedure was followed between German and Polish teachers. See *Gemeinsame Deutsch-polnische Schulbuchkommission: Empfehlungen für die Schulbücher der Geschichte und Geographie in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland und in der Volksrepublik Polen*, Braunschweig 1995 (Schriftenreihe des Georg-Eckert-Insituts für Internationale Schulbuchforschung, vol.22/XV). Recently, many bilateral and multilateral projects were developed especially in the so-called "European countries in democratic transition" (ex-communist countries).

The ideological and political uses of history[2] —school history, in particular— have been a common feature in all European countries in the 19th and 20th century. Balkan countries have been no exception to the rule. In most textbooks in Southeast Europe we may find expressions and phrases that could generate negative or hostile attitudes towards neighbours. Consequently, one could think that there is some connection — more or less direct — between the content of textbooks and the escalation of nationalism, whose extreme manifestation is armed conflict. The upsurge of violence and nationalism has rekindled in the last fifteen years the old Western stereotype of the Balkans' cultural singularity, which was thought to be reflected in schoolbooks (Koulouri 2002).

In the last two decades, the revision of history teaching has been promoted through bilateral, multilateral/regional and international projects. These projects aimed at eliminating stereotypes and hostile attitudes vis-à-vis neighbors, and included textbooks analysis, teacher training and compilation of teaching materials. They were initiated either by NGOs or by international organizations, such as UNESCO and the Council of Europe, which collaborated with governments and could eventually influence education policies.

3. History Textbooks as a Tool of Regional Stabilization

Political analysts and researchers have tried to identify the different causes of recent interethnic conflicts and violence in the Balkans. The recognition and description of the causes could lead, in this point of view, to design means of conflict prevention and stabilization of the region. School history textbooks have been identified as one of the potential causes for intolerance between different nations or ethnic communities and, consequently, as a reason for conflict.

Recent research projects and publications in the Balkan region have tried to investigate the possibilities of eliminating «conflict-producing» national stereotypes from textbooks. The underlying assumption behind this activity is that a change in the teaching methods of history may have a long-term effect on the way neighbouring peoples see one another. An improvement of school textbooks may function as a long duration Confidence Building Measure — a tool for reconciliation. Consequently, the ultimate goal of this concept of writing and teaching history is to promote democratic citizenship, tolerance and mutual understanding.

After the recent «Balkan wars», the necessity of changing the content of history textbooks has been seen as more imperative. This change should consist in eliminating negative stereotypes and in stressing on common elements in Balkan history. School should prepare citizens of democratic states who would live together peacefully and not potential soldiers of rival nations. Consequently, educational reforms were supported both by western and local agents, aimed at stabilization and reconciliation of the region. These initiatives can be understood in terms of international intervention.

[2] There is a long literature about the ideological and political uses of history. See, among others, the famous studies of M.I. Finley and Marc Ferro: M.I. Finley, *The Use and Abuse of History*, London: Penguin, 1990 (first edition 1971); Marc Ferro, *Comment on raconte l'Histoire aux enfants à travers le monde entier* [How History is narrated to children all over the world], Paris: Payot, 1983.

II. *International Intervention in Post-conflict Balkans*

1. Types of Intervention

The power asymmetries that exist between the Balkans and the outside world open up the possibility of intervention. We may follow international intervention in SEE since the creation of Balkan nation-states. After WWII, the Truman Doctrine (1947) making a pledge to intervene anywhere in the world to support 'free peoples who are resisting attempted subjugation by armed minorities or by outside pressures' (Lampe 2006: 13), established a political ideology of intervention. However, during the Cold War, after the Tito-Stalin split of 1948, the Non-Aligned Movement that was established, advocated the principle of non-intervention.

After 1989, transition in Eastern Europe followed the Western model of multiparty democracy and free market economy. The break-up of Yugoslavia between 1990 and 1995 was a dramatic aspect of the fall of the communist regimes. During the Yugoslav wars, Western policy set as first priority to stop the warfare and as second priority to protect the human rights for minorities within state borders. This concern culminated in 2001 with the creation of the European Court for Human Rights.

Dayton, which was signed in November 1995, "marked the end of the war, but only the beginning of the peace" (ICB 2005:3). Actually, after the Yugoslav wars, international presence has been particularly pronounced in the Balkans, especially in Bosnia and Kosovo. International intervention has been displayed at different levels and under different faces, aimed at regional stabilization. Strategies to achieve stabilization have been adapted to the various phases of transition of each Balkan country. As a result, Balkan countries have been categorized in different groups —e.g. Western Balkans— and a new balkanization of the region has emerged. Moreover, balkanization has been enhanced by two kinds of international intervention: recognition and military intervention.

- **Stability** was taken to include recognizing the series of states that emerged from the dissolution of Yugoslavia. Thus, **recognition** became another important instrument of intervention (Siani-Davies 2007: 17).
- **Military intervention** was manifested with the NATO bombing campaign in Yugoslavia (1999) and the presence of Western military troops in Kosovo and Bosnia.

If the creation of new states in the region and international intervention contributed to balkanization, regional cooperation constitutes the reversal of this process, at least on a symbolic level. To the same direction is heading the perspective of European integration. In fact, since 1996, in the context of the EU (European Union) enlargement, the integration of Balkan countries into the EU has created a new collectivity, which goes over SEE's borders. European-ness absorbs Balkan-ness.

2. Europeanization against Balkanization

Consequently, regional cooperation is the symbolic reversal of Balkanization. In other words, Europeanization is the opposite of Balkanization and the only perspective to overcome it. The notion of 'European integration' has replaced the notion of 'international intervention'.

This notion "is based on the beliefs that the Balkan states are interdependent and that the problems of this geographically contiguous area necessarily impacts on the EU" (Siani-Davies 2007: 172). Besides, Europe has been thought to have a moral and a security imperative towards the Balkans (ICB 2005: 6).

The common European identity is propagated as an instrument of cohesion in the Balkans, through the inspiration of a sense of common citizenship. It is noteworthy that the International Commission on the Balkans, including 18 members and chaired by Giuliano Amato, in its report in 2005, explicitly states that 'the real choice the EU is facing in the Balkans is: enlargement or Empire' (ICB 2005: 11). The political reality of weak states and the quasi-protectorates of Kosovo and Bosnia warns us of the danger of a neo-imperialism in the Balkans.

3. The Stability Pact

The Stability Pact established in 1999 supported the perspective of the region's integration to the EU. The Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe was established at the suggestion of Germany with the mission to promote the reconstruction and stabilization of the region. Education was put on the official agenda as a means to ensure democratization and peace. The ultimate objective of this process was the region's future integration into the EU. This mental map of Europe was probably the reason why the term "Balkans", with all its negative connotations, was deliberately avoided during the Stability Pact negotiations and replaced instead by South Eastern Europe (Lafontaine-Schwarz 2005: 18). The process of reconstruction in post conflict Balkans has been influenced by stereotypes for the region that existed in Western minds for centuries.

An example: According to the Report of the International Commission on the Balkans (1996), the task of the international community after Dayton was to "help transform the proverbially chaotic, bloody and unpredictable Balkans of the past into a stable, peaceful and dependable Southeastern Europe of the future" (ICB 2005: 3).

4. NGOs (Non-Governmental Organizations): A New Actor of Global Policy

Although the notion of 'intervention' implies governmental and inter-governmental international actors, the post-Dayton reconstruction and stabilization of SEE has significantly relied on NGOs' action. There are at least two reasons why this action has been promoted: first, the importance accorded by international community to the strengthening of civil society in the Balkans and second, the fact that NGOs were thought to be more flexible and more efficient at the level of local community and more able to address the poor and underprivileged parts of the population. International organizations have seen the strengthening of civil society as an essential prerequisite for democratization and peace.

After decades of state control, a large number of NGOs emerged in post-communist Balkans. However, the large number of NGOs does not necessarily mean a strong civil society. In Bosnia, for example, a group of Western 'experts' have been working to propagate the values of civil society but actually the activity of international NGOs has been hindering local NGOs' development. Local NGOs have been financially dependent on international NGOs and clientelist networks have developed. A new Western-oriented, English-speaking elite has been

replacing the old socialist bureaucrats, acting as a mediator between the international community and local society.

Public opinion researches conducted in the region have revealed a widespread scepticism vis-à-vis NGOs in local societies as well as low levels of public participation. A growing trend of public pessimism, dissatisfaction and distrust has also been found out in a research conducted by the International Commission on the Balkans, during the same period.

III. *Intervention in History Teaching and Peace Education*

1. Educational Reforms in Post-conflict Balkans

Intervention in history writing and history teaching has been materialized in the fields of peace education and reconciliation. The experience of western textbooks revision has been combined with the objectives of regional stabilization, in order to inspire models of educational reform in the Balkans. In the fields of education and history teaching, Western curricula and textbooks have been used as models to imitate.

Educational reform required collaboration of international and local agents, but obviously the relations between them were not symmetrical. Models' development was controlled by western agents and mostly was not informed by a good knowledge of the actual situation. This was due to a large extent to the lack of language skills and the necessary use of indirect information. The suggested reforms were based on the rejection of previous educational system as a whole and started at zero point: education should be reformed in its contents, objectives and methods following exclusively the western model. I think that the failure of educational reforms up to now has to be ascribed to the fact that the reforms designed by the international community had rejected the elements of local culture as 'non European'. However, the planning of the transition should take into account the double heritage, of communism and of conflict, at least in Western Balkans.

2. Conflict and Peace Education

Different models of educational initiative have been developed according to the type and the status of conflict. Before the conflict, in a situation of social unrest, educational initiatives should aim at prevention. After the conflict, they should contribute to social reconstruction and ultimate development.

In post-conflict situations, the main thesis is that peace education[3] is a prerequisite in order to establish lasting peace. The Enhanced Graz Process offers an example of applied peace education. Initiated by Austria (presidency of the EU), it became the Coordinator of the "Education and Youth" Area of the Stability Pact. In fact, the main agent of educational reform has been the Stability Pact.

According to the documents produced by the Stability Pact, history teaching is placed in the centre of peace education with the following arguments:

[3] The term originated around 2000, although the concept, under different expressions, had existed since the aftermath of World War I. (Lafontaine-Schwarz 2005: 12-15).

- first, that in the countries of SEE history had been distorted and used to foster particular identities and ideologies and
- second, that history teaching should be revised critically with regard to marxist interpretation and to the history of neighboring countries and ethnic minorities.

3. History Teaching as Part of Peace Education

As I have already mentioned, at an international level, the revision of history teaching and textbooks has been supposed to secure peace in societies traumatized or threatened by conflict. In SEE, a region 'suspicious' of nationalism, the revision of history was embodied in the reconciliation process. Reconciliation concerned equally relations between neighboring countries and relations between majority and minorities within the state. Furthermore, a 'dialect' of reconciliation has been composed with key-words such as democratic citizenship, social reconstruction, mutual understanding, tolerance, stability etc.

4. Common Balkan History against Balkanization

On the basis of regional cooperation the main initiative developed with regard to history teaching was aimed at the writing of a common Balkan history. Common Balkan history has been taken as a response to the gradually growing balkanization of the region's past. Especially in ex-Yugoslavia, the new nation-states were denying any common past, while emphasizing the conflicts between them as a historical fact. Since the 90s, an exaggerated remembrance of the conflict —starting at the recent period and going back to time, has replaced the collective forgetting which had been instilled in Yugoslav society after WWII, in order to achieve coexistence in one single state. In parallel, Balkan national histories were directly linked to European and global history, strangely by-passing the intermediate regional level.

These Balkan realities made some people think that an attempt to give a coherent account of the region's history could pacify inter-ethnic rivalries and antipathies and promote harmonious coexistence and a common future. The concept of common history referred primarily to regional history but also to national histories individually, i.e. integrating minorities in the national narrative.

5. The Joint History Project

Therefore, the concept of a new Balkan community emerged as a counter-weight to new aggressive and defensive nationalisms. The Joint History Project (JHP), inaugurated in 1998 by an NGO —the Center for Democracy and Reconciliation in Southeast Europe (CDRSEE), aimed mainly at investigating the possibility of writing and teaching a common history for all Southeast European countries, from Slovenia to Cyprus.

The Joint History Project has been conducted by a body of Balkan historians, the History Education Committee, whose I am honoured to be the chair. Actually the HEC includes 17 members, mostly history teachers at all three levels of education and representing all SE European countries.

In our point of view, we should of course stress on a common history of the region but

this new history should not be a new construction which would replace the national histories. It would rather be a new interpretation of the national pasts based on a common Balkan cultural and institutional heritage. Besides, we were aware of the fact that national history would continue to be taught in all Balkan countries and that it would be utopian to try to abolish its teaching. Consequently, any innovative attempt should integrate national history or at least be compatible with it. This kind of innovation means that changes in content should be paralleled by changes in method. As a matter of fact, revision of textbooks does not mean —at least exclusively— change of content but development of new skills, abilities, applied knowledge etc.

During the first phase of the project (1999-2000), we analyzed history textbooks and curricula in all the countries of the region and we investigated the situation in history education. The results of this work were included into two publications:

- *Teaching the History of Southeastern Europe (2001)*.
- *Clio in the Balkans. The Politics of History Education (2002)*.

The second phase of the JHP aimed at teacher training. From December 2000 to February 2002 five regional workshops of teacher training were held dealing with common historical issues in all curricula such as the Balkan Wars, the First World War, the Second World War, the Decline of the Ottoman Empire and the Creation of the Nation-States.

During the third phase of the project, we tried to suggest a very concrete method for the teaching of history in the perspective of reconciliation and regional stabilization. We produced four Workbooks under the title "Teaching Modern Southeast European History". We chose four historical periods that are included in all curricula of the region.

- The Ottoman Empire
- Nations and States
- Balkan Wars
- World War II

All four topics belong to modern and contemporary history, a period when the peoples of the region followed a more or less common fate, through co-existence and conflicts.

These workbooks are not textbooks but thematic books of sources, complementary to the textbooks used in the classroom. Their method is comparative and multi-perspective. Sources are not classified per country or per nation but are integrated in larger thematic units regardless their origin. For each event or case or subject, we offer different aspects and perspectives coming from different national histories. Besides, the history of the region is put into the larger comparative context of European and world history.

6. Reactions against the Revision of History

However, strong reactions against any revision of national history were manifested in all countries. Reactions have not been homogeneous nor have their agents been identical. I will try to sketch briefly the main parameters of these reactions, referring mainly to the example of the four workbooks I edited. These workbooks, which suggested a novel approach to regional history based on multiperspectivity and collaboration of historians from different countries, provoked fierce reactions mainly in Serbia, Greece and Kosovo.

a.The foreigners' conspiracy

The first element of these reactions was the so-called 'conspiracy theory'. In the last decade, the long experience of interventions in the Balkans restored the widely spread stereotype that the so called Great Powers, the powerful 'foreigners' were to be blamed for the region's misfortunes. This stereotype encompasses two aspects which may coexist. First, the colonialist policy and behavior, contemptuous of 'backward' local populations. Second, conspiracy theory, according to which the powerful people of the globe are scheming dark plans at the expense of Balkan people. In both cases, the powerful foreigners are thought to support neighboring nations who have held or still hold hostile relations with the nation under threat. The first case has been thoroughly analyzed by a long bibliography, where dominates Todorova's book *Imagining the Balkans*, and where western attitudes towards the Balkans are conceived as another aspect of orientalism (Todorova 1997).

The conspiracy theory was applied in the case of the revision of history teaching in SEE. "A possibility to successfully complete a common regional project was in all attacks accused as a result of the supra-national conspiracy, whose aim is creation or restoration of former multinational states that existed in the Balkans. In Croatia, there was immediately fear that this should lead to restoration of Yugoslavia; in Serbia, that this will mean an imposition of the "brotherhood and unity"; while in Greece, there was a fear that this should bring the restoration of the Ottoman Empire" (Stojanovic, 2007).

In Greece, the main argument has been that there exists a global political plan (i.e. conspiracy) emanating from the US, the Sionist lobby, and multinational companies, aimed at the "pulverization of the Balkan, namely the orthodox populations and their unification under a neo-ottoman Turkey". For the plan's success, it is necessary to deconstruct Balkan national identities so that the Balkan nations will be again subjugated to a new empire under American leadership, the so called New Order.

According to this theory, Greek 'young' historians have been collaborating in these international plans, deconstructing Greek national identity with their work, while forming a dominant group at the university —the university 'establishment'. Actually, the distinction between two groups of historians and two schools of historiography has been seminal in this debate. We may call the first group "traditional" and "conservative" and the second group "young" and "progressist". As "young" historians we may define those historians who are carrying a renewed approach to historiography, in accordance with the international level of historical science.

b. Traditional historians against 'young' historians

Each group holds common features but also varies from country to country according to the political situation and to the academic tradition. The reasons for which traditional historians react depend, in several cases, on that their prestige is being compromised by new, mostly younger historians.

On the other hand, the attitude by "young" historians is not homogeneous. Although they participate in the projects of revision of the traditional, nationalistic history, they are skeptical about the political parameters of this revision. Let me quote Maria Todorova:

"It is therefore imperative, when assessing the unprecedented present-day rhetoric, especially in the aftermath of the NATO bombing in Yugoslavia, calling on constructing a positive Southeast

European identity, to look carefully into the political motivations behind these calls, as well as the political and cultural costs of the project. After all, identity politics is as much a form of social control and political mobilisation as any other kind of politics." (Todorova 2004: 10)

As far as common Balkan history is concerned, just like in the case of European history, historians think that it is not necessary to fabricate an idealized picture of a common past neither to construct, in the means of history teaching, a new identity, namely a common Balkan identity, based on the model of the constructed national identity. In short, the construction of a new identity is not necessary in order to surpass the old identity and the construction of a new mythicized narrative is not necessary in order to surpass the old national myths.

Conclusion

There is a widespread consensus that revision of school history can prepare peaceful coexistence among nations who have experienced conflict and hostility. This consensus has inspired a series of international and bilateral initiatives all over the world. All those initiatives were taking as starting point the belief that education plays central role in preparing future generations either for war or for peace.

This general principle was applied in Southeast Europe in the last two decades, especially after the bitter experience of the collapse of Yugoslavia and the armed conflict in Bosnia, Kosovo and Republic of Macedonia. Southeast Europe has not yet escaped from nationalism. Quite the opposite. In most countries, fluid political situation combined with the immanent fear of a new outbreak of hostilities and the unfulfilled national aspirations create a context where rallying to national identity offers refuge and security. Consequently, the revision of national history is conceived as a threat to national identity and to the very national existence. This threat can only be external. The 'other' who is writing 'our' history may be the US, Europe, the strong neighbor, the traditional national enemy, the majority of a nation-state.

Despite the reactions that we have registered, in many countries there exists a core of young historians and teachers who are eager to work towards the revision of history teaching in order to achieve cohesion and unity in the region. It is obvious that how we write and we teach history depends on our vision of the future. The EU integration has offered a new perspective to this region that can be instrumentalized also in the field of history education.

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