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**THE FUNCTION OF
HISTORY TEXTBOOKS
FOR PRIMARY
SCHOOLS IN BUILDING
A NEW IDENTITY
AND HISTORICAL
CONSCIOUSNESS IN
THE YUGOSLAV STATE
(1918–1941)**

The principles on which the Yugoslav state was formed in 1918, had followed the trend that was dominant in European societies of the 19th century, when national states were formed based on national ideologies. The educational policy and school itself had a key role in this process. All

theorists of nation agree that a citizen is formed by school. Through the process of socialization, whose essential tool in modern society is school, an individual becomes a member of a particular ethnic group. National identity and national feelings result from the assumption of common knowledge, norms and values; they arise from the adoption of a single set of cultural models and specific values. They define personal identity, which is inextricably linked to the collective identity, and after that, individuals find the nation in themselves.¹ Primary schools stand out by their significance because they represent the most massive type of education. For many reasons, science sees the primary education introduced in Europe from the second half of the 19th century as a secular equivalent of the church.²

At the end of the 19th century, the time of the formation of nations and nationalism were formed, statements maintaining scientifically proven past events were utilized in order to strengthen the collective identity and charge the contemporaries who were brought up to be faithful heirs of a “glorious history” with a mission to extend the legacy of their past. National history mirrored the construction and triumph of the nation all over Europe. It imposed the point of view that a nation must become the sole object of individual loyalty at the expense of every other form of identity and affiliation. At the same time, in order for the abstract community which was the nation to be built and shaped, it was necessary to support national enthusiasm by connecting the nation’s language, history and mythology.³ Nations were constantly recreating their collections of ethnic myths and values; they were in need of a sacred territory, a hero and a golden age in order to encourage a form of ethnicity that was intended to strengthen the feeling of belonging to a collective. According to some nation theorists, inventing tradition is a requirement of every nation’s existence.⁴

In the process of formation of nations, history teaching was entrusted with the especially important task of creating a sense of historical unity, which was already something inherent in the ethnic group (or groups). In effect, it was the historians who developed some of the widely accepted national myths, more or less loosely based on real facts. Despite the importance of teachers, history textbooks have always had a key role in the teaching of history. These textbooks tend to be cultural patterns (models); samplers which contain everything or almost

1 Šnaper, Dominik. *Zajednica građana. O modernoj ideji nacije*. Sremski Karlovci-Novi Sad: IK Zorana Stojanovića, 1996, pp. 177–178.

2 Erik Hobsbom, Masovna proizvodnja tradicija. In: Erik Hobsbom, Terens Rejndžer (eds.), *Izmišljanje tradicije*, Beograd: Biblioteka XX vek, 2002, p. 395 (Hobsbawm, Eric. Mass Producing Tradition: Europe 1870–1914. In: Hobsbawm, Eric. Ranger, Terence (eds.). *Inventing Tradition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

3 Šnaper, *Zajednica građana*, pp. 180–181, 184.

4 Šnaper, *Zajednica građana*.

everything essential for a culture. They actively build and shape members of a specific culture. The textbooks attempt to establish control over the whole person, down to the level of their finest sentiments. For cultural activity, some elements of the textbooks are essential, direct and powerful, while others are completely irrelevant or merely background material, indirect and marginal. The agency of the history textbook works on several levels, ranging from direct influence in keeping with its proclaimed objective, to building up an unconscious background and generating side effects that even the author of the textbook is unaware of. The textbook serves as both formative and educational tool, whereby the modelling of cultural experience is its directly stated goal.⁵

In the process of the transmission of cultural content, the textbooks facilitate the process of self-awareness so that it becomes clear what is important for a community, establishing the hierarchy of the cultural values, determining which are primary and which are secondary. The study of the textbooks used at schools gives an insight into the standard that school system wishes to achieve in a relatively objective manner.⁶ Historiographical analyses of history textbooks reveal the attitude towards the Yugoslav national idea, but also the attitude towards the Yugoslav state as such. History textbooks should be perceived as one of the most important tools of creating a new patriotism or creating the new Yugoslav national identity among those who were expected to soon become the most creative and most productive members of this community – i.e. the school youth.

A precondition for establishing the educational policy of the Yugoslav state was the construction and standardization of the school system, because in this field, there were very large differences and discrepancies in certain parts of the country. The expansion of the school network aimed to achieve the education of a large part of the population and the gradual inclusion of new generations in the system of compulsory primary education.

After creating the new state in 1918, at least in the first years of its existence, the greater part of the intellectual elite supported the building of its institutions and its key objectives in various ways. In this sense, there was continuity with the period before WWI. However, it soon turned out that it was most difficult to achieve cohesion, or so-called “spiritual unity” especially on the cultural level. The proclamation of the dictatorship of King Alexander on January 6, 1929, did not mark a turning point in the political life of the country solely. The ideological

5 Plut, Dijana. *Udžbenik kao kulturno-potporni sistem*. Beograd: Zavod za udžbenike, 2003, pp. 17,45–46; Ivić, Ivan, Pešikan, Ana, Antić, Slobodanka. *Vodič za dobar udžbenik, Opšti standardi kvaliteta udžbenika*. Novi Sad: Platoneum, 2008, pp. 19–21.

6 Rosandić, Ružica. Patriotsko vaspitanje u osnovnoškolskim udžbenicima. In: Plut, Dijana i dr. *Ratništvo, patriotizam, patrijarhalnost. Analiza udžbenika za osnovne škole*. Beograd: Centar za antiratnu akciju, 1994, p. 43.

conception of Yugoslav national unity was also proclaimed at that time, replacing the earlier national unity idea. However, under the influence of the political events at the end of the thirties, notably the creation of the Banovina of Croatia on August 26, 1939, the concept of the state and national unity were formally abandoned.

The creation of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes on December 1, 1918, marked the realization of the idea of the unification of the South Slavic peoples into a single national state. This idea had its relatively long pre-history in the nineteenth century, and became politically current in the first decade of the twentieth century.⁷ Researchers agree in their assessment that the Yugoslav state was created with half of a century delay, and that it could not be a monolithic national state because the nations which constituted it had mostly been formed already.⁸ Indeed, if we draw a comparison with the “delayed nations” such as the Italian or the German nation, the creation of the Yugoslav nation whose prerequisite was the creation of a unique state was in even greater historical delay. Paradoxically, the new state failed to create Yugoslavs, but it became a suitable framework for the final shaping of the Slovenian and Croatian nations. Mass Croatian national consciousness arose only after the establishment of the Yugoslav state in opposition to the new state and alleged Serbian dominance in it.⁹ Unlike the Slovenian, the Croatian nationalist mass movement more strongly emphasized striving for an independent state in which the hostility of the Roman Catholic Church towards the new liberal state played a major role.

The national ideology of the new state was based on the idea of ethnic and cultural unity according to the European model of the nation-state. The new nation was supposed to be a political community of citizens, or a community of people of the same language and origin. This was supposed to harmonize the two basic types of intellects of a nation, the civil-territorial (“French”) and the ethnic-genealogical (“German”).¹⁰ This second type took precedence because the new state with its borders encompassed most of the ethnically related communities which were considered to be set apart only by religion and had heretofore belonged to different countries. It was believed that the new community would provide the conditions for the realization of the “centuries-old aspirations” of the South Slavs or Yugoslavs for their complete national and state unity. In support

7 Ekmečić, Milorad. *Stvaranje Jugoslavije 1790–1918*, Vol. I–II, Beograd: Prosveta, 1989, passim.

8 Gligorijević, Branislav. *Jugoslovenstvo između dva rata (Protivrečnosti nacionalne politike)*. *Jugoslovenski istorijski časopis*, 1986, Nr. 1–4, p. 76.

9 Gross, Mirjana. On the integration of the Croatian nation: a case study in national building. *East European Quarterly*, 15, 1981, p. 224 (Quoted in Erik Hobsbaum, *Nacije i nacionalizam od 1780. Program, mit, stvarnost*, Beograd: Filip Višnjić, 1996, p. 154.

10 *Ibid.*, pp. 221–250. The author criticizes the two nations idea and claims there is only one nation; *ibidem*, p. 244.

of this stance was the commitment of the Yugoslav national elite to unite at the end of the Great War in 1918. Their resolve was increased by the aspirations of the neighbours towards their territories, notably the Italians, who had set their sights on the eastern Adriatic coast. Nation theorists believe that it was an attempt to construct a Yugoslav national tradition comprised of the traditions of the Serbian, Croatian, Slovenian and other ethnic groups, and that the weakness of this national tradition was to form the root of later conflicts.¹¹

Apart from the political intentions, none of the necessary conditions for the Yugoslav national integration, nor for the creation of a solid base of Yugoslav nationalism which could result in a truly unified nation, actually existed. The first and most important obstacle was the fact that the three “tribes” that the new state consisted of had in fact had already been established as nations, or were on the way to completing the process.

One of the central roles in creating a unified Yugoslav national idea and a Yugoslav citizenry was to be played by cultural policy. Generally, the designed cultural policy is an important part of general social modernization and the commencement of rapid development. However, the meaning and content of the cultural policy in the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes / Yugoslavia, as well as the whole social development, faced a number of limitations, these being mainly the undefined political relations and the major economic and cultural differences of its individual parts. In the Kingdom of SHS there were up to 37 different national and provincial laws and regulations governing the field of education.¹² Cultural policy was perceived by the authorities solely as a political activity; a form suitable for placing the desired ideological and political content, views and interests into.¹³

Researchers of the social phenomena in the history of Yugoslavia agree that the cultural policy, including the educational policy, played a very important role in the attempted social integration of the Yugoslav area in the period between the two world wars as well as during the entire history of the Yugoslav state. This applies both to historians who approached the cultural policy as a complex and comprehensive phenomenon (Lj. Dimić), and those who understood the culture as a set of activities carried out by state institutions with the aim of creating and maintaining the Yugoslav state; primarily in the ideological field (E. Vahtel).¹⁴

11 Ibid., pp. 45–46.

12 Dimić, Ljubodrag. *Kulturna politika u Kraljevini Jugoslaviji 1918–1941*. Beograd: Stubovi kulture, 1996, Vol. II, *Škola i crkva*, p. 118.

13 Dimić, *Kulturna politika*, Vol. III, *Politika I stvaralaštvo*, pp. 412–413.

14 Endru Baruh Vahtel. *Stvaranje, razaranje nacije. Književnost i kulturna politika u Jugoslaviji*, Beograd 2001, passim (Vahtel, Andrew Baruch. *Making a Nation, Breaking a Nation. Literature and Cultural Politics in Yugoslavia*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998)

According to one point of view, culture was an essential factor in maintaining the existence of Yugoslavia.¹⁵ Thereby the idea of national unity of the Yugoslav nations was achieved in four major ways: 1) by conducting a language policy with the aim of creating a single language; 2) by imposing a Yugoslav literary and artistic canon upon all the nations comprising the state; 3) by implementing the planned policy of education, particularly with regards to the teaching of literature and history in schools; and 4) through the creation of new literary and artistic works that expressed a Yugoslav ideology.¹⁶ Since the beginning of the 20th century, and later in the Yugoslav state, the cultural foundations of the Yugoslav ideology were synthetic and based on the best from each of the Yugoslav “tribes”, i.e. cultures. The interwar Yugoslavia was dominated by two cultural models: the multi-cultural, in which the new culture was created by combining elements of the existing “tribal” cultures, and the supranational, in which the culture was created beyond the existing ones.¹⁷ Although this opinion exaggerated the importance of culture in relation to the other (dis)integrative social factors, primarily religion, it was completely justified from the standpoint of emphasizing the undeniable importance that the idea of Yugoslav national unity had in school history teaching.

Basically, the decreed Yugoslavism meant the defeat of the Yugoslav idea, because it turned into its opposite. In essence, it was one of the models of inventing tradition – of the kind that established or legitimized institutions, status or relations of identity.¹⁸ The integral Yugoslav ideology was based on a structure in which the entire history of the country was actually the history of Yugoslavs and a kind of preparation for unification or the final realization of the idea of a single Yugoslav nation.

For the new state, just like any other nation-state, the leading question was how and for what purpose to educate the young generations. The importance of the schools was increased even more because they were supposed to create a new Yugoslav national consciousness; Yugoslavia had been created and Yugoslavs were supposed to be created, too. Although the generations that were meant to create and comprise the new country had not been educated in the Yugoslav, but in the national (in the new terminology: “tribal”) spirit during the course of their educations, at least the schools in the new country would have the main goal of building and nurturing an awareness of the new national and state unity. However, there were major obstacles in the path of this strategy in the very school system.

15 Ibid., pp. 12–13.

16 Ibid., p. 14.

17 Ibid., pp. 90, 99–100.

18 Hobsbom, *Kako se tradicije izmišljaju*, pp. 17–18.

To begin with, there were several school systems on the territory of the new state, which was a serious obstacle to achieving the proclaimed “spiritual unification”. In accordance with the liberal ideological principles on which it rested, the Yugoslav state was making efforts to implement a unique concept of public schools and curricula in the field of education in line with the main objectives of its policy.¹⁹ The Government of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes endeavored to equalize educational policy and to place all the most important tasks in this field within the competence of the Ministry of Education. A significant role in creating and implementing educational policies within the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes was held by the General Educational Council as an expert advisory body to the Minister of Education. Following the formation of the state and the subsequent restructuring, the Council expanded so that it was now comprised of prominent experts from all parts of the new state. The main tasks of the Council were related to creating a unified school system. It also dealt with issues such as the conception and implementation of primary and secondary school curricula, textbooks, teachers’ status issues and many others.²⁰

There were also significant differences in the applied formal legal and pedagogical-methodological terminology among the school systems in the different parts of the country. At the same time, there were differences even in the more significant things which had to be altered. It was proclaimed that schools need to change their “spirit” or their national-ideological orientation in accordance with the new national and state ideology and the school curricula and textbooks, as well as the teachers’ understanding and commitment, were also expected to adjust to it. All these problems were perhaps best portrayed in the system of primary education and were reflected in the textbooks, including the history textbooks, as the best representative of substantial changes in the ideological and political sphere. From the creation of the new state onwards, the professional public had advocated the harmonization of the legislation and primary school teaching.

In schools, particular importance was given to the teaching of history in which, as before, Western European models were followed. In the European education systems of the 19th century, during the construction of the nation-states, history teaching was delegated the role of nurturing the love of the motherland and a civic spirit. According to this “classical” theory of history teaching, its task was to transfer moral lessons by using examples, which is why this kind of history was also called “moralizing history”. This theory of history teaching

19 Dimić. *Kulturna politika*, Vol. II, *Škola i crkva*, pp. 117–120.

20 AJ, 66–485–490, *Zapisnici Glavnog prosvetnog saveta*; Tešić, Vladeta i dr., *Sto godina prosvetnog saveta Srbije 1880–1980*, Beograd: Zavod za učbenike SR Srbije, 1980, passim.

presupposed a high degree of consensus regarding the nature of the classical values to be conveyed by the curriculum, i.e. which were the implicit virtues, which ones were common and eternal. With the escalation of the political differences that culminated in World War I, this concept was subjected to serious criticism. Therefore, in the period between the two world wars, in response to the moralizing history, a new attitude was formed, according to which schools were supposed to primarily transmit knowledge about history, to impart knowledge about the past, and the content of the national cultural heritage.²¹

The main role in achieving the educational task of strengthening the awareness and national unity of the Yugoslav nations was carried by a “national group of subjects” which were comprised of the “state” language (Serbo-Croatian, Slovenian or Serbo-Croatian-Slovenian), Geography and History. Special methodological instructions regarding the teaching of this national group of subjects were also issued.²²

At the end of the war in Serbia, in 1918, the printing of primary school textbooks in which the unification of the Yugoslav peoples was unequivocally announced commenced. This was in accordance with the Yugoslav programme that the Serbian government adopted on December 1914, which it consistently followed. It was clear that textbooks should be one of the means of national education and in a way, the “bearers of the state idea”.²³ With the language policy of unification imposing Yugoslav literary and artistic canons and the creation of new literary and artistic works that expressed Yugoslav ideology, the education policy, especially the teaching of literature and history, were the most important methods for the realization of the idea of national unity.²⁴ Subsequently, the creation of the new national identity was based on a collectivist, rather than an individualist approach.²⁵

The idea of Slavic mutuality and solidarity affected the policy on upbringing and education, as well as the history textbooks. Highlighting of the common Slavic origin could already be found in the history books of the Kingdom of Serbia, and became even more pronounced after the establishment of the Yugoslav State. The first teaching units of all history textbooks for primary

21 Knut Čelstali, *Prošlost nije više što je nekad bila, Uvod u istoriografiju*, Beograd: Geopoetika, 2004, pp. 300–303 (*Kjeldstadli, Knut. Fortida er ikke hva den engang var. En innføring i historiefaget*, Oslo: Universitetsforlag, 1992).

22 Petrović, Đ. *Pomoćna knjiga za obradu nacionalnih predmeta (izrađeno u smislu naređenja Ministarstva prosvete ON. BR. .34360/21)*, Novi Sad, 1926.

23 Dimić, Ljubodrag, Alimpić, Danko. Stereotipi o narodnom i državnom jedinstvu u udžbenicima istorije u Kraljevini Jugoslaviji. *Nastava istorije*, 3, Novi Sad, 1996, p. 144.

24 Vahtel, *Stvaranje nacije, razaranje nacije*, p. 14.

25 Golubović, Zagorka. *Ja i drugi. Antropološka istraživanja individualnog i kolektivnog identiteta*. Beograd: Republika, 1999, pp. 20–22.

schools were devoted to the common Slavic origin, life and social organization of the Slavs, as well as to discussing the fact that at that time the Slavic nations were very close to each other.

The students in the Kingdom of SHS first encountered history teaching in the third and fourth grade of the four-year elementary school. They studied the “people’s history”, or the national history of the Yugoslav nations.²⁶ Since 1922, there were always multiple history textbooks for the same grade of primary school in the Yugoslav state. The competition among the authors of textbooks further increased in the thirties, when a new generation of textbooks was developed. At the same time, the old textbooks were adapted to the new curriculum and were still in use. There were sometimes misunderstandings or conflicts regarding the selection of textbooks that were recommended to students, certainly due to the substantial financial profits the publishers and authors hoped for from the reprints. It should be noted that all the textbooks were published as private editions by different publishers – including the largest publishing houses of the time. Further evidence of this big rivalry can also be found in the numerous advertisements in the professional and elite publications, as well as in the reports of school supervisors.

At the beginning of the twenties, the history textbooks for primary schools were actually textbooks of Serbian history (mostly Serbia as a country) which included short additions on the history of the Croats and the Slovenes.²⁷ At the same time, we also see the beginning of the printing of textbooks which showed the most important events, processes and individuals from the histories of all three “tribes”: the Serbs, the Croats and the Slovenes.²⁸ The histories of the Slovenes and the Croats were presented simultaneously and successively together with Serbian history, the latter of which still held the largest amount of space. However, the mutual history of all three “tribes” was given increasingly more space. This can be seen in the quantification of the content of some representative textbooks of this period. In one of the most common textbooks of this period, a total content percentage of 83.9 was dedicated to Serbian history, 12.7% to events from the mutual history of all three “tribes”, 3.3% to Croatian history and less than half a percent (about half of a page) to the history of the Slovenes.²⁹

In the 1920s, the official policy of a national unity of the three Yugoslav “tribes” gradually gained its expression in a synchronized presentation of their

26 Aranicki, Kosta A., Karadžić, Stevan (eds.). *Najnoviji učiteljski zbornik svih zakona, uredbi*, Pančevo, 1936.

27 Todorović, Čedomilj. *Istorija srpskog naroda za četvrti razred osnovnih narodnih škola. Istorijske slike po programu sa slikama u tekstu*, Četvrto izdanje, s istorijom Hrvata i Slovenaca, Beograd, 1922.

28 Rabrenović, Milan. *Istorija Srba, Hrvata I Slovenaca za IV razred osnovnih škola*, Beograd, 1922.

29 Jović, Mihailo. *Srpska istorija sa kratkom istorijom Hrvata i Slovenaca za četvrti razred osnovne škole sa slikama po novom programu*, Četrdeset prvo izdanje, Beograd, 1922.

particular histories in the primary school textbooks, with increasing emphasis on what had brought them together in the past. Ever since then, the name “Yugoslavs” was used for the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes as a synonym and a common name. However, most often they were identified by the phrase “all our people, Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes,” which outlined the common origin as the basis of national unity whose natural expression was the unification on December 1, 1918. The closeness of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes was pointed out, as members of one branch of the Slavic, South Slavic (together with the Bulgarians) nations, and then as belonging to one Yugoslav nation. In some textbooks, this was aligned with the titles of the teaching units (“The religious beliefs of the old Yugoslavs”, “The Baptism of the Yugoslavs”).³⁰ The history of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes was portrayed as having been Yugoslav and mutual from the early Middle Ages.

Since 1922, the concept was built into the textbooks that the entire history of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes or Yugoslavs, had led to solely one goal: national liberation and unification. As they were one nation, albeit with three names, their natural tendency had been to achieve their national unity. The unification was thus portrayed as the realization of the tendency of “all our people” and supposedly marked the end of their unnatural separation which had existed under the influence of external and internal factors. The creation of a common state was shown as a fateful watershed of their history because it had ended a long and bloody, but at the same time glorious period, and started a new era personified by the common people’s state. In this state, all national forces – now united – were in the service of the people and not foreigners; all three peoples were now completely free and with equal rights, judged and managed by the laws passed by the national representatives (the National Assembly). The state that transcended all earlier divisions had been created, and it was the duty of all its citizens to guard it, to work and to be united and consequently, everyone would be happy and satisfied. In line with this concept, the contents which referred to the common history, and then to the history of the Yugoslav state, would gradually take up more and more space in the textbooks.

The Teachers’ Association, including the Association of Teachers of the Yugoslav State, took part in fostering these Pan-Slavic feelings and their institutionalization. A new impetus to these efforts was given by the Pan-Slavic Teacher Education Congress held in Poznanj from July 8 to 11, 1929. Among the key issues at the Congress was the reform of primary school teaching and organizing Pan-Slavic teaching. It was decided that this had a deep significance, “even in terms of the wider, national, Slovene,” and that this was a “great movement

30 Ibid.

for the formation of the unified spirit and of one Slovenian ideology in the organization of education and teaching.” One of the main tasks of the Congress was to determine the principles for a “Slavic pedagogy, which would create in primary and secondary schools the place and the feeling for social equality and democratic education”. On the last day of the Congress, the Pan-Slavic Teacher Alliance, based in Warsaw, was formed.³¹

Yet despite the efforts of the Ministry of Education to unify the curricula of all the primary schools throughout the Kingdom, the educational goals proclaimed in the Constitution were not achieved. The discussions on several drafts of the new unified law on primary schools had lasted from the creation of the Yugoslav state itself.³² In the debates that were held in the professional media over the national schools, an almost unbridgeable gap between the desired and the existing reality was pointed out. Professor J. Turić from Zagreb at this time highlighted that the draft law which anticipated an eight-year national school was completely unrealistic, stating the following facts: 1) 70% of the nation was illiterate; 2) the intelligentsia did not understand the necessity of educating the masses; 3) people did not know the value of education and science; and 4) the extant political and economic circumstances did not allow larger investments in education.³³

Among the public there was also a continuous and ongoing debate on the need for a fundamental reform of the school system. At the time of the Minister of Education Kosta Kumanudi, in the early days of December 1927, a wider commission of educators from across the country was established, with a mandate to draft a national educational program. One of the main demands was for a reform of the primary school system and the introduction of a unified curriculum and program. One of the resolutions made by the commission was that they had to implement the systematic opening of primary schools. As the existing four-year primary school did not suit this purpose, it was requested that primary school would last for 8 years: 4 years to cover the lower course, and 4 years for the higher, and that the lower course would be the same everywhere. The request was also issued to adapt primary school education to the “local and national needs.” Special requirements also referred to the development of curricula and textbooks for primary schools.³⁴ However, all the relevant key legislation in the field of education was not drafted until the proclamation of the dictatorship of King Alexander on January 6, 1929.

31 Sveslovenski učiteljski kongres u Poznanju. *Učitelj*, 1. septembar 1929, pp. 75–76.

32 Dimić. *Kulturna politika*, Vol. II, reference 127; Projekat zakona o narodnim školama za Kraljevinu Srba, Hrvata i Slovenaca. *Narodna prosveta*, 1. septembar 1921, p. 2.

33 Turić, J. Nacrt zakona za narodne škole. *Prosvetni glasnik*, 5–6, maj–juni 1922, pp. 353–357.

34 Novitović, Jerotije. *Rad na stvaranju državnog prosvetnog programa*. Beograd, 1928, pp. 1, 3, 25–27.

In the period after the proclamation of the royal dictatorship on January 6, 1929, there was a unification of the educational policy of the state as well. This unification was manifested by adopting a number of laws, including the Law on Textbooks and the Law on Public Schools. The Law on Textbooks for national civic school teaching and high schools adopted on September 27, 1929, stipulated that only the state editions of textbooks could be used. It turned out, however, that this provision was impossible to implement, and in 1938 the concept of a state monopoly on textbook publishing was abandoned. This meant that for public schools, an unlimited number of textbooks could be approved, and that every part of the country could have its own textbook adapted to the local conditions.

The Law on Public Schools was passed on December 5, 1929. In the spirit of the “sixth January idea”,³⁵ i.e. the ideology of integral Yugoslavism, the national schools were defined as “state institutions, with the task of teaching and education in the spirit of the state and national unity and religious tolerance, to prepare students to be moral, loyal and active members of national, ethnic and social communities; to spread the national education programme directly and indirectly through cooperation with cultural institutions for cultural enlightenment”. The classes in public schools became general and compulsory throughout the Kingdom, and were free as well. The state took care of opening schools, i.e. the creation of a school network, as well as paying the teachers’ wages.

It was determined that primary school would last for four years, and higher national schools the next four years. The education in all eight grades was compulsory. With the passing of such a law, the state authorities sought to unify primary education throughout the territory of the Kingdom, both in terms of duration as well as in terms of educational content. In the unified primary schools, a total of 14 subjects was taught. In addition to those provided by the curriculum from 1926, the new subjects of Housekeeping and Hygiene were also added; and for the children who did not speak the national language as their mother tongue, there might have been another class in language studies, which was not included in the compulsory education curriculum (Article 9).³⁶

Although the regulations determined that only the state-editions of textbooks could be used in primary schools,³⁷ there was not always consensus regarding this issue. Throughout the interwar period, not a single state-edition textbook was published for use on the entire national territory and discussions were also held regarding this issue by the General Education Council.

The introduction of the Sixth-January Dictatorship brought significant changes in virtually all fields of political and social life, including the field of

35 Adžić, Svetozar. *Pravni položaj narodnih škola* (Ph.D.manuscript). Beograd, 1941, pp. 41–42.

36 *Službene novine Kraljevine Jugoslavije*, Nr. 289, 1929; Dimić, *Kulturna politika*, Vol. II, pp. 122–128.

37 *Pravila o štampanju udžbenika za narodne i srednje škole*, pp. 107–112.

education. The main ideological thread of these changes was complete equalization and possibly the deletion of the existing differences in, what had been until then, the “three-named people”, in the spirit of the integrational Yugoslav nationalism. It was believed that the new generations, born after the Great War in the new country, without the burden of the older generations, would be the bearers of a new national life, whose core values would be acquired in schools organized on the new conceptual foundations. Particular importance in this process was given to the role of national (primary) schools and textbooks. It turned out, however, that it was not so easy to put the set norms into practice.

In history textbooks for primary schools, in the period after the proclamation of the royal dictatorship, changes were made which are visible in the adaptations to the new national policy, although the curriculum had already been adopted in 1927 and was in force until 1934. The *fil rouge* in these textbooks was historical content that testified to the closeness, connection and cooperation of the Yugoslavs. It was a historical argument of state national policy that needed to be incorporated into the awareness of primary school students. These changes were reflected on the terminological level as well, so that the name Yugoslav largely replaced national names.

Programming the teaching of history was consistently based on the principle of concentric circles which could be seen in the textbooks for the fourth grade of primary school. Only national history was taught in this grade as in the third grade, but at a higher level, so that the history textbooks had a richer content and more detailed chronology than the textbooks for the third grade. Although they were all based on the same curriculum, the textbooks of different authors varied noticeably, in their overview of Yugoslav history, as well as in other areas.

The concept of the curriculum and the textbooks for the third grade were entirely based on the biographical method, which was considered to be more appropriate for the transmission of historical knowledge to children at that age. History was taught according to the biographies of the nine most important figures in the history “of the Yugoslav people” who set the appropriate example for children to identify with, with the intent of effecting the formation of a mutual historical consciousness. These were: Cyril and Methodius, St. Sava, Kraljević (Prince) Marko, Knez (Duke) Lazar, Nikola Subic Zrinjski, Karađorđe, Štrosmajer, King Peter the Great and King Alexandar Karadjordjevic. All the textbooks were illustrated with these characters, as visualization was meant to reinforce the message that the biographies transmitted to the students.

The important historical events were shown as well to some extent within the biographies, but most of the presentations were devoted to the works done by these and other personalities for the national good, and to facilitate all aspects of

the national unity of the Yugoslav peoples. This primarily related to the biographies of Karadjordjevic, Strossmayer, King Peter I and King Alexander I, which were allotted more than half of the contents of the textbooks. These biographies suggested to the students implicitly and explicitly, that the greatest achievement of the entire history of the Yugoslav people was the creation of the single state, the greatest good of the Yugoslav nation. Moreover, the country of Yugoslavia was presented in the textbooks as an important international political factor because it advocated cooperation and friendship with all peoples and peace in the world.

The historical knowledge that was supposed to be adopted was in the form of isolated images (islands of history), most of which were related to each other. It was characteristic that the first two figures in a row, the two brothers Cyril and Methodius, were important for broader Slavic history, especially the history of the South Slavs. Other personalities were also allocated their significance for the histories of the individual Yugoslav nations, with examples where cooperation and unity were emphasized, especially in landmark events such as the Battle of Kosovo. Only the last three biographies, those of Strossmayer and, above all, Kings Peter and Alexander were clearly linked to the history of Yugoslavia. It stands out that there was not one person from Slovenian history. The disparity in the scope and structure of the individual biographies was also noticeable. All the biographies had in common an emphasis on the human and moral qualities and, above all, the protagonists' striving for the national well-being – even at the cost of their life.

The decisions of the educational authorities that the publication of textbooks should respect the particularities of certain parts of the country show that the model of cultural policy adopted by the royal dictatorship in 1929 had been abandoned. According to the new concept, distinctiveness was not in conflict with the idea of community and unity, and did not delineate boundaries in the spiritual life shared by the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes.³⁸ It was also a kind of announcement of major political changes in managing the country – including the education system – which was brought about by the creation of the Banovina of Croatia.

After the proclamation and legal implementation of the integrated Yugoslav ideology, history textbooks for primary schools were designated an extremely important role in its implementation. A new subject name was introduced for the teaching of history instead of the former name of the History of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes: National history. The selection of the teaching units and their content placed even greater emphasis on all that joined together or was common to some or all parts of the single Yugoslav nation, on everything that built the idea of the community realized by the unification of December 1, 1918.

38 Dimić, *Kulturna politika*, Vol. I, pp. 376–377.

This can also be seen in the predominance of lessons that relate to the mutual history of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes.³⁹

Historical contents referred to the closeness, connection and cooperation of Yugoslavs from the earliest times even more than previously. The state national policy was supposed to be internalized by students already in primary school, and its full expression was reached in the history textbooks. At the beginning of the thirties, especially following the implementation of the new curriculum for primary schools which came into effect in 1934, a new generation of history textbooks that fully reflected the new national educational policy appeared. Then the history of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes became even more emphatically Yugoslav history, and the change was also mirrored on the terminology level. The name of Yugoslav largely replaced national names, and it marked national history from the early Middle Ages. Some authors even introduced the term “the ancient Yugoslav”,⁴⁰ but it was not widely accepted.

In the fourth grade history textbooks, national history was studied at a higher level. These had a richer content and more detailed chronology than the third grade textbooks. There were significant differences between the textbooks by various authors, including the overview of the history of Yugoslavia, although they were all based on the same curriculum. In their presentations of what had unified Yugoslavs during the course of history and created their (imaginary) common history, some authors indulged in making hypothetical and ahistorical statements⁴¹ which reflected the even more emphasized integrative role intended for primary school history textbooks.

In the early thirties, the first textbooks that were able to analyze the relations in the new state appeared but, as always, the emphasis remained on the decisive role of the ruler and the Karadjordjevic dynasty. Despite the idealization of the past and the claim that the new state was the result of the aspirations and actions of all Yugoslavs, it could be concluded that there were serious difficulties in its functioning. In some textbooks, it was clearly emphasized that the new state was suffering from an old trouble, namely, discord among its leading figures. This was the main argument used to explain the necessity of introducing the royal dictatorship in 1929.

It was observed in professional circles that the history textbooks for primary schools were very comprehensive according to the curriculum of 1927, with a large number of new facts and words that were not adapted to the age of the students they were intended for. This was particularly the case with regard to

39 Vujanac, Milorad. *Istorija za III razred osnovnih škola u Kraljevini Jugoslaviji*, Beograd, 1932.

40 Prica, Dušan. *Istorija jugoslovenskog naroda (Srba, Hrvata i Slovenaca) za III razred osnovne škole po novom nastavnom programu*. Beograd, 1932, p. 12.

41 Vujanac, Milorad. *Istorija za IV razred osnovnih škola u Kraljevini Jugoslaviji*, Beograd, 1931, p. 8.

the textbooks for the third grade of primary school. After numerous debates in public and professional circles, the new curriculum for primary schools of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia was adopted on July 17, 1933, with the provision that it was to be implemented in the following academic year of 1934/1935.⁴² The main objective of history teaching was defined in the spirit of the Yugoslav national ideology: "Introducing students to the past of the Yugoslav peoples and education in the national spirit." According to the new curriculum, history teaching was organized somewhat differently than before because not only the ideological-political reasons were taken into consideration, but also the didactic-methodological remarks by the experts. The creators of the new curriculum fundamentally changed the concept of studying history in the third grade of primary school and adapted it to the reduced number of history classes in that grade, because instead of the former two there was now only one class a week. As before though, the history classes in the fourth grade still took place three times a week.⁴³

Out of 41 teaching units in the fourth grade, 16 (39%) were dedicated to the mutual history of the Yugoslav nations, 14 (34,1%) to Serbian, 6 (14,6%) to Croatian, 1 (2,5%) to Slovenian and 2 (4,9%) to the histories of Bosnia and Montenegro. The authors mostly adhered to the guidelines of the curriculum so that the mutual proportions of the units in their textbooks were similar to the listed ones. In one of the textbooks, the proportions were as follows: out of 40 units, 16 (40%) were allotted to the shared history, 13 (32,5%) to Serbian, 7 (17,5%) to Croatian, and 1 (2,5%) to Slovenian history, 2 (5%) to the history of Bosnia and 1 (2,5%) to the history of Montenegro.⁴⁴

From 1935 onwards, a whole new series of history textbooks for the third and fourth grade were published and the existing ones were adapted to the new curriculum. The year 1939 stood out by the number of published textbooks. In this period, the history textbooks for primary schools were finally shaped by the ideological postulates of the integral Yugoslav policy. The textbooks for the third and the fourth grades, though written using two different methods: the biographic and the chronological-progressive, were in many ways complementary and comprised a well rounded off whole. Together, they built a relatively complete system of historical knowledge of Yugoslav national history on a clear ideological basis – which was certainly what the educational authorities had intended, as in a predominantly agrarian society such as the Yugoslav one at the

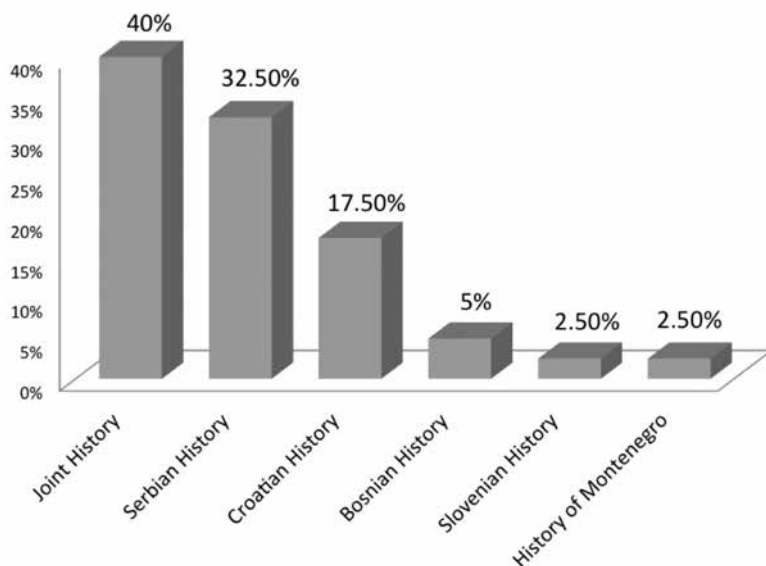
42 Nastavni plan i program za osnovne škole u Kraljevini Jugoslaviji. *Narodna prosveta*, 11, 10. Septembar 1933, p. 3.

43 Aranicki, Karadžić, *Najnoviji učiteljski zbornik svih zakona, uredbi*, p. 58.

44 Rabrenović, Milan. *Istorija Jugoslovena (Srba, Hrvata i Slovenaca) za IV razred osnovnih škola izrađeno po najnovijem nastavnom programu, Dvadeset prvo izdanje*. Beograd, 1935.

time, the education of the majority of the students ended upon completion of the fourth grade of primary school.

Chart 1: Structure of the textbook



(Source: Rabrenović, *Istorija Jugoslovena/Srba, Hrvata i Sloveneca*, 1935)

This generation of textbooks for the first time mentioned historical facts which explained some of the important events in greater detail. The image of the Yugoslav past, especially the most recent, was less idealized and was given more realistic contours. On the other hand, the presentation of some of the key historical events was reduced by ignoring some important facts; without doubt due to the influence of political reasons, especially the fact that a number of disputes reached their peak in those years. These were temporarily silenced by creating the Banovina of Croatia, but at the cost of abandoning the unitary state structure and the Yugoslav national ideology as well as the concept of a unified education policy. These changes were also visible at the terminological level because the term Yugoslavs (or “our people”) was re-used as an aggregate name for the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes. Compared to the previous curriculum, the new content was more comprehensive. Therefore the textbooks written in keeping with it were much more extensive.⁴⁵

45 Matović Miloš S. *Istorija Jugoslovena za četvrti razred narodnih škola*, Beograd, 1938; Prica, Dušan M. *Istorija jugoslovenskih naroda (Srba, Hrvata i Slovenaca) za IV razred osnovnih škola po najnovijem nastavnom programu*, Beograd, 1940.

In the history textbooks for the largest, primary school student population, history was almost completely identified with national history and was meant to consolidate and preserve the state and above all national harmony and unity. This way the history textbooks fulfilled the role assigned them – that of facilitating an emphatically patriotic upbringing. However it remains questionable whether and to what extent history textbooks were able to fulfill the tasks allotted them. Their success primarily depended on the attitude of the content of the textbooks and the cognitive ability of children aged 9 to 11, since research has shown that at this age students have difficulty in understanding the concept of historical time and orientation in it. At the same time, it is also difficult for them to understand general historical terms if they are not connected with clear and close associations.⁴⁶

Although some textbooks displayed noticeable efforts of explaining the events of national history and some key events of general history, for most students, history consisted mostly of centuries-old struggles (mostly by the sword, but also by music, poetry and pen) of their people against external enemies and their rule, which ended with the epochal act of unification of December 1, 1918. This general picture was used to build the image of the history of the Yugoslav state, which was presented as the beginning of a new era of peace, development and comprehensive progress that could not be fettered. It was suggested to the students, implicitly and explicitly, that the greatest achievement of the entire history of the Yugoslav people was the achievement of this unified state and that it served their ultimate good. Their ancestors had fought and died for it for centuries and its creator, King Alexander I the Unifier, who was its personification, had also given his life for it. This dimension of universality was added to this image of national history in order to present the Yugoslav state as an important international political factor because of its commitment to cooperation, world peace and friendship among all peoples. The Yugoslav state was idealized as a largely conflict-free community of equal citizens, who enjoyed all-round progress under its auspices. The conflicts that nevertheless occurred were merely the result of discord among the people's representatives, but the King as the supreme authority was bringing back and strengthening national unity.

In the second half of the thirties, the social and national contradictions in the Yugoslav state were more manifested. These contradictions were largely articulated in the so-called Croatian issue, in regards to which the ruling and opposition forces on the Serbian political scene were determined to hold their

⁴⁶ Pešikan, Ana Ž. *Nastava i razvoj društvenih pojmova kod dece*. Beograd: Zavod za udžbenike, 2003, pp. 118–130; Pešikan, Ana Ž. *Shvatanje istorijskog vremena kod dece*. *Nastava istorije*, 3, 1996, pp. 113, 119.

ground.⁴⁷ The discussions on restructuring the state were inseparable from the debate on Yugoslav national unitarism, which increasingly competed with the idea of the national individuality of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes. Some were of the opinion that the reorganization of the state on the federal principle, or giving lease to broad and unconstitutional governments were not mutually exclusive, and that centralism was dangerous to the idea of national integration.⁴⁸ The better organized Croatian nationalism, however, supported by the highly influential Roman Catholic Church, strongly emphasized the Croatians' right to their national identity and individuality, as well as their own statehood – whether within or outside of the Yugoslav state. The national homogenization of the Croats and their political demands were destroying the concept of Yugoslav national unitarism and encouraging the organization of Serbian cultural and political factors. One of the most influential among them was the Serbian Cultural Club.⁴⁹

By proclaiming the Banovina of Croatia on August 26, 1939, the remodeling of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia began. Centralist state organization was rejected, even though there was not a clear concept of the new state's organization. Since the Banovina was created on ethnic (national) principles, the concept of Yugoslav national unitarism which was inextricably linked with the belief in the centralist state was abandoned. This reorganization of the state meant finally dismissing the unitarian-centralist system of the country, or the victory of the principle of federalism and national distinctiveness.⁵⁰

In the process of the realization of the educational policy in the Kingdom of SHS / Yugoslavia, history textbooks for primary schools were one of the most important means of creating the new patriotism, and of the formation of the Yugoslav national identity among school youth. In order to achieve the projected goals, History was a compulsory subject in the third and fourth grade of primary school. The history textbooks for the third and fourth grade were designed according to the basic requirements of the state's national policy. Their contents aimed to build and shape proponents of the Yugoslav national idea.

With the introduction of the dictatorship of January 6 and the ideology of integral Yugoslavism, the year 1929 marked a turning point in the school system and in achieving the proclaimed state principles in schools. Obligatory eight-year primary school education was introduced in 1929 when the Law on Textbooks was passed for national, civic and teacher's schools. Resultantly, the

47 Dimić, Ljubodrag. *Istorija srpske državnosti*, Vol. III, *Srbija u Jugoslaviji*. Novi Sad: SANU, 2001, pp. 162–182.

48 Petrović, Milan. *Naš nacionalni paradoks: Jedan ili dva naroda?* Novi Sad: Jovanović i Bogdanov, 1938, pp. 8–10.

49 Ibid., pp. 197–206; Pavlović, Stevan K. *Hitlerov novi antiporedak. Drugi svetski rat u Jugoslaviji*, Beograd: Clio, 2009, p. 27.

50 Ibid., p. 192.

basic ideological premises based upon which the history textbooks in primary schools implemented the state's national policy, appeared in their "pure" form. From the beginning of the thirties onwards, especially following the introduction of the new curriculum for primary schools which came into effect in 1934, a new generation of history textbooks that fully reflected the new national educational policy appeared. During this time, the history of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes became even more emphatically Yugoslav history, and the change was also mirrored in the terminology used. However, the proclaimed goal of publishing uniform national textbooks was never achieved in practice. Privately published textbooks saw massive issues and the political events in the late thirties brought about the formal abandonment of the concept of state and national unity and broke the unique ideological basis of the school system in the country.