

Peter Vodopivec

# HISTORY EDUCATION AND HISTORY TEXTBOOKS IN SLOVENIA SINCE 1991

**“W**e shouldn’t deceive ourselves: Our image of other nations as well as ourselves is closely linked to the history we were told (and taught) when we were children,” the well-known French historian Marc Ferro pointed out in his book *How History is Told to Children All Over the World*. “In this first presentation of history, which marks us for our whole life and which for each of us is a discovery of the world and the past of societies, are enrooted our ideas...and there remain ....the traces of our first questioning, our first emotions indelible...”<sup>1</sup>

---

1 Marc Ferro, *Comment on raconte histoire aux enfants à travers le monde entiers*. Paris: Payot, 1986, p. 7. The book was first published in French in 1981 and already in 1984 translated into English under the title *The Use and Abuse of History, Or: How the Past is Taught to Children*, Rotledge&Kegan Paul, 1984.

Marc Ferro's book encouraged a group of Slovene historians and pedagogues at the end of the 1980s to begin a critical discussion on the history of education in Slovenia and in the then extant Yugoslavia.<sup>2</sup> In the 1980s, history was one of the least popular subjects among elementary and secondary school students in Slovenia. Overloaded with political facts and abstract quasi-sociological generalizations, 20<sup>th</sup> century history in particular was a subject laden with indisputable political and ideological messages, intended to secure the legitimacy of communist rule, demonstrate the "brotherhood of the Yugoslav peoples" and glorify the communist resistance during World War II and the development of postwar Yugoslavia towards communism.<sup>3</sup> The first critical discussions about history education in Slovenia had already started by the second half of the 1980s, but history curricula and history textbooks could only begin changing in the 1990s, after the fall of Communism and the demise of Yugoslavia.

## I

In Slovenia, the remodeling of history teaching and textbooks took place at the beginning of the 1990s, when Slovenia became an independent state, without exciting any particular political or public interest. A debate on school history education was initiated and organized by the Association of Historical Societies, which, as a non-political, civic organization, formed two working teams. These two teams then produced two proposals for new approaches to teaching history in elementary and secondary schools. Due to a lack of institutional support, the debate on the two proposals was so protracted that the final formulation of the curricula was not approved by the competent Expert Council for General Education until 1998.<sup>4</sup>

In their proposals, the authors of the new history curricula followed the example of the draft secondary school curriculum proposed by Professor Bogo Grafenauer of the University of Ljubljana already at the end of the 1970s. In Slovenia and Yugoslavia, the 1970s and 1980s were a period when the Communist authorities, more than ever before, had reshaped school history education into a

2 Milica Bergant, Tatjana Rozman, Peter Vodopivec, "Pouk zgodovine" ["History Teaching"], in *Nova revija* No. 89/90, 1989, pp. 1232-1265.

3 Peter Vodopivec, "Drafting Slovenia's New History Curricula. History Teaching in Central and East European Countries", in: *Beiträge zur Historischen Sozialkunde*, 2, 1996, pp. 18-21.

4 More information in greater detail can be found on this topic in my article: Peter Vodopivec, "The Politics of History Education in Slovenia and Slovene History Textbooks Since 1990", in: Augusta Dimou (ed.), *Transition and the Politics of History Education in South-East Europe*, *Studien des Georg-Eckert-Instituts zur internationalen Bildungsmedien Forschung* Band 124. V&R Unipress 2009, pp. 49-69.

tool of ideological and political indoctrination, due to which the gap between school history and professional historiography was deeper than ever after WWII. The situation being what it was, Professor Grafenauer argued for the coordination of school teaching orientations with academic historiography. He conceived his curriculum proposal as a chronological and thematic review of the basic historical processes, phenomena and institutions which characterize human development, stating that the focus of history teaching should be the most complex possible presentation of human existence in space and time – the historical experience of the Yugoslav and Slovene population being presented within this framework. Professor Grafenauer's curriculum tended in this respect towards a clear outline, without ideological bias, of the social and cultural history of the most important periods of the human past from its beginnings to modern times.<sup>5</sup> The proposed reorientation of school history from the eventful political surface to deeper cultural, economic and socio-historical aspects focusing more on contrasting historical situations and conditions than on the supposedly perennial (national-ideological) messages and values, was however not acceptable to the communist school politicians, who insisted that one of the most important tasks of teaching history was the transfer of revolutionary, patriotic and “progressive” national traditions and messages to coming generations. Grafenauer's draft of the curriculum was thus rejected, with the controversial argument that it was not sufficiently “Marxist”, nor “national” enough.

The working teams, however, which in the 1990s after the fall of communism and Slovene independence had prepared new curricula for history teaching in Slovenia, took the example of Grafenauer's draft on the one hand, and that of the modern - particularly the French and German - social and cultural historical literature on the other, as well as the materials of the Council of Europe devoted to history education, and proceeded in their work from the following premises:

History teaching should mainly focus on transformations of human society at different times and in diverse forms. Students/pupils should become acquainted with the main trends, institutions, events, situations, ideas and existential problems in all their varieties and durations. Attention should be focused chiefly on Europe as a cultural historical framework, with greater attention paid to national and regional history in primary school. Slovene heritage, history and culture should be given special consideration but, wherever possible, set within a broader European, Central European and South-Eastern European context.

5 Bogo Grafenauer, “Problematika izrade programa istorije kao obaveznog predmeta zajedničke programske osnove usmerenog obrazovanja u reformiranoj školi” ([“Some problems pertaining to the shaping of history curricula in the framework of the common program platform for the reformed, vocationally oriented secondary schools”]), in: *Pouk Zgodovine – Nastava povijesti*, Zagreb, No. 1, 1979, pp. 2-7.

History teaching should inform students on events as well as on historical processes. At both the primary and the secondary school level, teaching should be organized along chronological lines, and gradually change from a more narrative presentation to one more centered on topics and problems. History should certainly not consist of the rote learning of names and dates. Rather, it should help to develop an intuitive grasp of time spans, of phenomena, both changing and enduring.

History teaching will be able to address the many questions transmitted by the collective memory if individual and group experiences are themselves set in a broader spatial and temporal frame. History as a school subject should therefore be freed as far as possible of ideological and nationalistic catchwords and formulae. This does, of course, not amount to a rejection of political history. On the contrary, it calls for its integration into social, cultural, economic and chronological contexts.<sup>6</sup>

On the basis of the above starting guidelines the working teams designed comprehensive curricula for history teaching in elementary and secondary schools (gymnasiums),<sup>7</sup> both of which were conceived chronologically. At both levels, according to these guidelines, the subject should cover the entire time span from the beginnings of human civilization to the contemporary periods, whereby elementary school education should be more oriented towards events and “everyday life images”, and secondary school education to a thematic presentation of the most important currents and phenomena. At the elementary school level, more time was to be devoted to the national and regional past, and at the secondary school level, to European and World history. In European history, certain topics and particularities of Western, Central and East European history were to be specifically mentioned, while from studying the settlement of the South Slavs in the Balkans in the early Middle Ages onwards, students were also supposed to obtain a basic knowledge of Serbian, Croatian, Bosnian, Macedonian and Montenegrin history. Similarly, within the frame of the treatment of 20<sup>th</sup> century Slovene history, there were extensive chapters devoted to the first and to the second Yugoslavia.<sup>8</sup> At both levels, the curricula stimulated broadening

6 Peter Vodopivec, “Ob predlogu novega programa pouka zgodovine v gimnazijah” [“On the New History Curriculum in Gymnasiums”] in: *Zgodovinski časopis*, 48, No. 2, 1994, pp. 257-258.

7 Until 1999/2000, basic elementary school education in Slovenia was organized in two cycles: the lower encompassed grades one to four, and the upper grades five to eight with subject instruction. History was a compulsory subject from the fifth to the eighth grade. From 1999 to 2000, elementary school education was gradually extended from eight to nine years. Since then, history has been a compulsory subject from the sixth to the ninth grade. In the four higher grades of elementary school in Slovenia, a total of 235 hours are devoted to history; in gymnasium 280 hours are assigned to history over the course of four years.

8 In the original conception of the curricula, the ratio between the topics of Slovene (national) history and world history at the elementary school level was supposed to be 60% national history to 40%

the study focus from political to social, economic and cultural history which, naturally - considering the number of available lessons - was more easily done with the earlier periods than with contemporary history. However, the review of 20<sup>th</sup> century history was still conceived fairly traditionally since the authors of the curricula presumed that the political and historical events of “recent history” had marked the “contemporary world” to such an extent that they could not be simply summarized if one wanted to present them clearly.

As we could see during our meetings in Ljubljana and Tokyo, the premises/guidelines of the new history curricula proposed by the two working teams in Slovenia in the 1990s were similar in many aspects to the Proposal for the Japanese History Curriculum in Senior High Schools presented at our meeting in Tokyo in December 2010 by Professor Hiroshi Mitani.<sup>9</sup> Professor Mitani pointed out four principles which in his opinion the subject of history in senior high schools in Japan should be based upon. The first was the integration of national history into world history in primary and secondary school education. The second one was fitting the subject of history into the framework of global history by “stressing the connections of peoples on a global level: not only from the point of view of political and diplomatic, but also non-political relations, such as trade, migrations, the spreading of ideas, cultural influences etc.”. According to the third principle, special attention should be paid to East Asian countries with the aim of giving Japanese students a better and more concrete “understanding of the history of neighboring peoples”. And finally the fourth principle: “Special sections should help the students to understand long term phenomena: religious beliefs and practices, alterations to the environment, gender relations etc.”

Professor Mitani’s proposal limits itself to modern history, but in the same way as the Slovene one from the 1990s, it suggests that history education (on the senior/secondary level) should turn its attention from the eventful political surface to deeper cultural, economic and social historical currents. Let us take a brief look at some of the topics and constructs both proposals suggested teachers should pay particular attention to when dealing with so called Modern history; specifically, the period from the late 18<sup>th</sup> century onwards. The proposal presented by Professor Mitani began with “a bird’s-eye view of the world at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century” to show, as is stated, the “initial conditions of each region at the starting point of contemporary globalization” and the Slovene proposal for

---

European and world history and at the secondary school level (in gymnasium) 40% national history to 60% European and world history, but in the adopted final draft of the curricula these ratio versions were not specifically delineated.

9 Hiroshi Mitani, “A Proposal for the Japanese History Curriculum in Senior High Schools: Integration of the National History into Global History”, (Paper presented at the Meeting of the Japanese/Slovene group of historians in Tokyo on December 17 2010) .

the secondary/high schools began in nearly the same way: with the “known and unknown world at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, with the transition from the old (“ancien régime”) Europe to the post-Napoleonic Europe, with the growing role of the United States and wars of independence in Latin America, and with a brief presentation of the historical map of Asia and Africa.

The second section in the Japanese proposal was dedicated to regional history and to the various regions in Asia in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and a similar section in the Slovene one to Central Europe and the Habsburg Monarchy, to the Slovene and South-Slav regions, to international relations in Europe and its crisis areas (Italy, Germany, Poland) as well as to Russia in the East. The third complex of questions, envisioned by the Japanese proposal under the heading of The Acceleration of Globalization by the West focused on British and French relations in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the emergence of the United States, the French Revolution, the technological development of transportation and communications and on the beginnings of accelerated industrialization. All these topics were also included in the Slovene curricula proposal and, in the same way as in the Japanese proposal, there was also a special section dedicated to the impact of the economic changes in the West on the changes in other parts of the world; in the Japanese proposal above all to the changes in Asia, and in the Slovene one to the changes in Central and Southeastern Europe. In the Slovene curricula, greater attention was paid to the development of the urban settlements, to the changes of the agrarian landscape, and to the changes of the social structures of different European societies, while the Japanese one dwelt more extensively on the migrations and immigration in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. There was also a similar approach in both proposals to the topics dealing with the questions of nationalism, European colonial expansion, the economic growth of the USA, the progressive decline of the role of Great Britain in international trade, and European and world instability before WWI.

However, there are also obvious differences in the Japanese and the Slovene curriculum proposals. In the Slovene curriculum proposal, much more attention is still paid to political history than in the Japanese one. Topics like the French and European revolutions of 1848, the national integration movements and the political development of different European countries, are given much more consideration in the Slovene curricula than the political developments in Japan, China and other Asian countries are given in the Japanese one. The Slovene curriculum is also quite Eurocentric and pays relatively little attention to the world outside of Europe, or to Asia and Africa. In the topics dealing with the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the crisis of Imperial China and the Chinese Revolution before WWI, the modernization of Japan in the Meiji period and the Japanese-Russian War as well as the progressive decline of the Ottoman Empire

are briefly mentioned, while Africa is presented only in the context of European colonial expansion, which garnered rather salient criticism from Africans living in Slovenia and Slovene anthropologists. In contrast, when dealing with non-Asian history, the Japanese proposal pays attention nearly exclusively to the European West and the USA, giving only a cursory mention of Latin America, Russia, Eastern Europe and North Africa. An important difference between the Slovene and the Japanese curricula proposal is also that in the Slovene curriculum about 40%-50% of the topics are dedicated to national history, as in Slovenia, national history is traditionally integrated into history teaching on both school levels and is thus an integral part of contemporary education in history.

## II

The Slovene curricula proposed in the 1990s were outlined in a fair amount of detail for both the elementary and secondary level – not, however with the aim of teachers realizing them in their entirety, but mainly to serve as guidelines for teaching in classes. When preparing his/her annual curriculum, the teacher was to be much more independent than she/he had been in the communist period. Up until the end of the 1980s, a teacher had strictly to follow the curricula, but under the new guidelines, he/she could select topics from the curriculum framework she/he would devote more attention to because of their topicality or because they were of special interest to the students. In this regard, the proposers of the new curricula maintained that a properly trained teacher was a competent judge of his or her profession, capable of independently designing his/her annual curriculum. The authors of the curricula thus also avoided giving a detailed enumeration of didactic and teaching goals for each individual topic, and only briefly defined general study objectives.

The new curricula proposals and their orientations were supported by representatives of the profession, history professors at the University of Ljubljana and the Association of Historical Societies of Slovenia, yet some school teachers were at first not very happy about them. In the 1980s, teachers loved to complain that the strictly programmed curricula hardly left them any freedom; however, the new curricula, which enabled them to plan their lessons more independently and to devote more attention to social, cultural, and everyday life topics, perplexed them. Some teachers therefore found that the new curricula, which did not define in detail the “compulsory” study contents, were “not sufficiently precise”; and others objected to the broadening of the study focus to social, economic and cultural history, since they claimed that there was more than enough political

history which needed to be presented at school. The return to a curriculum that would define more precisely the “study contents” and “study objectives” was also supported by the National Education Institute - the central state institution responsible for the development of education. The curricula prepared by the working teams of the Association of Historical Societies were thus, without their approval, furnished with extensive didactic instructions along the lines of “the student should learn”, “the student should know” and “the student should be able to describe”, which only made the teachers even more perplexed.<sup>10</sup>

As a result, in the second half of the 1990s, the working teams which had prepared the new curricula attempted to familiarize teachers with the new study orientations at numerous professional meetings and seminars. Since the school authorities in Slovenia and the National Education Institute as the central state institution whose duty it was to monitor the modernization of the curriculum constantly failed to show any particular interest in introducing changes into the contents in history education, the debate on the modernization of history teaching was promoted by the new curricula authors themselves. In their organization of trainings for teachers, they relied on the recommendations and materials of the Council of Europe intended for history teaching, while some teachers and members of the National Education Institute also actively participated in the programs held by the Council of Europe on history education.

As a result of the increased attention paid to the training of teachers, the number of teachers who rejected the new curricula notably diminished. Simultaneously, history became a popular school subject again, which was evident not only from the growing participation of students at annual competitions in the knowledge of history but also from the fairly large number of secondary school students who chose history as one of the elective subjects in their secondary school graduation exam. However, the graduation exam tests also revealed that the history knowledge of students, even after the introduction of the new curricula, was rather weak. It turned out that although teachers had for the most part successfully abandoned the simplified ideological-political interpretative schemes applied in the time of the Communist regime, a not negligible part of them had instead resorted to a historicistic and one-sided nationally (even nationalistically) colored teaching of the subject. Students continued to encounter numerous details in the study of history, even at the secondary school level, which they were unable to make sense of or place in a broader time-and-space context. They generally had great difficulties with time and space orientation as well as with basic concepts such as feudalism, capitalism, liberalism, absolutism, parliamentarism, religious tolerance and freedom, and citizenship.

---

10 Vodopivec, “Politics of History Education”, p. 51.

The poor results of history tests in the secondary school graduation exams was further proof to the critics of the new curricula, that they had to be remodeled again in order to define more precisely the topics which the teacher should (more or less compulsorily) cover, while advocates of the new teaching orientations and of greater independence for teachers believed that these results served as an additional argument in favor of more intensive professional training for teachers. However, in the National Education Institute and in other institutions charged with teachers' training, the general pedagogues and didactic experts prevailed, who thought that teachers needed primarily more practical, didactic skills in order to raise the quality of teaching. Subsequently, not much attention was paid to the problems caused by the new subject orientations of history teaching such as the open issues - the most prominent amongst these being the post-communist interpretations of so-called recent history. Although following the fall of Communism, Slovene historiography had fairly steadily challenged the long prevailing communist interpretations of conditions in the Yugoslav and Slovene territories during WWII and of the post-war Yugoslav and Slovene political and social reality, different views of the "recent past" incited sharp public polemics. The authors of the new curricula advised the teachers to rely on the latest findings of historiography in the treatment of the recent, as well as of the more distant past, and to avoid as far as possible subjective (political) judgments. They also recommended that they listen to the students' viewpoints and commentaries, and if through their emotionally and politically colored views they had moved too far from historical facts, to try to point out the differences in the understanding and evaluation of historical processes and events. There was however no precise information about how teachers were to proceed under the new political conditions after 1990 and after the adoption of the new curricula dealing with the essence of teaching history in schools. Analyses performed by the National Education Institute and other institutions again devoted themselves mainly to the pedagogical and didactic aspects of teaching, and were only interested in the contents in terms of formal comparison with other curricula. Under such conditions, the ongoing efforts to create a closer link between history education and education for citizenship also failed. There were no clear recommendations given on how to include the civic related approach into history teaching, how to teach civic related topics and how to reflect upon them in order to make them part of the curriculum, which could substantially contribute to the transformation of the still overly traditional, historicistic and nationalistically oriented teaching of history into an open, citizenship-based school subject.

But in 2004 – some months after Slovenia became a member of the European Union – an important political turn occurred. The government coalition, which

had been led by the Liberal Democratic Party for almost twelve years, lost its majority and the new coalition, led by the Democratic Party, took over the government. The new coalition among other things and rather paradoxically, considering the very recent accession of Slovenia to the European Union, declared that it would pay substantially more attention to Slovene national interests in all areas, including education, than its predecessors had. While the Liberal Democrats, during the twelve years they had held the leading political position in the government, had underestimated the political relevance of history issues and interpretations, the leaders of the Democratic Party instead advocated rather populist, anticommunist views concerning Slovene 20<sup>th</sup> century history, Slovene and Yugoslav resistance during World War II and the post-communist WWII Slovene and Yugoslav past. The new Minister of Education thus argued that more attention should be paid in history teaching to topics that would fill students with “national pride” and which would have a positive impact on strengthening the Slovene “national identity”. History teaching was in his opinion (particularly concerning the period of WWII and the Yugoslav Communist regime) too “old-fashioned”. After a scrutiny of curricula and textbooks, the critics of history education which accepted such an evaluation mostly limited themselves to the individual enumeration of topics, events and persons with which the students “had to be familiarized”, while claiming in a generalized way that history education and historiography in Slovenia were not completely cleared of “judgments inherited from the Yugoslav and communist period”, and only once, when more attention than heretofore was devoted to national and patriotic educational goals, would they again become what they were supposed to be: basic shapers of the new “patriotic culture”.<sup>11</sup>

Teachers were naturally not enthusiastic about the repeated transformation of curricula and textbooks, nor did the new school politicians’ requests for an increase in the volume of “national history” and “patriotic contents” and topics enjoy any noticeable support among them. A similar standpoint was taken by the group of teachers, didactic experts and school counselors who prepared a new draft curriculum for history education, but who nonetheless at the same time advocated radical changes in history education - which not only deviated from the study orientations adopted and confirmed in the 1990s, but also from the long-term tradition of history education in Slovenia.

The new draft curriculum, prepared in 2007, thus partly distanced itself from the chronological and introduced a subject-oriented approach, whereby it

11 Milan Zver, “Da ne bi bili tujci v lastni kulturi” [“Not to Be Foreigners in Our Own Culture”], in: *Državljska in domovinska vzgoja*, [Citizenship-Oriented and Patriotic Education]. Slovenska Bistrica: Beja, 2006, pp. 18-21.

divided the topics meant to be treated at school into obligatory and optional.<sup>12</sup> Among the obligatory topics, to which 60% -70% of the available time was supposed to be dedicated, the prevalent topics were those of political history, the development of different forms of government, states and empires, and in matter covering the most recent period, the emergence of modern national movements, democratic political institutions and parliamentarism - while much less attention was paid to economic, social and cultural issues, which were mostly included amongst the optional topics. Teachers were supposed to devote from 30%-40% of the available hours to optional topics, in which they should include the most important social, economic and cultural issues, and in some historical periods also issues pertaining to religion and everyday life. Simultaneously, in each historical period, the obligatory and optional topics were divided into two blocks: general and European history, and Slovene national history. The general and European history block were designed very generally, and mostly from the Western European point of view, and did not stimulate teachers to focus on a more concrete presentation of differences in the development of various parts of Europe and of the world. The new curriculum also did not anticipate a detailed presentation of the history of South-Eastern Europe and of the Southern Slavs. As far as Europe was concerned, the curriculum recommended a more detailed presentation of specific conditions only in relation to some major nations and states, while the South Slav nations were only be dealt with in the context of the first and the second Yugoslavia. Also, it is suggested that the above two topics (the topics on the first and second Yugoslavia) were to be presented from the Slovene point of view. Similarly, the new curriculum no longer anticipated the coverage of topics which would direct teachers to a more extended treatment of the history of both Yugoslavias and Yugoslav communism. Even more: there was (and is) fairly little attention paid to communism, Communist movements and Communist regimes; more specifically it is stated that teachers should treat "communism" within the topic of "Totalitarian systems: Fascism, National Socialism, Bolshevism", and in the presentation of the "communist take-over of power" in Slovenia and in Yugoslavia after WWII.

The new draft curriculum for history education in gymnasiums was supposed to be publicly debated, but there has been almost no debate, since only some teachers and experts have been familiarized with the proposed changes, while the period anticipated for debate was too brief. As a result, mostly advocates of the teaching orientations adopted in the 1990s have responded to the new

12 See: *Program osnovna šola, Zgodovina, učni načrt* [Teaching Program for Elementary School History]. Ljubljana: Ministrstvo za šolstvo in šport, Zavod za šolstvo 2011; *Učni načrt, Gimnazija, Zgodovina* [Teaching Program, History, Gymnasium]. Ljubljana: Ministrstvo za šolstvo in šport, Zavod za šolstvo 2008 (also at: <http://www.mizks.gov.si>).

curriculum with critical objections, and declared that the new curriculum represents a “backward step”, since - by means of its obligatory topics – it limits the teachers’ hard-won independence and brings political topics back to the fore in history teaching, while pushing social, economic and cultural-historical themes into the background. In the proposed changes, they also resented the reduced volume of “Yugoslav history” and the reduced attention to the “recent Yugoslav and Slovene communist past”, while in conceptual terms they reproached the authors that, through partial abandonment of the chronological approach and clearer highlighting of long-term currents of development and processes, they have made it even harder for young people to acquire a clear understanding of the chronological orientation of events. Despite this, the governing school politicians considered that the new draft curriculum for history education in gymnasiums fulfilled their expectations. It is true that it has not substantially increased the volume of national history, but it did contain less Yugoslav history and less history of communism than to date, while some national history topics which stimulated patriotic feelings and stressed the Slovene independence process in 1989-1991 received special attention. The competent Expert Council for General Education approved the new curriculum for history education in 2008, without any particular debate.

Very little research is done on the teaching practices in schools from the point of view of the contents and messages transmitted, but it is more or less obvious that the social, economic and political processes are, in face of the actual political teaching, being pushed into the background again, while the prevailing focus is directed on political, even national political facts and political surface events.<sup>13</sup>

### III

Since the beginning of the 1990s and Slovene independence, there are no longer any legal restrictions on the publication of school textbooks in Slovenia. They can be published by state owned or private publishers, although only textbooks approved by a special state educational committee can be used in schools. This committee has again been evaluating textbooks primarily from the viewpoint of their linguistic and didactic suitability and their conformity with the curricula, but its standards were (and are) rather loose, since history

---

13 It is also clear that at least some of the more ambitious teachers were unhappy that their autonomy was limited again. “Slovene teachers, in comparison to the teachers in Finland, are overburdened with administrative obligations (teaching reports) and far too extensive school curricula”, pointed out the elementary school teacher Alenka Može in Ona, the Supplement of the Ljubljana daily *Delo*. See: Alenka Može, “Finska in Slovenija” [“Finland and Slovenia”], *Ona, ženski magazin Dela*, 6. November, 2012, p. 6-7.

textbooks which undoubtedly lacked the necessary professional qualities, have also been approved as suitable. It has thus been (and still is) possible to choose from among several textbooks for each subject and for each study level, while the final decision about which textbook is to be used is adopted by teachers or by school administrations.

History textbooks published in the 1990s and since 2000 have certainly been more attractive with regard to the graphics and general appearance than their “socialist” predecessors. Their authors - university professors and school teachers - have mostly succeeded in doing away with the simplified and schematic communist terminology and stereotypes. In particular, textbooks dealing with Greek and Roman, Medieval and Early Modern history, have devoted more attention than before to social and cultural history and to everyday life in the past. There has also been more coverage of Western European and non-European history. Nevertheless, authors who have designed school texts in a more dynamic/narrative and less dry/factual way, have been more of an exception rather than the rule, and most of them have not followed the guidelines from the beginning of the 1990s – not even in the didactic sense - since their textbooks have remained over-extensive, overburdened with facts and information, and for the most part have failed to render the historical contents in a way that would be attractive and understandable for young readers. The second “generation” of history textbooks, published from the end of the 1990s onwards, was less comprehensive, but not much less factual. There is even a tendency among some recent elementary school textbook writers to create the shortest possible texts - limited to actual facts and rendered in the form of questions and answers. However, this is in clear contradiction to the recommendations of the guidelines proposed in the 1990s aiming at transforming the then unpopular school subject of history into a narratively conceived, communicative subject which would be friendly to the young.

According to the new curricula in the school textbooks for the first secondary school level dealing with Ancient, Medieval and Early Modern history, general European and non-European topics prevailed, while national (Slovene) history has been presented in special chapters, with more or less modernized emphases. Authors describing conditions in the territory of present-day Slovenia during the time of the Roman Republic and of the Roman Empire thus still write about “Slovene territory under the Romans”, but they present the inhabitants of Early Medieval Carantania, which Slovene historiography had until recently proclaimed as a Slovene state, not as Slovenes but as Western (Alpine) Slavs. It is true that some textbooks mention that the Alpine Slavs were the predecessors of the Slovenes, and that Carantania was an “independent principality” of the

Slovene forebears, but even elementary school textbooks no longer designate the Carantanian Slavs simply as Slovenes. This is in compliance with the orientation of contemporary Slovene historiography, which rejects a one-sided projection of modern national concepts and designations onto periods in which there was still no national identification, which causes considerable difficulties for both the authors of the textbooks as well as the students and the teachers. In the context of early Slav history, somewhat more attention is also devoted to Eastern and South-Eastern Europe and to early medieval political formations in what is now Croatian, Serbian and Macedonian territory. The presentation of the migrations of the Slavs in the Early Middle Ages is, however, limited exclusively to an outline of the settlement of the Slavs in the Eastern Alps, i.e. part of (the present) Slovene territory.<sup>14</sup>

In terms of their contents, textbooks for the secondary schools (gymnasiums) dealing with the Middle Ages and early Modern Period history, are conceived similarly to the textbooks dealing with the period of Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages - except that they contain even less military and political history - while the main focus is on Western European social, economic, cultural and religious-ecclesiastical currents and developments. Compared with textbooks used during the time of the socialist Yugoslavia, these new textbooks contain notably less history of the Balkans and of the Southern Slavs (Croats, Serbs, Macedonians and Bulgarians), which are mostly mentioned briefly in synthetic chapters on European and world conditions. Surprisingly, little space is also devoted to the Ottoman Empire and to the Ottoman expansion into the Balkans, while "Turkish invasions of Slovene territory" are portrayed more in detail in the chapters dedicated to (Slovene) national history. In the entire period treated by textbooks for the gymnasium level (this being the period from the 10th to the beginning of the 19th century), Slovene history is presented primarily from the aspect of the administrative, political, ecclesiastical, cultural, social and economic development of the regions inhabited by the Slovene speaking population. Textbook authors designate as "Slovene" the provinces of the Austrian Crown Lands with a Slovene speaking population majority, yet nowhere do they give a clear explanation that the so called "Slovene" provinces were never homogeneously "Slovene" and that they were all that time also at least partly populated by German and Italian speaking populations as well.

It is true that it can be understood from some chapters that for a long period the Slovene speaking people were mostly subjects and peasants, while the nobility and the middle-classes were mainly of German and Italian origin, but the relations among the different population groups speaking different languages and the way

---

14 See: Stane Berezlak, *Srednji in novi vek, Zgodovina za 2. letnik gimnazij* [*The Middle Ages and the New Ages, History for the Second Grade of Gymnasium*]. Ljubljana: Modrijan, 2002.

these languages were used and what the various language practices represented with regard to the relations among different ethnic groups is not clearly explained. Nor do authors pay any attention to the loyalties of the population prior to the emergence of the modern nations and what bonded the inhabitants of the “Slovene provinces” at that time, although in some of the newest textbooks, the regional and provincial feelings of belonging are mentioned, which competed with the national ones even later in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century - after the formation of modern national awareness. It is thus obvious that the authors of the textbooks were (and are) trying to consider the viewpoint of professional historiography, in opposition to a generalized national concept of history and interpretations for the pre-national period and even after, but that they were, at the same time, having considerable difficulty in adopting more modern concepts and approaches.

The textbooks also do not pay any particular attention to the processes of the formation of modern nations, to the gradual affirmation of modern national awareness, or to the question of why modern nationalism is such a break with the traditional sentiments of belonging and loyalty.<sup>15</sup> Nations and national movements appear in the textbooks suddenly, without detailed explanations – starting in the outline of the beginning of the Slovene cultural movement at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century - apparently initiating trends towards the introduction of the Slovene language in schools, in literary works and in public. Textbooks for the gymnasium level dealing with the history of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, contain more detailed presentations of the national movements in Central and Western Europe in the first half of the century and point out that “people speaking the same language, who had the same culture and felt connected through history, wanted to live together in their own states”. However, they do not pay any particular attention either to the mutual, interacting Slav, German and Italian influences or to the cooperation between the educated people of different national origins in the formation of the early national movements, which would make it clear that the formation of the modern national awareness was a rather tolerant, interethnic and transnational cultural process and that the Slovene cultural movement at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> and at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century was also a result of such a transnational Slovene-German-Italian and Slav spiritual and cultural exchange.

15 In the newest edition, published in 2010, the authors of the History Textbook for the Third Grade of Gymnasium simply try to explain “Early Nationalism” with a quotation from Eric Hobsbawm’s book: *Nations and Nationalism*. In the short quotation published in the textbook, it is claimed that “modern nationalism” is a product of growing supra-regional economic and cultural communications, migrations, industrialization, the revolution in communications, and progressive secularization. Its final goal is however supposed to be “the accommodation of modern society to the needs of capitalism”. There is no concrete explanation added to this quotation and also no concrete example demonstrating how these changes influenced the feelings and the relations of different groups of populations. See: Janez Cvirn and Andrej Studen, *Zgodovina 3 [History 3]*. Ljubljana: DZS 2010, p. 56.

Despite the guidelines recommending that textbooks and teachers should pay more attention to social, economic, and cultural conditions in dealing with 19th century history in schools, political and factual history remains prevalent. The great social, economic and cultural changes caused by modern industrialization in Europe and the rest of the world in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, are presented in chapters encompassing about 15% to 25% of the total amount of text, while the presentation of the economic, social and cultural transformation in the so called "Slovene Provinces" is included in the chapters dealing with Slovene history. In the secondary school textbooks dealing with the 19<sup>th</sup> century, slightly more than 40% of the text is dedicated to Slovene history, and approximately 10% to the Habsburg Monarchy, while quite a lot of attention is paid to the (Slovene) national issue. The picture of the Habsburg Monarchy presented in the light of national oppositions remains one-sidedly dark, pointing out that their ruling German and Hungarian elites had no (or later in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century only little) understanding for the national aspirations of the non-German and non-Hungarian nations. The Slovene movement after 1848 is rather uncritically portrayed as a relatively large-scale or mass movement, and mainly from the aspect of Slovene national-political demands, cultural activities, political divisions, and individual cultural and political achievements. The political goal of the Slovene national movement in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century was the realization of the program adopted in 1848, i.e. the unification of all Slovene populated regions into a single, autonomous administrative and political unit within the Habsburg Monarchy, which it seems also represents a sort of national ideal to the textbook authors. The concepts of nation and national identification even seem to be so self-evident to them that they need no special explanation. The main focus is instead on the political struggles for national and linguistic emancipation through the introduction of the Slovene language into schools and the administration, which was without doubt of great importance for Slovene national development. However, at the same time, the Slovene relations to the German and Italian non-Slovenes living in the same provinces as the majority of the Slovene population, as well as to the nation's neighbors – the German-speaking Austrians, the Italians and the Hungarians – were and are represented only from the aspect of national antagonism and conflict.

Yet these antagonisms and conflicts are again nowhere or only superficially explained. From the textbooks it is obvious that the German and Italian speaking non-Slovenes living in the same Austrian provinces as the majority of the Slovenes were not in favor of, and even opposed to the Slovene national aspirations, but there is no clear explanation of the exact social and political background of this opposition. In one of the newest textbooks, published in 2010, it is only simply

maintained that the ruling nations of the Habsburg Monarchy, the Hungarians and the Germans, claimed certain rights for themselves, which they were not willing to recognize for the non-Hungarians and non-Germans. It is true that all the textbooks also contain extensive chapters dedicated to the most important events of German, Italian or Hungarian history, such as the unification of Germany and Italy, or the Hungarian Revolution in 1848, but their relations to the Slavs - particularly the Slovenes - as well as the opposite: the Slovene attitude towards them, are presented exclusively as antagonistic.

Based on this, we can conclude that the authors of the textbooks did not and still do not even try to pay more attention - although suggested by the guidelines formulated in the 1990s - to the everyday life realities and relations, which were often far less antagonistic, or even friendly; nor do they attempt to deal more extensively with the mutual influences in the political and cultural life of the era and the formation of the national-ideological concepts of the time. They also mostly refrain from or fail to explain in greater detail how it was possible in the given situation that the Slovenes had succeeded in developing in only about a hundred years, i.e. from the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> to the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, from a rather socially weak, and overwhelmingly illiterate people to a culturally developed and socially structured ethnic group, whose literacy according to the pre-WWI statistics lagged only behind the Germans, Czechs and Italians of the Habsburg Monarchy. The fact that modern nation building is not only a political, but also a social and cultural process, in which, in the Slovene case, the socially open Austrian educational and school system played a very important role, remains nearly completely overlooked. The middle class Slovene educated elites, which became the most important dynamic factor of the Slovene national movement before WWI, were namely formed in the relatively short time span of three generations - from approximately 1840 until 1910 - mainly thanks to the establishment of schools and a solid education system.

In this light, we can point out that the depictions of Slovene history and Slovene nation building since the beginning of the 1990s have changed and been modernized much more when dealing with the earlier historical periods, particularly the Middle ages than in the case of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the Slovene national movement before WWI, while the Slovenes' German, Italian and Hungarian co-habitants and neighbors are also still - and much like in the former Yugoslavia - portrayed above all as national adversaries and enemies, who hindered or even threatened Slovene national development. The only Slovene neighbors portrayed in more friendly colors were and are the Croats, although the newest textbooks pay only little attention to the history of Croatia and Slovene-Croatian relations; much less than was paid in the period of Yugoslavia.

All this is also characteristic of the textbooks for the fourth secondary school level, dealing with the 20th century,<sup>16</sup> as the basic structure of the topics and content in these does not substantially differ from the textbooks used in the last decade of socialist Yugoslavia. True, more attention is paid to economic, social, and cultural historical issues, but political and factual history nevertheless strongly prevail. The new textbooks, published after 1990, naturally differ essentially from their socialist predecessors in their interpretations of the two Yugoslav states (the Yugoslav Kingdom and communist Yugoslavia), the Slovene position within the framework of both, the relations among the individual Yugoslav nations, and the history of Communism and of WWII in the Yugoslav and Slovene territories. The portrayal of both Yugoslavias is again rather dark and presented above all in the light of national antagonisms, but the authors of the textbooks also clearly state that Slovenia developed rather quickly and successfully in both of them and that the great majority of the Slovene population and political leaders up until the final crisis in the 1980s were in favor of Slovenia's remaining a part of Yugoslavia, and that the possibility of Slovene independence did not enjoy wide popular support before the late 1980s. One of the weakest points of the Slovene history textbooks is that their authors often use ideas, notions and definitions, as well as present facts and events, without clearly explaining them. This is also true of the most politically controversial and publicly discussed topics, such as the history of Communism, the Communist movements and communist Yugoslavia. There is - in most of the textbooks - subsequently no clear explanation of the communist ideas and goals, nor a more detailed presentation of the political and social systems the Communists were opposed to. What's more, in the case of Yugoslavia, the picture of the Communists and the Communist movement is quite contradictory: in the chapters dealing with the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, the Slovene and Yugoslav Communists are portrayed as social revolutionaries radically opposing an unjust social, national and political system, while in the chapters dedicated to WWII, they are presented as anti-fascist and the main organizers of the resistance against the German and Italian occupying forces, to be followed by the chapters presenting the post WWII developments, where they are described - without any additional explanation - as the leaders and supporters of an extremely undemocratic, totalitarian system. All this is done in a supposedly "neutral", but in actual fact historicist way, by enumerating facts, and at the same time failing to advance any clear interpretation or evaluation, so that students

---

16 Božo Repe, *Naša doba, Oris zgodovine 20. stoletja* [Our Age, An Outline of 20th Century History]. Ljubljana: DZS 1995; Božo Repe, *Naša doba, Oris zgodovine 20. stoletja* [Our Age, An Outline of 20th Century History]. Ljubljana: Modrijan 2000. Ervin Dolenc and Aleš Gabrič, *Zgodovina 4* [History 4]. Ljubljana: DZS 2004.

using and reading the textbooks remain confused by the inconsistencies and lack of explanations and assessments.<sup>17</sup>

Also, the picture of Slovene relations with the country's neighbors in the history textbooks dealing with the 20<sup>th</sup> century seems, if possible, even darker than the picture of the first and second Yugoslavia. The focus is again nearly exclusively on the conflicts, although, granted, these are indeed difficult to avoid, as the Austrian/German-Slovene, Italian-Slovene and Hungarian-Slovene relations in the 20<sup>th</sup> century were far from being friendly. The large Slovene minorities incorporated into Italy and Austria after WWI had only very limited national rights in these two countries in the interwar period, and Italy and Germany (the latter with the participation of many Austrians) did, after all, occupy Slovenia during WWII and impose an oppressive occupying regime upon it. Subsequently, Yugoslavia's relations with both its neighbors were, owing to the long-time unresolved border issues and unfriendly Italian and Austrian minority politics, strained and antagonistic after WWII (especially until the end of the 1970s). Yet there has been - particularly since the mid-1960s - when communist Yugoslavia opened its borders also a lot of diverse and successful cooperation (economic, cultural and individual), which most of the textbooks almost completely fail to mention.

The one-sided focus on the antagonisms and conflicts between Slovenia and its neighbors present in these history textbooks is also in contradiction with the endeavors of the professional historians, who have - particularly in the last two decades - attempted to find some middle ground between the differing views and evaluations of the relations between neighboring countries in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century, and in 2001 even published a tri-lingual Slovene-Italian-English history report on Slovene-Italian relations in the period from 1880-1956 in a book form.<sup>18</sup> It is also well in opposition to the ambitious European projects of producing bi-national and multinational history text-books, which would tend towards overcoming past conflicts and the diverse history interpretations founded in them.

To conclude: Slovene historians still have much work to do to modernize the country's history textbooks and particularly their presentations of the Slovene national history and Slovene relations with its neighbors. The greatest problem is that there is little interest in Slovenia in the discussion on how history is taught in schools and in what way it is presented in the textbooks; and that, among

17 Peter Vodopivec, "Communism and Communist History in Slovene and Croatian History Textbooks", in: Maria Todorova (ed.), *Remembering Communism, Genres of Representation*. New York: Social Science Research Council, 2010, pp. 335-345.

18 *Slovensko italijanski odnosi 1880-1956. Poročilo slovensko-italijanske zgodovinsko-kulturne komisije. I rapporti italo-sloveni 1880-1956. Relazione della commissione storico-culturale italo-slovena. Slovene-Italian Relations in 1880-1956. Report of the Slovene-Italian Historical Commission*. Ljubljana: Nova revija 2001.

the didactic and general pedagogy experts who unfortunately have a definitive influence on the country's educational politics, there is a much greater interest in the pedagogical and didactic aspects of teaching than in the contents and messages that are transmitted. The main focus of the history textbooks and history teaching is thus still on the political and social surface of events, although some of the newest, most recently published textbooks, also contain special chapters which present accounts of everyday life and social and family relations in the past. The perspective from the bottom up is a sort of a parallel and not an integrative teaching outlook, and above all, not an approach which would help the students to understand more clearly the complex and often contradictory historical, political, social and national reality. In this sense, Slovene history textbooks, as well as Slovene history teaching, are still in a process of transition and there are still no clear recommendations on how to teach young people about the national and the European past in order to help them towards gaining greater insights in their contemplations and their ideas of the present.