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HISTORY TEACHING IN CROATIA (1990-2012)

The period of intensive political changes during and after the break-up of Yugoslavia (as a part of wider changes in Europe caused by the collapse of communist regimes) had a strong impact on history teaching in Croatia. The first multiparty elections in Croatia after the Second World War were held in April and May 1990. The former League of Communists of Croatia, then re-named the Party of Democratic Changes (and now called the Social Democratic Party, hereafter: SDP), lost power. The elections were won by the right-nationalist Croatian Democratic Union (Hrvatska demokratska zajednica, hereafter: HDZ), which also won subsequent parliamentary elections in 1992 and 1995, which enabled it to maintain the monopoly in decision making about all relevant issues of societal life, including (history) education.¹

1 Snježana Koren, Branislava Baranović, "What Kind of History Education Do We Have after Eighteen Years of Democracy in Croatia? Transition, Intervention, and History Education Politics (1990-2008)", in Augusta Dimou (ed.), *"Transition" and the Politics of History Education in Southeast Europe*. Göttingen: V&R unipress, 2009, pp. 91-140.

In these political circumstances, educational issues were primarily treated as political ones and education underwent changes that were significantly influenced by the dominant ideology of ethnic nationalism. As a part of the so-called “national subjects”,² history education and textbooks were among the areas where this political influence was the most perceptible. History teaching was charged with the task of supporting the process of nation and state building and fostering of the Croatian national identity. The importance attached to history also found its reflection in the increased number of hours per week dedicated to history teaching: in the school year 1991/1992, additional school periods were devoted to history in the fifth grade of elementary school, and it became an obligatory subject in all four grades of the gymnasium, in the first two grades of the four-year vocational schools, as well as in the first grade of the three-year vocational schools. There were also significant interventions in the contents of history education. These were first conducted on the textbooks, and only later on the curricula. Their introduction was facilitated by the existence of only one textbook per grade as well as by retaining the highly centralized educational system regulated by the Ministry of Education.³

The so-called “de-ideologization” was characteristic for the first changes in history teaching conducted in curricula and textbooks inherited from the socialist period at the beginning of the school year 1991/1992. This term was used to denote the process of removing from historical narratives the interpretations inspired by the Marxist view of history, as well as other ideological layers of the Yugoslav Communist regime (such as overemphasizing the history and the values of the so-called “National Liberation Struggle”, the cult of Tito, the history of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia, the ideology of “brotherhood and unity” etc.). But, in the end, this process mostly amounted to exactly the opposite: the replacing of one ideology with another⁴ - a development which will be discussed later in the text. However, the structure of the textbooks dealing with the earlier historical periods (separate chapters on general history, Croatian history and the history of the other Yugoslav peoples, each allocated cca. 30 percent of the textbooks) and the Yugoslav framework were both still kept intact. Mayor changes,

2 This term has been in use at least since the end of the 19th century, referring to subjects that are supposed to convey specific cultural and political traditions of the nation (such as language, history, geography, and music).

3 The ministry in charge of education has changed its name and its field of activities several times since 1990. It used to be referred to as the *Ministry of Education and Culture*, the *Ministry of Education, Culture and Sports*, the *Ministry of Education and Sports*, and, since 2004, the *Ministry of Science, Education and Sports*. Hereinafter in the text, it is referred to as the Ministry of Education.

4 Wolfgang Höpken, “History Education and Yugoslav (Dis-) Integration”, in Wolfgang Höpken (ed.), *Öl ins Feuer? – Oil on Fire? Schulbücher, ethnische Stereotypen und Gewalt in Südosteuropa. Textbooks, Ethnic Stereotypes and Violence in South-East Europe. Studien zur internationalen Schulbuchforschung, Band 89*, Hannover: Hahnsche Buchhandlung, 1996, pp. 163-192.

however, were already introduced in the textbooks dealing with 20th century history where the same group of authors that had written the previous textbook from the late 1980s offered a new book. In the new textbook from 1991, the number of pages and lessons dedicated to the history of the “workers’ movement” and the Communist Party of Yugoslavia were significantly reduced and replaced with lessons on the history of the bourgeois political parties. The role of the Croatian Peasant Party in dealing with the Croatian national question in the interwar period was emphasized.⁵

However, it was the topic of World War II in Yugoslavia that underwent the biggest modifications. The 1941-1945 war, which in Yugoslavia was called “The National Liberation Struggle” (*Narodnooslobodilačka borba*, hereafter: NOB), was a topic of particular significance in the history curricula and textbooks of communist Yugoslavia. With its emphasis on the “common struggle of all Yugoslav nations against the occupying forces and collaborators” (as the phrase goes) and the unity of the NOB and the socialist revolution, it was meant to provide the basis of legitimacy for the Yugoslav Communist regime.⁶ Textbooks in the 1980s still paid an extensive amount of attention to the NOB – about 40% of the curricula and textbooks were dedicated to it - and the textbook narrative was marked by belligerent terminology and emotionally charged language. In the 1991 textbook (which was, by the way, written by the same group of authors as the previous textbook from the late 1980s⁷), the number of lessons was drastically reduced (from 14 to 6), the liberation struggle was no longer equalized with the socialist revolution, while the phrase about the “*brotherhood and unity* forged in the common struggle of all Yugoslav peoples against fascism” (common in that period) was replaced with statements about the “heavy civil war” caused by “political, social and religious differences”.⁸

The war in Croatia (1991-1995) radicalized this orientation, while the proclamation of independence (1991-1992) created new circumstances, where supp-

5 Snježana Koren, “Slike nacionalne povijesti u hrvatskim udžbenicima uoči i nakon raspada Jugoslavije”, *Historijski zbornik*, LX, 2007, pp. 247-294.

6 On the other hand, different interpretations of the NOB among the political and intellectual elites of the six Yugoslav republics (about the role of each of the Yugoslav nations during the war and their merits in the creation of the second Yugoslavia), which found their reflections in the respective history textbooks (i.e. each republic produced its own textbooks), also served in certain periods as an indicator of a deeper inter-ethnic breach, especially in Croatian-Serbian relations. Snježana Koren, *Politika povijesti u Jugoslaviji (1945-1960): Komunistička partija Jugoslavije, nastava povijesti, historiografija*. Zagreb: Srednja Europa, 2012; Eadem, “Udžbenik iz 1971. i udžbenici o 1971: udžbenički narativi i politike povijesti 1971-2011, in Tvrtko Jakovina (ed.), *Hrvatsko proljeće: 40 godina poslije*. Zagreb: Centar za demokraciju i pravo Miko Tripalo, Filozofski fakultet u Zagrebu, Fakultet političkih znanosti u Zagrebu, Pravni fakultet u Zagrebu, 2012, pp. 309-332.

7 R. Lovrenčić, I. Jelić, R. Vukadinović, D. Bilandžić, *Čovjek u svom vremenu 4: udžbenik povijesti za VIII. razred osnovne škole*, I. izdanje. Zagreb: Školska knjiga, 1991.

8 Koren, „Slike povijesti“, pp. 258-274.

orting the process of nation and state building was given priority over a necessary pedagogical reform of history education. This was especially characteristic for changes conducted in the school year of 1992/93, when new or thoroughly revised textbooks were published (without changing the curricula!). Their publishing was preceded by the first big textbook affair in spring 1992, when history textbooks became the matter of debates in the Croatian Parliament, amongst the parliamentary Committee for Education, Science, Culture and Sport and the politically controlled press. Some of the existing textbooks came under strong political attack by some members of Parliament (from the HDZ) because of their “pro-Yugoslav content”. The Ministry of Education and the Minister himself were accused for the “failure of cleaning the textbooks of everything that is not in the service of the Croatian state”. As a result, the Minister resigned, some textbooks were withdrawn and part of the history program suspended, under the official explanation that they were “obsessed with Yugoslavia” and “imbued with the Yugoslav unitarian spirit and based on Marxist-materialistic ideology and class consciousness” (April 1992). At the beginning of June, the new Deputy Minister of Education (at the same time, also a highly ranking official of the HDZ, Chair of the Parliamentary Committee for Education and future president of the Croatian Parliament), submitted his report on the history textbooks in which he strongly criticized some of them, especially those dealing with the 19th and 20th century. However, he also offered his interpretations of certain events (for example, of the First and the Second World War) which subsequently found their way into some of the new history textbooks published in the school year of 1992/93 (!). In the following years, the textbook content was additionally controlled by establishing the office of the Ministry’s Special Consultant for History Textbooks who had a final say in the textbook approval procedure over the next five years.⁹

“Singling out Croatian history from the Yugoslav context” became the motto of the changes conducted in the new generation of history textbooks produced in the school year of 1992/93 (or “de-Yugoslavization” and “renationalization” as referred to by W. Höpken in his comparative analysis of post-Yugoslav textbooks in the first half of the 1990s¹⁰). These new textbooks firmly promoted the ideology of Croatian statehood – in their narrative, the continuity of the Croatian state from the Middle Ages to the present day was (over)emphasized, and the whole of Croatian history was mostly presented as a struggle to create an independent national state. National history was now predominantly understood as the history of Croats (as the majority ethnic group), and not only those living in Croatia, but also in the neighboring countries, especially in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Ethnic

9 Ibid, pp. 261-271.

10 Höpken, “History Education and Yugoslav (Dis-)Integration”, pp. 163-192.

minorities were mostly not seen as an integral part of the national narrative and their contribution to the national history was largely ignored. Where textbooks once emphasized similar historical experiences and the common historical destiny of the South Slavic people – which was still characteristic of the textbooks in the late 1980s – they now built the national identity on stressing differences between, and a separation from, the former compatriots. A further consequence was the reduction of the content matter dedicated to the history of the latter, which was either completely omitted (e.g. the Macedonians), or significantly reduced. The only exception was the history of Bosnia and Herzegovina which retained the same amount of volume as before, but was mostly included in the units on Croatian history. This strong ethnocentric approach advocated by the 1992 textbooks was finally sanctioned by the 1995 curriculum which set the ratio between world and national history at 40:60% respectively, and prescribed that “we study our historical relations with the world in both past and present times from the standpoint of national history”.¹¹

Although the topics that were subjected to intervention (i.e., re-interpretation) ranged from the Middle Ages to the most current events, it was the history of the two Yugoslav states, and especially the topic of the Second World War in Yugoslavia, that underwent the most dramatic modifications. In the 1990s, the HDZ leadership, together with President Franjo Tuđman (1990-1999), promoted the idea of “national reconciliation” among the former war adversaries (the Partisans and the Ustasha) and their descendants, based on the synthesis of state-building elements from the different political and ideological options originating from the Second World War as the basic precondition for the creation of the independent Croatian state. In accordance with this orientation, the new textbooks offered a significant change of content and perspective. The whole Yugoslav experience was evaluated negatively and, through a biased selection of negative examples, the Yugoslav episode was stripped of any positive historical memory. Probably the most contested part was the way the history of the Second World War and the National Liberation Struggle were dealt with. The manner in which this entire question was treated gave a strong impetus for historical revisionism regarding the NDH and the Ustasha movement - in politics, as well as in public discourse. In the new interpretative paradigm, every Croatian state in the past, including the pro-Fascist Independent State of Croatia (*Nezavisna država Hrvatska*, hereafter: NDH) during the Second World War, was presented as a positive historical fact. Ustasha atrocities against Serbs, Jews and Romanies were marginalized, while those committed by the Chetniks and Partisans against

11 *Okvirni nastavni plan i program za osnovne škole u Republici Hrvatskoj (izmjene i dopune)*, Glasnik Ministarstva prosvjete i športa Republike Hrvatske, posebno izdanje, br. 1, Zagreb, 1.8.1995.

the Croats were given priority. At the same time, textbooks paid considerable attention to the “Croatian Antifascist Movement”, which was, however, separated from the rest of the Yugoslav context and primarily placed in the context of creating the Croatian state within the Yugoslav federation. Among the historians, a small group actively supported the authorities in their shaping of a new historical memory about World War II; some of whom had a strong impact on history teaching because they were actively engaged in the creation of new textbooks and curricula.¹²

Thus, the war in Croatia (1991-1995) contributed to the radicalization of narratives and forestalled necessary discussions about the methodology and aims of history teaching, as well as of the basic underlying values promoted through history education. In such circumstances, history textbook authors continued to adhere to the “official” version of history controlled through detailed and prescriptive history curricula and the textbook approval procedure. The pedagogy of history teaching constantly received less attention than the content of the history curriculum. There was also a great deal of continuity in the methodological approaches and in the way the purpose of history teaching was perceived with the history teaching and textbooks from the Communist period. Consequently, the calls for changes in history education which intensified after 1995, and which offered a different understanding of what history education is all about, have, to a great extent, meant coping with both the heritage of the Communist period, as well as that of the first half of the 1990s.¹³

In the second half of the 1990s, there were two distinctive directions that reflected the different interests and pressures affecting and shaping history teaching. On the one hand, educational authorities endeavored to consolidate history education exactly on those foundations which were laid in the first half of the 1990s. The ethno-national paradigm that had been built since the beginning of the 1990s was given its most rigid expression in the history curricula from the mid-1990s and in some textbooks approved by the Ministry of Education, especially those dealing with 20th century history. The history curricula for primary and secondary schools introduced in 1995 (with some minimal changes

12 Koren, Baranović, “What Kind of History Education Do We Have after Eighteen Years of Democracy in Croatia?”, pp. 118-119; Snježana Koren, “Nastava povijesti između historije i pamćenja: hrvatski udžbenici povijesti o 1945”, in Sulejman Bosto, Tihomir Cipek (eds.), *Kultura sjećanja 1945: povijesni lomovi i svladavanje prošlosti*. Zagreb: Disput, 2009, pp. 241-245.

13 Koren, Baranović, “What Kind of History Education Do We Have after Eighteen Years of Democracy in Croatia?”, pp. 99-101.

in 1997 and 1999) were written single-handedly by the ministry's special consultant for history textbooks, which effectively meant that one and the same person had almost complete and simultaneous control over the creation of the history curricula and textbook approbation. However, probably the most peculiar aspect of the 1995 curricula was the way in which they were pieced together from titles and subtitles of textbooks published after 1992. Thus they reproduced the structure and ideological presumptions of these textbooks, which consequently was reflected in both the textbooks and the classroom approaches in the following years. It is worth noting that the secondary school curricula developed in the mid-1990s are still in force.¹⁴

On the other hand, one of the main factors of change in the second half of the 1990s was the introduction of textbook pluralism, i.e. the emergence of the system of multiple textbooks per grade. This was introduced for the first time in the school year of 1996/1997.¹⁵ Eventually, these new textbooks, although still written on the basis of the same curricula and mostly traditional in their methodological approach, gradually offered improvements in design, more moderate language, and in many cases, a more complex, leveled, and balanced presentation. The emergence of alternative textbooks did not, however, immediately bring about the diminishing of state control over textbook production. For another couple of years, the Ministry of Education kept the process of textbook approval and production in its hands and continued to use the office of special consultant as a means of overturning the decisions of textbook selection committees. It is also important to note that during the 1990s only two authors were allowed to publish textbooks on 20th century history for primary schools and the different types of secondary schools. In the secondary schools, some of the most controversial and most criticized textbooks were used for 20th century history¹⁶ and the first textbook which to a certain extent stepped out of the existing paradigm was approved only in 1999,¹⁷ whereas in primary schools, it was not until 2000 that parallel textbooks were approved.

Simultaneously, the debates which opened in the second half of the 1990s started to question the existing paradigm and the politics of history education. Some Croatian historians and journalists, as well as several international experts, repeatedly raised several issues: the critique of the history curricula, the procedure

14 Ibid.

15 For example: Damir Agičić, "Kako do europske nastave povijesti" ["Which Way to a European History Education"] in *Hrvatska revija*, 4, 1998 and "Udžbenici bez ideologije i demagogije" ["Textbooks Without Ideology and Demagogy"] in *Večernji list*, 20.9.1998.

16 In the 4th grade of gymnasium, two textbooks were used in parallel; those of Ivan Vujčić and Ivo Perić. Different textbooks of Ivan Vujčić were also used in vocational schools and that of I. Perić, as the only textbook without alternative, in primary schools (*Povijest 8*. Zagreb: Alfa 1998).

17 This was a textbook for the 4th grade of gymnasium: *Povijest 4*. Zagreb: Profil 1999.

of textbook selection, and the contents of the history textbooks, especially those dealing with 20th century history. Journalists primarily focused on textbook content and problematic aspects in some textbooks, especially those dealing with the 20th century. Historians – mostly from the Faculty of Philosophy in Zagreb – viewed the impact of the government on history teaching as predominantly negative, but their opinions were largely ignored by the educational authorities. The historians repeatedly pointed to the curriculum as the main problem and the cause of the inferior quality of the textbooks and criticized the Ministry of Education for the nontransparent procedure of textbook selection.¹⁸ Nevertheless, the introduction of multiple textbooks was greeted with mixed feelings. Among the Croatian historians there were many who believed that it is the state who must determine from which textbook students will learn. Furthermore, the prevailing attitude among historians and educationalists in the field of history teaching at the time was that it was not up to textbooks to debate historiographical problems and different interpretations. Discussions were still largely focused on the content of history education and only rarely was there any criticism from the pedagogical and methodological point of view.¹⁹

Finally, there were certain influences in that period which came from abroad. Representatives from the Ministry of Education, and some academics who were involved in writing history textbooks, regularly attended seminars and conferences organized by the Council of Europe or UNESCO. Analyses of Croatian textbooks from abroad were also of certain importance.²⁰ Direct intervention was mostly connected with the role of the international community in introducing the moratorium on teaching contemporary history in the Danube Basin region (Podunavlje). When Croatia regained control over most of its territory in 1995, only the eastern-most part – Podunavlje (the Danube region) – remained under the control of the local Serbs. In November 1995, with the assistance of the international community, the Erdut Agreement was signed between the Croatian government and the local Serbs, placing Podunavlje temporarily under the jurisdiction of the UN Transitional Administration - until 1998, when Croatia regained full sovereignty over its entire territory. In 1997, a letter of agreement was signed as an annex to the Erdut Agreement, which ensured the educational rights of the Serbian minority. The agreement included the implementation of a five-year embargo (“the moratorium”) – from school year 1997/98 to 2002/2003 – on teaching contemporary Croatian history in classes of Serbian pupils. Since

18 See, for example, “Između mitologije i povijesne istine. Kakvi su nam udžbenici?” [Between Mythology and the Historical Truth. What Kind of Textbooks Do We Have?], in *Vijenac*, 5.11.1998.

19 Koren, Baranović, “What Kind of History Education Do We Have after Eighteen Years of Democracy in Croatia?”, pp. 135-140.

20 *Ibid.*, p. 105.

Podunavlje is one of the Croatian regions that were mostly affected by the war, the intent of the moratorium was to avoid situations where history education might be used as a means of separation and the promotion of intolerance, and subsequently contribute to new cycles of violence.²¹

The political changes in January 2000 (the electoral defeat of the HDZ and the coming to power of the coalition government led by the Social Democrats) had given impulses to new governmental initiatives for the reform of history teaching. These political changes, moreover, re-ignited public debates on the school history textbooks from the 1990s, which was a part of the wider debates about the heritage of the Tuđman period, especially about its problematic aspects. These debates were prompted when the Ministry of Education established in April 2000 – three months after the elections – the Commission for the Evaluation of History Textbooks Inherited from the 1990s.²² Its members were partly historians, mostly from the Faculty of Philosophy in Zagreb, and partly history teachers. Although the head of the Commission insisted in his public appearances on the apolitical nature of the Commission and described its task as merely the evaluation of the quality of the existing texts (which was obviously due to political attacks),²³ the Commission's work was designated a "textbook revision" in public, and the Commission's activities were opposed by various groups and individuals, most vehemently by those who had participated in defining history education in the 1990s.

In its cautious report of June 2000, the Commission negatively evaluated some textbooks from the 1990s and proposed, as a temporary measure, the thorough rewriting of the most problematic ones. The Commission also recommended – as a more permanent solution – the creation of new history curricula during the following year, and the subsequent creation of new textbooks. It also suggested seminars with the participation of international experts for the authors of curricula and textbooks, as well as study trips abroad. However, the demands for history teaching that stimulated students' critical-thinking and analytical skills – which had been expressed by certain historians, history educators and history textbook authors since the mid-1990s – did not find their way into the

21 Ibid., pp. 124–126.

22 Debates regarding the history textbook commission in 2000–2001 were also analyzed by Brigitte Le Normand "The Present Reflected in the Past: Debates Over History Education in Croatia, 1996–2000", in: *Working paper*. History Department, UCLA, 2003.

23 See, for example, the article "Nije riječ o reviziji udžbenika" ["It's not about the textbook revision"] written by the chair of the Commission in *Vjesnik*, 12.5.2000.

Commission's report. Thus, the Commission's conclusions in that respect lagged behind what was already present in the educational discourse.²⁴

Ultimately, almost none of these moderate requests were implemented; as the Commission emphasized in its second report in January 2001, most publishers ignored these recommendations, and the Ministry of Education took no further steps after the report had been submitted. During the mandate of the coalition government, the history curricula were not changed, nor were any of the textbooks that the Commission had denoted as the most problematic withdrawn (although the approbation for some of these textbooks was annulled after they had obtained less than 10 percent of the market share for three years, a process enabled by provisions of the new Law on Textbooks from 2001). The ministry's reluctance to deal with these issues was clearly due to the other political problems the coalition government had to deal with and any actions that could additionally charge the already tense political atmosphere were avoided. Thus, in the second part of the mandate of the coalition government, the reform of history education lost its momentum.²⁵

Additionally, the Commission's work and other described activities incited a debate (in newspapers as well as at round tables) on which interpretations of World War II in history textbooks played an important role. The Croatian history textbooks from the 1990s had frequently been criticized inside and outside of Croatia because of the ambivalent way they dealt with the problematic aspects of Croatia's past during the Second World War.²⁶ As a result of these debates and critiques, most textbooks that have been published since 2000 have abandoned the interpretative paradigms from the 1990s (or at least their most controversial aspects), although in some of them there are still underlying assumptions which to a certain extent reflect those paradigms. Over the following years, disputes on interpretations of the Second World War continued, and other actors took part in the debate as well. Among them were some veterans from World War II organizations, yet although the latter rightly warned about the way this topic was dealt with in the 1990s textbooks, the interpretations they offered mostly did not go beyond the old paradigms from the Communist period. On the other side

24 Koren, Baranović, "What Kind of History Education Do We Have after Eighteen Years of Democracy in Croatia?", pp. 108-111.

25 Ibid.

26 See for example Höpken, "History Education and Yugoslav (Dis-) Integration"; Ivo, Goldstein. "Povijesni izolacionizam" ["Historical isolationism"], in *Vijenac*, November 5, 1998, p. 25.

of the spectrum, there were those (some politicians, journalists, historians) who have emphasized the Communist aspect of the Partisan movement, as well as the Partisan atrocities committed during and especially at the end of the Second World War, and downplayed its character as a resistance movement. The disputes that have occasionally erupted, usually in times of commemorations of events from the Second World War (in which those that took place in Jasenovac and Bleiburg have a special role), show that this topic still has the potential to create ideological conflicts in Croatian society. Finally, the simultaneous existence of textbooks inherited from the 1990s and their successors, and the new ones that mostly accepted a critical position towards the Ustasha regime, means that textbook narratives after 2000 have continuously reflected the clash of interpretations and the divided memory about the Second World War that exists in Croatian society.

On the other hand, the intensified international activities (i.e. seminars on history teaching in cooperation with the Council of Europe and Euroclio, Croatia becoming a member of the International Task Force for Teaching about the Holocaust etc.) of the Ministry of Education signified the end of the isolationist trends that were characteristic of the late 1990s. Furthermore, the Ministry continued with a more liberal policy of textbook approval: commissions appointed by the Ministry in that period used evaluation criteria that gradually facilitated a detachment from the rigid framework imposed by the 1995 curricula. Already the new generation of textbooks that appeared in the spring of 2000 was directed towards didactical innovations and some of the textbooks started to systematically incorporate multiple perspectives and focus on promoting students' critical thinking. However, the system of parallel textbooks has constantly been contested by those who perceive the deconstruction of the traditional ethnocentric narrative as a danger to Croatian national identity.²⁷

Although there was no reversion to the positions from the 1990s after the HDZ returned to power (2004), its educational politics in the field of history teaching generally remained ambivalent – either for pragmatic or ideological reasons. One of the first initiatives of the new authorities was aimed at changing the procedure of textbook approval and eventually reducing the number of textbooks. This has resulted in the adoption of the new Law on Textbooks (2006) which has limited the number of parallel textbooks to three per grade and has

27 Koren, Baranović, "What Kind of History Education Do We Have after Eighteen Years of Democracy in Croatia?", pp. 105-118.

increased the possibilities of state intervention and political interference – as was the case with some history textbooks during the 2007 textbook approval procedure. Although textbooks have generally become more attractive in appearance and challenging in their didactical dimension (narratives are reduced in favor of illustrations, sources, and questions for students), there are significant differences among textbooks in their methodological approach, which point to very different understandings of the purpose of history education. Some textbooks systematically incorporate different perspectives on the level of both textbook narrative and non-narrative materials (sources, illustrations), using the latter to encourage students' independent and critical thinking. Some (or most), however, use sources almost exclusively to support or illustrate the author's narrative; while in others, sources are even equipped with the author's commentary and/or instructions for their "appropriate" interpretation. Needless to say, these approaches are mainly characteristic of the topics of national history considered too important to be left unguarded.²⁸

There is a similar ambiguity in the latest curricula development, with the introduction of the new history curriculum for the higher grades of primary schools in 2006. The new program shows some progress in comparison to the previous (1995) one and has brought about moderate didactical and content innovations. Although political history remains dominant, the curriculum has put more emphasis on the previously neglected fields of history (cultural history, gender history etc.), which has found its reflection in the new generation of textbooks published in 2007. Among the goals of history teaching there is multiperspectivity, multiculturalism, working with sources, teaching about interpretations, the development of critical thinking, etc, which represents a significant departure from the previous value-oriented and ethnocentric curriculum. However, there are several occasions which reveal that it is much easier to define these goals than to implement them coherently throughout the curriculum components, let alone in teaching practice. For example, although the curriculum is less prescriptive than the previous one and provides teachers with more freedom when shaping their individual syllabi, it remains overloaded with content, which significantly reduces the use of the active methods of teaching that are emphasized as one of the new curriculum's most important components. Furthermore, although "preparing students to live in a multiethnic and multicultural society" is defined as one of history education's important goals, very little effort has been made to place added emphasis on the content that was already neglected in the previous curriculum, such as the history of ethnic minorities or regional history.²⁹

28 *Ibid.*, pp. 113-117.

29 *Ibid.*

In conclusion, the appearance of multiple textbooks since the mid-1990s, didactical innovations focused on the development of critical thinking, modest improvements in history curricula and increased public discussions about controversial issues in the teaching of contemporary history have signaled advances towards a different understanding of its purpose in the education of young generations. However, the results of these educational processes in history education in Croatia have remained ambivalent and the general direction is still unclear.

Since 2004, another issue has been in the focal point of debates about the content of history education: the 1991-1995 war, which in Croatia is called the "Homeland War". Narratives about this recent war entered the history textbooks almost immediately: the 1992 textbook already included highly emotional descriptions of the conflict, and the topic was subsequently included in the 1995 history curricula. The textbook narrative was very much attuned to the official memory and did not change much during the 1990s. However, the term the *Homeland War*, which today is widely accepted in textbooks, historiography, political documents, and public discourse, appeared in textbooks for the first time in 1999; until then, textbooks mostly used terms such as *the war of the Great Serbian forces against Croatia* or *the Great Serbian aggression against Croatia*.³⁰

In the years following the end of the conflict, the war has acquired an important place in the Croatian collective memory: it has been portrayed as one of the key events in Croatian history, the victory of the Croatian defenders over the Serbian aggressors which ensured the very existence of today's independent Croatian state. Especially after 2000, increasingly greater significance is attached to the Homeland War in political discourse: for many, it is no longer the synthesis of state-building elements of different ideologies originating from World War II, but the "values and virtues of the Homeland War", that provide the foundation for today's Croatia.³¹

There are several examples that demonstrate how politically and ideologically important this topic has become. During the recent constitutional changes in 2010, the 1991-1995 war was added to the list of key events in Croatian history from the Middle Ages to the present day. In 2001, the Croatian government passed a resolution to initiate scientific research on the Homeland War at the

30 Ibid., pp. 122-124.

31 Ibid., p. 123.

Croatian Institute for History, and in 2004 it founded the Croatian Memorial-Documentation Center of the Homeland War. The Croatian parliament issued several declarations attempting to provide an official interpretation and to define the character of the war, the most important among these being the Declaration on the Homeland War (2000) and the Declaration on Operation Storm (2006). Numerous war veterans' associations have been created, and several public holidays and memorial days which commemorate war events have been introduced. The most important among them is the 5th of August, *Victory and Thanksgiving Day* (1996, 2001), which since 2008 has also been celebrated as *Croatian Defenders' Day*.³² There are also other memorial days which are associated with commemorating war events: the *Day of Remembrance of the Sacrifice of Vukovar in 1991* (November 18th, since 1999), the *Day of Remembrance of the Genocide in Srebrenica* (July 11th, since 2009) and the *Day of Remembrance of the Detainees of Enemy Camps*, (August 14th, since 2010).

However, since the war ended, some other questions that burden the war's memory have come into focus. Among these are: a split memory about the war, the issue of the war crimes, and different evaluations of war events (reflecting not only differences of opinions between Croats and Serbs, but also within each of these groups) have mostly influenced the textbook debates that intensified after 2000. The independent media and NGOs, in particular, have raised public debate on war crimes committed by both Serbs and Croats and have played an important role in truth-seeking initiatives and Croatia's coming to terms with the recent past. Additional impetus for these debates has come from the prosecution of war crimes, especially after the International Criminal Tribunal for former Yugoslavia in The Hague brought charges against some of Croatia's senior army officers. Attempts to raise these questions have met with strong resistance, especially among those (politicians, war veterans' associations) who regard it as their duty to protect what they refer to as the "dignity of the Homeland War".

In the field of history teaching, two parallel processes have taken place during the last decade, both very much determined by contemporary political debates and controversies. Some textbooks published after 2000 cautiously began to offer narratives that went beyond the simplified descriptions of war events

32 On that date in 1995, the Croatian Army captured the town of Knin during Operation Storm, which brought an end to the Republic of Serbian Krajina, a self-proclaimed Serb entity in Croatia; simultaneously, it resulted in an exodus of the indigenous Serb population from that area. In the last few years it has become one of the key public holidays which primarily celebrates Croatia's military victory in the imposed war. However, this commemoration is burdened by the unresolved question of the Serbian refugees, and thus every year it provokes opposing reactions, both in Croatia and in its neighboring countries. Nevertheless, the official memory of the war has remained a one-sided and single-perspective one, and the experiences of the Serbian refugees are mostly excluded from the speeches of state officials, which mainly recount the victories and sufferings of their own side.

characteristic of the 1990s. At the same time, there were increasing demands by some war veterans' associations and some politicians to dedicate more space in curricula and textbooks to this topic. However, this issue really came into public focus only after 2003, when the Ministry of Education had to deal with the end of the moratorium on teaching recent history in Podunavlje. With the moratorium's five-year expiration date approaching, the Ministry of Education organized several meetings and consultations with teachers, experts on intercultural education, and political parties from the region. A decision was reached to end the moratorium, but none of the existing history textbooks was acceptable to the representatives of the regional Serbian community.³³

In January 2003, the Ministry of Education appointed a commission comprised of historians, experts on intercultural education, representatives of the Serbian community and several Ministry officials. The Commission decided to fill the gap in contemporary history materials with a supplement to the existing textbooks that would serve as a temporal solution until new textbooks were developed. The issue was also an important one politically, as the Ministry of Education had made a commitment to the international community to develop the supplement by the end of 2003, when the moratorium would end. After two failed attempts at creating the supplement in 2003, and the change of government at the beginning of 2004, which temporarily brought the work on the supplement to a halt, the Commission assigned the job to another team of authors at the end of 2004. The text – entitled *Supplement to the Textbooks on Current Croatian History* – was eventually finished in April 2005 and accepted by the Commission. It was decided at that point that the Supplement should serve as additional material not only for pupils in Podunavlje, but for those everywhere in Croatia. The Ministry then decided to have the text additionally reviewed by various institutions and individuals (among them, the History department of the Faculty of Philosophy in Zagreb, the Croatian Institute for History, and some members of the Textbook Approbation Commission). This resulted in quite a divided response, with some reviews evaluating the text positively, and others negatively.³⁴

In July 2005, in the charged atmosphere of war crime trials and the commemoration of the tenth anniversary of Operation Storm, negative reviews of the supplement suddenly appeared in some media (daily newspapers and TV networks). The Supplement came under sharp attack by a number of right-wing politicians, journalists from the right-wing media, and various war veterans' associations, as well as some historians (mostly from the Croatian Institute for

33 Koren, Baranović, "What Kind of History Education Do We Have after Eighteen Years of Democracy in Croatia?", pp. 123-125.

34 Ibid., pp. 125-127.

History). The attempts to introduce different perspectives to the teaching of recent conflicts and to address crimes committed by both Serbian and Croatian forces were condemned as education “without any value guidelines”, a “distortion of the historical truth about the Serb aggression”, a “relativization of the Serbian responsibility for the war” and an attempt “to show Croats as equally guilty for the war as the Serbs”. The Supplement was also condemned because of its “neutral terminology” and its avoidance of the term *the Homeland War*. Negative publicity eventually resulted in the ministry’s decision in August 2005 to give up the project. The debate, however, continued for some time even after the Ministry had given up on the book. More than 80 articles were published in different newspapers and journals, ranging from heavy criticism to praise. Two round tables were organized (2007, 2008), and two books were published as a result of the debate.³⁵

Furthermore, as echoes from the debate about the supplement still reverberated, numerous changes were made to the new history curriculum for compulsory education, which was at the time under construction (2005-2006). It turned out that the topic of the recent war underwent the greatest modifications: new details were added, making it the most extensive topic in the new curriculum. For example, students were expected to describe in detail the course of the war, to describe the most important military operations of the Croatian army, to “name distinguished Croatian defenders”, and to “precisely define who was the aggressor and who was the victim”.³⁶ Students were also expected to describe crimes against civilians in the war, but only those crimes in which Croats and Bosnian Muslims were victims are mentioned (Dubrovnik, Vukovar, Srebrenica). At the same time, this topic was whitewashed of any events that could interfere with the official memory of the war: for example, the sentence from the original curriculum proposal which mentioned the exodus of the Serbian population after Operation Storm was removed in the final version (2006). Similarly, Croatia’s role in the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina is not mentioned.³⁷ Thus, this case makes it evident that the intention of the curriculum authors is to offer not only certain content,

35 The first one – *Jedna povijest, više historija. Dodatak udžbenicima s kronikom objavljivanja* [*One past, Many Histories*]. Zagreb: Documenta, 2007 – offers the perspective of the authors of the Supplement. This book contains the Supplement, newspaper clips, essays written by the authors of the Supplement and the president of the Ministry’s Commission and some documents. The other – Robert Skenderović, Mario Jareb, Mato Artuković, *Multiperspektivnost ili relativiziranje? Dodatak udžbenicima za najnoviju povijest i istina o Domovinskom ratu* [*Multiperspectivity or Relativisation: the Supplement to Textbooks and the Truth About the Homeland War*]. Slavonski Brod: Hrvatski institut za povijest – Podružnica za povijest Slavonije, Srijema i Baranje, 2008 – offers the perspective of the critics: this book contains several essays by historians who wrote negative reviews of the Supplement, as well as their reviews.

36 *Nastavni plan i program za osnovnu školu*. Zagreb: Ministarstvo znanosti, obrazovanja i športa, 2006, p. 291.

37 *Ibid.*

but also a certain clear and unequivocal evaluation of recent events: the content of this curricular topic serves as a memento of patriotic values and a catalogue of events through which “the Homeland War” should be remembered.

Another cycle of debates on teaching about the war started in the spring of 2007, when some of the new textbooks written according to these new curricula nevertheless offered interpretations of the recent war that differed somewhat from those in the curriculum, including some strategies and approaches very similar to those in the Supplement two years previously. The 2007 debate was not as high-profiled as the 2005 one and it was mostly conducted with the same arguments. The Ministry of Education eventually accepted all textbooks after some minor changes: the passage of time since the war’s end and a more favorable political context have proven to be crucial factors for teaching about recent conflicts.³⁸ However, reactions to both the Supplement and the 2007 history textbooks have clearly illustrated the political importance still attached to history education, and have also revealed different and competing conceptions of the purpose of school history and its potential role in the formation of pupils’ identity. This debate also encouraged the Ministry of Education to start organizing (beginning in 2008) annual seminars for history teachers on the *Homeland War*: in-service training of history teachers has proven to be another important strategy the Ministry has at its disposal to promote an official version of history.

Teaching about recent wars has proven to be a difficult task because it involves strong emotions and invokes traumatic memories. On the most general level is the question of how to teach about wars, especially those that are considered to be starting points for the emergence of a new state. Reactions to these cases have also revealed the political importance still attached to history education, as well as the different and competing conceptions of the purpose of school history and its potential role in the formation of pupils’ identity. Recent events have also indicated that the government has not given up its intention of intervening in history textbook narratives, but they have also shown that Croatian society has become open enough that the ministry can no longer so easily keep its monopoly on interpretations, nor promote only the official memory of the war.

38 Koren, Baranović, “What Kind of History Education Do We Have after Eighteen Years of Democracy in Croatia?”, pp. 126-128.