

## Supporting History Education Reform in Kyrgyzstan

First international workshop to support the history education reform in the Kyrgyz Republic

**PUBLIC REPORT**

**Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan  
8 - 10 December 2017**



The capital of the Kyrgyz Republic, the city of Bishkek, in the north of the country. Bishkek borders the Tian Shan mountain range of Central Asia.

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The first international workshop to support history education in the Kyrgyz Republic took place from 8-10 December 2017, in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan. Over 30 history education specialists from all over Kyrgyzstan, as well as various professional backgrounds, took part in this workshop. This event was organized by EUROCLIO in partnership with the Kyrgyz Ministry of Education, the Global Centre for Pluralism, and the Aga Khan Foundation, with support from the European Union Delegation to Kyrgyzstan. The activities provided participants with examples of how history education reform had gone about in other countries, what some of the priorities of reform should ideally be, and emphasized an interactive approach to engagement.

### Objectives of the Workshop:

- To respond to the wishes of the Ministry of Education in the Kyrgyz Republic.
- To build consensus amongst key stakeholders on the future direction of history education in Kyrgyzstan.
- To share relevant experiences from Europe on the development of standards, curricula, and exams with their peers in Kyrgyzstan.
- To identify needs and wishes for continued professional development.



Above: The participants to the international workshop are photographed mid-discussion.

## DESCRIPTION OF THE ACTIVITIES

### Day 1: Friday 8 December 2017



Pictured above: Icebreaker activity led by Chris Culpin

After opening speeches, the first day of the workshop began with presentations which were meant to contextualize the workshop for the participants. The primary stakeholders and sponsors of the initiative stepped forward to speak, which set the stage for the work that would be done throughout the workshop, and set the training and discussion in its proper context of a changing educational environment within Kyrgyzstan. First, Larisa Marchenko, the Advisor to the Minister of Education, spoke of the plans of the Ministry for reforming the education system. Next, Burulai Aitikulova from the Aga Khan Foundation spoke about the plans of the Aka Khan Foundation within the Schools Improvement Programme to support this endeavour. Finally, Damira Umetbaev from European University Viadrina in Freiburg, Germany presented her research on the different perceptions of the Soviet Past in Kyrgyzstan.

### Presentation by Chris Culpin: Exploring what history education could look like

This first training was led by Chris Culpin from the Historical Association of the United Kingdom, with support from Mare Oja of the Estonian History Teachers Association and Bojana Dujkovic Blagojevic from EUROCLIO-HIP. This was the first of two presentations that Chris led at the workshop, and this one was more based upon learning active teaching methods, whereas the second was an examination of education reform in England.

The key topics Chris discussed were the importance of a multi-perspective approach, a

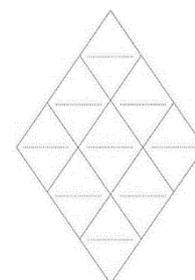


Above: participants try the Diamond Activity

focus on historical thinking, planning for progression, offering choice to students in their learning environment, and the use of activating methodologies. Furthermore, the development of educational resources should include a provision of initial teacher training to ensure that teachers know how to implement the reforms and understand their functions, as well as fostering continued professional development. Chris stressed that in order to be done properly, an educational reform needed to be implemented gradually in phases; fine-tuned rather than unearthed entirely.

At the start of his presentation, Chris asked the audience: what is the purpose of a national curriculum? This was the focus of the first activity, called the **Diamond Activity** (pictured below, right). In groups, participants were asked to lay out eight cards in order of importance along the diamond pattern, the most important going to the top and least important going to the bottom. This facilitated a start to the discussion on national curricula. The cards were the following:

- Prepare young people for a job
- Learn how to make an effective argument
- Learn how to analyse data
- Know about diversity in our country
- Transmit our culture to a new generation
- Know about our national heroes
- Understand the present by giving it a historical context
- Learn about other nations across the world



- One final box was left blank to allow participants to add their own element
- Next, Chris began explaining the distinction between first- and second-order concepts. First-order concepts are the basic building blocks of any historical discussion, such as independence, treaty, imperialism, colonialism, democracy, parliament, decade, or century. These concepts are necessary to know and understand in order to engage in constructive historical learning, but knowing these concepts should not be the ultimate goal. Instead, the goal should be to use these tools to better understand second-order



Chris Culpin (above, both photos) from the Historical Association presentation

Pictured above: history educators pose for a photo during the workshop

concepts such as chronology, change and continuity, cause and effect, similarity and difference, significance, and interpretations. The rest of the presentation was then devoted to explaining each of these concepts and their significance.

**Chronology** is how well one can evaluate the sequence of events and their relationship, so placing events in their proper place along a timeline. This aids students in being able to answer questions like: “Between 1500 and 2000, wars were supported by the population. How much do you agree with this statement?”



**Change and continuity** is to what extent things have stayed the same or changed, and are interwoven with one another. This aids students to be able to answer questions like: “In what ways was 1876 a turning point in the lives of the people of Kyrgyzstan?”



**Cause and effect** is understood when one understands that change occurs due to multiple factors and leads to many different results or consequences. These create a web of related causes and consequences with different levels of influence, and can be pushed both by historical actors and the conditions of the time. This aids students to be able to answer questions like: “Explain why President Kennedy took action against Soviet missile bases in Cuba in 1962.”



**Similarity and difference** can only be understood when a student has more than a superficial grasp on the elements of a time

period or historic event, and is able to constructively place both side by side and evaluate their features. This aids students to be able to answer questions like: “What were the similarities and differences between the ways the authorities dealt with the Black Death of 1348-9 and the Great Plague of 1665?”

The **significance** of an event can be assessed in multiple ways. An event may be significant because it (1) affected a lot of people, (2) affected people deeply, (3) affected people for a long time, or (4) continues to affect people today.

Pictured above (1, 2): history educators immersed in the learning activity presented by Chris Culpin

Finally, **interpretation** is perhaps the most crucial building block of a historical education. Students must understand that every piece of historical

writing is an interpretation of some sort, and that the approach an author takes is important, as well as to consider the context, viewpoint, audience, purpose, and evidence chosen to build any give interpretation.

At an early age, students should be able to understand that stories can be about real or fictional people, be aware that different stories can give different versions of events, and be able to distinguish between fact and opinion. However, by later years, they should be able to understand that accounts of the past can be different from known facts and that interpretations depend on the sources, describe the strengths and weaknesses of an interpretation, show how attitudes and context can affect interpretations, and explain how groups and societies use different interpretations. One of the main take-aways of

Chris’s presentation was that there is a big difference between a curriculum that emphasizes learning knowledge and one that emphasizes learning skills. Knowledge is the ability to recall facts, names, dates, and events, while skills involve explaining, analysing sources, reaching judgements, asking questions, communicating, etc.



#### Roundtable discussion: Mapping the needs for history education reform of different actors.

This discussion, facilitated by Bojana Dujkovic Blagojevic from EUROCLIO-HIP, featured multiple perspectives on the needs of reform from a variety of different stakeholders. These stakeholders included (1) historian D. Zhaparov from the National Academy of Science of the Kyrgyz Republic; (2) history teacher trainer Nasira Diusheeva from the Republican Institute for Development of Leading and Research-Pedagogical Staff of Education System; (3) history teacher Elizaveta Shapovalova; and (4) student Sergey Yashin. Each offered their own point of view of why reform in the history education system in Kyrgyzstan was necessary, as well as the challenges ahead.

#### **Day 2: Saturday 9 December 2017**

##### Presentation by Mare Oja: The experience of Estonian educational reforms

Pictured above, left to right: Sergey Yashin, Elizaveta Shapovalova, Nasira Diusheeva, and D. Zhaparov during the roundtable discussion

Mare Oja's presentation was based on the experiences of Estonia, specifically looking at what history education looked like during the Soviet period, how history programmes developed after the fall of the USSR, and how assessment strategies and teaching materials changed to cope with a new age. This report will briefly summarize the material presented by Mare Oja.



Mare Oja discussing the challenges of education reform in Estonia during her presentation

History teaching in Soviet Estonia was unified and centralised, based on Soviet ideology, and contained a lot of “final truths” and “correct values.” It was a system entirely based on fact-learning. This began to change in the period from 1987 to 1990, when several events pushed for new solutions. These events included: the commemoration of the Tartu treaty being dispersed by the police in February 1988, the national tricolour flag being hoisted in

commemoration of Independence Day on February 24 1989, the change of the Estonian party leadership in the summer of 1988, and the Spring Revolution (lasting from spring to autumn 1988). These events altered the tone of Estonian society and created a context that necessitated change.

In 1987, the Congress of Estonian Teachers was held, leading to the introduction of Estonian history into the curriculum. From 1989-1992, a new democratic educational model was set up with the history of Estonia launched as a separate course. Soviet textbooks were abandoned and white spots in history started to be filled in. Meanwhile, the Russian speaking schools were asked to follow a similar path to the changed programmes in the Estonian speaking schools. By 1996, the first National Curriculum had unified the Estonian and Russian speaking schools. The



Participants listen intently to an anecdote Mare Oja tells during her presentation about Estonian education reform

education system had somewhat decentralised to grant more responsibility to the teachers and headmasters of individual schools, transitioned to a system of courses (gymnasium-style), and developed a competence-based programme focused on developing critical thinking skills and an ability to work with sources rather than teaching facts. In 1993, the Estonian History Teachers' Association was created, which joined EUROCLIO.



The problems with history education in Estonia are the legacies of the Soviet education system, the current position Estonia holds in the Russian information space, conservative mentalities, conflicts between history teaching and collective memory, and the fact that language skills amongst students and teachers are very inconsistent. The result is that there are dual perceptions of history between the official version and the real version, which manifest in memory conflicts, contrasting anniversaries, and ultimately, distrust.

Participants read materials distributed for the presentation

From 2000-2007, Estonia's economy was quickly growing and it became a member of the European Union and NATO, all the while with different parties fighting for internal dominance. In 2002, the Second National Curriculum was introduced, which featured fixed lessons offering multi-perspective and multicultural material, as well as emphasizing the development of analytical skills, critical thinking, and discussion.

In 2007, economic growth slowed down and inequality increased. Particularly following Bronze Night, when riots and political unrest began from the relocation of the Bronze Soldier statue in the city centre of Tallinn, interethnic tensions between Estonians and Russians increased dramatically and there was violence in schools. The National Curriculum in 2011 tried to combat these issues, by integrating values, decreasing workload, and improving school culture, as well as increasing the amount of local and cultural history rather than focusing on the political in order to raise interest.

To summarize, the Estonian history education system went from having a single-truth approach to a multi-perspective approach that emphasized teaching critical thinking and analytical skills rather than only facts. Once having a single ideological textbook, Estonia now has a variety of teaching material available for teachers.

Some of the key take-aways from Mare's presentation were the following pieces of advice for implementing a national curriculum reform:

1. Involve teachers, teacher educators, textbook authors, and other interest groups from the beginning, not only in the phase of implementation.



Participants discuss their respective topics during the World Cafe

2. Curriculum development should be a professional, not a political issue.
3. Research the situation and changes - curriculum development should be based on research, theory, experiences, but not opinions of some people.
4. Study the experience of other countries, but adapt it, do not copy.
5. Take traditions into account and the best practice from the previous system. Too far of a jump might not be understood by implementers and thus not feasible.
6. Think about the ways to support teachers: training seminars, publications, discussions.
7. Take the teachers' association as a partner - success depends on teachers.
8. Make a plan for implementation: what happens and when.
9. Think about the evaluation and assessment, which is orientated to goals of the changed curriculum: if you are not assessing, you will not achieve. External assessment is a very good tool to make changes happen.
10. Do not expect quick changes. Curriculum development is a process.

#### World Café: Which historical topics can be considered through the method of teaching?

Participants were split into groups that would each consider one of the following topics in relation to this question. Group 1 studied the history of the place where students live, including local and family history; Group 2 studied the stories of other people who live there, including local and family history; Group 3 also studied the stories of people who live there, including minorities and people who moved there recently; and Group 3 studied the links with the rest of the world, including regional and world history.

#### Presentation by Bojana Dujkovic Blagojevic: Learning from the Western Balkans

Similarly to the presentation given by Mare Oja, Bojana Dujkovic Blagojevic from EUROCLIO-HIP gave a talk and workshop about how history education reform can be conducted, providing insights and examples from the case of Bosnia-Herzegovina. She outlined the current situation of the country to place its educational system in proper context and described how change had occurred.

The current situation in Bosnia-Herzegovina, as Bojana explained, is the result of the signing of the Dayton Agreement in 1995 after the Bosnian War. In Bosnia-Herzegovina, there exist 3 primary ethnic groups: Bosniaks, Serbs, and Croats, and 3 religious groups: Muslims, Orthodox Christians, and Catholic Christians, which more or less correspond with one another. Republika Srpska, a highly autonomous constitutional and legal entity of B-H, is predominantly populated by Serbs, while the rest of the country is mostly populated by Muslims and Croats.

There are 13 education ministries in Bosnia-Herzegovina, with 3 different educational systems for Serbs, Croats, and Bosniaks, each with their own set of materials. However, the goals of each education system are fairly similar: they aim to develop a historical frame of thinking for the child that encourages critical thought, appreciation for diversity, and an ability to independently work with sources. Meanwhile, there exist plenty of minority groups in Bosnia-Herzegovina, such as Jews, Roma, Turks, Slovenes, Czechs, Poles, Hungarians, Germans, etc. who do not have their own educational system. Republika Srpska also has minorities such as Jews, Roma, Slovaks, Ukrainians, and others.

At the end of 2016, over 550,000 people were officially unemployed out of a population of 3.7 million. The youth unemployment rate is 58%, partially because the only secure employment is with the government. Working in schools is a dream of many graduates, however, this is a highly regulated sphere: in order to secure employment at school, demands include a university degree with at least average grades, a certificate of completion of government exams, a certificate of registration with the employment agency and years of work experience. The result of the system is that students have high grades yet a low level of knowledge. In Banja Luka, for example, the *de facto* capital of Republika Srpska, students who achieved very high grades in domestic testing did very poorly in international testing and competitions. The efforts to change the education system have been uncoordinated and sometimes contrasting, with the added challenge of history often being presented by politicians in ways to best suit their own needs.

Since 2000, new attempts have been made nevertheless. Teachers have gone through trainings about multiperspective approaches to history, especially in regards to controversial issues. The materials have slowly started to move away from hard stances and positioning groups as “the enemy,” and towards presenting emotional issues with care. In partnership



Participants discussing the materials of Bojana Dujkovic Balgovic's presentation



Bojana Dujkovic Blagojevic during her presentation

with EUROCLIO, initiatives have resulted in publications such as: *Moving on the Move*, *Bridging Histories*, and *Once Upon A Time ... We Lived Together*. The next steps that B-H has to take is to improve teacher trainings, improve the curriculum and implement new measures taken by the OSCE in relation to standards and results, further professionalization, and strengthening the Association of History Teachers in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

Bojana described what the goals of EUROCLIO are and how they relate to Bosnia-Herzegovina. She explained that when historical learning is used as a weapon, different peoples start positioning themselves as the older group, or the one who first settled on the land, or the one with historical “right” or ultimate victimhood if they are asking the wrong questions. This leads to controversy and divided societies. Instead, we must ask questions like: How did something happen? Why did it happen? What were the consequences? What did we learn from these events? Then there is room for reconciliation to move forward. Thus, a responsible approach to teaching history ensures that students understand that history is based on evidence, on multi-layered witness testimonies, and on interpretation.

It is important to include students in the process of trying to find historical truths, and allow them to form their own opinions based on the evidence and sources that they see. This active role motivates students to care about the history they’re discussing. To this end, the associations of history teachers from all the countries of the former Yugoslavia are involved in the development of new teaching materials on the general history of 1900-1990 and in the development of a common understanding.

Bojana finished off with a striking quote from Barack Obama. “Change will not come if we wait for some other person or some other time. We are the ones we’ve been waiting for. We are the change that we seek.”

### Day 3: More methods and planning ahead.

#### Presentation by Chris Culpin: Learning from the experience in England

Chris Culpin from the Historical Association led a presentation about the lessons learned from the history education reform in England. This interactive workshop focused on developing practical skills useful for developing curricula, standards, exams, and educational resources. However, he also continued some conversation in regards to active methodology which he had not covered in the previous session.

The participants were shown a list of sample questions they could ask their students about the Treaty of Versailles, and asked to determine which ones would make superficial moral judgements, and which questions would be good for teaching, but not good for assessment. Were they asking about causation, evidence evaluation, interpretation, or none of the above? Next, Chris dove into a few historical examples this could be applied to: (1) Was Tsar Nicholas II mainly to blame for the 1905 Revolution? (2) Was Russia in 1914 on the verge of revolution or becoming a western-style democracy? (3) Was it the Civil War which turned the Bolshevik revolutionaries into Communist dictators? For the first sample question, for example, Chris presented a chart of many possible causes of the 1905 revolution to show how students could try and evaluate, based on their knowledge, how many of them could be connected back to Tsar Nicholas II (see right).

In order to properly understand a question such as this, it is necessary to look at sources from the time, such as diaries, newspapers, photographs, news film, letters, official documents, memoirs, biographies, oral testimony, or statistics. Students need to understand that the study of history is a source-based enquiry, since all historical conclusions have to be supported with evidence, yet surviving sources from all periods are fragmentary and incomplete.

Chris showed a variety of different examples of these kinds of sources. For example, he discussed an aerial photograph of Wharram Percy, England, where the remains of a village can be made out, and an artist's reconstruction of what the village might have looked like, along with the peasant crofts and tofts, the manor enclosure, and the church. He also showed footage of the falling of the Berlin Wall, a photo of a soldier jumping over wire in August 1961, and a quote by Winston Churchill describing the dangers of a growing Soviet Union to President Truman. Each source, presented without its necessary context, is not helpful, but is illustrative when juxtaposed to its historic setting.

Next, Chris discussed the educational reforms of teaching history in England. In the UK, resources for learning are a free-market publishing business. Schools have their own budgets approved by Governors who represent the parents and local community. The head teacher delegates the budget to individual subject teachers, and each teacher chooses their own teaching materials. The authors of these materials are generally practising teachers, although sometimes they can also be examiners, university professors, or freelance authors. They are not, however, written by government officials.

**SOURCE 1** *A factory inspector describes what happened to a young girl in a textile mill.*

She was caught by her apron, which wrapped round the shaft. She was whirled round and round and repeatedly forced between the shaft and the carding-machine. Her right leg was found some distance away.

**SOURCE 2** *Statistics from the census returns.*

**Manchester's population**

1750: 18,000  
1851: 303,000

**Preston's population**

1750: 5,000  
1851: 70,000



Pictured above: sources found within the textbooks presented by Chris Culpin. The final image depicts developing Manchester in the middle of the Industrial Revolution.



Pictured above, left: a participant examines a British history textbook provided by Chris Culpin. Pictured above, right: Chris Culpin explaining the elements found inside the textbook

Over the years, the textbooks have changed from having no sources to many sources, from no tasks to complex tasks for each topic, few pictures to lots of pictures, and the focus has shifted away from the author's explanation to an encouragement of student thinking. Chris showed examples of sources provided by textbooks, such as a vivid description of a girl who faced a near-fatal accident in a mill during the Industrial Revolution and the census reports of how the population of Manchester changed due to factory workers from 1750 to 1851. The activity in the textbook would then ask students to use the sources to answer

questions about what life was like in mid-19th century industrialized Manchester.

World Café: What proposals can you think of that can help all history teachers understand and implement these standards and curricula?

Participants were encouraged to consider how the standards and training plan are presented and how the history teachers receive information, how they are involved in the process, and how they are trained.

Suggestions included the founding of a history teachers association, the development of a methodological guide, and additional training seminars. The development of new teaching resources was emphasized as a key priority.



The participants of the 1<sup>st</sup> international training workshop in Kyrgyzstan pose for a final photo

Final sessions and feedback

Finally, by the end of the last day, it was time to reflect upon what had been learned over the course of the workshop and plan next steps for the second international workshop that would be held to continue the work being done. This was split into two different sessions: one interactive session and one concluding session.

The interactive session was first an opportunity for the participants to give feedback on what they had liked and disliked about the workshop, what could be improved next time, and what sort of material should be the focus in the future. Some of the main requests from the participants included working on new methods and new themes, hosting sessions on how to inspire students and how to select historical content for classroom work, sessions on working with different types of sources, how to assess competences, how to develop educational materials, and learning from the experiences of other countries. This feedback will be taken into account for the content of the second workshop.

The concluding session included a presentation given by Larisa Marchenko, who discussed how the Ministry planned to move forward from this point with the reforms at hand. Following this speech, the dates and times of the next workshop were finalised and certificates were handed out to the participants. It was agreed that the next workshop would focus mainly on methodologies and the development of educational resources.

## About the organisers



### **The Aga Khan Foundation** (part of the Aga Khan Development Network)

Aga Khan Foundation (AKF) is a private, international, non-denominational, not-for-profit organization established in 1967 in Switzerland by His Highness the Aga Khan. Its activities are mainly concentrated on the needs of rural communities in mountainous, coastal and resource-poor areas. The Foundation seeks to develop and promote creative solutions to long-standing global challenges like poverty, hunger, illiteracy and disease. AKF is an agency of the Aga Khan Development Network, a group of development agencies with mandates that include the environment, health, education, architecture, culture, microfinance, rural development, disaster reduction, the promotion of private-sector enterprise and the revitalisation of historic cities. For more information, please visit the website at [www.akdn.org](http://www.akdn.org)



### **The Global Centre for Pluralism**

Founded by his Highness the Aga Khan in partnership with the Government of Canada, the Global Centre for Pluralism is an international research and education centre located in Ottawa, Canada. Inspired by Canada's experience as a diverse and inclusive country, the Centre was created to advance positive responses to the challenge of living peacefully and productively together in diverse societies. For more information, please visit [www.pluralism.ca](http://www.pluralism.ca).



### **EUROCLIO - European Association of History Educators**

EUROCLIO is a membership based international NGO, founded in 1992, with support of the Council of Europe. It is the mission of EUROCLIO to inspire and empower educators to engage learners in innovative and responsible history and citizenship education. It does so by providing opportunities for professional development, developing (open) educational resources as part of a collaborative process, and facilitating exchange of ideas and experience amongst education professionals. For more information, please visit [www.euroclio.eu](http://www.euroclio.eu)

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