

# BEYOND THE DOORSTEP: THE NATURE OF HISTORY TEACHING ACROSS EUROPE

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It is long since I entered Groningen University in the Netherlands to study history. I remember that my decision to study history was very much determined by the wish to know all about the past. I was curious and eager to learn about everything and everybody. My first two tutorials on medieval history had an enduring impact on the rest of my life as historian and history educator. We started to discuss the end of the Roman Empire, and were asked to read an article, where the author argued that the supremacy of the Romans had disappeared by the devastating effects on the Roman elite of lead poisoning caused by the leaden water pipes and leaden saucepans. His argumentation sounded very plausible and we now fully understood the cause of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire.

However the second tutorial made us again visit the topic and we were given another article. Here, the author gave a different explanation for the Fall of this Empire: the other European peoples had, at a certain point in time, gained strength enough to attack with success the Empire. We were surprised to find out that there were such dissimilar interpretations for the same process. And what I further noticed was that during the discussions about this article, the last theory had far more difficulty to be accepted as plausible by the group than the first one.

That day I realized that I had learned two important lessons: the first one was that there is not such a thing as one true narrative about the past. The second lesson came out as even more important: I learned that the first story you learn, places very deep impressions, and that variants of that story or even very different stories have great difficulty to be later accepted as also possible valid. I translated these early lessons into an important concern for history education: if young people in school receive narratives from a simple, single and national perspective, it will be at a later stage very hard to open their minds for other interpretations or perspectives<sup>1</sup>. This understanding became

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a main thread for my work in history education, firstly in the Netherlands and later in Europe.

This article therefore I would like to explore the question what is school history means in Europe. It addresses issues as the organisation of school history, the aims and content of history curricula, the balance in focus between national and European history, the understanding of the concept Europe in school history, the role of politicians and the past and present challenges.

### **Organisation of school history in Europe**

Compulsory history education starts almost everywhere in Europe with age-group 9, and in a few countries earlier<sup>2</sup>. In most countries history is obligatory till the end of compulsory education, generally with age-group 15<sup>3</sup>. In England/UK history is only compulsory till 14<sup>4</sup>. History is in many countries also compulsory in upper secondary education, however there is a tendency in decrease of time allocated to the subject or even to make the subject optional<sup>5</sup>

The organization of history curricula in Europe could in the late Twentieth Century generally be divided in two, rather different conventions. The first approach, more or less generally applied in North Western Europe, offered open history curricula, where textbook authors, schools and teachers were rather free to design their own programmes<sup>6</sup>. Other countries, among them France and all Post-Communist countries, had more to very strict prescribed programmes of study, with regularly, even for each lesson, in detail described what to teach. In the last 20 years this general picture has undergone changes, resulting in stricter curricula in the first region and more open in the latter, however the differences are far from bridged<sup>7</sup>. Even more, a country as England made in this period a full loop when it narrowed down its open history curriculum to a rather prescriptive National Curriculum in 1988. With each revision of this curriculum the character became more open. The in 2008 newly introduced history curriculum for year groups 5 till 14 almost restores the approach of before 1989<sup>8</sup>

### **Reform**

In the early Ninety Nineties, there was a massive drive among the political elites, scholars and practitioners in East and West to change practice in school history. After the *Fall of the Wall*, this wish for this change was in Central and Eastern Europe in the first place focused on writing and rewriting (recent) history, especially the national history<sup>9</sup>. The focus in the Soviet education had been the denationalisation of the different peoples living in the Soviet Union

and school practice was aimed at the creation of a disciplined, politically aware and active citizen-internationalist<sup>10</sup>. In reaction, the new born nations in the Post Soviet space felt an immediate urge to redefine and write down their national pasts and to disseminate this narrative as widely as possible among its historians, history teachers, students as well as among the general public<sup>11</sup>. Although the other post communist countries were spared the denationalization efforts of the Soviets, their national histories had followed the same Marxist historical approach. History and history education had therefore in the eyes of the scholars in the first place to be freed from socialist / communist jargon and terminology<sup>12</sup>.

In Western Europe, however, the concern about the practice in history education was expressed amongst educationalists<sup>13</sup>. They signalled that school education had to be adapted to the requirements of the Twenty First Century. This change was certainly relevant for school history, as most children were not particularly keen on the subject<sup>14</sup>. There was a clear need to innovate itself, in order to make it a meaningful subject for young people in the Twenty First Century.

Finally, motives for reform could be noticed in Western Europe, when in 1992, with the Maastricht Treaty, the narrow focus of the (restricted) European Union educational policy on vocational education was, somewhat, widened into a desire to enhance the European dimension in (history) education. The European Union initiated in the early nineteen nineties a hype of articles, debates and activities concerning the idea of a European dimension in general education. Whereas in the same time the Council of Europe, looking at the New Europe after the changes of 1989/1991, emphasised the urgent need of European co-operation in the field of history education. In several countries curriculum reforms reflected these new requirement of widening the European perspective<sup>15</sup>

These movements resulted in the late last century, everywhere in Europe, in a wave of curriculum debates and in substantial reforms in history curricula<sup>16</sup>. In order to have some insight in this process of change EUROCLIO, the European Association of History Educators, has since 1997 organised each year an inquiry into the trends in history education in Europe<sup>17</sup>. The 2003 questionnaire aimed to describe the state of history education in Europe in 2003 with questions about the organisation of the curriculum, the aims and objectives of the (national) history curricula, the discussions over the emphasis on knowledge or competencies and on chronological order or thematic approach. The inquiry also aimed to sketch and visualise the process of change since 1989. Its results are a useful resource for understanding

current trends, problems and debates in school history. The results of the 2003 EUROCLIO questionnaire demonstrated that the new programmes of study were introducing often new content as well as a stronger emphasis on skills.

### **Aims and objectives for the learning and teaching of history**

In 2003 and 2006 EUROCLIO questionnaires looked into aims and objectives for the learning and teaching of history. The results showed that the aims for the subject in Europe are surprisingly similar but also that in a period of three years shifts in approach could be noticed. In 2003, almost all history curricula in Europe aimed *at development of citizenry and democracy*, closely followed by the objective *to make pupils understand the world they live in*. Also *enhancing critical learning skills* and *raising awareness for cultural heritage* were frequently mentioned. In 2003 Strengthening national identity and patriotism and reinforcing labour market skills were considered least important.

However in 2006 this picture had changed. Enhancing national identity together with 10 becoming aware of the historical continuity of their nation and strengthening patriotism and even strengthening readiness to sacrifice, if necessary, for their nation received by far the first place. Other aims such as promoting citizenry and democracy; making pupils understand the world they live in and appreciating shared aspects of cultural heritage were still mentioned but certainly received a lower profile. And this was also the case with enhancing critical thinking and developing a multi-perspective approach to historical events. To become aware of the on-going nature of historical research and debate was hardly mentioned at all. The little importance of Europe became also clear as aims such as the development of a European citizenship mean, promoting European integration ; broaden their knowledge and awareness of Europe or becoming aware of the different meanings of 'Europe' were hardly ever required.

However there was a striking difference between the frequency of an aim mentioned in the European curricula, and the appreciation of its importance. Despite the fact enhancing national identity was mentioned far more often, enhancing critical thinking and becoming aware of the on-going nature of historical research were far more appreciated (mean 2.32 against 2.87 and even 4.50. This came out as even stronger related to the European dimension related aims (means of 4.33 4.67 and 4.50)

### **Content**

The structures of history curricula in Europe have remained rather constant, and most topics in school history curricula show remarkable longevity. Their

interpretation and focus has been subordinated to ideological change in the way they are presented, but elements in the history curricula, introduced in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, are still present today, allowing for these ideological changes. I would like to give two examples: in the EUROCLIO Balkan project *Understanding a Shared Past, Learning for the Future* (2000-2003), it came out that many topics in the history curricula of Albania, Bulgaria and Macedonia, introduced in the 19<sup>th</sup> century were still present in the communist and post communist curricula. And in 2007 the head of the Turkish Curriculum Committee Prof. Dr Mustafa Safran reflected on the international topics in the Turkish upper secondary history curriculum, "Discoveries, Renaissance, Enlightenment, France Revolution and Industrial Revolution", which had entered the curriculum in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, when under French influence the Ottoman leadership started to build an educational system.

Only with the beginning of the school year in September 2006 the famous 19<sup>th</sup> century story about secret Greek Orthodox classes during the Ottoman period was abolished, despite the fact that academic historians in Greece long ago proved that the Ottoman had generally allowed education. And also the story of the Danish king wearing a yellow (David) star during the war, survived against negative evidence. Pupils and students like such stories. Myths and good stories have a long life in school history.

However there is some change. Since the late Ninety Eighties the emphasis on recent and contemporary history has grown as well as the role for school history on strengthening European consciousness, human rights and civil society through the teaching of history and civics<sup>18</sup>. We can observe how regional and temporal the choices of some more recent topics are, and how provisional the interpretations of certain relatively recent events were and remain. In Spanish history education World War II has as little prominence as Balkan history in England. Topics like Korea and Vietnam, popular in the 1970s and 1980s, hardly feature anymore. However some not earlier discussed white spots such as national crimes against humanity, colonialism and slavery, have slowly entered the curricula. There is also more emphasis on everyday life history and the Islamic world but gender issues still struggle for recognition

### **Methodology**

This process of change has taken place certainly as much on the methodological level<sup>19</sup>. The ways and approaches of the learning and teaching of history are changing.

A teaching and learning of history which aims to develop pupils' critical

thinking and their capacity for individual inquiry is certainly the most important methodological development in school history throughout Europe, together with a growing emphasis on the development of abilities and skills in history teaching and enable personal attitudes and evaluation of historical processes and facts.

Working with sources, different interpretations and concepts such as multiperspectivity have appeared in history curricula and school history practice in most European countries<sup>20</sup>. The understanding of the concept historical interpretation for school history was in the late Twentieth Century in many countries unknown. However also in 2009, the concept interpretation is not generally applied in school history in Europe. In countries like Macedonia, Belarus and Ukraine, there is still a strong believe among historians that through careful research an objective historical truth can be discovered. In such approaches authorised versions of well-known academics or even a state-approved account are considered to be the true school (national) story/ narrative of the past.

A real multi-perspective approach is in most European countries also in 2009 hardly implemented<sup>21</sup>. For many textbook authors and teachers it is hard to translate this idea in classroom practice, not seldom as good historical evidence is absent.

Unfortunately changes in the history curricula are not seldom only theoretical, and in reality far from implemented<sup>22</sup>. Publishers and educational authorities regularly do not understand the full consequence of the new curriculum requirements and offer far to little financial and human resources to implement the required reforms. Despite that fact that school history should foster critical thinking, students are still internalising the traditional interpretations' of their teachers and societies. Robert Stradling, as a long time Council of Europe expert on history, has reflected on a wide variety of themes related to the innovation of the learning and teaching of history in Europe. He writes that 'the scope for introducing major curriculum changes depends on a political will, the existing official guidelines and syllabuses, the degree of autonomy which individual teachers have to decide what they teach and how they teach it, and the material resources available to support curriculum change'<sup>23</sup>.

### **Debates in Society**

The increasing (history) curriculum debates since the late 1980s, and -in several countries- also the introduction of national history examinations, made the selection of well-balanced content more challenging and led to a sharp confrontation between theory and practice in Europe and beyond<sup>24</sup>. It became

clear that writing a (history) curriculum that includes everything considered to be important, relevant and useful, is impossible. The time allocated to history in the national or school timetables is increasingly limited, and not all historical topics are suitable for pupils and students of all ages and levels. As Sue Bennett, former School History Curriculum Expert in QCA, London and former EUROCLIO President used to say 'the problem with curriculum selection is not what to put in, but what to leave out'. As the new curricula were written, it became clear that official selection was inevitable. And with this insight the concern about the lack of (survey) knowledge among pupils and students grew.

In 2009 the professionals may almost commonly agree that good history teaching is not just high-quality story telling about the past and excellent history learning is not simply memorizing the many facts in these stories. However for many others in society this truth is far from acknowledged. The increasing focus on learning and teaching has lead to heated debates between those, who see the main purpose of school history as teaching students about important events and developments and those who think the main purpose is to facilitate the learning of historical skills and understanding. This debate flares up in most countries once new curriculum proposals for history are discussed.

The current national curriculum debates regularly position the traditional a survey chronological knowledge against the practice to offer a selection of historical themes<sup>25</sup>. However, what is considered as the traditional chronological survey of historical knowledge, is in fact often nothing more than the traditionalist's selection of historical topics: a mono-perspective narrative with many important men, few women, no minority communities, much politics, lack of ordinary people, some elite culture, not too much emphasis on colonial history and, in fact, excluding most parts of the world<sup>26</sup>.

A special problem is the debate until which moment in time history is considered history. In several European countries curricula and textbooks stop at a certain point in time, as a certain contemporary period is not considered history but politics and only perhaps suitable for civic education. The argument mostly used is that academic historians cannot study the period in depth, not in the least place due to the fact that the contemporary archives are not open for research purposes<sup>27</sup>. In Scotland therefore the term modern studies is introduced, for the period after 1945. This issue becomes even more problematic in Post-Conflict countries such as Bosnia, Croatia, Georgia and Serbia or in countries with tense internal relations such as Estonia, Macedonia and Latvia. The local historians generally refuse to contribute to

writing about these recent problems. However with these refusal they deny their responsibility to help society to handle these traumas. As a result the young generations in such countries are educated about these events by the emotional narratives of family, politicians, and media.

In 2009 the same topics as in the late 20<sup>th</sup> Century are still featuring in many curriculum debates and give evidence that many of the issues are still undecided.<sup>28</sup> The results from earlier questionnaires may differ from the present picture as high-speed change was and still seems to be a significant feature of European history curriculum development since 1989.

### **National History**

The trend in the early Nineteen Nineties to strengthen the European dimension did not bring abundant results. Unfortunately there is hardly any academic evidence about the proportions of national and world history as academic cross-border comparative surveys on teaching history in Europe hardly do exist<sup>29</sup>. The EUROCLIO annual inquiries modestly try to fill this gap. The answers related to the proportions of national and world history seem to indicate that since 2000 the focus on national history in Europe is increasing<sup>30</sup>. It looks that Europe gradually lost its momentum, and in 2009 the European spirit among politicians and many others in society is on a low tide. In 2007 teaching national history features high on the agenda in many European countries.

Politicians, historians and media all over Europe and beyond, repeatedly complain that the general public has a lack of national historical knowledge. In a growing group of countries politicians insist to increase the amount of national history in the curriculum or to change the national narrative in school history in such way that the victim hood, the heroic epochs and dominant ethnic communities and religious denominations are given prominent emphasis. It is interesting to notice how such national politicians acknowledge the need for developing a national (inclusive) identity as tool for internal cohesion but how they at the same time deny school history a role in the creation of a sense of European belonging<sup>31</sup>.

History Education in Europe and beyond has always been a national political instrument. The subject is -to smaller or larger extends- always used by national power elites to justify the present. These more or less official national narratives are building around *mirrors of pride and pain*. That means that these stories are in the first place centered on the suffering of the nations, followed by those events and persons which were reasons for national pride. Events or persons in the past, which caused agony and suffering among



people at home or beyond, are generally neglected or downplayed. Histories of those areas which did not connect to the nations' narratives receive hardly any space at all. Most children will leave school with a picture of the past which might be biased and which is certainly, also in Europe, ethno-centric. They carry this representation of the past into their future life and in their turn pass it on to later generations.

This traditional approach is often also revealed in the chronological choices, made in the curriculum. Greece, Italy or Portugal, for example, like to emphasize those periods in the national past, such as antiquity, renaissance and the discoveries, which place their cultures in a more profitable light than the teaching about the more recent, Twenty Century, past. Many Post Communist countries after 1989 have also the attitude to avoid teaching about the recent national pasts, and look for those topics in the national past which emphasized the nation's glory and victim hood. The new nationhood urged historians to find examples of earlier nationhood. However for some countries this was very difficult or even impossible. Slovaks had to go back to the short lived Moravian Empire in 10<sup>th</sup> century, vague Medieval Empires in Balkan received great prominence and the Cozaks became the nucleus of the Ukrainian people. Unfortunately for Estonia such early nationhood was even not possible, however it build its national narrative on suppression by Crusader knights, German nobility, Russians and Soviets.

This national curriculum is, except for a few attempts, hardly under discussion in Europe. A curriculum from a truly global perspective is - as far as I have seen- hardly implemented in Europe. Many argue that in order to make students understand the world they live in it is better to start near by, and start with local and national history<sup>32</sup> This argument is not based on any specific evidence, but based on a practical and traditional point of view. Maria onderzoek<sup>33</sup> I believe that other approaches are possible, but for many specialists in Europe, history curricula based on a national perspective are the most logical choice

### **History and History and history education are Politics**

National history is closely related to the national political debates. History education is even today very political and therefore almost everyday hot news somewhere in the world. The EUROCLIO website [www.euroclio.eu](http://www.euroclio.eu) offers an array of examples<sup>34</sup>.

I would like to give some recent examples of this situation. In Croatia veterans of the recent Yugoslav wars claim, with approval of certain politicians and media, that they should teach the history of these wars in school. They

disagreed with the new school history materials, which were produced on request of the Ministry of Education, after a ten year moratorium on the history of Eastern Slavonia. And together with others they forced the books to be withdrawn<sup>35</sup>. In Georgia the new government after the Rose revolution introduced a new curriculum, trying to denationalise and multi-culturalise history education. However this new curriculum, which integrates national and world history meets with much resistance, from historians, politicians and history educators as they fear that the history of Georgia should lose its prominence. This division in a course on national and a course on European or world history is applied in many, mostly Eastern European countries, which might, as the Rumanian historian Capita puts it be 'an essential problem as these two different narratives are developed at the same time with hardly any connections' <sup>36</sup>.

And also within the European Union, the importance of teaching national history is re-evaluated. In Latvia the international curriculum for school history, in place since 1995, is in 2005 changed into a curriculum, separating national and world history<sup>37</sup>. Valdis Klisans, former national advisor for history, argues how in his country a massive political and media campaign emerged in 1999 against the practice of this integrated school history course. The opponents suggested that through such approach the national history would dissolve in the general history and that the 'students would not be able to understand the continuity of national historical processes and events'. Such integrated course was not suitable for a patriotic upbringing.

And do not think this political interference is a prerogative for countries which have just overcome a non-democratic tradition. In 2002 the Educational Authorities in England decided, despite a school history already traditionally focused on national history, that the focus on national history was not enough and that therefore the English history should be obligatory on each level of history education, also for students on the A-level, the pre-university examination. And after the events of 7 July 2005, teaching *Britishness* through school history seems to have gained even more importance<sup>38</sup>.

In the Netherlands, a country with a long term international tradition in school history, an official Canon of Dutch Culture and History is published in 2007, which should acquire a central position in the history lessons for pupils aged 9-14<sup>39</sup>. The Canon for Dutch History and Culture has caused a hype in the Dutch society thinking over canonical knowledge for a wide range of subjects, such as local and provincial canons, science canons and Dutch literature canons. In April 2009 the Minister of Education decided that the Canon of Dutch History and Culture should be seen as a source of inspiration and

not made compulsory for history education for age-group 10-14. However a majority in the Dutch parliament, with parties ranging from left to right have already announced that this decision is not acceptable and that the Canon should be compulsory in history education.

And also in the spring of 2009 Dutch politicians interfered at length in the planning of the New Dutch National History Museum in Arnhem. The management of this future Museum decided to move away from the original ideas of the politicians to follow the also newly designed Dutch Canon, and develop their own ideas as museum directors and historians. Politicians, forming the majority of the Dutch Parliament, demanded that either the museum management carries out exactly what they consider the main thread of the museum, or that they would reopen the whole decision making process around the museum<sup>40</sup>. In June 2009 the Museum Directors were forced to accept the political will of the politicians. And also in Denmark, another country with traditional international outlook, the new history curriculum gives evidence of the demand to introduce a bigger portion of national history.

History education is even targeted during election campaigns, and is regularly changed or addressed when new political leadership comes in, or new political targets have to be addressed. According to Kenan Cayir, a Turkish Academic historian, the process of EU membership application for example triggered the first new curriculum reform since 1968 in Turkey<sup>41</sup>. Recent negative examples of this practice come for instance from Greece and Northern Cyprus. In Greece new generation of independently written history textbooks were intended to be introduced in the school year 2006/2007, based on valid, common areas of modern history and historiography and with an emphasis on critical reading of a multiplicity of historical sources and understanding of history instead of memorizing wars and peak political events<sup>42</sup>. However the orthodox Archbishop of Greece protested strongly against one particular textbook and with further growing criticism, the new history textbooks became a major national issue. After adaptations the Greek Ministry of Education accepted the second edition however after elections in September 2007 the permission to use the book in schools was immediately withdrawn. And in Northern Cyprus, during the latest election campaign in April 2009, the innovative textbooks on Cypriot history were targeted<sup>43</sup>. The National Union party promised its electorate that they should after a possible election victory of this party be abolished.

### **History needs political sponsorship**

History education suffers as no other school subject from the

compartmentalization through European borders. National perspectives are determining the manner history educators inform the students about Europe and the world. They tell their nations story but do not know the stories of the others. Bernard Eric Jensen, in his talk *on writing European History- the Danish Way* during the conference *Writing European History* in June 1999 in Essen, Germany, questioned why the Danes had set out writing three complete history's of Europe over the last 100 years. He pointed out that these three endeavours always had been political grounded. Therefore he concluded that historians and history education need certain (political) projects to convince the society of the benefits of their work. In the conference *Learning and Teaching of History in Europe* organised during the European Union Presidency of France in Blois in autumn 2000, one of the speakers noticed that *history always needs sponsors*. This could be a local power, the nation state, the European Union, the United Nations or any other political organisation. Without such political support, history and history teaching have little change to be acknowledged, as a subject in a society where *utility* is a key concept. The French historian Martin points at France as an example for this specific relationship between history education and politics. He uses the example of the Third Republic in France, which created free schooling for every child with history as a tool in the battle against monarchist and religious ideas<sup>44</sup>. And also Stradling notices that the major curriculum changes for history depend on a political will<sup>45</sup>.

### European Dimension

Recurrent questions in the EUROCLIO questionnaires seem to indicate that since 2000 that the desire to enhance a European dimension is decreasing<sup>46</sup>. When EUROCLIO asked its Member Associations in 2003 which dimension (national, regional, European or world) had been increased since the late 1980s, national history came out as the area of greatest growth<sup>47</sup>. However this growth could at that time generally be attributed to the curriculum choices of the new and newly democratic member-countries in Central and Eastern Europe. In 2004 the members were asked to reflect on how far they were satisfied with the proportion of geographical dimensions- local, regional, national, European and world history- in their curricula<sup>48</sup>. The greatest area of satisfaction was the proportion of national history (average *yes* for all age-groups 68%), whereas the proportions of local (*no* average 51 %) and regional history (*no* 52 %) revealed some dissatisfaction. The amount of European history received a 32 % (*no*)dissatisfaction, and gives evidence that people were not really concerned about its share in the history curriculum. In 2005 the results on the question if more teaching about European issues was necessary, demonstrated a general interest for *some increase*, but not too much. However,

in the same questionnaire, promoting European and global citizenship through history education was generally acknowledged as a desirable goal for school history<sup>49</sup>.

### Understanding of the concept Europe

What does Europe mean when European history educators talk about European history? In the almost twenty years, I have actively been involved in promoting European history, I noticed the ever-recurring theoretical debate about the definition of the concept Europe, without leading to any concluding idea<sup>50</sup>. In many books, articles and meetings people have reflected on the understanding of the concept Europe. In the introduction of the book *Towards a European Historical Consciousness of Approaches to European Historical Consciousness, Reflections and Provocations, Shaping European History*, Sharon Macdonald and Katja Fausser write *Yet, what 'Europe' means to those who live in it- as well as to those outside- is inevitable shaped by perceptions of its history.*<sup>51</sup>

EUROCLIO members have generally chosen for a pragmatic solution. Europe is mostly considered the Europe of the Council of Europe and therefore including Turkey and countries such as Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan, which belonged to the former Soviet Union.

The meaning of the concept of Europe in the learning and teaching of history seems not border the European history educators too much. Europe is mainly understood as a geographic concept and in fact European history is mostly understood as the history of some large Western European countries plus Russia. Observing the situation in Wales, Jones writes that 'the teaching of the history of nineteenth and twentieth century Europe tends to refer mainly to the major states of western Europe. Many schools study the history of the USSR in the twentieth century, although this is almost always very Russia-centred in approach. There is little study of Scandinavia or the countries of Eastern Europe' approach. There is little study of Scandinavia or the countries of Eastern Europe'. And Falk Pingel, former Deputy Director of the Georg Eckert Institute for International Textbook Research, confirms this observation from a Europe wide perspective<sup>52</sup>. Stradling observes that European syllabuses 'tend to omit those parts of Europe which, for significant periods of their history, were untouched by those influences thought to be central to the European tradition. They also tend to gloss over those periods of European history when the mainstream cultural tradition was virtually lost to large parts of Europe'. At the same time external influences on Europe are mostly downplayed.

In 2005 the EUROCLIO inquiry also looked into the question what *Europe*

means when European history educators say they teach about *Europe*<sup>53</sup>. The answers illustrate that also for the history educators teaching about Europe means in the first place teaching about Western Europe, with *good coverage* of that region from 42% for age-group 10-12, through 63% for age-group 12-15 to more than 80% for age group 15-18/19. Secondly comes Central Europe, with a respective 11%, 32% and 53% *good coverage* for the same age-group order and Eastern Europe, with in the same order 10%, 28% and 48% *good coverage*. However Northern Europe was very little represented in European history classrooms, as we see only 12%, 20% and 31% *good coverage*.

It is however questionable what *good coverage* for the respondents actually meant. When asking more detailed questions about how far a country like Latvia was represented in the school history textbooks, it came out that the country only features, or, even better to say, is mentioned in the aftermath of World War I, further related to the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact and finally in connection with the end of Soviet Union and the rise of the new Independent States. It became clear that the present European focus in school history curricula and textbooks only differs marginally from the curriculum choices before 1989: teaching about Central and Eastern Europe means still predominantly teaching about Russia and the Soviet Union.

The French researcher Nicole Tutiaux looked how young people in France understood Europe<sup>54</sup>. The common picture she found was that Europe had a Christian tradition, a weak cultural diversity and was constructed through conflicts. The German Professor in history didactics Bodo von Borries offered in his great Youth and History Research 15-year-old students in 1995 several options for understanding the concept Europe. The possibilities were a geographical expression, no more; birthplace of democracy, enlightenment and progress; group of white rich countries, guilty of economic and ecological exploitation; only way to peace between nations previously destroying each other; solution of the economic and social crises of the countries of Europe and danger to sovereign nations, their identity and culture. It is interesting to notice that the students dismissed a geographical expression, no more. However all other options were estimated more or less neutrally<sup>55</sup>. Through his findings we may conclude that also pupils do not have a clear opinion what they understand as concept Europe.

### **World history**

Is there a border between Europe and the rest of the world<sup>56</sup>? The past has always operated beyond borders and people in the 21st Century live in global society. History education should therefore not create new artificial borders

by moving the traditional national subject focus to a European one. However the concept 'Europe' is quite often more or less synonym with the concept 'world'. In the Soviet Union, as well as in present day Russia, school history was divided in National and World history, and this tradition is still very much alive in most countries in the Former Communist world. The Russian Historian M. Boytsov reflects that the central concept in the old Soviet and now modern Russian school textbooks always has been the world. However, the topics show that in fact the overall concentration is on (large) Western European countries, and that the world is therefore mainly understood as the history of The United States<sup>57</sup>. This observation is shared by many others. A Wales history inspector, Elim Jones, writes that 'while the media in Wales, as in the rest of Britain, are so much influenced by the United States of America, that it is difficult for European issues to attract the attention of students'. However also that it is for young people more naturally looking outside of Europe, as pupils are influenced by the foreign, but English speaking films, television and the Internet. The EUROCLIO inquiry of 2005 also showed that a global dimension for school history in Europe is virtually absent<sup>58</sup>. In the 2005 inquiry the question was asked about the representation of the rest of the world. The outcome was clear; apart from North America with an average for all age-groups of less than 25% *good coverage*, all other continents were hardly featuring at all..We may conclude that the world outside Europe, except for the United States, hardly exists in European school history<sup>59</sup>.

### **National history with a European dimension or a European perspective?**

However despite all mentioned hurdles, the expansion of European awareness has nevertheless increased the European dimension in history education. The special emphasis on *Europe* in school education is evident. Two Hungarian history educators Laszlo Bero and Vilmos Vass observed that 'Teaching about Europe is also teaching for Europe' the European integration process has stimulated special programmes. The learning about Europe is also widely represented in the educational system of Latvia where Latvian historical membership to Europe is stressed in the school textbooks. And in France too has the teaching of European history always been one of the main purposes of the French Ministry of Education<sup>60</sup>.

In many countries local and national history develop a European dimension as a particular period, event or person has influenced Europe or was by influenced Europe<sup>61</sup>. In such way European history is in a sense an annex to the national. In France for example, other countries than France are only mentioned in history textbooks related to specific themes such as



Germany under Nazi rule and Italy for Renaissance and fascism. And such understanding of the European dimension is by far the most common approach. Even topics with a clear European dimension are generally treated from an entirely national perspective. A clear example emerged from the national contributions during the EUROCLIO Annual Training Conference in Berlin in 1995 about the Potsdam Conference of 1945<sup>62</sup>. The national focus in teaching this European/Global subject was overwhelming. It became clear that the textbooks in the countries, which had been hardly involved in the Second World War like Spain and Portugal, barely mentioned this important conference. Others like France, Germany and the UK predominantly addressed their personal preoccupations: respectively to be excluded from the conference table, to be definitively divided into occupation zones and to be hindered by national elections. Also the EUSTORY Charter is aware of this limitation and strives to broaden the learning and teaching of history to a global perspective. It writes that 'a European framework can thus be a step on the way towards a global approach<sup>63</sup>'. However it looks like that this approach is still wishful thinking in the current practice of history education in Europe

A second type of European dimension is a focus on persons, texts, works of art, artefacts and phenomena and processes without a direct link to the national past or on shared historical experiences and cultural heritage. Only very rarely we can find examples of such approach, however some periods, phenomena and processes feature in many history curricula, such as the Antiquity, the Renaissance, the French Revolution or Napoleon regardless if there is a relation with the national past.

### **European Textbook**

Repeatedly this issue of a possible common European textbook has been brought up by politicians and journalists<sup>64</sup>. In spring 2007 European Union Education ministers met this in Heidelberg, during the German EU Presidency and discussed the creation of a common European history book. The German Minister of Education and Research Annette Schavan promoted the idea. She argued that education is essential for shaping identity and for social cohesion in Europe. The minister called on her colleagues in EU nations and neighbouring countries to stress the shared values and cultural perspectives among Europeans. However the Education Ministers from Poland and The Netherlands were sceptical, and in 2009 this initiative has not been followed up.

Historians and certainly history educators in Europe rarely advocated such approach, as many feared a watered down official European narrative as result. A charter of good practice was acceptable and in 2001 the Council



of Europe's *Recommendation on the Learning and Teaching of History*, prepared by history education experts throughout Europe, was not only subscribed by the full Council of Ministers but disseminated to all member states of the Council<sup>65</sup>.

The only existing example of such common European narrative *The History of Europe*, in English *the Illustrated History of Europe*, published in 1992, confirmed for many this anxiety<sup>66</sup>. The book is translated in many European languages and has an uniform design in all the different language editions. It has though not been able to avoid the traditional national mirrors of pride and pain. The twelve authors, representing twelve European Union countries, worked on a French master text. However the national language texts start to deviate considerably, as soon as the edition touches the national history. Only example might illustrate this already. It concerns the German and English version, involving German history and national pride. The English version follows the master text and it writes on the Blitzkrieg *The Wehrmacht advanced rapidly, but was not able to wage a 'lightning war' or Blitzkrieg like its campaigns in Poland and France.* But in the German text adds extra information: It was not only a Blitzkrieg against Poland and France, but also *in the spring of 1941 on the Balkans*. We may question if the master text deliberately wanted to diminish the strength of the German Army, or that the German text wanted to demonstrate German pride about the quality of the army attack during the Second World War<sup>67</sup>.

## Challenges

To conclude it might be good to have a short reflection about the major challenges for history education in Europe in 2009. The biggest challenge is the low national and international political priority for education. As a result of the existing EU legislation, general education has within Europe hardly any value. It is even more difficult to convince politicians that history education is relevant: they frequently question the usefulness of school history. If there was interest for history education in these past years, it was because of big words like Reconciliation, Democracy and Intercultural Dialogue. However, the hard content of the subject was, to the dismay of many history educators, disregarded. European wide questions how to deal in school history with the big issues of the European History of the Twentieth Century such as its Communist Legacy, its Devastating Wars, its Massive Migration and Deportations or its long-lasting Controversies created by the Paris Peace Conference of 1919, are generally left to the discretion and responsibility of individual history teachers.

A second challenge is today's generation of young people, which is growing up in a new social environment. They live in an instant global society, where information is available at their fingertips around the clock. The information technology revolution is changing the way young people learn and process information. Recent international test results indicate that students' level of knowledge, and capacity to think are in many European countries decreasing. On the one hand, young people are used to finding information on the internet quickly and effectively, but on the other, they lack sufficient skills of processing and judging this information.

The last challenge regards the teaching profession. The role of teachers today is changing, but not diminishing. Quite contrary. More than ever, students need guidance in learning to process. History teachers have a unique possibility to help young people understand what Europe is about, but they cannot do so without the appropriate skills and training. Recently *Life Long Learning* has become the European slogan for people in education. That was high time, as systematic in-service education was certainly not embedded in the education cultures of Europe. However an EUROCLIO inquiry in revealed that on national, local and school level, there is still generally little support for such training. On the contrary, many obstacles that prevent teachers from full professional development. Teachers are not allowed to leave school for training, they receive insufficient or even not any financial support for participation, they have to take unpaid leave or even are forced to cover the cost for their substitution. Based on this inquiry and supported by information EUROCLIO acquired organizing international training events, it can exemplify several EU countries, which basically deny their teachers continuous professional training.

The late influential Polish politician Bronislaw Gemerek, concluded that the *Future of Europe is Democracy*. If so than Europe needs to work with more effort on strengthening the role of education in this process, and reinforce the role of history education and history educators<sup>68</sup>. The question is how can we connect the need for a European perspective in history education with innovative, 21th century, teaching methods? As response to this question, EUROCLIO proposes an alternative format for a European School History Textbook. Under the title it has started to explore the development of an online multimedia tool to support comparative learning about common themes in European history and heritage. But, such tool alone is of course not enough. It needs a well educated professional work force to disseminate and implement it.

### Final remark

In 2009, History Education in Europe is under construction and it will probably continue to be so, as each generation asks its own questions to the past. As history transmitted through school history is still regularly a weapon in intercultural intra-state and cross border confrontations, there is clearly a need for more intercultural dialogue on history in Europe. It is important that historians and history educators in Turkey join this pan-European challenging voyage, as this working with the past involves the future of young generations in Europe.

### ENDNOTES

- 1 Stimulating teachers to provide their pupils with a variety of perspectives to the past, is one of the goals of EUROCLIO, *the European Association of History Educators*, which I co- founded. This democratic Network organisation was established in 1993, after the Fall of the Berlin Wall and the Dissolution of the Soviet Union, in order to build bridges among the European countries by exploring the connections and complexities between their different histories. In 2009, EUROCLIO represents more than 60 organisations from over 40, mainly European, countries. Please look for more information on [www.euroclio.eu](http://www.euroclio.eu).
- 2 Leeuw-Roord, Joke van der (ed), *History Changes. Facts and Figures about History Education in Europe( since 1989*, 2004, (7)
- 3 History Changes (7-9) en boek van Alois Ecker
- 4 <http://www.qca.org.uk/>
- 5 History Changes (7-9) en boek van Alois Ecker
- 6 History changes, (21-22)
- 7 Examples for this development are amongst others reforms in history curricula in England, Finland, The Netherlands and Denmark
- 8 Ian Philips in his lecture *Nature of history curriculum change & reform in England* on 6 June 2009 in Kızılcıhamam, Turkey during the EUROCLIO seminar *New Roads for History Education in Turkey* Stocktaking, Assessing and Planning. See for further information the history section of the QCA website [http://www.qca.org.uk/qca\\_6354.aspx](http://www.qca.org.uk/qca_6354.aspx)
- 9 Martin Roberts (ed), *After the Wall, History Teaching in Europe since 1989*, Eustory series, *Shaping European History*, Volume 4, (Hamburg, 2004) This publication scrutinizes the impact of this period of change on school history in Europe.
- 10 Polina Verbytska, 'School history education for the development of democracy' (62-69) in *After the Wall*.
- 11 Lubos Vesely(ed) *Contemporary History Textbooks in the South Caucasus* (Prague, 2008); Ukraine have until now not operated along similar lines. Claudia Fischer in *Writing about History without Pathos? Some Remarks on the Best Contributions to the 1998 Students Competition on Ukrainian History* (116) in Joke van der Leeuw-Roord, (ed) *History for Today and Tomorrow. What does Europe mean for school history?* The second

- volume of the series *Shaping European History* (Germany 2001) writes that Ukraine gave priority to the nation-state building of Ukraine and new Ukrainian textbooks only reflected the political changes in replacing the former Soviet symbols, heroes and idols. Joke van der Leeuw-Roord, 'Geschiedenis op school in Europa', (49-61) in P.den Boer en G.W.Muller (red.) *Geschiedenis op school* (Amsterdam, 1998) (49)
- 12 Balkan publicaties/Julia Kushnerereva, *Textbooks in Russia since 1989 in After the Wall* (148)
- 13 Angvik, Magne/Bodo von Borries: *Youth and History. A comparative European Survey on Historical Consciousness and Political Attitudes among Adolescents*, Hamburg (Edition Körber-Stiftung) 1997 [vol. A: description, vol. B: documentation, CD-ROM]. Subject(s): Teaching of history - Historical consciousness - Political attitude - Conception of history - Adolescents - Europe - Belgium - Bulgaria - Croatia - Czech Republic - Denmark - Estonia - Finland - France - Germany - Greece - Great Britain - Hungary - Iceland - Israel - Italy - South Tyrol - Lithuania - Netherlands - Norway - Palestinian Territories - Poland - Portugal - Russia - Slovenia - Spain - Sweden - Turkey - Ukraine
- 14 Youth and History
- 15 Bero and Vass , in *Teaching and Learning about Europe in Hungary* (147) in Jones, *Sharing the bad with an Elephant: Teaching History in Wales* ( 41-42)Martin in *European History and Old French Habits*(56-57)in *History for Today and Tomorrow*
- 16 *History Changes*. (17-32)
- 17 We may conclude that the results of the questionnaires offer at the moment the only comparative insights in school history in Europe
- 18 In his research on the work of the Council of Europe on School History Stradling noticed a considerable change in the school history curriculum
- 19 Boytsov *History for Today and Tomorrow*
- 20 Bodo Von Borries in *Multiperspectivity - Utopian Pretension or Feasible Fundament of Historical Learning in Europe?* (269-295) in *History for Today and Tomorrow* ;Bob Stradling *Multiperspectivity in History teaching, A Guide for Teachers*, Council of Europe publishing (2003) [http://www.coe.int/t/e/cultural\\_co-operation/education/history\\_teaching/european\\_dimension/Multiperspectivity-E.pdf](http://www.coe.int/t/e/cultural_co-operation/education/history_teaching/european_dimension/Multiperspectivity-E.pdf)
- 21 Martin Tutiaux confirms his view as she writes in France there is '.. *History for Today and Tomorrow*
- 22 As one of the participants in a EUROCLIO conference in 2001 in Tallinn observed. The situation, he wrote, '... shows how much of the traditional history is maintained in all progress that is made, for instance by shifting to teaching skills. Real innovation is, I was convinced already before the conference but now more than ever, a shift in focus....'
- 23 Stradling A Council of Europe handbook on Teaching 20<sup>th</sup> Century European History (240) in *History for Today and Tomorrow*.
- 24 Linda Symcox , *Internationalizing the U.S. History Curriculum* (37) in Linda Symcox and Arie Wilschut *National History Standards, the Problem of the Canon and the Future Teaching of History*,2009 ; [http://www.euroclio.eu/joomla/index.php/component?option=com\\_myblog/Itemid,384/](http://www.euroclio.eu/joomla/index.php/component?option=com_myblog/Itemid,384/)
- 25 History changes, (28)
- 26 Jan Bank en Piet de Rooy, 'Een canon van het Nederlandse verleden. Wat iedereen móet weten van de vaderlandse geschiedenis', NRC Handelsblad, 30 oktober 2004.

- 27 Teaching about the History of the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia is only going to be allowed in 2009 [http://www.euroclio.eu/joomla/index.php/component/option,com\\_myblog/Itemid,384/archive,October-2008/](http://www.euroclio.eu/joomla/index.php/component/option,com_myblog/Itemid,384/archive,October-2008/)
  - 28 "Yearning for Yesterday, Conference on National history Standards", Utrecht, 5 and 6 October 2006
  - 29 The most vocal advocate for world history in Europe is Luigi Cajani, from Università di Roma 'La Sapienza' (Italy). He has been involved in experiments to implement such approach in school history in Italy.
  - 30 See for instance EUROCLIO questionnaire 2005 [http://www.euroclio.eu/joomla/index.php/component/option,com\\_docman/Itemid,402/](http://www.euroclio.eu/joomla/index.php/component/option,com_docman/Itemid,402/)
  - 31 Linda Symcox and Arie Wilschut in Introduction (5) in *National History Standards*
  - 32 Wijnand W. Mijndhardt "De zinloosheid van een nationale canon in leerbaar" in Arie Wilschut, *Haalbaar*, Vossiuspers, University of Amsterdam, 2005, page 17.
  - 33 Maria en kees
  - 34 <http://www.euroclio.eu/joomla/index.php> History Education in the News
  - 35 Kooren story
  - 36 Carol Capita *Small World, Big Country. A reappraisal of Europe in Rumanian History Teaching* (77) in *History for Today and Tomorrow*.
  - 37 Valdis Klisans, 'The teaching of Local, National and European History. Recent Latvian Experience' in Online EUROCLIO Bulletin 22 <http://www.euroclio.eu/download/2005/Bulletin22/bulletin.PDF>. Valdis Klisans in 'National and European history in Schools', (109-115) in *History for Today and Tomorrow*
  - 38 'The Future of Britishness': Speech by Gordon Brown to the Fabian Society: January 14 2006. Fabian Society Press Release
  - 39 Commissie Ontwikkeling Nederlandse Canon, <http://entoen.nu>. *Tussenrapportage* (2 februari 2006), [www.canonvannederland.nl](http://www.canonvannederland.nl) . Leeuw-Roord, Joke van der; 'De Canon' Uzerine Bir Degerlendirme in " *Ana Hatlariyla Hollanda Tarihi* (De Canon) (2008) 113-127.
- The Canon for Dutch History and Culture has caused a hype in the Dutch media about thinking over canonical knowledge for a wide range of subjects.
- 40 See for debates on the Dutch National History Museum [http://www.sica.nl/pdf/verslag\\_23\\_mei\\_2007.pdf](http://www.sica.nl/pdf/verslag_23_mei_2007.pdf) and <http://www.rnw.nl/category/tags-english/dutch-national-history-museum>
  - 41 Kenan Cayir *Preparing Turkey for the European Union: nationalism, National Identity and Otherness'* " in *Turkeys New Textbooks, Journal of Intercultural Studies* , 30: 1, 39-55,
  - 42 Maria Repoussi, *New History Textbooks in Greece, The chronicle of an ideological war on the national past*, via <http://users.auth.gr/~marrep/html/intro/articles/New%20History%20Books%20in%20Greece.pdf>, Euroclio Bulletin 26; Jurgen Broeders, *The Greeks fought heroically, A history of Greek history textbooks*. (2008) Master's thesis Radboud University Nijmegen
  - 43 <http://www.kibrispostasi.com/index.php/cat/35/news/25241/PageName/KIBRIS>
  - 44 Martin (50-52). *History for Today and Tomorrow*
  - 45 Stradling9). *History for Today and Tomorrow*
  - 46 See for instance EUROCLIO questionnaire 2005 [http://www.euroclio.eu/joomla/index.php/component/option,com\\_docman/Itemid,402/](http://www.euroclio.eu/joomla/index.php/component/option,com_docman/Itemid,402/)

- 47 *History Changes*, (19-20)
- 48 See EUROCLIO questionnaire 2004. [http://www.euroclio.eu/joomla/index.php/component?option=com\\_docman/Itemid,402/](http://www.euroclio.eu/joomla/index.php/component?option=com_docman/Itemid,402/)
- 49 See Questionnaire 2005 [http://www.euroclio.eu/joomla/index.php/component?option=com\\_docman/Itemid,402/](http://www.euroclio.eu/joomla/index.php/component?option=com_docman/Itemid,402/)
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- 51 Sharon Macdonald (edited) *Approaches to European Historical Consciousness, Reflections and Provocations*. Hamburg, 2000.
- 52 Jones ()Pingel in *How to approach Europe, The European dimension in history textbooks* ()
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- 55 Youth and History()
- 56 Jones ().History for Today and Tomorrow
- 57 In his contribution *A Joint Venture: EUROCLIO and Russians Writing Schoolbooks on the post-war History*, ()History for Today and Tomorrow
- 58 EUROCLIO questionnaire 2005
- 59 Klisans in *National and European History in Schools and Examination in Latvia* ()as well as Bero and Vass ().History for Today and Tomorrow
- 60 Bero and Vass write. Latvia France.
- 61 Capita Bero and Vass, Martin .
- 62 Leeuw-Roord, Joke van der, *Altered States and Consciousness, examining Potsdam*, in TES, April 7, 1995 (V-VI )
- 63 [http://www.eustory.de/root/img/pool/bilder\\_fuer\\_our\\_network/pdf/eustory\\_charter.pdf](http://www.eustory.de/root/img/pool/bilder_fuer_our_network/pdf/eustory_charter.pdf)
- 64 <http://www.eurotopics.net/en/presseschau/archiv/article/ARTICLE14880-A-European-history-textbook> and<http://www.dw-world.de/dw/article/0,,2370988,00.html>
- 65 <http://wcd.coe.int/ViewDoc.jsp?id=234237>
- 66 Frederic Delouche (ed.). *Histoire de l'Europe*. 1992.
- 67 *Histoire de l'Europe*.(344)
- 68 Gemerek, Bronislaw, *De overwinning van de democratie in Europa*, page 93-111, in Leo Ornstein en Lo Breemer (ed), *Paleis Europa*. Grote denkers over Europa. Amsterdam, 2007