
Regional History in Textbooks

The Croatian Case

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Croatia, just like France, is a land of dual position. The continental part of its territory belongs to Central Europe and the coastal part to Southern Europe. Croatia is often referred to as a Balkan country. [...] Considering culture, tradition, religion and economic development, this is a special part of Europe. Influences from that region reached Croatia too, but were never as significant as those from Central and Southern Europe. *Some* would like to include *us* among Balkan countries. Knowing *our* culture, tradition, religion and other characteristics, the official Croatian geography does not consider *our* country a Balkan one. ¹

Such description of the Croatia's position in the regional division of Europe is not an exception in Croatian history and geography textbooks.² They mostly present the historical processes that confirm cultural, political and geographical connection with Western and Central Europe, while the notion of "the Balkans" has the negative meaning *per se* and it is markedly contrasted to European culture to which Croatia, as it has been often emphasised, belongs for centuries. For example, the above-mentioned textbook distinguishes the "cultural influences" that Croatia "accepts" from the ones it is forced to "defend itself against". "Central European" and "Western European/Mediterranean" influences – with their Catholic religion and Western culture – belong to the former. On the other hand, the "South East European/Balkan influence" is mentioned only in the negative context: "Throughout history, Croatia was forced to defend itself against the influences from the East, because it was threatened by conquerors spreading Orthodoxy and Islam."³ Or, even more directly, in another geography textbook: "The world recognises the Balkans as the synonym for insecurity, ethnic intolerance, economic backwardness, fragmentation and other negative elements. Taking all these facts into consideration, Croatia has to [...] make immense efforts to build its age-old image of a country that belongs to the circle of Western European culture and civilisation."⁴

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- 1 Z. Čukelj, Ž. Šilović, *Zemljopis 8* (8th grade primary school textbook), Zagreb, 2003, pp.14-15. The italics are mine.
 - 2 The same map of regional division of Europe could be found in all primary and secondary school geography textbooks (17 analysed). They clearly place Croatia in Central Europe, at the same time acknowledging its dual position between Central and Southern Europe. There is only one textbook among them which acknowledges the dual position of Croatia between Central and Southeastern Europe.
 - 3 *Ibid.*, p. 15
 - 4 D. Feletar, R. Labazan, Z. Stiperski, *Geografija 4*, (4th grade secondary school textbook), Zagreb, 2001, pp. 8-9



This division between «us» and «others», so evident from these three short paragraphs, opens a range of questions: What constitutes “our” cultural heritage? Who belongs to “our story” – who is included and, even more importantly in this case, who is excluded? Although these examples indicate in the first place the attitudes and interpretations of textbook authors, they also originate from the curriculum, the fact which should not be neglected because it refers to the educational policy of the state. The cause of concern is the rejection of a part of the particular cultural heritage, which leaves doors wide-open for ignorance, fears, prejudices and contempt towards diversity and prevents pupils from understanding and accepting different cultural contributions as equal.

Learning to live together is one of the four pillars of education for the 21st century that have been emphasised in the report of the UNESCO Commission headed by Jacques Delors in 1996.⁵ Education should help young people to develop knowledge, skills and attitudes necessary for living in a multiethnic and multicultural society: respect for diversity, empathy, tolerance, communication, cooperation, peaceful problem solving, openness, adaptability and critical thinking. It is clear that history teaching has an important role in achieving these aims. When we teach our pupils about past societies and cultures, when we try to help them comprehend the different perspectives and ways of life, we also hope they will gain more understanding and tolerance for the people in the present whose beliefs and attitudes are different from theirs.

It also seems that these important goals are often expressed in history curricula only declaratively and achieved in history teaching with difficulty, at least in most countries that emerged after the break-up of former Yugoslavia. Taking into consideration the tragic events in the first half of the 1990s, it is no wonder that exactly the presentation of regional and national history underwent most significant changes. In Croatia, this has resulted with an almost completely new narrative of the national history and re-definition of its relation with former compatriots. This analysis is therefore focused on the history textbooks from the first half of the 1990s, to show how they, as the mirror of their time, reflect political and social changes from that period, especially when regional history is concerned. In order to establish elements of continuity and discontinuity, this period is compared with the second half of the 1980s and 1990s. The primary school was chosen since at this educational level all pupils between 11 and 14 learn history, which is not the case in secondary education.

5 *Learning: The Treasure Within*, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 1996 (Croatian edition: Učenje: blago u nama, Zagreb, 1998, p. 102-104)

However, as an educator, I will also argue that teaching neighbouring histories is just a part of the bigger issue. Textbooks are just the most visible part of it; below the surface there are many other factors – curricula, pedagogical tradition of history teaching, educational policy of the state, etc. However, more than anything else, it is the question of the perceived *purpose* of school history in a certain society, of its role in the education of young generations. It is important to consider why school history matters and why governments and different groups throughout the world try to influence history curricula. We have to ask ourselves *what kind of history* we choose to teach, *how* we teach it, and most importantly, *why* we teach it. These questions are also connected with schools history's capacity to shape pupils' identity and to create their individual and collective memory; they underlie every discussion about pedagogy of history teaching, its strategies and classroom methods. They are also at the heart of this analysis.

In the 1980s, Croatian pupils received some factual knowledge about the peoples with whom they shared the common Yugoslav state, but at the same time very little knowledge about other neighbours outside that state. Approximately 20-30% of textbook content was dedicated to the Croatian history, 30-40% to the history of “other Yugoslav peoples”, and 30% to world/European history, which was heavily Western-oriented. Croatian history was presented within the Yugoslav framework, but in separate lessons.⁶ It is important to say that the image they got from textbooks about the so-called “our peoples” (as it was constantly emphasised in textbooks) – Serbs, Slovenes, Macedonians, Montenegrins, Muslims in Bosnia and Herzegovina etc. – was positive, based on affirmative examples from their histories, especially their cultural achievements. But, it was mostly based on emphasising their common historical faith of small nations constantly threatened by the great powers (Frankish Empire, Byzantine Empire, Ottoman Empire) and neighbours (Italians, Hungarians, Austrians, Greeks, partly Bulgarians) and especially on the joint struggle against the common enemy during the Second World War. This was in accordance with the famous phrase of the *brotherhood and unity* of Yugoslav peoples, which was one of the important educational objectives of the period.⁷ Sentences that emphasise the need for a common struggle against foreign domination permeated textbooks, which provided the interpretative framework for presenting the history

6 Described by W. Höpken as a kind of *numeric Yugoslavism*, “based on proportional consideration of both ‘Yugoslav’ and separate national history”. ‘History Education and Yugoslav (Dis-)Integration’, in *Oil on Fire? Textbooks, Ethnic Stereotypes and Violence in South-Eastern Europe*, Hannover, 1996, p. 106

7 W. Höpken emphasises the problem of teaching a separate national and common Yugoslav historical identity at the same time: on the one hand, the development of the common identity was not very successful and there were constant complains of students' poor knowledge of other Yugoslav nations; on the other hand, there was a constant fear in some republics, including Croatia, of undermining national identity because of the relatively little space left for the national history. *Ibid.*, pp. 106-8

of South Slav peoples. For example:

Fighting for national liberation and unification, each of our peoples became aware of their interdependence in common fight. In the 19th century, this awareness developed into an aspiration for the unification of all our peoples in one common state.⁸

On the other hand, the image pupils were presented about their surrounding outside the Yugoslav state was pronouncedly xenophobic. It was the notion of the land surrounded by “enemies”. *They* “threatened our peoples”, “plundered *our* coast”, “prevented *our* economical and cultural development”, etc:

Croatia entered the Early Modern Ages divided between three masters – Venice, Turks and Habsburgs. Turks ruled their part by rough force – whip, sabre and stake, while Venice and Habsburgs ruled by force and perfidious artfulness.⁹

The most negative presentation was that of Ottoman Turks, which was probably to a large extent due to the period of the first Yugoslavia (perhaps even earlier) and to the state of affairs in historiography. It was full of stereotypes which are for the 16th and 17th centuries based on the image of conquerors and destroyers of the South Slavic statehood and culture, and for the 19th century on contemptuous attitude about the Ottoman Empire as the most backward state in Europe and stereotypical image of the “sick man on the Bosphorus”, the phrase which is often repeated without any explanation. This negative image was only partly diminished by the positive presentation of the Islamic culture, but this was reserved only for the history of Bosnia, although some parts of Croatia were under the Ottoman rule for more than 200 years. It is interesting to notice that pupils got very little knowledge about Austria, although Croatia was for 400 years a part of the Habsburg Empire. The image of the Austrians was completely equalised with the negatively evaluated politics of the Habsburg rulers. More information can be found about the Hungarians, but their history is mentioned within the framework of Croatian-Hungarian relations, and it is viewed exclusively from the Croatian national perspective. This image is negative for the Early Middle Ages and especially for the 19th century, and mostly neutral for the period of the 20th century and the period between the 11th and the 18th centuries. The history of the Italians was largely reduced to the struggle for control over Dalmatian coast, with few exceptions which include Renaissance (positive), Risorgimento (partly negative because of the Irredenta movement) and Fascism (negative).

Basically, at the end of the 1980s the Croatian surroundings was presented in textbooks in two stereotypical images: on the one side there was the almost idealised image of relations between «our peoples», and on the other the image of other Yugoslav neighbours as enemies. It is obvious that such an image could not have been further away from what happened in the

8 D. Pavličević, F. Potreblica, R. Lovrenčić, *Čovjek u svom vremenu* 3, Zagreb, 1986 (7th grade textbook), p. 48

9 I. Makek, J. Adamček, *Čovjek u svom vremenu* 2 (6th grade textbook), Zagreb, 1985, p. 177

Yugoslav society at the end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s. So, what was the pedagogical response to that situation? Unfortunately, it was obvious that the approach to history teaching, which was dominant for decades, when there was only one possible History, has left history teachers helpless when faced with many competing histories. Of course, these “other stories” existed all the time, in the form of family histories (which at the end proved to be more convincing than the official history), because some controversial and sensitive topics, especially from the recent history, were either avoided altogether or presented as resolved by the Communist Party politics. But in the late 1980s and early 1990s these parallel histories were out and openly competing in the media and children were bombarded daily with different messages. However, was there even a possibility to tackle these issues, when there was a profound confusion among many teachers who were never taught to teach differently and who were at the beginning of the 1990s asked to change their ideological discourse in the classroom overnight? So, the result was that in the 1990s we were again stuck with *the History* – only its content was different!

In the first half of the 1990s the curricula and textbooks underwent significant changes that could be summed up as “de-ideologisation”, “singling out the Croatian history from the Yugoslav framework” (or “de-Yugoslavisation” and “re-nationalisation”, as described by W. Höpken¹⁰) and “the reduction of content in the over-burdened curricula”. As we shall see, all these changes, apart from their original intent, were partly used to reduce the number of pages in textbooks dedicated to “other Yugoslav peoples”, which went hand in hand with the redefinition of who “we” are – in the process, some of the former “our peoples” became enemies.

The first changes in the Croatian curricula and textbooks were introduced soon after the 1990 elections which brought the period of the Communist rule to an end. They were mostly about the so-called “de-ideologisation”, removing from textbooks the interpretations inspired by the Marxist view of history. Eventually it really meant, as W. Höpken warned¹¹, the switch of ideologies and not an attempt to introduce the multiperspective approach. However, in these first post-Communist textbooks, still written by the same authors, there was no reduction in the number of pages dedicated to other South Slavs, the Yugoslav framework was still left intact and the existing teaching units were retained, although some of their titles were changed (for example, the unit *South Slavs in the Early Middle Ages* was renamed *Croats and other South Slavs in the Early Middle Ages*¹²).

¹⁰ Ibid., pp. 112-117

¹¹ Ibid., p. 112

¹² *Nastavni plan i program za osnovne škole u Republici Hrvatskoj (izmjene i dopune)*, Zagreb, 1991 (National curriculum – amended, 1991)

The second wave of changes began soon after the proclamation of independence, mostly in 1992. This time the changes were more radical. Some of the textbooks were withdrawn after a strong public attack by the members of the new political establishment because of their supposedly “pro-Yugoslav content”.¹³ In the next couple of years, strengthening the national identity became the main goal of history teaching, while the creation of national state was presented as a leading idea of the Croatian history, the fulfilment of “the thousand-year-old dream”. This new interpretative framework has also served in some textbooks as a justification for certain less pleasant episodes from the national history, such as the establishing of the pro-Fascist regime during the World War II and its crimes. It is often the case in these lessons that the presentation of events is usually preceded by the broad retrospection which brings the story of centennial Croatian struggle for independent state and lists political injustices done against the Croats by the Hungarians, Habsburg rulers, Serbs etc. In the case of NDH, this serves the purpose of separating the act of state-creation, which is evaluated as positive, as something wanted by all Croats regardless of their political affiliation, from the Ustasha regime and its crimes, which are evaluated negatively.

It is interesting that these changes were first made in textbooks, and only afterwards in the curricula. The existence of only one textbook for a grade only made such changes easier. For primary schools, there were new textbooks for the 5th and 8th grades. Modifications were particularly drastic in the 8th grade textbook¹⁴ dealing with, not surprisingly, the 20th century, where there was a complete change of content and perspective for the national history. But, the most bizarre was the case of the 5th grade, dealing with prehistory and antiquity (therefore without any national history or any particularly controversial topics), when a textbook originating from early 1940s¹⁵ was again approved in 1994! In the 6th and 7th grades, dealing with the period from the Early Middle Ages to 1918, there were somewhat subtler changes: the same textbooks remained, but their texts were “adapted” to the new circumstances.¹⁶ On the basis of these modified textbooks, the new curriculum was created in 1995, which presented a break from the existing praxis. It is still valid today.

One of the consequences of these changes was the significant switch of perspectives. Lessons on Croatian history were now completely separated from the Yugoslav framework. If it is fair to say that there was more or less general consensus about it, there was lesser consensus about

13 For example, comparing the report of the deputy minister of education about history textbooks in the Croatian Parliament in June 1992 (in *Školske novine*, 9 June 1992) and the history textbooks approved in October 1992 indicates that the sentences used in the report entered directly in some occasions into the textbooks. This is particularly the case with the 7th and 8th grade textbooks.

14 I. Perić, *Povijest: za VIII. razred osnovne škole* (8th grade textbook), Zagreb 1992

15 Ž. Jakić, *Povijest staroga vijeka: za V. razred osnovne škole*, (5th grade textbook), Zagreb, 1994

16 Particularly interesting is the case of a 7th grade textbooks withdrawn in April 1992 for its “Yugoslav Unitarian spirit” (*Glasnik Ministarstva prosvjete i kulture Republike Hrvatske*, 16. lipnja 1992) and re-approved in October 1992 with significant changes in content and perspective.

the final result, especially the 1995 primary and secondary school curricula¹⁷. In their centre was the national history, which now meant exclusively the history of Croats, not only those living in Croatia, but also in the neighbouring countries, especially in Bosnia and Herzegovina. On the other hand, the very detailed and prescriptive curricula did not demand explicitly from textbook writers and teachers to deal with the history of ethnic minorities on the territory of Croatia. The share of the national history, defined in this way, was increased from 30% to 60%. When explaining aims and goals of history teaching, curriculum makers emphasise that “we study our historical relations with the world in both past and present from the standpoint of national history”¹⁸. This basically means that most events from the national history that have regional, European or world context (e.g. migrations, 1848 etc.) are perceived only from a very narrow national perspective.

A further consequence was the reduction of content matter dedicated to the history of South Slav peoples, both in textbooks and the curricula. The number of pages in textbooks was significantly reduced. However, it did not mean that pupils learnt more, or even differently, about other Croatian neighbours, indeed the negative image from the 1980s about the Austrians, Hungarians, Italians and others remained the same. This shows that the same model from the previous period has been uncritically kept in the case of non-Slav neighbours, while in the case of South Slavs it has been equally uncritically discarded. This was largely done under the pretext of the so-called “reduction of content”, particularly after 1995 when this demand was repeated year after year. It must be said that this measure had its pedagogical rationale, because of the really overburdened curricula (the problem which is still not dealt with), but it is significant that the first victims of such a reduction were lessons dedicated to neighbouring countries and minorities! Besides, the reduction of content in certain cases often meant removing facts but leaving the negative interpretations no longer based on facts, which only blew some events out of proportion and served to strengthen the generally negative image.¹⁹

17 The 1995 curriculum was preceded by the 1993 proposal of the group of historians which offered some interesting and innovative solutions. However, it was in use for only one semester in the school year 1993/94 and then it was repealed without any further explanations.

18 Prosvjetni vjesnik: Special edition, Zagreb, 1999, p. 136

19 A good example is the presentation of the Serbian history in the first half of the 19th century, which usually includes the political programme called *Načertanije*. In the 1986 textbook there were 7 lines out of the nine pages dedicated to that programme which were presented neutrally. (Pavličević, Potrelica, Lovrenčić, *Čovjek u svom vremenu* 3, p. 85) In the 1992 textbook this document is evaluated negatively as the programme of the Great Serbian politics. Authors now dedicate half a page to it from the two and half pages altogether. (Pavličević, Potrelica, *Povijest*, p. 78) Finally, in the 1996 textbook the presentation of the Serbian history in that period is reduced to only one page, but one third of it is dedicated to *Načertanije*, which turns it into the most significant phenomenon in the Serbian history of the 19th century! (Pavličević, Potrelica, *Povijest* 7, p. 53)

It is interesting to follow what happened with lessons on history of South Slavs. For example, in the 6th grade, they became a part of the general history units and were reduced from one third of the textbook to a couple of pages.²⁰ The case of the 7th grade is even more colourful. A separate unit for the history of South Slavs in the first half of the 19th century was introduced in the 1992 textbook (but nothing similar for the second half of the century).²¹ Originally its title was *Neighbouring South Slav lands at the end of the 18th and the first half of the 19th century*, by which it was meant the history of Slovenes, South Slavs in Southern Hungary, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Serbia and Montenegro. After the introduction of the 1995 curriculum, this title – with the same content – was changed to *Alpine and Balkan territory at the end of the 18th and the first half of the 19th century*. Macedonians have, little by little, disappeared from the horizon. The presentation of Slovenian history basically remained the same, but that of history of Bosnia-Herzegovina and Serbia underwent major modifications. The history of Serbia was, wherever possible, put in the negative context.²² The most specific was the case of the history of Bosnia and Herzegovina which was included in units on Croatian history (with the exception of the first half of the 19th century, as indicated above). The textbook dealing with the medieval period further emphasised the tight connections between Bosnia and Croatia²³, while for the 19th century the account of Bosnian history was primarily used for the presentation of the history of the Croats living in Bosnia.²⁴

However, it was the presentation of the history of two Yugoslav states, as it was already mentioned, that underwent the most drastic modifications. Everything except Croatian history was left out. The tendentious selection of negative examples from the common past served the purpose of erasing any positive historical memory about the two Yugoslav states. Such a construction is mostly visible for the interwar period, which has become the central point of

20 I. Makek, *Povijest 6*, 1992; also in the 1997 edition.

21 Pavličević, *Potrebica*, *Povijest 7*, 1992, pp. 65-80

22 For example, the lesson title in 1992 textbook *Other neighbouring South Slav lands at the end of the 18th and in the first half of the 19th century* (meaning Serbia and Montenegro) was changed, as demanded by the curriculum, in the 1996 textbook to *Great Serbian politics of the Principality of Serbia. Montenegro* (Pavličević, *Potrebica*, *Povijest*, 1992, p. 76; Pavličević, *Potrebica*, *Povijest*, 1996, p. 53).

23 I. Makek, *Povijest*, 1992; also in the 1997 edition.

24 For example, in the 7th grade curriculum there were lessons such as *Croats and other peoples in Bosnia and Herzegovina*, *Austro-Hungarian rule and Croats in Bosnia-Herzegovina*, *Political movement of Croats in Bosnia-Herzegovina*. Prosvjetni vjesnik: Special edition, 1999.

25 The focus in the 1987 textbook was on the Second World War period (38% of the textbook for the whole war, 26% of the textbook for the wartime national history) which was considered the main element of political legitimisation of the Communist rule by emphasising the unity of the liberation movement and the Socialist revolution. (See the text by M. Najbar Agičić, ...) This was reduced in the 1992 textbook to 20% for the whole war and 10% for the national wartime history. The interwar national history (which meant the history of Yugoslavia) occupied about 10% in the 1987 textbook and 28% in the 1992 textbook (now mostly Croatian history). Lovrenčić, Jelić, Vukadinović, Bilandžić, *Čovjek u svom vremenu*, 1987; Perić, *Povijest*, 1992.

the historical narrative for the 20th century, focusing on the national oppression of Croats.²⁵ This led to certain absurdities because textbooks were filled up with facts such as party programmes or biographies of prominent politicians, but at the same time there was no wider Yugoslav context which would enable pupils to understand them! The same was applied to the presentation of the history of the Socialist Yugoslavia, while the account of the period of the Second World War is characterised by neglecting the problematic aspects of Croatian history and emphasising the events for which the other side bears responsibility.

On the level of textbooks, all of this acquires an additional dimension, especially in the books originating from the 1980s (6th and 7th grades). Even a very superficial language analysis shows a range of modifications – omitting and adding words and sentences which specify, strengthen, soften or question the standpoints from the previous version, or completely change the meaning. I shall illustrate this by using 6th grade textbooks as an example. In the lesson on the medieval Dubrovnik in the 1985 textbook there are a couple of sentences that indicate Dubrovnik's relations with its neighbours:

Dubrovnik secured its trading interests with the rulers of Balkan states (Bosnian, Serbian, Bulgarian, Byzantine) and our and Italian towns. [...] In that period Dubrovnik expanded its territory by waging wars with neighbouring nobility and buying land.²⁶

In the 1992 textbook, the first sentence is modified by changing the word order and omitting the list of Balkan rulers. But it is other two sentences that change the meaning of the text in terms of attitude towards Dubrovnik's neighbours:

Citizens of Dubrovnik secured their businesses by making contracts with numerous Italian and Dalmatian towns and the rulers of Balkan lands. [...] However, [Dubrovnik] did not avoid armed conflict when it was necessary to defend freedom. It successfully campaigned many times against Serbian and Bosnian rulers and neighbouring nobility who tried to impose their rule. It expanded its territory by waging wars and buying lands [...] ²⁷

Finally, in the 1997 textbook the first sentence completely disappears. New statements are added which now offer an utterly claustrophobic and xenophobic picture of the medieval Dubrovnik:

Citizens of Dubrovnik did not avoid armed conflict when it was necessary to defend freedom. At the time when Serbian rulers spread their authority in the neighbouring area, they threw themselves upon Dubrovnik too. Dubrovnik vehemently kept the enemy at bay. They did not allow inhabitants from the hinterland to move to town, fearing that they would subsequently take control. They expanded the territory of Dubrovnik by waging wars and buying land [...] By

²⁶ Makek, *Čovjek u svom vremenu*, pp. 101, 102

²⁷ Makek, *Povijest*, pp. 87, 89

pursuing such a deliberate and determined politics, the citizens of Dubrovnik survived on the very edge of the Balkan-Orthodox civilisation and preserved their affiliation with the Croatian nation and the Western-European and Catholic civilisation.²⁸

There are other similar examples. Sentences or titles that indicate the common faith or co-operation of Croats and Serbs disappear from texts²⁹. In some wartime textbooks there are direct parallels between the past and the present, for example between the Ottoman conquests in the 16th and the 17th centuries and the Croat-Serbian war in the 1990s. In the process, the pronouncedly negative image that existed about the Ottoman Turks is now transmitted onto the Serbs who become the modern Turks³⁰. As it is already mentioned, sufferings of the “other” side are almost completely neglected, which is particularly characteristic for the presentation of the two world wars.³¹ It seems as if the present conflicts influence the ability of some textbook writers to acknowledge the sufferings of others even in the past!

This rather bleak picture becomes somewhat brighter in the second half of the 1990s. The key role in these changes belongs to the emergence of alternative textbooks, which were for the first time allowed by the educational authorities (although rather unwillingly and almost accidentally) in the school year 1996/7 and afterwards. This second generation of post-Communist textbooks offered a different approach, although they were written on the basis of the same curriculum and subjected to a rather strict control by the Ministry’s appointees. It has to be mentioned that there was no alternative/parallel textbook for the 20th century in that period. In these new textbooks (especially those dating from the end of the 1990s), the openly hostile images of neighbours could no longer be found, and they tried to give a more complex presentation of the processes and historical phenomena. For example, the 6th grade textbook

²⁸ Makek, *Povijest*, p. 76

²⁹ For example, when the integrative-Yugoslav processes are mentioned, there are also warnings about the bad consequences of these ideas in the future. There are also some interesting modifications of paragraph titles. The neutrally named title *Unification of Yugoslav peoples* in the 1986 textbook is modified to *State of national oppression of non-Serbian peoples* in the 1992 edition. Pavličević, Potrelica, Lovrenčić, *Čovjek u svom vremenu*, 1986, p. 227; Pavličević, Potrelica, *Povijest*, 1992, p. 110

³⁰ For example: “Centuries of “Turkish (*sic*) troubles” and “church bells” continued [...] Poet speaks of “two centuries when Croatia mourned” her dead heroes [...] But, it was the heroic period in the history of the Croatian people. Indeed, it was not the only one, but just as troubled as the one which the today’s Croatian generations experience.” Makek, *Povijest*, 1992, p. 119

³¹ For example, the sufferings of the Serbian population at the time of the Austrian-Hungarian occupation are no longer mentioned in the 7th grade textbook (Pavličević, Potrelica, *Povijest*, 1992 and 1996). Another example is the 8th grade textbook, which dedicates just one sentence to the sufferings of the Serbs, Jews and Roma population in the Independent State of Croatia, but at the same time gives a detailed description of the partisan and chetnik crimes against the Croats (Perić, *Povijest*, 1992, 1998).

for the period of the Middle Ages presented the picture of ethnic diversity of the territory of the present-day Croatia, without being confrontational and in fear of the “others”³² and in the 7th grade textbook there were no longer negatively determined lesson titles and offensive language.³³

The third generation of textbooks appeared in the year 2000 and later, which was partly the result of the political changes in the country and consequently a more liberal policy in the Ministry of Education.³⁴ These textbooks, although still written on the basis of the same curriculum, have brought about more substantial changes and have been directed towards didactical innovations (many of their authors were teachers). They have also offered different interpretations of certain events, especially when the 20th century history is concerned. In this manner, textbooks and publishers (not curricula or educational policy) have had significant impact on innovations in history teaching and have become the generator of the progress, perhaps more than in some other subjects. This shows that different texts *are* possible even on the basis of the same prescriptive curriculum which depends, to a large extent, on perceptions of the purpose and aims of the school history and its place in children’s education.

However, as far as regional history is concerned, the existing curriculum with its Croatocentric perspective remains the main obstacle for the more substantial subject reform. At the moment, the Ministry of Education is preparing the new National Educational Standards, but they are again based on the existing curriculum. Although the multiperspective approach is mentioned as one of the important goals of history teaching, it still remains to be seen how it will be applied on topics from the national history which also have a wider regional context. Some current debates indicate it is not going to be easy.

Introducing multiperspective approach is not at all simple in the history teaching where the prevailing tradition is still oriented towards directing pupils’ opinions, attitudes and values instead of developing critical and independent thinking. This is the tradition of teaching where open questions and different interpretations and evaluations of the past still provoke uneasiness of many teachers *and* educational authorities. Some cases which have recently stirred the fierce public debate – an attempt to write a supplement on the contemporary

³² For example, describing the Slavonian towns in the 14th century, it says: “During that period Zagreb was the most developed Slavonian town, with Slav, German, Latin (Italian and French) and Hungarian citizens.” Budak, Posavec, *Rađanje*, 1998, p. 66

³³ Agičić, *Povijest 7*, 1998

³⁴ Appointment of the commission for revision of history textbooks incited the public debate that found its reflection in newspapers articles and headlines, e. g. *Is it allowed to raise our children in the Croatian spirit?* (Slobodna Dalmacija, 21 April 2000), *Are Croatian textbooks Croatocentric and xenophobic?* (Vjesnik, 28 April, 2000), *Textbooks will not be ‘de-Croatized’, but ‘Europeanized’* (Vecernji list, 14 May 2000), *School textbooks full of enemies?* (Slobodna Dalmacija, 23 May 2000).

Croatian history, disputes about the content of the above-mentioned National Educational Standards and introducing war veterans to schools to teach about the recent war – revealed different and competing conceptions on the purpose of school history and its potential role in the formation of pupils' identity. The attempt of new teaching materials to apply multiperspective approach on the teaching of recent conflicts caused very different reactions, including the demands by some *historians* that Croatian textbooks should present the "Croatian truth".³⁵ It is clear that teaching recent history is still a very sensitive issue in Croatia because it stirs up strong emotional reactions, but also because it tackles the way how we perceive not only our past, but also our present. In such circumstances, school history easily becomes, as these examples show, a political battleground.

As it is evident from this analysis, Croatian pupils today learn less facts about their neighbours than in the 1980s, especially those neighbours with whom Croatia shared, not so long ago, the common state. This development obviously reflects the political changes in the last fifteen years, but here we also encounter a didactical problem. One can wonder if the pupils in the 1980s really benefited from learning those parallel linear stories, because the sheer amount of events, names and dates offered by these texts raises doubts about it. In the long run, we can say that neither before nor after 1990 the knowledge about our neighbours was significant. The first model was not successful because pupils were overwhelmed by the huge quantity of facts mostly from political history and without any real interrelations; the second one was even less successful because it has brought about a narrow national perspective which leaves out everybody else.

This brings us back to the beginning. I do not know if such a use and abuse of school history will ever completely end, but if our goal is to teach children about the world they live in, about the values outlined at the beginning of this text, then our connections with neighbours are important. However, it is not so much the matter of *how many* lessons we shall dedicate to

³⁵ After the peaceful reintegration of the Danube basin region (the most eastern part of Croatia which was during the 1991-5 war under the control of local Serbs) in 1998 there was a moratorium on teaching contemporary history for Serbian pupils in school years 1997/98 - 2002/2003. When the moratorium was coming to an end, the Commission appointed by the Ministry of Education decided to make an additional teaching material for all Croatian pupils, which should be source-based and offer a multiperspective views on recent history. After failed attempts in 2003, the Commission assigned this job at the end of 2004 to a team of text writers. The text was eventually finished in April 2005 and accepted by the Commission but before it was published it came in the centre of public dispute. The multiperspective approach of the new teaching materials came strongly under attack by different groups, especially when certain sensitive issues from the recent past are concerned, which resulted in the Ministry's decision to put this project temporary aside.

them, but more about *what kind of history* we choose to teach and *how we* are going to teach it. After all, curricula and textbooks are *always* about selection; it is just the matter of criteria we apply to it. I also think it is not so important if we are going to teach these *selected examples* as separate lessons or as a part of the national history units. For me, the key question is how we are going to present the national history and its relations with the neighbours and the wider world. If we look at things in a more positive manner, then we shall see that there is indeed no reason for the national history to be isolationist, introverted and suspicious toward the “others”. On the contrary, by offering different histories and multiple perspectives it can help pupils realise that “our national story” is much more complex than it often seems at first sight and promote a better understanding of our neighbours. It certainly does not mean that we have to avoid teaching about conflicts or hide differences, which would be another extreme, but to teach them in terms of understanding the circumstances and causes of their occurrence, and this will not do without presenting our pupils with multiple perspectives. In the long run, we can hope for the history teaching that cultivates tolerance and respect for diversity and most of all develops our pupils’ ability of a critical approach to information.

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