

СВЕТОЗАР НАУМОВСКИ

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ПРОСВЕТНО ДЕЛО

The Culture of Dialogue

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Textbook analysis, especially regarding SEE, is a very modern topic in these days. We could witness a number of initiatives, not only within the region, that had the goal of healing the sick societies of several troublesome countries. Obviously enough, the recent wars in Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Yugoslavia/Kosovo attracted much attention of scholars who were genuinely interested in making things better, but also of such who thought that the misfortune of the mentioned countries could become a good source of income through projects that could be identified by donators as politically highly interesting and “correct”. It was sometimes difficult to distinguish good projects from unnecessary ones and I myself was a bit suspicious about the Textbook Committee when I first joined it at the Halki conference. However, after the completion of the first set of workshops, I must admit that I am more than satisfied with its achievements.

One of the main reasons for my satisfaction is the fact that the whole project, by organizing a number of workshops that brought together scholars from the region, and a few of them for several times, created an atmosphere of cooperation and communication which did not exist previously. The opportunity to talk continuously to colleagues from different SEE countries, and to openly discuss matters considered by some to be controversial, would in itself be enough to justify the existence of the Committee. We

should hope that the culture of dialogue maintained in the workshops could be disseminated into less open circles of scholars and scholastics. Because of this positive experience, I feel very optimistic about the forthcoming teachers' training workshops.

Another achievement of our meetings was their direct influence on textbook writing. All those textbook authors who participated in one or the other discussion will certainly implement something of what they learned or realized in the workshops. This is something I can confirm from my own experience while preparing a new textbook on the Middle Ages. It is not so much the idea, we have to write about other SEE countries and make children learn even more data. It is much more the notion of how to write about others, what kind of history (political, economic, social, cultural?) to confront the children with. One of the important conclusions of our workshops was that a shift towards cultural history would not only be better from a methodological point of view, but could enable both teachers and authors to show the more positive contributions of other nations/states/regions to our common culture. This would not be an attempt to falsify history in order to make it look better, but to stress those fields of human activity which were very often neglected because of the old-fashioned national(istic) and martial attitude towards the past.

At the workshops, however, we sometimes discussed some more general questions, like: how much do textbooks influence national consciousness and the comprehension of history at all? Or is it other media (family tradition, mass media, religious education) that are more powerful in this respect? Shouldn't we try to propose a project of investigating these, or some of these factors, however difficult that could be? This is an ongoing debate, and no matter how it will end within the Committee, it made us think about

fields of interest related to the investigation of textbooks and the training of teachers.

The educational situation in all of the SEE countries is very different. In some there is more democracy, others have more financial means at their disposal, still others a more developed historiography and a better teacher-training system. In spite of this, we came to the conclusion that only a plurality of curricula, textbooks, and methodologies can create an atmosphere of openness within an educational system, which is necessary for the development of a critical approach towards one's own history from the side of the pupils and teachers, as well as enable national educational systems to communicate with one another.

It was mentioned several times in our meetings and reports, that it must be made clear to both pupils and teachers, that there are different interpretations of the same event, process, or phenomenon and that these interpretations should have an equal status as long as they are a result of honest scientific work based on historical sources. Only such an attitude can create open-minded, democratic and critical citizens, which should be the goal of every educational system.

Therefore, I can conclude that I have rarely participated in a project which was so useful, interesting, and challenging. With every improvement of the political situation in SEE, the hopes of implementing the results of our project in the whole region are becoming bigger and bigger. So, let us go on with our work!