

## Albanians and Their Neighbours: the Future's Past

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THE FOURTH WORKSHOP organized by the Center of Democracy and Reconciliation in Southeast Europe focused on teaching of a sensitive and controversial issue in the Balkan history: «Albanians and Their Neighbours: the Future's Past»<sup>1</sup>. The work during the first morning was devoted to textbooks in Albania. In the first part of the session, Prof. Valentina Duka presented Albanian educational system, which had not been presented in previous workshops. History is taught in nine grades, from the fourth to the twelfth. National history occupies only somewhat more than half of the curriculum, while the other half is devoted to general, European and Balkan history. The authorization, publication and distribution of textbooks are official responsibility of the Ministry of Education and Science and its dependent institutions as the Institute of Pedagogical Studies and the Publishing House of the Schoolbooks. After the presentation of the main data about history teaching in Albania, Valentina Duka presented answers to the questionnaire compiled by the Albanian team.

In the second part of the morning session essays referring to Al-

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<sup>1</sup> Scholars from Albania (Ferit Duka, Valentina Duka, Eva Hyskaj, Thoma Murzaku); Greece (Thalia Dragonas, Anna Frangoudaki, Despina Karakatsani, Christina Koulouri); Yugoslavia and Kosovo (Srdjan Rajkovic, Dubravka Stojanović, Shkelzen Racaj) participated in the workshop. The workshop was attended by Erind Pajo from the University of California (Irvine, USA), while participants from FYR Macedonia did not come. Costa Carras, Member of the Board of Center for Democracy and Reconciliation in Southeast Europe, responsible for the Joint History Project, opened the workshop. He introduced the Center and the entire Joint History Project, their tasks, former and future activities. He also announced that upon the completion of all seven conferences that would discuss the teaching sensitive and controversial issues in Balkan history, the Textbook Committee will devote its attention to the work with history teachers and teacher training.

banian textbooks have been read. The essay by Erind Pajo entitled «Albanian Schoolbooks in the Context of Societal Transformation» pointed to changes that occurred in history teaching after the collapse of communism. The conclusion is that many views on the past have changed. That particularly refers to the relationship towards western countries, which are now presented as the most important model, and to the attempt of educational authorities to interpret history «politically correctly» («Albania's Communist regime was bad – democracy must be good»). Yet, many controversial issues remained unresolved. The textbooks have been assessed as the product of ideological tensions, both a part and a reflection of the state of transformation in Albania.

Prof. Ferit Duka read his essay entitled «The History of Balkans in the Textbooks of Pre-University Education in Albania». He presented in detail the share of Balkan history in every grade, from elementary till the end of secondary school. According to these findings, the Balkan history is presented in satisfactory manner and in adequate volume. Proceeding from the need that young generation leaves school with as extensive knowledge of the common Balkan history as possible, at the end of his essay he proposed a special course entitled «History of the Balkans» to be introduced into history curriculum.

The essay of Eva Hyskaj was devoted to the treatment of Balkan history and its place in university textbooks. Her essay was inspired by the fact that national problems in the Balkans have their own concrete territorial and political dimensions and that in addition to that purely historical aspect; the question also has contemporary political dimensions. Therefore, after a brief presentation of the literature and textbook on the history of the Balkans used in university education, she concluded: «Let us forget all the challenges, lies, pain, violence and we will see that the region will bright up with all its traditional values of culture, character and people's intelligence».

Problems in history teaching in Serbia and in Kosovo were presented during the afternoon session. In his essay entitled «Image of Albanians in the Middle Ages in Serbian Textbooks», Srdjan Rajković proposed several controversial points for discussion concerning the image of Albanians in the Middle Ages in Serbian history textbooks. These are: the origin and the name of Albanians; territory inhabited by Albanians; the notion of «spreading the Albanian ethnic character». In addition, he pointed out that the fact that Albanians in the Middle Ages

did not have their own state and that they did not have their own culture for a long time «because they were under foreign cultural influences» are particularly stressed in textbooks.

In her essay, Dubravka Stojanović spoke about the way the image of Albanians in Serbian textbooks affects the establishment of the main features of the Serbian identity. There are two desirable identity notions about one's own nation that were very important in Serbia during the last decade: the image of people-victim and the image of Serbian people as a historically sinless people. The image of Albanians that can be derived from the interpretation of historical events has the role to reinforce these two properties important for Serbian identity and historical consciousness.

The discussion that followed these two essays focused on two central issues: the name used to refer to Albanian people in the textbooks (Albanians–Shqiptar) and the development of national identity. Through the discussion the participants came to the conclusion that the name Shqiptar is not offensive, but the only way Albanians refer to themselves, but the term became a pejorative in Serbia. The second part of the discussion referred to pronounce similarity that exists in the way most Balkan peoples represents their past. The main similarity is that identities of all peoples are established as the opposition to another, neighboring nation, whereby the idea that their own people is the victim of all others and that someone else is always to blame dominates among them all.

After the first afternoon discussion, an essay of Denisa Kostovicova (Cambridge), who could not attend the workshop, was read. The topic of her essay was «Albanian Schooling in Kosovo 1992-1998: Liberty imprisoned». She presented the course of the Serbian–Albanian conflict over education that ended with the establishment of a parallel schooling system for Albanian students in Kosovo at all levels – from the primary school to university. She described the ways that education was organized and all problems relating to that process. She stressed that the establishment and survival of «parallel» education has been used by Albanian political actors as an important symbol and proof of Albanian statehood in Kosovo.

In his essay Shkelzen Racaj from Priština presented the development of Serbian–Albanian relations since the 1970s. He devoted particular attention to the period after mid-1980s, especially after the

Memorandum of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts. After the promulgation of the new Constitution of Serbia in 1990, Serbian schooling system was introduced in Kosovo that did not have separate Albanian history or mother tongue. That prompted Albanians to organize a parallel educational system. He also presented ongoing efforts in Kosovo to create a schooling system without hatred or violence.

In the discussion about the situation in education in Kosovo that followed, Racaj answered that new history textbooks for Kosovo are now being written and that he hopes they would be more impartial, because they are written with the participation of historians from Albania, whom Racaj considers to be more objective than their colleagues in Kosovo. As for the education of the remaining Serbian children, he said that there are several elementary schools that a secondary school operates only in Štrpce, while some forms of university education are carried out in Kosovska Mitrovica. Reacting to that discussion, Anna Frangoudaki said that situation in the Balkans cannot be resolved as long as history is viewed and evaluated from the national point of view, as long as history is called Serbian, Albanian, and Greek. She spoke in favor of a more objective approach to history, the aim of which would be searching for historical truth that could be achieved if history were taught in a more general way.

Essays referring to relationship between Greece and Albania were presented in the second part of the afternoon session. In the first essay Despina Karakatsani dealt with the treatment of Albania and Northern Epirus in Greek textbooks after 1970. In the first part of this essay she gave the review of treatment of «national issues» in Greek textbooks from the end of civil war to the beginning of dictatorship (1950-1967) and showed that in all of them there was an emphasis on the strengthening of national morale and national identity, which was overemphasized during the military dictatorship. During the dictatorship (1967-1974) strong emphasis in the textbooks was placed on the fact that Northern Epirus must be awarded to Greece for historical and ethnological reasons, as well as because Greece has international right to that. In the civic textbooks after 1974 there is no reference either to the national issues or to Albania and Northern Epirus.

In the presentation of situation in Greek textbooks, Anna Frangoudaki and Thalia Dragonas presented their conclusions about the position of Albanians in Greek textbooks. Their main conclusion was that

upon completion of their education Greek students would lack knowledge about other peoples in the Balkans. The reason for that, in their opinion, lies in the fact that Greek textbooks are ethnocentric and do not offer consistent data on any other nation. Besides, they stressed that more data are provided on certain European nations than on any Balkan people. They particularly focused on the textbook *Thematic History*, in which Albanians are presented as a people not autochthonous in Epirus and as a people with weak national consciousness that was often manifested in history through their cooperation with occupiers. Yet, at the end of the lesson it was stressed that Albania has recently accepted European standards, raising hopes that this change would lead to better relations between the two countries in the future.

In the discussion on the same topic, Christina Koulouri explained that the mentioned Greek textbook was published in the early 1990s and that it truly reflects the prevalent mood in Greece after the establishment of the FYR Macedonia – a mixture of paranoid fear and hope that the relations will improve. Further discussion focused on E. Pajo's proposal that when writing textbooks it would be necessary to take into consideration the theory of constructed nations (B. Anderson) and implement the method of deconstruction in the teaching. According to Anna Frangoudaki that method exceeds the knowledge level of school children. She proposed in turn to historicize history, to show the processes and changes that happened and thus muster historical opinion in which no truth is one and forever. Ferit Duka spoke in favor of a rational reinterpretation of history with an intention of creating a new atmosphere among the Balkan peoples.

All participants took part in the high-quality discussion on the last day of the workshop within the Round Table entitled «Albanian future, Albanian Past». The discussion mainly centered on the fact that the analyses of all textbooks show that they are based on the same pattern of historical philosophy, that is essentially authoritarian and patriarchal, with a tendency to offer the single authentic truth about history. Conclusions and proposals adopted at the end arose from such an assessment.

### **Conclusions and proposals**

1. It was proposed that historical events be interpreted through contradictions, showing that every historical period had different opinions about certain historical phenomena. In such a way historical truth will become more complex and will lose its aura of «sacredness».
2. It was also proposed that more influence on the ministries of education in the region should be exerted through civil society institutions, such as associations of teachers, historians, university professors or researchers, to release the textbook market, because as long as there is only one official textbook under the ministry's control there will be an impression that there is only one truth about history.
3. Teacher training was proposed as one of the safest ways, because new approaches to teaching can offset the flaws of the poorest textbook.
4. Participants commended the idea about thematic textbooks, in which one topic is treated in multidisciplinary way, from the point of different areas of human knowledge. Thus students get a more modern approach to education. If history is presented from all these angles, it will cease to be a myth and will be able to help students understand the evolution of human society and a man himself.
5. To place mutual contacts between Balkan peoples during history in a broader context, it was proposed that textbooks be also written from the point of social, cultural history, historical anthropology, history of everyday life, which will put warrior and heroic subjects in their realistic place.