

Historiography and History Education in the South Slavic and Albanian Speaking Regions

Veranstalter: Georg Eckert Institute for International Textbook Research, Braunschweig; Institute for National History, Skopje; Institute of Spiritual and Cultural Heritage of the Albanians, Skopje

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A recent international conference brought together around 20 scholars mostly from south-eastern Europe, but also from central and Eastern Europe in Skopje (Macedonia). They met to present and discuss their ongoing research on historiography and history teaching in the region. The conference aimed at bringing new and interdisciplinary perspectives to a familiar and „hot“ topic: the inter-cultural and cross-cultural relations present in the history of the Albanian and South Slavic communities in the Balkans, as well as their representation in history textbooks.

The conference was organized by the Georg Eckert Institute for International Textbook Research (Braunschweig) – a member of the Leibniz Association, in cooperation with two local Macedonian academic institutions - the Institute for National History and the Institute of Spiritual and Cultural Heritage of the Albanians, both based in Skopje. The event was organized within the framework of a larger transfer project on history textbooks in the areas inhabited by Albanian communities today, run by the Georg Eckert Institute (project duration 2013 to 2015). This conference was in fact the last in a series of several conferences, seminars, workshops and research stays taking place in the region (Tirana, Prishtina, Skopje, Gracanica etc.) as well as in Germany (Braunschweig). The project was financed by the German Federal Foreign Office.

The directors of the three organizing institutions opened the conference in the National and University Library „Sveti Kliment Ohridski“. They stressed the quantity and quality of the work required to improve history

textbooks in the region. DRAGI GJORGIEV (Skopje) pointed to current anomalies in the textbooks, such as the lack of source material and the absence of encouraging critical thinking. SKENDER ASANI (Skopje) accentuated the role of historians in peace-building and criticised ethno-centric approaches to textbooks, deeming them a negative influence on society. ECKHARDT FUCHS (Braunschweig) announced his optimism for future cooperation in the field of historiography and history teaching between the three institutions, based in Macedonia and Germany.

The first panel examined „Current issues in Macedonian history textbooks“ and combined the research of local historians and psychologists with specific examples from textbook analysis. SKENDER ASANI and ALBERT HANI (both Skopje) focused on the Macedonian ethno-narrative of historical events and stressed the need for a more nuanced portrayal of ethnic Albanians as well as a more substantial inclusion of Albanian narratives in future textbooks. NIKOLINA KENIG and VIOLETA PETROSKA-BESHKA (both Skopje) analysed the paradox in which a multi-ethnic society produces ethno-centric narratives in history textbooks, despite the promotion of multi-perspectivity and inclusiveness being explicitly defined in the curricula. IRENA STEFOSKA (Skopje) examined the image of neighbours as a threatening „Other“ in the textbooks, and outlined four practices which directly or indirectly demonstrated this tendency. During the discussion, the participants from Macedonia agreed that the textbooks were based on political agreements and had therefore not changed during the last decade. What did prove controversial, however, was the level of effective influence exerted by academic institutions and political parties in the country's curriculum design and textbook production.

The second panel focused more on the region's „Cross-cultural history (first half of the twentieth century)“, and combined research from historical and anthropological perspectives. ROBERT PICHLER (Berlin) spoke about social similarities and traces of economic relationships between Albanians and Macedonians in rural areas between the 1930s and 1960s, based on his analysis of family and

household structures in western Macedonian villages. He proposed avoiding a perception of encounters and conflicts solely through ethnic lenses because it can prevent other important social boundaries becoming visible. BESNIK EMINI (Skopje) presented his research on the cultural activities of Albanian emigrants in Bulgaria at the beginning of the twentieth century. He presented his analysis of publications by the Albanian communities in Sofia and stressed their importance both as producers and transmitters of ideas across the Balkans (linking the Albanian communities from Albania to Romania).

In the third panel, on „The ‘Other’ in history textbooks after 1945“, textbooks from Macedonia and Albania were investigated in order to compare the construction of the respective ‘Other’. ETLEVA NITA (Elbasan) analysed the images of Slavic neighbours in Albanian textbooks, and pointed out that they are mentioned only in narratives of war. She accentuated the importance of historiography in the processes of regional reconciliation. ENIS SULSTAROVA (Tirana) conducted similar research encompassing both the communist and post-communist periods in Albania. He argued that the Slavs (especially the Serbs) have been regularly portrayed as perennial enemies of the Albanian people ever since their arrival in the Balkans. He also called attention to four factors which had led to an intensification of that image after the fall of communism. PETAR TODOROV (Skopje) provided a critical analysis of the representations of Albanians in the Macedonian ethno-narrative conveyed through history textbooks from the 1970s until the present day. Based on the amount of space allocated to the topic, frequency and content analysis, he followed the changes in the controversial portrayal of the ‘Other’, moving from explicit to implicit stereotypes, a shift which occurred especially after the last revision of history textbooks in Macedonia in 2004. KONSTANTINOS GI-AKOUMIS (Tirana) presented the research results from cross-border cooperation between scholars in Tirana and Skopje, focusing on the representations of wars and revolutions in Macedonian and Albanian textbooks. He accentuated the role of the political system, and of ideology, in the shifts in the discourse on

war and revolution in both countries.

The first working day concluded with a keynote lecture by NATHALIE CLAYER (Paris) from the renowned Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales (Paris). She was preceded by a welcome speech from the German ambassador CHRISTINE D. ALTHAUSER (Skopje) and proceedings were moderated by Irena Stefoska. The lecture was titled „Albanians, Slavs and others: elements of a shared history“, and discussed the inter-ethnic and cross-cultural relations in the Balkans on a conceptual level. Furthermore, she introduced a terminological discussion on the meanings and (non-)appropriateness of the terms: shared history, entangled history, histoire croisée, etc. She stressed the importance of religion in a bottom-up perspective of the entangled history of the region, and proposed that mobility be considered the norm, and not the exception, when studying southeastern Europe.

The fourth panel on „Ethnographic views on ‘otherness’“ gave an insight into recent research done in Albania, Kosovo and Serbia. DENIS ERMOLIN (St. Petersburg) presented his ongoing research into the pre-war interethnic relations in Pristina, which focus on locality, especially local identity and local history. His research was based primarily on interviews and participant observation, linguistic notes and a historical review of the urban development and transformation of twentieth century Pristina accompanied his presentation. Using numerous interview extracts he presented several examples of interethnic co-habitation and tolerance in pre-war Kosovo. His discussion of the urban ethnography of Pristina involved Serbs and Albanians, locals and newcomers. In his concluding words, Ermolin stressed the importance of learning the language of the Other and proposed the restitution of sacked monuments from different time periods. ANDREAS HEMMING (Halle) detailed his 9 months of field work in Rrëshen, a small town in the mountainous Mirdita region of northern Albania. He conducted research into local perceptions of the Self and the Other among school students, using surveys and participant observation. He developed his discussion from a regional to a national and trans-national perspective. Fi-

nally, using an analysis of Serbian publications from the eighteenth to twentieth centuries, as well as of regional ethnographic traditions, ALEKSANDAR PAVLOVIĆ (Belgrade) discussed the possibility for a narrative of friendly Serbian-Albanian relations throughout history. His focus was on the perceptions of heroism and the practice of intermarriage in the zones of Serbian-Albanian contact. His aim was to challenge mainstream narratives of inter-ethnic and inter-cultural enmity.

The fifth and final session of the conference dealt with „Albanian-(south)Slavic relations after WW2“ in regional historiography and history education. ESILDA LUKU (Durrës) examined Albanian-Yugoslav relations between 1945 and 1948, as well as their presentation in subsequent history textbooks from communist and post-communist Albania. She focused on the political and economic aspects of these complicated bilateral relations and their interruption by the (in)famous Inform-Bureau resolution of 1948. JURIJ HADALIN (Ljubljana) presented the results of his research into the changing perceptions of Albania and Albanians in post-World War 2 Slovenia. He analysed numerous documents, newspapers and publications from different time periods, presented relevant statistical results and demonstrated how the image of the Albanian was influenced by political and cultural circumstances in Yugoslavia (and Slovenia in particular), as well as by geographic and cultural distance or proximity; the discourse on the Albanians having moved from Orientalism to cohabitation with several transitional phases.

The participants agreed in the final discussion that the conference and the three-year long project had managed to provide: space in which to share experiences and research results, expert guidance, interdisciplinary literature, and a solid networking opportunity. In fact, the project created a transnational network, not only of researchers but also textbook authors and history teachers who focus on textbook research in Albanian and other languages. It was decided that this network should be preserved beyond the end of the project at the Georg Eckert Institute and that the cooperation of the three institutes should

also continue.

Conference Overview:

I. Current issues in Macedonian history textbooks (introductory panel)

Chair and commentator: Dragi Gjorgiev (Skopje)

Skender Asani / Albert Hani (Skopje), History textbooks between reality and ideology

Violeta Petroska-Beshka / Nikolina Kenig (Skopje), Ethnocentric history textbooks in a multi-ethnic society: The case of the Republic of Macedonia

Irena Stefoska (Skopje), The threatening „Other“: image(s) of Macedonia’s neighbours in history textbooks

II. Cross-cultural history (first half of the 20th century)

Chair and commentator: Petar Todorov (Skopje/Istanbul)

Robert Pichler (Berlin), Social similarities and traces of economic entanglement between Albanians and Macedonians in rural Western Macedonia between the 1930s and the 1960s

Besnik Emini (Skopje), The cultural activities of Albanian emigrants in Bulgaria at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century

III. The „Other“ in history textbooks from 1945 to the present

Chair and commentator: Eckhardt Fuchs (Braunschweig)

Etleva Nita (Elbasan), The image of Slavic neighbours in the history of Albanian textbooks

Enis Sulstarova (Tirana), Perennial enemies: the presentation of Slavs in national history textbooks of Albania

Petar Todorov (Skopje), The Other: representations of ethnic Albanians in Macedonian history textbooks

Konstantinos Giakoumis (Tirana), Representing war and revolution in school history textbooks from neighbouring states: a comparison between Macedonia and Albania

Welcome speech of the German ambassador

Christine D. Althauser

Keynote lecture

Nathalie Clayer (Paris), Albanians, Slavs and others: elements of a shared history

Irena Stefoska (Skopje), Introduction and comments

IV: Ethnographic views on „otherness“

Chair and commentator: Besnik Emini (Skopje)

Denis Ermolin (St. Petersburg), „In our community we spoke Turkish“: (hi)stories of a shared past in pre-war Pristina

Andreas Hemming (Halle), Images of the Self and images of the Other among school students in Mirdita, Albania

Aleksandar Pavlović (Belgrade), Forging the enemy: the transformation of common Serbian-Albanian traits into enmity and political hostility

V: Albanian-(south) Slavic relations after WWII

Chair and commentator: Nathalie Clayer (Paris)

Esilda Luku (Durrës), Albanian-Yugoslav relations (1945-1948) and their presentation in school history textbooks

Jurij Hadalin (Ljubljana), Slovenes and Albanians in the twentieth century: Changing perceptions – from orientalism to sharing state cohabitation

Final comments

Discussion of the findings of the three-year project on Albanian textbooks conducted at the GEI: What still needs to be investigated by future research and in which direction do we want to go? What will be the projects and research questions that emerge from them?

Facilitator: Claudia Lichnofsky (Braunschweig)

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