EEPG History network meeting in Strasbourg 2-3.12.2004

Participants:

Ms Kärt Jänes-Kapp, Koolibri Publishers; e-mail: kart@koolibri.ee
Ms Gerlinde Steinberger, Veritas Verlag; e-mail: g.steinberger@veritas.at
Ms Mari Rakkolainen, Otava Publishing Company; e-mail: mari.rakkolainen@otava.fi
Mr Christiaan Hollander, Bokförlaget Natur och Kultur; e-mail: christiaan.hollander@nok.se
Mr Kornelius Slezevicius, Alma Littera; e-mail: slezas@one.lt
Ms Mechthilde Fuhrer, DG IV, Council of Europe; e-mail: mechthilde.fuhrer@coe.int
Mr Preben Spåth, EEPG Central Office; e-mail: eepg@adr.dk

Minutes:

Wednesday 1.12: Arrival of participants and welcome dinner in the evening

Thursday 2.12: meeting on the premises of the Council of Europe (Room B 340)

09.00-09.30: Opening of the meeting – presentation of/by the participants
09.30-11.00: Presentation of the Council of Europe’s History Project

Ms Mechthilde Fuhrer, Council of Europe, gave a detailed presentation of the history of the Council of Europe with special attention to the ongoing History project. The main points include: The Council of Europe (CoE) has initiated several projects of relevance to educational issues, first and foremost History. One the one hand they have organised regional approaches to the teaching of History (the Baltic Sea, the Black Sea and the Caucasus region, all of them resulting in extensive reports and educational material for the history of the regions in question), on the other hand the CoE is dedicated to the Education to Democratic Citizenship (a major point in the year 2005), and finally Ms Mechthilde Fuhrer presented in more detail the development of the CoE initiated project European Dimension in History Teaching, which has its focus on five years of European History: 1848, 1912/13, 1919, 1945 and 1989/90. For each of these important years the CoE has organised vs. will organise seminars with keynote speeches by experts in History dealing with the respective years. The reports on the seminars regarding 1848, 1945 and 1989 were given to the participants of the meeting. The intention is to produce a series of CD-ROMs with guided tours through the events of the year in question, in a pan-European perspective along with numerous documentaries (texts, pictures, video clips etc.), in addition a teacher’s handbook will be published – all of this will be available in English and French by the end of 2005.

As regards the potential co-operation between the CoE and the members of the EEPG it became clear that there certainly would be possibilities for EEPG members to use the master CD-ROMs either as is (i.e. in English) or translated into the local language as a tool for teachers and students of History with which they can explore in depth the events and the European background of the years in question. Apart from producing a series of CD-ROMs it was indicated that it would also be possible to use the material offered as an on-line web based database for History. The target group of the material has been defined as pupils of 14 to 16 years old.

Secondly Ms Mechthilde Fuhrer explained the history of the CoE as an organisation and also described the structure and the policies of the CoE. She referred to the three summits of 1993, 1997 and the coming summit in 2005, describing the role and the importance of concepts as democracy and peace, human rights, cultural diversity, history, regionalisation, and culture. The CoE has 46 member states and has a General Secretariat with 1,800 employees (in Strasbourg). Furthermore the policies of the CoE are decided by three bodies, i.e. the Committee of Ministers, the Parliamentary Assembly (with 630 members), and the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities.

11.00-12.00: A presentation and discussion of the current status of the EEPG project "The Virtual History Classroom".
Mr Preben Späth explained the present status of the project: So far 10 members of the EEPG have sent materials to Mr Götz Schwarzrock, Cornelsen Verlag, with the texts and pictures which in their history textbooks for the target group of 14 to 16 years old describe the events and the consequences of the Potsdam conference in 1945. According to Götz Schwarzrock all this material has been digitised and should be accessible (via password protection) by February 2005. It was clear that there were important correspondences between the "Virtual Classroom" approach and the History project of the CoE. It was decided that all EEPG members should visit and try the EEPG project from February to May 2005 in order to be able to deal in depth with it at the coming meeting of the History network at 2-3 June 2005 (in Zürich). Furthermore it was decided to give Ms Mechthilde Fuhrer access to the web site so she could investigate further the possibilities of strengthening the relations between the EEPG and the CoE History project.

12.00-13.00: Lunch
13.00-13.30: Presentation and discussion of the possibilities of co-operation between the Council of Europe's History project and the members of the EEPG.

It was generally stated that there is a good potential for co-operation between the EEPG and the CoE concerning the History project. However, some questions needed to be solved; among these was the problem of translation from English to the national language. On the one hand it was suggested to ask the national Ministry of Education or a local cultural foundation for (financial) support to have the relevant texts translated, on the other hand it would be possible in some cases to let the authors and teachers of the EEPG member in question use the English version as a database of materials to be used for enhancing the teaching of European History. Ms Gerlinde Steinberger, Veritas Verlag, raised the question of who is going to select and edit the material sent to the computer company in Edinburgh, which organises the work with the CD-ROM series. Ms Mechthilde Fuhrer answered that this would be taken care of by the editorial board, set up by the CoE, headed by Mr Robert Stradling. It was suggested that a member of the EEPG, preferably Preben Späth, should attend the meetings of the editorial board. Furthermore some of the EEPG members opted for a web site solution in which members of the EEPG could present their history books and add a link to the CoE web site where all the documentaries etc. were available for inspection by teachers and students. In conclusion it was unanimously agreed that there was great potential for a co-operation between the EEPG and the CoE on this matter and that the options should be further investigated in 2005.

13.30-14.30: "History Changes – history education in Europe since 1989".

Preben Späth (EEPG Central Office) gave a presentation of the book and the CD-ROM, produced by Euroclio (European Standing Conference of History Teachers Association), highlighting the change in the number of lessons dedicated to History in the different European countries between 1989 and 2003. Furthermore he presented the outcomes of the survey (describing the differences between the European countries) concerning the following topics: Integration (or not) of History into other school subjects (Civics, Social Science); the balance between skills (‘critical thinking’), activities/tasks, attitudes/values, and content; History as a compulsory or optional subject; time (i.e. number of lessons per week) spent on History for pupils of the age 10, 12, 15 or 17 years; the role of textbooks in comparison with other teaching aids like computer, CD, DVD, television etc. All of these aspects were shown for Europe as a whole highlighting the differences between the countries and especially the development in the years between 1989 and 2003. It was, however, stated that in some cases the information given in the survey (by national associations of History teachers) seemed somewhat biased. Preben Späth promised to put selected graphs and maps on the EEPG web site for further investigation.

14.30-17.00: Visit to the European Parliament
The participants had the opportunity of having a guided tour through the buildings of the European Parliament followed by a discussion with Mr Otmar Philip. It was unanimously agreed that this was a great opportunity for all participants to see in detail how democracy works in Europe.

Evening: Common dinner and visit to the city of Strasbourg

Friday 3.12: meeting on the premises of the Council of Europe (Room B 340)

09.00-12.00: The participants present new or coming history projects (books, CD-ROM, Internet based materials etc. for Secondary and Upper Secondary School))
Ms Gerlinde Steinberger, Veritas Verlag, presented "Netzwerk Geschichte 2" ('Network History 2') for grade 6 of the Austrian secondary school. The package consists of a textbook, teacher's guide and a DVD with films, video clips, interactive games, glossary etc.; plus on-line work sheets indicating how to find historical information using the Internet. Each page on the textbook is structured like this: At the top of the page is a timeline and a small globe indicating where you are; secondly there is the main text (for intensive reading); in addition there are pictures and other types of illustrations; and finally a series of questions and tasks to be done by the pupil, and at the bottom a few summarising questions. In addition to the chronological approach (in this book covering the time from the Stone Age to the Middle Ages) there are on the one hand pages dealing with the methods of History ('skills') and on the other hand thematic pages ('Treffpunkt Geschichte') dealing with topics like agriculture, technology and religion in a historical perspective.

Gerlinde Steinberger, Veritas Verlag, also presented the book series "Durch die Vergangenheit zur Gegenwart 8" ('Through the past to the present'), highlighting the textbook for the last year of the Upper Secondary (age 18-19) presenting political systems. The most interesting aspect was the fact that the Jewish community of Austria had expressed disagreement with a picture on the cover showing an Israeli tank attacking Palestinians and with the text describing the development of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. This lead to a very interesting discussion among the participants about the impact of different interest groups on educational materials (Mr Christiaan Hollander, Natur och Kultur, mentioned groups like feminists, homosexuals and Muslims).

Mr Kornelius Slezevicius, Alma Littera, who is an author for history textbooks, mentioned briefly the upcoming history textbook about European history to be published in 2005.

Ms Kärt Jänes-Kapp, Koolibri Publishers, explained the situation in Estonia where Koolibri does not have a sufficiently big market in history books. This is mainly due to the fact that the books are published without accompanying teacher’s guides. However, Koolibri has published one history book for the 5th grade with some success, which is based on a thematic approach; for the 10 to 12 grades Koolibri has some success with a textbook and accompanying resource materials on the history of Estonia. More successful is a series of three books on ‘Human society and culture’ for the 11th grade. More interesting for the integration of history and civics are three books for the grades 4, 9 and 12 on civics with a textbook, a workbook and a teacher’s guide which are selling quite well. But the general impression is that for Koolibri history textbooks present a problem, due to the lack of workbooks and teacher’s guides.

Mr Christiaan Hollander, Natur och Kultur, presented the books “Political Ideas” and “History of Ideas” as examples of books for the Upper Secondary. He stressed the fact that in Sweden these subjects are studied by all students of Upper Secondary (‘Gymnasium’) which means that students who want to become electricians and who want to study at the university have the same curriculum.

As regards History in the Secondary school Natur och Kultur is definitely the market leader having two series of textbooks: "Living History" and "History”. A new reform is expected by 2007 which means that history becomes compulsory for all students of Upper Secondary school, probably with a focus on the history of the 20th century. The series "Living History" comprises a textbook, a workbook, a number of CDs, and teacher’s guides.

Ms Mari Rakkolainen, Otava Publishing Company, presented the project "Forum" for Upper Secondary school. Whereas the similar books for primary and secondary schools are based on the chronological approach, the "Forum" series for Upper Secondary is mainly using the thematical approach (e.g. ‘Man, Environment and Culture’ or ‘European Man’). In addition the series offers a number of documentary resources like maps, pictures, text documents, tables, and graphs along with tasks/exercises and sample solutions.

12.00-13.00: Lunch
13.00-14.00: Discussion on the different pedagogical approaches used in materials for teaching and learning History at Secondary School level

A very interesting starting point of this final discussion was the presentation by Ms Gerlinde Steinberger, Veritas Verlag, of the Austrian educational system from the point-of-view of History education. Although the pupils are divided into two different sections from the age of 12 years into a) the ‘Hauptschule’ (‘general education’) and b) ‘Gymnasium’ (preparation for university studies) the curriculum for History is the same. However, the teachers have very different backgrounds in that teachers in the ‘Hauptschule’ only have studied two subjects (and are normally teaching any subject) in three years, whereas teachers in the ‘Gymnasium’ have an academic (University) study of two subjects as their background. Now, the teachers in the ‘Hauptschule’ normally teach any subject (not necessarily the subjects of their study), while the teachers in the ‘Gymnasium’ only teach the two studies they have studied at university. But since the curriculum for both kinds of schools as regards History is the same, the educational publishers have to make books for
both kinds of schools. This means that the books must have additional materials (‘teachers’ guides’) in order to support the teachers of the ‘Hauptschule’ who are not experts regarding the subject in question, in fact they possibly have not learnt history at all. This provoked a very interesting discussion on how the teachers are educated in the different countries and for the different levels.

14.00-15.00: Conclusions and discussion on the future work of the History network.

Regarding the topics for the coming meeting of the EEPG History network (at 2-3 June 2005 in Zürich) it was stressed that the following items should be considered:

1) The status and the implications of the EEPG project called the ‘Virtual Classroom’ should be made clear to all members of the EEPG. It was pointed out that all members of the EEPG should be aware of the project and should be offered the option to join the project. Also it was suggested that the next meeting should discuss which years to integrate into the project. When the results so far of the project are accessible on a web site from February 2005 all members should investigate the results and send a representative to the Zürich meeting to indicate their interest in the future of the ‘Virtual Classroom’ project. Furthermore it would be important that all EEPG members interested in joining this project would be attending the meeting in Zürich.

2) Secondly it was agreed that we should expand the History network of the EEPG to include representatives from the EEPG publishing houses with interest in Geography and Social Science, since these subjects are already integrated into History in a number of countries. Consequently the network should from now on have the name ‘EEPG History, Geography and Social Science Network’. This complies very well with the decision of the General Assembly in Frankfurt 2004 to include Geography in this network.

3) Regarding topics for the coming meetings of this network it was unanimously decided to include two or (hopefully all) of the following topics: a) the status and the future of the ‘Virtual Classroom’ project; b) the relationship between educational publishers and interest groups of any kind (censorship, pressure groups etc.); c) the use of maps in History and Geography from a Semiotic and traditionally scientific perspective.

At the end of the meeting Ms Mechthilde Fuhrer, CoE, handed out to all the participants the official recommendation on history teaching in twenty-first-century Europe, which is a very important document for the approach of the CoE to the teaching of History in Europe. She also informed the participants about the CoE web site (www.coe.int) which offers a lot of information about the policies and strategies of the CoE on the teaching of History etc.

In summary I speak on the behalf of the participants of the EEPG in expressing my sincere appreciation to Ms Mechthilde Fuhrer, CoE, for her help to make this EEPG meeting a big success, and we very much look forward to organise a meeting of the EEPG History, Geography & Social Science network in Strasbourg in 2006.

Hasselager, 6.12.2004
Preben Späth