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Nationalism And World Unity: How  
To Educate for the 21st Century

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**NATIONALISM AND EDUCATION:  
THE CASE OF BULGARIA**

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by

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NATIONALISM AND EDUCATION :  
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Nationalism on the Balkans is a very complicated phenomenon. Due to some historic reasons nationalism was for decades long interwoven with the Balkan countries' state policies, therefore influencing interstate relations. On the Balkans, where East and West, North and South meet, different religions, cultural heritage, languages and political systems coexist. Here, the interests of Russia (later the Soviet Union), of the major European countries and subsequently of the USA too, intertwine. Therefore, every analysis of nationalism demands a comprehensive, cross-cultural approach.

Nationalism affects in a specific way the education systems of the Balkan countries, in our case - education in Bulgaria. The main thesis in this paper is that nationalism and the image of the enemy in Bulgarian text-books is changing along with the changes in Bulgarian ruling elite's political attitude.

I. The Image of the Enemy in Bulgarian Textbooks of History ( High-school Level )

Owing to some historic reasons the waves of nationalism in Bulgaria's system of education are connected mainly with the Muslim part of the population of Bulgaria and with the Macedonian issue. In this paper we are discussing the principal ethnic problem in Bulgaria connected with the Muslim population of the country (about 10% of the whole population). It becomes the principal one not only because of the Bulgarian population's sensitivity towards the "Turkish factor" after five centuries of

Ottoman rule on the Bulgarian lands but because of Turkey's neighbourhood too. This fact, taken in conjunction with the significant Muslim population in Bulgaria, inevitably turns in the mind of the Bulgarian population into a threat perception .

Bulgaria had been under the Ottoman rule for five centuries, till 1878 . The early expressions and manifestations of Renaissance in Bulgaria had been blocked by the Ottoman invasion. The country's development was brought to a standstill and the Bulgarian population put into the position of an oppressed ethnic group . Bulgaria's Renaissance had practically lagged centuries behind the Renaissance in Europe. This engendered a particular "historical complex" in the consciousness of the Bulgarian people. For this reason the relationship of Turks and Bulgarians received a significant place in the textbooks of history. The objective historic facts were interpreted in one or another way in accordance with the relations of Bulgaria and neighbouring Turkey and the relations between Christians and Muslims in the country . The problem was further more aggravated by the fact that a significant part of the Muslims in Bulgaria , by their ethnic origin were Bulgarians, converted to Islam by force in the XV- XVIIth century ( the so called Bulgarian - Mohammedans).

Four periods might be distinguished according to the development of the image of the enemy in the Bulgarian textbooks of history, especially with respect to the attitude towards the Turks : a) the period after the Liberation from the Ottoman em-

pire to the end of the Second World War with a prevailing "patriotic position" ; b) the period of the so called "international proletarian solidarity" (1947 - 1980) ; c) the period of "Bulgarization" of the Muslim population and development of "state supported nationalism" ; d) the period after the "peaceful revolution" of November 10, 1989 .

I. After the Liberation from the Ottoman Empire till the Second World War

After the Russian-Turkish War (1878) and the liberation from the Ottoman rule the "patriotic position" and the enthusiasm for the liberation prevailed in the Bulgarian textbooks of history. In his textbook of history designed for the high-school the eminent Bulgarian historian S. Bobchev described objectively the reasons for the fall of the Bulgarian state under the Turkish yoke. Without putting a strong emphasis on the cruel sides of the Turkish rule he pays a lot of attention to the heroism of the Bulgarian people in its struggle for liberation. To his mind the decline of the Bulgarian (Christian ) Church was not a less important fact than the contradictions between the Bulgarian people and the Turkish authorities at that time. The image of the Turks is not introduced as that of an ethnic enemy but first of all as a religious one. In the same sense he describes the attempts of the Greek Church to "Hellenize" the Bulgarians - by conquering the Bulgarian Church. Writing about the cruel suppression of the April uprising (in 1876) which the Bulgarian population had not forgotten at the

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end of the XIXth century, he often quotes some sultan's decrees giving a few human rights to the Bulgarian people in the Ottoman empire (i.e. from 1839).<sup>1</sup>

The approach of the historians of that time is a balanced one, trying not to foment ethnic contradictions. In 1926 Ivan Pastuhov and Ivan Stoyanov wrote a new textbook on Bulgarian history for the high-schools and the teacher training colleges. This textbook is written with an exceptional tolerance towards the Turkish people. The periods of peaceful co-existence of Bulgarians and Turks on the Bulgarian lands are delimited comparing these times to a "Pax Romana".<sup>2</sup> The periods of tolerance in the relations of the two peoples are differentiated from the periods of cruelty and violence. The fact that many Bulgarian names of towns and villages were preserved is underlined too.<sup>3</sup> Pastuhov and Stoyanov emphasize that cruelty and violence increased along with the decline of the Ottoman Empire.

2. The Period of the So Called "International Proletarian Solidarity" (1947-1980)

In the period after the Second World War a marxist position on the national issue was gradually worked out, transformed through the prism of Balkan realities. According to the concept adopted by the Communist Party in the process of the "construction of socialism" the contradiction between the nations is replaced by a contradiction between the classes or

the class contradiction. Thus the whole picture of the Turkish domination is represented in the textbooks of history as a struggle between the feudal lords (the Turks/Mohammedans) and the peasants (the Bulgarians Christians). The brutality and the crimes of the Turkish authorities are represented mainly as an expression of class hatred and not as an ethnic contradiction. It is not by chance that the notion "Turkish domination" was replaced by the notion "Ottoman domination" in all the literature of history at that time.

A whole generation in Bulgaria, after the war, was educated on the textbook of history, written by A. Burmov, D. Kosssev and H. Hristov "History of Bulgaria" <sup>4</sup>. From 1955 till 1980 this was the main source of knowledge of Bulgarian history for the secondary school students along with some other textbooks of minor popularity. In order to trace through the dynamics of nationalism in Bulgarian education and teaching of history one may analyze in a comparative perspective several editions of this textbook.

While in the first editions of the textbook the class approach predominates, in the editions of 1968 the description of the atrocities committed by the Turkish authorities during the years of the national liberation movement in Bulgaria are given a greater emphasis. In this textbook the Turkish laws in respect to the Bulgarian population in the last centuries of the Ottoman yoke are described in greater detail as for instance the law forbidding Bulgarians to have better clothes and a better house than their Turkish neigh -

bors . The Bulgarian was not allowed to ride a horse if a Turk was present.<sup>5</sup> Generally speaking there is a tendency to foster the national spirit of the Bulgarian population through the description of its pains and sufferings in the period of the Turkish yoke. At the same time , about 1980 , this trend is balanced with the approach to represent the "Turkish enemy" as a "class enemy" .

In the last edition (1978) of this textbook nationalism is ever more accentuated in comparison with the previous editions.

3. The "Bulgarization" of the Muslim Population

After 1980 a dynamic process of acceleration of some nationalistic trends starts in Bulgaria .They are connected with a number of internal and external factors reinforcing the idea about the "danger" in connection with the Islamic factor . The culmination of this process was the campaign launched by the Communist Party and the Bulgarian government for a forceful replacement of the names of the Bulgarian Muslims with Slavonic (Bulgarian ) names (1984) . In this most drastic act of moral violence there was a search for the foundations of a state policy. It was expected that in the long-run it will lead to the "consolidation" of the Bulgarian nation.

There was an attempt to change quickly and radically the Bulgarian history . The Turkish names present in a number of research work on history were dropped or eliminated. It was declared that there is no Turkish population in Bulgaria and

that all Mohammedans are the descendants of the Bulgarians , converted to Islam by force between the XV and the XVIIth century. This drastic violation of the human rights in the country set Bulgaria into an international isolation , caused some tension in the population , laid the ground for a real ethnic conflict in the following years.

This policy, while pursued for a short time , left its impact on the education in Bulgaria too. The Bulgarian teachers were instructed to "erase" the Turkish factor from Bulgarian history, except in the cases when it was a question to highlight the negative sides of this process. The books on history emphasized moments as : "the unity" of the Bulgarian nation; the forcible conversion to Turkish nationality and Islam ; the perfidious Turkish policy , the violation of human rights by Turkish authorities on Bulgarian lands etc. In the textbook of history of D. Anguelov, D. Shopov and G. Georgiev of 1934 <sup>6</sup> (reprinted in a revised edition in 1990) there is an attempt to achieve a balance between the official policy of the country of this period and the historic facts for the nature of the period of Turkish domination in Bulgaria. A new moment, appearing in the 1990 edition, is that the forcible conversion of the Bulgarian population was effected not only by means of the conversion to the Islamic religion but by exerting an influence on the way of life, traditions, language etc. as well <sup>7</sup>. This is aimed to prove that almost all the Muslim population in Bulgaria is of Bulgarian origin. In the following period this problem roused a vehement political struggle in Bulgaria around the Bulgarians and Turks relationship treatment in the



most recent Bulgarian history.

4. The Period after the "Peaceful Revolution"  
of November 10, 1989

In the period after the crash of the totalitarian system in Bulgaria quick measures were taken towards democracy on the ethnic problem . As early as the end of 1989 the Bulgarian Parliament restored the Turkish names to those people who wanted it . After the June 1990 elections for the first time in the postwar history of Bulgaria a party built on ethnic foundations ( The Movement for Rights and Liberty ) entered the Parliament and became the third political force in the country. The Muslim religion was put on an equal basis with the other religions in the country . An Islamic College for the training of religious cadres was created in Sofia.

At the same time due to a number of mistakes made in the past in connection with the national issue , the restoration of the rights of the Turkish population in Bulgaria gave birth to strong nationalistic moods in the Bulgarian population, particularly in the regions of mixed population (North East and South East Bulgaria ) . This may bring to a new period of national stress in Bulgaria and impede the country's movement towards an integration in the European structures.

In this sense the creation of a modern educational basis and in particular of objective textbooks of history, reflecting the world experience in overcoming nationalism in a civilized way, will play an important role .

## II. How to Overcome Nationalism in Education:

### Practical Recommendations

If Bulgaria is to enter the XXIst century in a civilized way, it is necessary to overcome all tendencies towards destructive nationalism .

A. To liberate the teaching of history from ideology and politics. To get over the treatment of historic facts from the point of view of the current historical period requirements . To direct To direct teaching not only towards an understanding of national history but towards a perception of the world in a historic perspective.

B. To bridge over the ethnocentrist and nationalistic information and avoid the creation of stereotypes in the relationship and attitudes towards other nations. This concerns especially the history of the neighboring countries where the facts of the past should not contribute to arousing or stirring up of tensions among the modern states. To turn away from the "image of the enemy" and look forward to the "image of the partner" in their most recent history.

C. To comply with the changing nature of the so called "nation state" . The borders are to obtain a new significance and from a divisive become an unifying factor.

D. The teaching of national history is to be ever more accompanied by more information about the great waves of human civilization. It is necessary to highlight the historic

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tendency - nations which have to a certain degree isolated themselves, have perished. At the same time the teaching of history is to make the young generation aware of the respective nation's contribution to human civilization. The idea of unification requires knowledge and respect of one's own cultural heritage and spiritual identity. In order to respect other nations you need to respect your own. And vice versa. This is the great mission of the teaching of history on the threshold of the XXIst century.

Notes and References :

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