

The Issue of European Integration in Teaching History As Addressed  
by the School and Pedagogical Publishing House

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“History plays an important role in the general educational system in Polish schools. It introduces students to the world of national and universal values, provides them with knowledge of society and the mechanism that make it tick, the state, the economy, the internal workings of our country, and about the international situation, in the past and the present.

The knowledge and skills acquired by students in the process of learning history allow them to understand the past and shape citizenship attitudes, in which respect for democracy, the separate character of others [...], and continental and global integration plays a key role.”

The quoted fragment, an introduction to the history curriculum<sup>1</sup>, probably completely illustrates the importance of history education, which should be free of misrepresentations, damaging ideology, and stereotypes. The damage inflicted by poisoning history lessons and textbook pages with the venom of racism, chauvinism, and human intolerance will always have a negative, painful impact. The passing 20th century was too rich in such experiences and it has to be said that we cannot rest in our efforts to prevent such threats. This is a great challenge for teachers, all educators, as well as publishers.

The above statement has a global reach, but has particular meaning in our region which has been behind the Iron Curtain for over 50 years. Adapting school history to the government’s ideology, which leads to the creation of black and white pictures of the past, a one-sided perspective, and a lack of objectiveness in the evaluations of “blank spots” did not support proper history education. And in spite of the fact after 1956 the situation in Poland was far better than in other East Block countries, the negative effects of the past are still visible today. We have been rebuilding social confidence in the school history education program for the past several years. Our tools include the modernization of curriculums and new textbooks, in which a significant, if not key, role is played by School and Pedagogical Publishing House.

In the mid 1980’s, just as the censorship authority was loosing its grip, we began arduous work on removing the “blank spots”, primarily in respect to the most recent history. The new generation of textbooks, written for 1990/91 curriculums and free of censorship, were first introduced into schools in 1992. We put particular emphasis on those textbooks that had the most recent events censored (XIX and XX century), because the need for a new viewpoint and reinterpretation were the most evident here.

Between 1945 and 1989 both the author and publisher were obliged to closely abide by one official program, which in effect limited the author’s invention and that of the teacher who later worked with the textbook. Fortunately, all that is behind us now. Now textbooks are not langer written according to the curriculum, but on its base, which allows the author creative interpretation and the chance to present his or her own didactic and methodological approach to the textbook. This had allowed for the creation of alternative textbooks, which include the newest trends in didactics. Besides

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<sup>1</sup> *History. Curriculum for Elementary School*. School and Pedagogical Publishing House. 1998. Pg. 3.

synthetic textbooks, we have analytical/synthetic textbooks, in which the student will be able to become familiar with the source material, compare different points-of-view, and make up their own mind. Textbooks for the seventh and eighth grades<sup>2</sup> are good examples of this. Another example of an interesting didactic concept is a textbook of modern history, in which the historical process is illustrated through the evolution of a modern state. The authors justify this in the introduction in the following manner: "... the key theme, around which the whole text was arranged, is the modern state. This viewpoint pertains both to world, as well as domestic history. [...] It is our belief that the broadly construed issue of state constitutes an easily identifiable common denominator of a three-hundred year-long era."<sup>3</sup>

Works on reforming the national education system have been underway for the past several years. One of the stages addresses up-dating teaching programs, including those that pertain to history. The Publishing House took part in this stage, which bore fruit in the form of curriculums developed by teams organized by School and Pedagogical Publishing House. These curriculums, which take in account current history/geography and the newest didactic trends, were approved by the Ministry of National Education (September 27, 1996) and constitute our proposal for teachers and textbook authors. Among the goals of teaching history at the elementary level, we have identified among others, the following: making students aware of the most important events in regional, national, and world history and of the impact of different cultures, races, and nationalities on civilization, as well as introducing students to the world of global human values necessary to understand social life and shape their own value system. The history lesson should shape the student's respect for human civilization, shape tolerant and open attitudes towards people with different beliefs, attitudes, and value systems, as well as developing respect for democratic and humanistic values...<sup>4</sup> At the high school level, we want to expand our students' knowledge on the world surrounding them and associated processes and historical occurrences; help them develop historical thought; make them rationalize their historical awareness; instill in them respect towards their own nations and other nations and their respective cultures, as well as provide them with knowledge of and respect for human rights.<sup>5</sup>

We try to carry out all of the above both in our new textbooks, as well as our existing books which are only subject to updates in future editions. Our numerous authors, primarily academic historians, practicing teachers, and method specialists, express their understanding and openness for all suggestions. It is clear that each author, especially one who has lots of research behind him or her, has a right to his or her own view, and even sympathy or empathy. However, this cannot be expressed in the form of doctrine in a school textbook, especially from the point of view of a given political option. It cannot force a lopsided evaluation, discriminate opposing views, or present

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<sup>2</sup> E. Centkowska and J. Centkowsi. *History 7. "Poland is Still Not ..."* Edition 5. School and Pedagogical Publishing House. 1998 (Edition 1: 1993); E. Centkowska, J. Centkowsi, and J. Osica, *History 8. "Roads to Freedom."* Edition 2. School and Pedagogical Publishing House. 1998 (Edition 1: 1996).

<sup>3</sup> T. Cegielski and K. Zielinski. *History 2. Modern History.* Edition 7. School and Pedagogical Publishing House. 1998 (Edition 1: 1991). Pg. 8.

<sup>4</sup> *History. Elementary School Curriculum.* School and Pedagogical Publishing House. 1998. Pg. 8-9.

<sup>5</sup> *History. High School Curriculum.* School and Pedagogical Publishing House. Warsaw. 1998. Pg. 12-14.

hypotheses or topics that are open for discussion in the form of absolute truths. We can declare with complete confidence that our textbooks are not guilty of such sins.

Much emphasis in Polish historical education is put on world history, although it is not conducted in the form of a separate lecture. Domestic events are taught in close relation with global events because the history of Poland is a part of world history. History/geography has already established where we should look for the roots of European civilization and culture. Therefore, it is impossible to understand the history of Europe without understanding the primary events of the ancient world. Poland shaped its country over a millenium ago, coming into western Latin culture. Are we going to be able to get to know and understand the roots of our state without first becoming aware of the situation in contemporary Europe, not to mention that of our closest neighbors? Of course not. The famous Gniezno meeting of 1000 A.D., when the image of a unified Europe first came to light, was the result of a given political system on our continent. We have to be aware of the fact that it was that meeting which lead to Boleslaw Chrobry's greatness. We can mention numerous cause-and-effect relationships, but that's not what we are here to do.

The key is to utilize historical education in order to show that we have a common European civilization with a variety of cultures. While not covering up the conflicts and "darks spots" of European history, we want to point out everything that joins us, and not only that which divides us. We are trying to integrate domestic history with world history in our curriculums and textbooks. We are doing this in both textbooks on 'old' history, the 19th century, and especially on our own difficult century. Our recent textbooks have focused a good deal on explaining events, occurrences, and historical process that had a global impact and affected Poland's fate to a large degree. The following events can be mentioned in respect to the above: Versailles Treaty and post-Versailles Treaty Europe, Hitlerism and Stalinism as examples of totalitarian dictatorships, Europe just before World War II, Europe and the world after World War II, the Yalta Conference, as well as the fall of communism.<sup>6</sup>

As you can see, a lot of space in our textbooks has been dedicated to world history, but we are fully aware of the fact that a textbook cannot contain everything. Therefore, we have a full offer of auxiliary literature, both in the form of a synthetic text and a monograph. We cannot mention everything here, but we should point out the most important titles that help reinforce the idea of European integration. Among synthesized works we would like to point out Krystyna Szelagowska's *Lectures on World History*, adapted for the high school level<sup>7</sup>, or the two volume *World History*, authored by the famous Warsaw historian, Professor Maria Wawrykowa<sup>8</sup>.

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<sup>6</sup> E. Centkowska and J. Centkowski. *History 8. "Roads to Freedom"* Edition 1. School and Pedagogical Publishing House. 1996; A. Pankowicz. *History 3. Poland and the World 1815-1839.* Edition 1. School and Pedagogical Publishing House. 1996; H. Tomalska. *The World - Europe - Poland 1795-1939.* Edition 3. School and Pedagogical Publishing House; H. Tomalska. *Poland and the World After 1939.* Edition 1. School and Pedagogical Publishing House. 1997.

<sup>7</sup> K. Szelagowska. *World History Lectures for High School.* Edition 2. School and Pedagogical Publishing House. 1996.

<sup>8</sup> M. Wawrykowa. *World History. 1789-1849.* Edition 1. School and Pedagogical Publishing House. 1992; M. Wawrykowa. *World History. 1850-1914.* Edition 1. School and Pedagogical Publishing House. 1998.

Others works that deserve recognition include *Western Europe. Political History: 1945-1993* by Jerzy Krasuski, a great historian affiliated with the Poznan University<sup>9</sup>, or *The European Union*, a new book on our market, penned by Irena Popiuk-Rysinska<sup>10</sup>. Foreign publishers became interested in some of our books which were printed in Lithuania and Latvia. We consider this to be our way of supporting positive relations.<sup>11</sup>

The key event of 1995 was the publishing of the Polish edition of *The History of Europe*. This translation of a European textbook, initiated by the French publisher Hachette, was met with interest from Polish readers.

It is understandable that in lieu of European integration Poland is devoting a lot of attention to its neighbors, both in terms of the current borders, as well as historically speaking (e.g. Austria, Hungary, and Rumania). There is evidence of this in our textbooks, as well as other activities aimed at helping others better understand, become acquainted with, and clarify historically-difficult moments.

Our working relationships with the Austrian educational publisher "Osterreichisches Bundesverlag" (ÖBV) bore fruit to a common publication at the end of the 1980's: *Poland-Austria: From the History of Being Neighbors*<sup>12</sup>, published in German and Polish, on both markets. This is a book prepared by Polish and Austrian historians under the direction of Professor Walter Leitsch from Vienna and Professor Maria Wawrykowa from Warsaw. This book was addressed on the most part to history teachers in both countries to help them with controversial problems facing our joint history, from the Middle Ages to the 19th century.

We are working on another joint publication in a similar manner with the Ukrainian Genesis publisher in Kiev. We hope that the cooperation of Polish and Ukrainian historians, directed by Professor Teresa Chynczewska-Hennelowa and Natalia Jakowenko will yield an interesting book that we would like to publish in 1999. It is worth mentioning that this initiative is patronized by the European Council Education Department.

The most important event of 1997 and 1998 is a book we published in Lithuanian titled *The History of Lithuania*<sup>13</sup>, which is a textbook for the Lithuanian minority in Poland. The author, Bronislaw Makowski, a historian and scientific employee at the Institute of Polish History at the Academy of Sciences, is a Polish citizen and a Lithuanian national. This textbook was written in cooperation with the Lithuanian educational publisher "Sviesa" from Kaunas, with which we have been working successfully for many years. The books has been received well on both sides of the border. We intend to publish a Polish translation of the book.

<sup>9</sup> J. Krasuski. *Western Europe. Political History 1945-1993*. Edition 1. School and Pedagogical Publishing House. 1995.

<sup>10</sup> I. Popiuk-Rysinska. *The European Union*. Edition 1. School and Pedagogical Publishing House. 1998.

<sup>11</sup> The translations of the following books were published in Lithuania and Latvia: W.T. Kulesza and P. Winczorek. *Democracy at ...*

<sup>12</sup> *Polen Österreich: aus der Geschichte einer Nachbarschaft*. Vienna, ÖBV. Warsaw. School and Pedagogical Publishing House. 1988. *Poland-Austria: From the History of Being Neighbors*. Warsaw. School and Pedagogical Publishing House. Vienna. ÖBV. 1989.

<sup>13</sup> Bronius Makauskas. *Lietuvos Istorija*. School and Pedagogical Publishing House. Warsaw. 1997. "Sviesa. Kaunas. 1997

In the year 2000 we want to publish a book dedicated to our relationship with our neighbor to the west. An eminent expert on German issues, the already mentioned Jerzy Krasuski from Poznan, is writing for us a long awaited work titled *Poland-Germany. The History of 1000 Years of Being Neighbors*. In this way we intend to honor the anniversary of the Gniezno Congress held in 1000 A.D.

In order to exchange ideas and views with neighbors we have opened up the pages of a magazine called "Historical News". The Magazine includes articles by Polish and foreign historians that are dedicated to issues of interest to both sides that are discussed relatively infrequently. We hope that this type of forum will continue to develop and bring about creative discussion. Examples to this can be found in the 1996<sup>14</sup> and 1997<sup>15</sup> annuals of "Historical News".

We cannot forget to mention the active participation of School and Pedagogical Publishing House in ventures aimed at European integration, initiated or conducted by the European Council. In March 1995 we hosted the Director of the Department of Education in the European Council Culture, Education and Sport Commission, Mr. Maitland Stobard. We organized a seminar dedicated to the issues concerning teaching history in Cracow in which Mr. Stobard participated. The numerous historians that attended the meeting, including our own authors, had an occasion to exchange ideas on curriculums, textbooks, research, and teacher preparation.

On November 14-16, 1996 we co-organized a European Council seminar in Warsaw dedicated to textbooks and other aids for teaching history. This seminar created an occasion for our authors and invited teachers to become familiar with the experience and ideas of over 20 European countries. We participate in such meetings organized outside of Poland and we try to disseminate the information we acquire to as broad an audience as possible.

This brief overview of the work done by School and Pedagogical Publishing House on behalf of European integration through history education does not cover the whole subject. We are proud of our success, but we are full aware of the fact that we are at the beginning of the road. We know that the upcoming third millenium will bring about even more challenges for an educational publisher. We still try to meet these challenges. Four hundred years ago the great Polish humanist and head of state, Jan Zamoyski, wrote, "Republics will be like the upbringing of their youth". Today we can paraphrase that statement to read: Europe will be like the upbringing of its youth.

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<sup>14</sup> J. Osica. *Lithuania-Poland. The First Years of Independence (1918-1921)*. "Historical News" No. 4. Warsaw. 1996. Pg. 193.

<sup>15</sup> J. Hrycak. *Why Did the Ukrainian Revolution Fail?*; W. Medrzecki. *The Ukrainian National Revolution. 1917-1921*. "Historical News" No. 3. Warsaw. 1997. Pg. 139 and 129. W. Reprincew. *Damaging Stereotypes*; R. Torzecki. *Polish-Ukrainian Issues During World War II*. "Historical News" No. 5. Warsaw. 1997. Pg. 257 and 264.

**Summary**

The new history curriculums in Poland (1990) put much emphasis on world and European history. A key moment was in 1995, with the Polish edition of 'The history of Europe' (an European textbook, initiated by the French publisher Hachette, 1992).

**Key-words:** European integration, teaching history in Poland.