

BBC World Service Programme, Broadcast in Europe in 12 languages.

DATE:12/05/05

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EXTENSION:72392, TAC0519550

(Cue: China and Japan have -- for now -- put behind them their recent dispute which was prompted by Chinese criticism of a Japanese history textbook that appeared to belittle Japanese atrocities committed during their last war. Rows over the treatment of history have strained relations between the two Far Eastern economic giants from time to time. So could they learn from the example of various European countries that have gone out of their way since the Second World War to deal with contentious issues in their history? In the first of his two-part series on Europe's attempts to learn from its own history, the BBC's Central and South-east Europe analyst, Gabriel Partos, looked at the Franco-German experience. He now concludes his report by examining some current initiatives in the Balkans.

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(REP:) Germany's co-operation projects with France and Poland are often cited as some of the most inspiring examples of how former adversaries can successfully deal with the difficult legacy of the past. The Franco-German work on revising history textbooks was made easier by the fact that there were no unresolved issues between the two countries after the Second World War. German-Polish co-operation, which started in the 1970s, was helped by the 30-year distance that had dimmed some of the most painful memories of conflict. In much of the Balkans, though, the situation is different. And that's a point that is forcefully made by Professor Wolfgang Hoepken, Director of Germany's Georg Eckert Institute for International Textbook Research. His organisation -- Europe's leading institute of its kind -- has been providing assistance for a large number of projects, including those in the Balkans.

(TAPE BAND 1 HOEPKEN:) In the Balkans textbook co-operation has to be started almost immediately after the war when the pain of the war is still very, very, fresh, when a lot of issues are not settled -- for example, territorial questions, like in Kosovo, or the question of status; when you still have refugees, like in Bosnia. This is one reason why it's very difficult to expect short-term results in this field. What we have done -- and what other institutions are doing is to develop a kind of sensitivity and competence about how to deal with textbooks, how to write good textbooks, how to apply the concept of multi-perspectivity in textbooks to overcome the tendency which is still prevalent in almost all south-east European countries to make the textbooks an instrument for primarily creating national identity, and to turn it instead into an instrument for critical thinking.

(REP:) Different national interpretations of history are most often associated with different countries. But that's not always the case; particularly not in the Balkans where ethnic diversity -- and conflict -- is often a fact of life within individual countries. In Bosnia and Hercegovina schoolchildren who belong to the Muslim Bosnjak, Serb or Croat communities use different history textbooks and they are rarely taught each other's perspective. To remedy this, the Council of Europe has helped draw up guidelines which it expects to be adopted next month by all of Bosnia's education ministries. That, in itself, is no easy task as Bosnia has 12 such ministries -- one for each its two entities, the Serb republic and the Muslim-Croat Federation, and a further 10 for the cantons that make up the Federation. But the Council of Europe's Tatiana Milko points to other difficulties:

(TAPE BAND 2 MILKO:) Different textbooks coming from other countries -- first of all from Serbia and Croatia -- they are based on the system of education that was developed in these countries and which is quite different to the approaches used in the other parts of Bosnia. One of the main aims of these guidelines is to provide common approaches in teaching history and geography throughout the whole country and reflecting, at the same time, the cultural diversity of the country. Of course, there are controversial and sensitive issues, especially in history. We developed special approaches to how to teach and present these controversial issues, explaining to pupils all the complexity of the situation but, at the same time, without creating the images of "enemy".

(REP:) The next move -- logically -- should include co-ordination not just within Bosnia but also a trilateral approach that would involve Croatia and Serbia as well. But for now the Council of Europe is advancing one

step at a time. Meanwhile, another -- and much more ambitious -- scheme is taking shape across the Balkans thanks to the efforts of a Thessaloniki-based foundation, the Center for Democracy and Reconciliation in South-eastern Europe. With the participation of historians and teachers from 11 countries in the region, it's publishing a series of source books to supplement national history textbooks books for secondary school pupils. But what precisely is the project designed to achieve? Dr Halil Berktaş of Sabancı University in Istanbul is one of the project's co-ordinators:

(TAPE BAND 3 BERKTAŞ:) The idea is to introduce a significant degree of multi-perspectivity into history teaching practices that we believe simply isn't there at the moment. This is related to the overwhelmingly 19th century style national history discourses of most of history education in the Balkans. History education is regarded as an ideologically hyper-sensitive subject which is closely tied to the political and ideological mission of providing legitimacy for the delayed processes of nation formation in this part of the world that occurred from the early or mid-19th century onwards.

(REP:) A history project that brings together the six former Yugoslav republics; Cyprus, Greece and Turkey; as well as Bulgaria and Romania appears to be facing an uphill task. So how do the authors try to tackle long-established nationalist prejudices that have continued to permeate the teaching of history? And what's the best way of arbitrating between the different claims of "victim status" voiced by so many of the nations in the region? Sheila Cannon is managing director of the project:

(TAPE BAND 4 CANNON:) How do we try to overcome the different stereotypes when we come together? We don't try to come up with one homogenizing story of history. We don't try to unify it so that we all realise who really was the "victim". That's not possible. That's just continuing with the same thing. If you put together the different possible perspectives, you get a very multiple or plural picture. It's more complicated, it's less black-and white -- far more grey zones -- but we believe it's more accurate.

(REP:) One of the main aims of the project is simply to place different interpretations of the same event or historical process side-by-side in the same volume. That can often produce startling contrasts, as Halil Berktaş, editor of the source book on the Ottoman Empire, explains:

(TAPE BAND 5 BERKTAŞ:) It was more difficult, relatively speaking, for Turkish history teachers to get rid of the idea that somehow the Ottoman expansion into the Balkans had been an act of massive liberation, and it was -- on the other side -- it was much more difficult for the Greek and Bulgarian school teachers attending our interim workshops to get rid of the idea that the Ottoman occupation of the Balkans was tantamount to slavery.

(REP:) To most Europeans, and particularly to the peoples of the Balkans, the idea of Ottoman rule as "liberation", seems somewhat far-fetched. But Halil Berktaş points out that -- within its own perspective -- Turkish historiography has constructed a coherent case for it:

(TAPE BAND 6 BERKTAŞ:) This idea that came to be built into the Turkish nationalist discourse from the 1930s onwards was that prior to the Ottoman conquest of the Balkans, Balkan societies were in the grip of feudal anarchy. There were too many petty dynasties, principalities, kingdoms, etc. all of which were practicing internecine warfare against one another, and as a result the Balkan peasantries were too heavily oppressed and were being overexploited. There were very strong and very violent religious divisions. The Ottomans came in by imposing a generalised Pax Ottomanica, that is to say, they replaced this divisive and destructive kind of feudal anarchy with a peaceful and benevolent imperial rule.

(REP:) Although in general the guiding principle of the project was to place different arguments or interpretations side by side, in some controversial cases the authors have decided to adopt a different approach. One such example was that of the number of people -- Serbs, Jews, gypsies and anti-fascist Croats -- who were killed at Jasenovac, the most notorious of the concentration camps run by Croatia's pro-Nazi Ustaša authorities. Kresimir Erdelja, a history teacher in Zagreb, is editor of the source book on the Second World War:

(TAPE BAND 7 ERDELJA:) We didn't mention the controversial number of people killed in the Ustaša concentration camp of Jasenovac. Some Serbian historians -- usually right-wing -- mention the number of 700,000 Serbs killed; then some Croatian historians -- also right-wing -- would mention that there were no Serbs killed at all, but they all died of natural causes. Our decision was not to go into these specific figures. But we brought the estimate of those killed in Yugoslavia, the whole of Yugoslavia, by one Serbian and one

Croatian author. And, of course, we emphasised that the accuracy of these figures is still being examined. Both figures are around one million.

(REP:) Two of the four source books have now been published. The others are to follow soon. They will all need to be translated into the languages of the 11 participating countries. Most importantly, though, they will need the backing of history teachers and the education authorities in each of these countries if the source books are to be adopted and used across schools. There's been considerable support -- though not in every case, as Sheila Cannon explains:

(TAPE BAND 8 CANNON:) When we went to see the previous minister of education in the FRY of Macedonia in Skopje and presented the work that we are doing, he sort of turned round to us and said: "Who are you to do teacher training? This is the ministry of education and you shouldn't be coming in here to do teacher training. We obviously didn't get too much support then. Now with the new ministry we do. On the one hand it is the ministry's job, but on the other hand, teachers are free citizens to organise whatever they like to organise, if they want to explore alternative ways of teaching they are open to do that as long as they follow the national curriculum.

(REP:) Balkan co-operation in history teaching is still lagging a long way behind Franco-German progress which is about to be crowned with the publication of a joint textbook next year. But the crucial first steps of producing supplementary source books are now being taken. If the project proves a success, it could lay the foundations for changing the next generation's perception of history. And moving away from an often narrowly nationalist perspective to a more multi-dimensional interpretation may make a strong contribution to bolstering reconciliation among former adversaries. (end)

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TAC0519549, REISSUE

(Cue: China and Japan have -- for now -- put behind them their recent dispute which was prompted by Chinese criticism of a Japanese history textbook that appeared to belittle Japanese atrocities committed during their last war. Rows over the treatment of history have strained relations between the two Far Eastern economic giants from time to time. So could they learn from the example of France and Germany and other European countries that have gone out of their way since the Second World War to deal with contentious issues in their history? In the first of this two-part series on Europe's attempts to learn from its own history, the BBC's Central and South-east Europe analyst, Gabriel Partos, looks at the Franco-German experience -- and some of the other examples it's inspired.

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(TAPE BAND 1) (FX demonstrators crashing & cheering sounds)

(REP:) Protesters throwing stones at a Japanese restaurant in Beijing. It was one of many demonstrations in Chinese cities last month as people vented their anger against the Japanese. And the cause? A new Japanese history textbook that China criticised for playing down the extent of Japan's wartime atrocities in the 1930s and 1940s. The widespread protests that followed were a clear indication of just how powerful a force history -- and the teaching of history -- can remain in day-to-day politics, as the words of this protestor in Shanghai indicate:

(TAPE BAND 2 SHANGHAI PROTESTOR:) I don't like the Japanese. I hate the Japanese. They killed so many Chinese people.

(REP:) If history is often a potent symbol -- and sometimes a trigger -- for present-day conflicts, it can also be harnessed to try to bring about reconciliation. In Europe that tradition goes back a long way -- to the interwar years when French and German historians first got together in the mid-1930s to try to get rid of the mutually negative stereotypes that had characterised much of their history textbooks. That project fizzled out soon with the onset of the Second World War. But it was restarted soon after the war. So was it Nazi Germany's total defeat that helped the project off the ground? Rainer Riemenschneider, a German historian who's been actively involved in co-operation projects with his French colleagues for over 25 years, thinks the original motivation was more complex:

(TAPE BAND 3 RIEMENSCHNEIDER:) It was perhaps not so much the defeat of '45 -- but the victory of the Germans over the French of 1940. That was a sort of revenge that the Germans took on the French because the Germans thought that they had not been well treated at the Versailles Treaty of 1919. When this revenge was completed, the German political and historical consciousness about France was appeased.

(REP:) For France, of course, what mattered was first, the experience of defeat in 1940 and then that of the Allied victory in 1945. In any case, after 75 years of intense Franco-German rivalry, interspersed with the three bloody conflicts of the Franco-Prussian war of 1870-71 and the two World Wars, the situation was ripe for reconciliation between Western Europe's two arch-enemies. And their interpretation of history was to be part of that process. Professor Wolfgang Hoepken is Director of the Georg Eckert Institute -- the German organisation named after one of the pioneers of co-operation among historians and history teachers from different countries. He believes progress was made because the crucial factor needed for it was already in place:

(TAPE BAND 4 HOEPKEN:) If you want really to improve textbooks there should, at least, be a willingness on both sides to improve these textbooks. In particular with Germany and France, for example, but also later on with Germany and Poland, there was, indeed, a favourable or improving political climate. In the case of France there was, of course, the fact that all territorial issues which in the 19th and early 20th centuries always had been a problem in the relationship between the two countries, had been settled. The disputed Alsace region, for example, was not a matter of conflict any more. Both countries were members of the same

economic and military alliances. Under these conditions the German-French textbook co-operation very, very quickly agreed on almost all the basic issues already during the '50's and '60s.

(REP:) With much of the work on eliminating crude national stereotypes completed by the early 1960s, the intensive phase of Franco-German co-operation came to an end. But it was relaunched in the 1970s -- though this time with a different perspective: with an eye to the wider issues of European integration as well as to new approaches to the study of history. By the time Rainer Riemenschneider helped restart this process, the questions on which historians from the two countries were at odds had taken on a new form which had little to do with traditional nationalist historiography. Dr Riemenschneider, now based in France, remembers how he was taken aback by some of the advice he'd received from his French colleagues:

(TAPE BAND 5 RIEMENSCHNEIDER:) Our German textbooks dealt a lot with the French Revolution because the French Revolution is for us Germans -- after the war -- an important moment in history and an important issue for our national identity, too -- because German political consciousness is based on human rights, democracy and international co-operation. Therefore, there was a huge importance given to the French Revolution in German history. And our French colleagues told us: "For us, French, you deal too much with the French Revolution". It was very astonishing for us. And they told us: "We stress very much 'la longue duree', that is to say the long-term in history, "and we don't want to stress so much the ruptures, the collapses of history, and therefore we propose to you, German colleagues, to shorten your treatment of the French Revolution and to give more place to the French Third Republic which lasted 70 years.

(REP:) The success of Franco-German co-operation prompted similar undertakings between Germany and Poland, starting in the 1970s. Conditions were, of course, very different -- the two countries were on different sides of the Iron Curtain. So certain issues -- such as the Nazi-Soviet Pact of 1939, which partitioned Poland, were too sensitive for Warsaw's Communist authorities to handle. But progress was made in doing away with some of the hostile national interpretations -- and that's been followed, since the end of the Cold War, by similar projects involving Germany and Russia. Meanwhile, the idea of bringing historians together to work on history books has gained acceptance across much of Europe. The Council of Europe has been in the forefront of this effort over the years. One of its recent achievements is a source book on Black Sea history to supplement the various national history textbooks. It was published last year in time for the current academic year. The initiative came from Romania; but the project was soon embraced by Bulgaria, Georgia, Moldova, Russia and Turkey. Its co-ordinator at the Council of Europe is Tatiana Milko:

(TAPE BAND 6 MILKO:) In all these countries the main accent was on teaching national history and world history. But there was almost nothing on the history of the neighbours. And one of the main aims of this initiative was to look at this big geographical area but especially from the angle of how to present the history of the neighbours. Regional history gives an extraordinary opportunity to speak about interactions, and to show how in this big geographical area different countries made the same valuable input in the general process, through first of all such topics as trade routes, culture, economic history, scientific history and so on. We proposed to include such issues as the history of cooking and also legends about the Black Sea. And the result was absolutely fantastic because these two topics showed that different countries had a lot of things in common and their legends gave almost the same image of a peaceful area.

(REP:) Meanwhile, France and Germany have moved on. Next year they are publishing a joint history textbook -- the first of its kind -- which will be used in secondary schools in both countries. It's also a pioneering effort in the sense that it approaches history from a broadly European perspective. Its forthcoming publication marks the enormous distance that's been covered in historiography since the Second World War. But how much of a contribution can co-operation on textbooks make to reconciliation? Professor Hoepken:

(TAPE BAND 7 HOEPKEN:) Textbooks can only be one part of a broader policy of reconciliation. As long as, for example, the political elites in their rhetoric and in their policies are doing more to rekindle conflicts or to keep problems open, to turn education into an instrument for their own narrow political interests, I think then it becomes very difficult for education to have an impact. But if education and if textbooks are working within a general, favourable climate for reconciliation, then they can play a role.

(REP:) So given these problems and pitfalls, what kind of progress is being made in a region where ethnic conflict has a much more recent history? In the second and final part of this series, Gabriel Partos looks at fresh attempts at regional co-operation to amend the nationalist traditions of historiography in south-eastern Europe. (end)