

Comparative report

# Making History Work for Tolerance



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*The Project addresses the need to reduce political manipulations with history education in order to increase tolerance among majority and minority population (including migrants) and to reduce xenophobia in three EU countries – Denmark, Latvia and Slovakia, through research, direct work with teachers and advocacy.*

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## Contents

1	Introduction.....	4
2	Policy framework for history teaching.....	5
2.1	General policy framework for history teaching .....	5
2.2	The goals of history teaching defined in national curriculum.....	5
2.2.1	Goals of history teaching as reflected in curriculum .....	6
2.2.2	Hidden curriculum.....	7
2.2.3	Teaching the history of minorities and migrants .....	8
3	Political discourses on minorities and migrants.....	8
4	Stakeholders' perceptions regarding the uses of history for teaching about society and tolerance .....	9
4.1	History teaching experts.....	9
4.2	History teachers.....	11
4.2.1	Denmark.....	11
4.2.2	Latvia .....	12
4.2.3	Slovakia.....	12
4.3	Students' views on the connection between history education and tolerance.....	14
5	Conclusions and recommendations.....	15
6	Conclusions.....	16

## 1 Introduction

This paper presents the results of a comparative study of conditions for promoting critical, reflective and democratic history education in three countries of the European Union – Denmark, Latvia and Slovakia.

The project *Making History work for Tolerance: A Research-Based Strategy to Reduce the Intolerant Usage of History Teaching* addresses the need to reduce political manipulations with history education in order to increase tolerance among majority and minority population (including migrants) and to reduce xenophobia. The study is intended to contribute to practice-oriented activities such as trainings for history teachers, enabling them to resist politicisation of history education and to promote a critical and reflective approach to learning about the past and its implications for the coexistence of different groups in society.

Politicisation of history has become a permanent feature in a number of countries in Europe, including countries in this study, due to the nature of debates about national identity sparked by politicians and opinion leaders.

When seeking to understand how political narratives and perceptions of the role of different groups (majority and minority) in society are projected in history teaching, we have focused on four different levels:

- The political level: debate between different political interests in the public sphere about the sense or meaning of the nation state. Such debate often concerns criteria of membership in the nation, projecting old and new stereotypes about ‘us’ (majority, increasingly labelled ‘state-founding nation’) and ‘them’ (old and new minorities, usually understood in cultural terms).
- The policy level: history curricula and other policy documents defining the goals of history teaching in today’s society.

- The professional: the opinions of experts and history teachers on the role of history teaching in elucidating conflict and coexistence of different groups in society and promoting a certain understanding of nation, society and tolerance, as well as the obstacles to promoting a more critical and less intolerant perspective.
- The student level: students as the ultimate target audience of discourses promoted through history teaching.

The present study addressed the political and the policy levels through desk research. The political level was explored by studying publications of speeches, interviews and other expressions of opinion of political party leaders and policy makers, focusing on the presence of what has been termed ‘ethnic discourses’.<sup>1</sup> The policy level has been explored by identifying the goals of history teaching as described in national curricula, as well as the space accorded to teaching the history of minorities and migrants within national curriculum.

The professional level was explored through interviews with history didactics experts and with history teachers. The interviews (or focus group, in the case of Latvia), were intended to reveal teachers’ perceptions of how national history and European and world history is to be taught, and what is the role of history teaching in promoting a perspective on coexistence of different groups in society.

The students’ level was reflected through focus groups with students, asking them to share their experience of learning history in connection with learning about different groups in society and acquiring understanding of different perspectives on past and present conflicts and issues of intolerance and discrimination.

<sup>1</sup> See Teun A, Van Dijk(2000) *Ideologies, Racism, Discourse: Debate on Immigration and Ethnic Issues*, in: Jessika ter Wal & Maykel Verkuyten (Eds.), *Comparative perspectives on racism*. (pp. 91-116). Aldershot etc.: Ashgate.

In the end, Conclusions draw together the main observations of researchers from the three countries in order to propose a set of guidelines for empowering history educators to promote history learning that meets the needs of diverse democratic societies.

The research part of this report is based on national reports from Denmark, Latvia and Slovakia, prepared by researchers in these countries on behalf of the Danish History Teachers' Association, Centre for Public Policy PROVIDUS and Orava Association for Democratic Education.

## 2 Policy framework for history teaching

### 2.1 General policy framework for history teaching

The policy framework for history teaching in the three countries included in the study is defined by national curriculum. The main policy documents regulating the History curriculum are indicated in the table below.

The peculiarity of history teaching in Latvia and Slovakia, as differing from many other EU Member

States, is that national history and history of the world are taught separately.

In Slovakia, this is done within the framework of a single subject, History. In Latvia, the subjects (and curriculum standards) have been separated into History of Latvia and History of the World as a result of political pressure put on the Ministry of Education and on history educators by several politicians and by the national-conservative newspaper *Latvijas Avīze*. The amendments that created the separation of History subjects into two separate subjects were adopted on 12.10.2010 and a transition period was set until the school year 2012/2013.

### 2.2 The goals of history teaching defined in national curriculum

The goals of history teaching are defined differently in the countries in this study. While the main policy level at which the goals of history teaching are defined are curricula and educational standards, in some cases also government political programmes and other documents reflecting ideological direction of government policies address history teaching as part of a nationally (rather than internationally) oriented political agenda.

Country	Subject title	Policy documents defining curriculum
Denmark	History	History curriculum for The Danish General Gymnasium <sup>2</sup> , Lower secondary school curriculum <sup>3</sup>
Latvia	Latvian and World History (formerly) History of Latvia (2013) History of the World (2013)	National Standard of General Education, Standard of Basic Education, History of the World and History of Latvia curricula
Slovakia	History (but history of the world and history of Slovakia are taught separately)	National Curriculum for teaching History (ISCED 2 - lower secondary)

<sup>2</sup> <http://uvm.dk/Uddannelser/Gymnasiale-uddannelser/Studieretninger-og-fag/Fag-paa-stx/Historie-stx?smarturl404=true> and <https://www.retsinformation.dk/Forms/R0710.aspx?id=132647#B27>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.uvm.dk/Service/Publikationer/Publikationer/Folkeskolen/2009/Faelles-Maal-2009-Historie/Laeseplan-for-faget-historie/Folkeskolens-historiekanon>

E.g., in Slovakia, government's Programme Statement for the years 2012-2016 states that 'all levels of schools shall emphasise education in spirit of national, historical, and cultural values and traditions, knowing and respecting civil, national, and Christian traditions and values. Patriotism shall be promoted with modern forms and methods of teaching, and teaching about holocaust, racial and ethnic violence shall be deepened'.

### 2.2.1 Goals of history teaching as reflected in curriculum

The main goals of history teaching according to lower and upper secondary education curricula can be seen in the table below:

The goals of acquiring a critical perspective and ability to interpret historical events and/ or sources from that perspective are also usually included in curricula. Thus, in Denmark, gymnasium students are expected to 'use historical critical-analytical methods'.

The goals defined in national curricula are further qualified through requirements concerning learning outcomes. These requirements often circumscribe the competences and knowledge that students are supposed to possess in interpreting national and world history, and as such frequently include competences that specifically address understanding of phenomena that involve coexistence and conflict of different groups in society.

Country	Goals of history teaching: basic education(primary and lower secondary)	Goals of history teaching (upper secondary)
Denmark	Knowledge about development and different ways of organizing societies and communities in Danish and global history; chronological overview, and interpretation of and communication on historical themes.	Developing the students' historical knowledge, consciousness, and identity, as well as stimulating their interest in and ability to put questions to the past in order to reach an understanding of the complex world they are living in. The students gain knowledge of and insight in the history of Denmark, of Europe, and of the world, of their own cultural background and other cultures.
Latvia	To shape learners' understanding of the basic trends of human development facilitating the development of European identity and promoting growth of responsible and tolerant members of democratic society of the European Union (World History).  To promote the sense of affiliation to the Latvian State and patriotism (History of Latvia).	Creating an opportunity for the student to realize the importance of knowledge of history in understanding of the past and choosing the possible alternatives of personal and societal development, improving the knowledge and awareness of the key events in Latvian, European and world history and the historical development of the Latvian statehood.
Slovakia	Development of the subjective and inter-subjective competences to use gained knowledge in multiple learning and practical situations, that enable students not to approach history as a closed past, but develop the whole range of the competences to actively ask cognitively diverse questions, that help them to ask about the past through the prism of the present and so gradually develop their own opinion.	

E.g. the Latvian upper secondary school history curriculum includes requirements for students to be able to:

- describe, explain and analyse holocaust, other genocides and crimes against humanity in the contemporary history;
- describe the development of the idea of the Latvian national state from a cultural autonomy till an independent state;
- understand causes of democratic and authoritarian trends in Latvia, their manifestation and effects, and also have experience in assessing the history of parliamentarianism and authoritarianism of the Republic of Latvia;
- understand effects and consequences of the communist USSR and Nazi German occupation regimes in Latvia during the Second World War.

In Denmark, the focus of curriculum and history didactics is on the cognitive skills and competences that students are expected to acquire when dealing with history, as well as on understanding and interpreting specific events in history that raise the issue of coexistence of different groups in one territory.

## 2.2.2 Hidden curriculum

The ‘tacitly accepted’ or non-declared goals and implications in curriculum have been called ‘hidden curriculum’.<sup>4</sup> Also in the case of history teaching, the choice of themes and approaches by textbook authors and by educators constitute the basis of a ‘hidden curriculum’ or a set of assumptions that are transmitted through history teaching. In the case of

Latvia and Slovakia (and sometimes, recently, in the case of Denmark), hidden curriculum often implies that history of the nation, sometimes understood as the ‘state nation’ or main ethnic group, is taught – as opposed, for example, to the history of territory, or state, or all ethnic groups inhabiting the current territory of the state.

Thus, in Latvia, as researcher O.Procevska points out, ‘there has not been a strict distinction, whether we are teaching history of territory, history of state nation, or history of inhabitants of Latvia, which would mean including expat history and history of other nationalities’.<sup>5</sup>

In Slovakia, as in Latvia, the notion of history of ‘state-founding nation’ being the only history that matters, is also reflected in political discourse. This perception has been articulated at high political level by Prime Minister Robert Fico: “Our independent state has not been established preferentially for minorities, although we respect them, but primarily for the Slovak state-creating nation.”<sup>6</sup>

The analysis of interviews with teachers (below) shows that this cultural nationalist perspective is shared by some history teachers in their understanding of the goals of teaching national history.

In Denmark, the debate in the public about the influence of immigration on culture has repeatedly generated arguments along the same lines, claiming that the core Danish identity, based on Danish national history, Danish language, religion, and other Danish values is threatened. Many opinion leaders actively opposed the option of Denmark developing as a multicultural society. Two different perceptions of what is ‘Danishness’ have marked the Danish debate on nationalism for more than a generation. One perception sees Denmark as a nation of citizens, defined in legal

4 Michael Apple and Nancy King (1983) “What Do Schools Teach?” *The Hidden Curriculum and Moral Education*. Ed. Giroux, Henry and David Purpel. Berkeley, California: McCutchan Publishing Corporation.

5 Interview with O.Procevska, 10.09.2013.

6 See below, footnote 10.

terms. The other perception sees the nation of Denmark primarily as a culturally, historically, and linguistically defined community. The two perspectives are presented equally for the pupils in the Danish school. According to one recent study, a monocultural approach has become hegemonic in policy initiatives and legal documents related to the education of ethnic minority children in Denmark. This hegemony is achieved by representing ethnic, cultural and linguistic diversions from established norms in terms of deficit or deprivation.<sup>7</sup> The Latvian and Slovak national reports show that power relations reflected in political discourses support the notion that history of the ethnic majority or the ‘state-creating nation’ is *the* History that has to be taught in schools. This discourse relegates the history of other groups to the margins. In the case of Denmark, the debate is subtler, yet the discourse contrasting the ‘big’ (Danish and European) history with ‘small’ (history of own group or country of origin) was also encountered in the interviews for the country report.

### 2.2.3 Teaching the history of minorities and migrants

In Denmark, the history curriculum focuses on diversity from a global, much less from a national perspective: students in lower secondary school should know ‘decisive and important events in Danish, European and global past’. The extent to which materials on the history of minorities and migrants are incorporated in history teaching, especially in upper secondary school, depends on the teachers. Such materials exist, and concentrate on traditional minority groups (e.g. Jewish history is also reflected in Holocaust education which is part of human rights education – such as materials developed for lower secondary school by Danish Institute for International Studies (DIIS)), and

sometimes also on ‘new’ minorities (e.g. materials on history of migration to Denmark developed by EuroClio). Political and didactic discourses, often focus on how new minorities have integrated (or not) in the Danish society and ‘big’ history (history of the majority).

In Latvia, there is space in the national curriculum for topics related to the history of minorities, and minority schools are actively using this space. It is unclear, however, to what extent majority schools are incorporating topics on history of minorities in the syllabi, and as one of the interviewed experts pointed out, ‘It [history of Latvia] is a story based on national romanticism, there simply is no place for „others”’.<sup>8</sup>

In Slovakia, history of minorities and migrants as a theme within the national History curriculum is mentioned briefly, e.g. under the theme of “Multicultural Monarchy” where defined learning outcomes for higher secondary students (ISCED 3A) are “to be able take a stand in the discussion on the relationship between the majority and minority at a multinational state” or “to search, how the national diversity of the monarchy has been reflected in the historical destiny of your family”.<sup>9</sup> History of minorities and migrants can also be taught (according to the school’s choice) within cross curricular themes of “Multicultural Education” and “Regional Education and Traditional Folk Culture”.

## 3 Political discourses on minorities and migrants

When Slovakia’s Prime Minister, Robert Fico, stated in February 2013 that the state had been created primarily for the Slovak ‘state-creating nation’, he continued: “It has become a fashion, that from the minorities living in Slovakia, we observe mainly

7 Christian Horst, Thomas Gitz-Johansen (2010), Education of ethnic minority children in Denmark: monocultural hegemony and counter positions. *Intercultural Education*, v. 21, issue 2.

8 Interview with V. Klisans, 10.09.2013.

9 [http://www.statpedu.sk/files/documents/svp/gymnazia/vzdelavacie\\_oblasti/dejepis\\_isced3a.pdf](http://www.statpedu.sk/files/documents/svp/gymnazia/vzdelavacie_oblasti/dejepis_isced3a.pdf)

demands, stretched hands, and minimal cultivation of citizen's virtues, rather than obligations towards the state. This has to be changed.”

The negative reaction of minorities in Slovakia to this statement unintentionally highlighted the old opposition of a ‘state-creating’ national majority and a substantial national minority: representatives of the Hungarian minority, who protested against Prime Minister's statements in the newspaper *Dunajska Streda*, stated that the Prime Minister compared them to parasites, although they are also the citizens of the Slovak Republic and pay taxes.<sup>10</sup> This exchange reflects the same duality of perception as the (somewhat less high-spirited) debate about Danishness: the perception that legal citizenship is sufficient to claim an equal place in the making of the state and society is opposed by the perception that a cultural membership in the nation is required first.

A very similar debate has happened in Latvia prior to the adoption of the new National Identity and Intergration Policy Guidelines<sup>11</sup> in 2011, when a leading legal expert E. Levits proposed the thesis (accepted in the policy document) that Latvia as a state has been created by the Latvians, a culturally defined state-founding nation, and citizens not belonging to this cultural group have to be defined either as minorities or immigrants.<sup>12</sup>

The strong insistence on a hierarchy of different groups of citizens, culturally defined, creates a basis for intolerant discourses based in power relations. The notion that the (cultural and ethnic) majority can and should set the laws which minorities have only to comply with is evident in well-known instances of intolerant political speech. Thus, in 2012 Andrej Danko, a new Chairperson of the Slovak National Party, in an

interview to a local journal stated that „To communicate and look for solutions of Roma issue is so much worn out, that it seems to me even ridiculous. One basic rule shall be in force: if one does not work, he or she will not receive a cent. A stronger hand is needed there, to teach them basic life values and habits.“<sup>13</sup>

The summaries of interviews and discussions with teachers (below) illustrate that part of these discourses make way into perceptions surrounding history teaching, and are reflected either in the external pressures exerted on teachers (Latvia), or in the teachers' views regarding their task as history educators (Slovakia). The Danish reports demonstrate that this is not the case in Denmark

***It is important to provide support to teachers' ability to resist political and xenophobic pressures and to enable them to continue as professional and creative educators with their task of educating critical and tolerant citizens who support equality between citizens of different backgrounds and their joint ownership of their society and state.***

## 4 Stakeholders' perceptions regarding the uses of history for teaching about society and tolerance

### 4.1 History teaching experts

*Tolerance from a history teaching point of view is understanding, how and why differing narratives of an event develop and persist in public memory.* History teaching expert, Slovakia

*The worst that can happen is when teacher sees history only as black and white; divides everything into bad and good and then pushes this on a student. This goes against a system which belongs*

10 <http://www.snn.sk/index.php/slovensko/1395-robot-fico-stat-sme-zalozili-pre-slovakov>

11 Cabinet of Ministers (2011), *Nacionālās identitātes, pilsoniskās sabiedrības un integrācijas politikas pamatnostādnes*.

12 The thesis was first articulated at the Lawyers' Days seminar in 2010, J. Pleps, G. Litvīns (2010), *Latvijas tauta, nacionāla valsts un dubultpilsonība*. Jurista Vārds, 03.08.2010.

13 <http://www.sns.sk/aktuality/a-danko-pre-zilinsky-vecernik-nie-nacionalizmus-ale-vlastenectvo-nie-konfrontacia-ale-dialog/>

to a democratic state. History teaching expert, Latvia

*In Denmark we have a progressive and critical-thinking history education based on the responsibility of the teacher...The overall aim of Danish history education is based on multi-perspectivity, on citizenship-building, and on reflective thinking. It is an overall goal to teach the pupils to look at things from many angles, and not just repeat one view of history and one idea of what is true.* History teaching expert, Denmark

History teaching experts interviewed for this study in the three countries have all agreed that multi-perspectivity and ability to communicate to students a critical and reflective approach to historical events and narratives should be at the core of history education. The Danish experts, in particular, put much emphasis on the ‘professional’ and ‘didactic’ approach to history teaching, revealing a strong link to the Nordic and German schools of history didactics, speaking of the formation of ‘historical consciousness’.<sup>14</sup> The way the experts focusing on the role of history education in raising critical and tolerant citizens engage with the ‘historical consciousness’ of students in culturally diverse society, however, seems to be more focused on the historical perceptions and identity of students with migration background, and less on students from the ‘old’ Danish population – at least, the problem of ‘hidden history’ (socially unacceptable views of history that students do not express at school) in connection with intolerance is discussed more in connection with migrant students.<sup>15</sup>

The Latvian experts (in interviews for this study and also in publications) have stated that in their opinion, the separation of national history and world history, effected recently for political reasons in Latvia, does not contribute to the main goals

of history education – fostering a critical and reflective approach. Experts have also noted that history curriculum does not dictate unitary views on history of Latvia; the task of history teaching is to teach students to analyse different approaches, materials, views on history facts and understand that there is a diversity of views. The underlying history narrative in many cases, however, is still often influenced by romantic (cultural) nationalism. As pointed out by one of the experts, ‘*On the policy level Latvia has not made a clear distinction, but there is greater support for teaching history as history of state-nation. It causes several problems as this view not only excludes many people from history narrative and causes problems on a European level - in Europe it is not possible to look at history today as it was acceptable in 19th century.*’<sup>16</sup>

Another expert has also pointed out that the romantic historical narrative still identifies certain groups – e.g. Germans and Russians – as perpetrators or oppressors, without separating historical political entities of the past (e.g. Russian Empire) from ethnic groups living today: ‘*Base storyline of history of Latvia is nationalistic and neutral or sometimes even hostile towards the others, no matter if they are Russian or German.*’<sup>17</sup>

Other experts in the media have noted the radicalisation of political views in minority (Russian-language) schools, linked to the current growth of non-democratic discourses in Russia and in Russian-language history literature, including glorification of Stalinism and Soviet Union and occasionally denying the mass violations of human rights and mass murders.<sup>18</sup>

In Slovakia, given the political uses of history in leading politicians’ discourses, the experts have stated that because history education has been and still is politicized, students should be able to recognise why exactly now a concrete politician, ‘a

14 Aase Bitsch Ebbensgaard (2013), Danish national report on history education and intolerance, 22.

15 Ibid., 22-23. Also Aa. B. Ebbensgaard (2006): At fortælle tid. Danske gymnasieelevers liv med fortidsrepræsentationer. Ph. D. Odense. Syddansk Universitet.

16 Interview with O. Procevska, 2013.

17 Interview with V. Klišāns, 2013.

18 “Kauja par vesturi” (Battle for history), Daily newspaper Diena // <http://www.diena.lv/dienas-zurnali/sestdiena/kauja-par-vesturi-13944410> // 28.04.2012

prime minister or a president, for instance, strives to drive their attention toward certain chosen historical stories'. History teaching 'does not reflect much about the relations between different groups in our country, at least not explicitly. However, implicitly it teaches mostly negative content – stories on victories and oppression of a nation reproducing an image of an enemy (mostly defined ethnically).'<sup>19</sup>

This summary demonstrates that experts in Latvia and Slovakia see a challenge for history education fostering critical and reflective attitudes and promoting democratic citizenship, and this challenge for them is mainly located in nationalist discourses at the political level, which teachers as professionals dealing with history education are exposed to. In Denmark, experts are less concerned with the issue of nationalism, and more with the issue of professionalism of approach and 'history didactics'.

## 4.2 History teachers

As part of the study, researchers in three countries have interviewed history teachers about their perceptions of how national history is to be taught, and what is the role of history teaching in promoting a perspective on coexistence of different groups in society that reduces intolerance. The analysis of teachers' answers by country is given below.

### 4.2.1 Denmark

In Denmark, mostly Gymnasium (grammar school) teachers were interviewed, and their views represent a theoretically-based, didactic approach to the goals of history teaching and its role in promoting tolerance and democratic citizenship. The Danish teachers in pre-15 schools talk in their interviews about how history is taught by making

historical events to something that is present in pupils' lives.

Teachers are satisfied with the curriculum and the fact that their opinions were taken into consideration when it was developed, and see their own role mainly in stimulating 'pupils' historical curiosity', developing their reflective skills, and teaching them to work independently and to use multi-perspectivity in dealing with historical materials and topics. Teachers emphasize that all history teaching should be linked to current and present-day events and to the pupils' lives, pre-acquired histories, and historical knowledge.

The presence of ethnic and cultural diversity within many classrooms is seen by teachers as both a challenge and an incentive to add multiperspectivity to history teaching, especially speaking of the students' ability and willingness to relate to the histories of their families/ nations of origin. At the same time these statements reveal a somewhat essential view of what minority students can feel regarding European history:

*'If they have any relation to history it is not Europeans' history, so they are very interested in being introduced to the history of other continents, especially Middle East culture. The many foreigners give the teaching of history a special dimension, and one has to be aware of not saying anything wrong... I sense that religion is much more acute among many immigrants, and I use this in my teaching, not least because it is demanded by Middle East pupils... Danish pupils think it is a bit ridiculous that other young people are engaged in such an inferior thing as religion. But it raises the level of history teaching that questions are asked from another approach.'*

History teacher, Denmark

*'If the topic is e.g. the Ottoman Empire a Turkish pupil may add new views. In this way multi-perspectivity is introduced more easily... But of course one has to be careful and not take anything for granted.'*

History teacher, Denmark

<sup>19</sup> Interviews with M. Zavacká and L. Vörös, 2013.

This view of minority students as ‘experts’ in the history of their countries of origin can on the one hand enrich discussions and learning, but an essentialist approach assuming that these students as a rule have no ‘ownership’ of and no interest in Danish national and European history may present a problem. At the same time, the Danish national report underscores that it is a challenge to develop an interest in Danish history in students of immigration background.

#### 4.2.2 Latvia

The results of teachers’ interviews in Latvia illustrate that sometimes history teachers feel the pressure of political discourses focused on a certain vision of the nation and its past: ‘teachers feel responsible about history teaching as a tool for patriotic upbringing and feel responsible for students’ knowledge about Latvian, not so much world history events’. The curricular separation of Latvian history from world history, accompanied by political discourses of cultural nationalism, has thus created a new pressure on teachers taking their energies away from pursuing the declared goals of curriculum other than inculcating patriotism – e.g. ‘to shape learners’ understanding of the basic trends of human development’, or ‘promoting the growth of responsible and tolerant members of democratic society’.

Media pressure plays an important role in this, with students ‘tested’ every year by the media about their knowledge of important dates and their meaning. After some of them ‘fail’, teachers and educational system are blamed for not inculcating sufficient knowledge of national history. It is important to note here that this approach is in sharp contrast to the goals of official history curriculum that stipulates a critical thinking approach to the teaching and learning of history. Control by government institutions also can tend to interpret the requirements of curriculum inflexibly: thus, in 2011 the agency responsible for inspecting schools has found many deviations from

curriculum standards in the way history is taught in schools, which raised concerns of the Teachers’ Union regarding the limiting of teachers’ creative approach to history teaching.<sup>20</sup>

Teachers in minority (Russian-language) schools speak of the mainstream history narrative of Latvian history education as one that is at times difficult for their students to embrace, as it contrast sharply with the social and historical memory of their families and the remembrance culture of the Russians:

*‘We have to understand that school is not the only tool for raising patriots of Latvia. Students go home and they hear a completely different story. They consume media that says Stalin was a good manager and parents go to 9th May celebration to tell them that Soviets freed Latvia and Europe from Nazism. Which history they will believe in- the one that says Russians were villains or the one that states they were heroes? We have to help them consume media critically, but it will not happen if I as a teacher do not have creative freedom.’*

History teacher, minority school, Latvia

The pressures exerted by political discourses on the one hand, and by the realities of conflicting social memories and remembrance cultures on the other hand make the task of teachers as history educators particularly difficult, if they take their goal of educating critical, reflective and democratic citizens seriously.

#### 4.2.3 Slovakia

Interviews with history teachers in Slovakia reveal the same cultural nationalism perspective that is seen in the statements of politicians (analysed in section 3 of this report). This can be seen in perception of history as a competition between nations for recognition of their ‘civilisation’:

<sup>20</sup> Latvian Union of Education and Science Workers (2011), IKVD pret radošumu skolās <http://www.lizda.lv/?jaunums=474>.

*Our history is rich. We teach our national history so that our students were not only proud of it, but also knew that while there was nothing at some continents, we already had civilisations that have left a rich cultural heritage. If our students travel abroad, they should be able to present their country and say what is typical for the Slovaks – e.g. that in the past we already had a culture, script, monarchs.*

History teacher, Slovakia

Teachers have also stated that teaching national history is important because it reveals ‘our roots’, and a tentative list of values to be communicated through history learning included ‘moral values, such as patriotism, responsibility, respect, pride, resolution, initiative, respect towards the past’. Another teacher, however, pointed out that also ‘humanity, solidarity, tolerance, and integrity’ should be taught through history. The difference of positions between different teachers’ viewpoints can be described in a way as a presence of both ‘materialist’ and ‘posmateriealist’ values among history educators – with traditional, or ‘materialist’ values underscoring respect, unity and national pride, and ‘postmaterialist’ values underscoring humanity, solidarity and tolerance. Both seem to be present also at policy level as far as the defined goals of history teaching in Slovakia are concerned (see section 2.2 above).

As in Latvia, also in Slovakia teachers state that the curriculum does not leave them enough space for integrating tolerance as a goal of history teaching: ‘To teach students tolerance needs bigger room and much more time that we have’. They, however, do not focus on the didactics of history teaching as a set of analytical tools for making history teaching relevant for tolerance and democratic attitudes in society.

Teachers’ views on representing the relations of nations and ethnic groups in the past through the prism of ‘us’ and ‘them’, although constructed in denial of such a division, in fact show that the identification of ethnic groups with states and empires that have existed in the past does take place:

*‘When we teach history, we do not present problem as “our” or “their”. But we can talk “we and allies” or “we and enemies”. If we talk about Great Moravia, we are Great Moravia, when talking about Middle ages, we are Hungary, or later we are Czechoslovakia and they are our neighbours. Or we talk that the Slovaks did this, the Hungarians did that.’*

This quotation also shows that experts in Slovakia were correct when they noted that ‘stories on

#### **Students’ experience of learning about conflict and intolerance: Denmark**

*Pre-15 pupils could not remember very much about their early years’ history lessons. Often the subject was taught together with religion and Danish. Only from the 5th grade (11 years old) does the subject get its own identity. Here teaching is often done as discussion, and often the starting point is a topical issue being put in perspective forwards and backwards and from Denmark to the world outside.*

*The pupils give an example: The teacher showed a film cutting from May 1st, 2013, when the Danish Social Democrat prime minister and other Social Democrats were harassed physically and interrupted by extreme political opponents while speaking at public meetings. The teacher used the event both to link it to the topic of the history of the labour movement that they were doing and to discuss freedom of speech and tolerance in Denmark(...)*

*In contrast Gymnasium (grammar school) pupils think that history education is very much about thinking and reasoning. In addition the subject invites them to work independently with events and key questions. They are trained in historical method and most of all they say that they realize that there is no absolute truth of the past(...).*

Researchers also state that most Danish pupils find that personal and family-based history narratives are much more vital in forming identity and orientation than the history of society or societies.

This, in turn, may be an issue for students of migration background, who do not necessarily see a link between family narratives and history curriculum.

victories and oppression of a nation reproducing an image of an enemy (mostly defined ethnically)'.

### 4.3 Students' views on the connection between history education and tolerance

The views expressed by students regarding the goals of learning history and the influence of history education on tolerance and intolerance differ between the three countries, reflecting different kinds of consensus regarding the roles of different groups in society, but also the role of school as communicator of a state-endorsed, socially acceptable perspective on history.

In Denmark, students' experience of learning about conflict, tolerance and coexistence with others (no matter if the difference is social, cultural or political) differs between pre-15 (lower secondary school) and Gymnasium or grammar school (upper secondary school, where children of educated parents tend to be overrepresented).

The highly analytical perspective of Danish gymnasium students is somewhat echoed in the perspectives of Gymnasium (grammar school) students from Slovakia, who also find that the way

History is taught in their school helps enhance critical perception of historical events and reflection on basic human values:

In Latvia, discussions with students revealed that they often find history teaching simply boring, and do not identify much with the narrative presented by teachers – largely, it seems, due to didactic challenges. Students almost unanimously conclude that history is a boring subject with many dates to be learned by heart:

*"History is boring and it is just another subject that is based on learning facts. For me the hardest part is remembering correct dates, I would really need some help with that."*

### History teaching and human values: Slovakia

Students think that among the values that their History teacher tries to teach them, many are related to the basic human values and human rights, like the respecting of life, respecting of others, tolerance, to value what we have, to learn that conflicts can be approached in other ways, etc. They sometimes feel as if some politicians never looked back to the past and as if they didn't want to learn from history. Students also reflect on different views on the same historical events in their history textbooks and lessons and in the perception of their parents and grandparents, and feel they are obliged to take on the role of mediators, which they at times find too daunting:

*'Grandparents say that socialism was better, because everyone had a job. However, at school we learn that there was no freedom. The same way our grandparents say that they do not understand this world, they compare old times with new times. They praise socialism, because they had work.'*

*'My mother is Polish and if there are some Slovak-Polish problems, she has different view as my father, who is Slovak. For example she says that the Slovaks attacked the Polish in WW2. I want to explain them how it really was, but my parents do not want to listen to me. I do not know where is the truth.'*

This is not surprising given the thematic and factual overload of the Latvian history curriculum. As pointed out by a social memory researcher in Latvia, 'in schools where teacher plans curriculum according to standards, approximately 40 minutes are devoted to the theme of Soviet repressions. Students are introduced to basic facts, most of them are quickly forgotten and there is no time to discuss moral aspects, use audiovisual materials and testimonies of the deported'. No wonder that there is no space for critical discussion that would help to learn that victims and perpetrators are not ethnic groups, that responsibility has an individual dimension and that moral dilemmas faced in Latvia in the 1940s are faced by many people in the world today. As the same researcher, M. Kaprāns, further points out, 'It is positive that in some of the textbooks not only Latvians, but also minorities are mentioned as victims of deportations... the fact that inhabitants of Latvia took part in organizing deportations is also mentioned more clearly, but we

can still see a distinct caution to speak about this stigmatizing issue'.<sup>21</sup>

No clear understanding or even a hypothetical vision of the linkages between history learning and tolerance or intolerance has emerged from discussion with students in Latvia, which suggests that the current state of history teaching does not particularly foster a critical understanding among students of why history is actually worth learning.

## 5 Conclusions

Despite the large differences in standards of living, histories of democracy and authoritarianism and geopolitical situation, EU countries discussed here encounter somewhat similar challenges at the level of political discourses. Membership of old and new minorities in the demos that makes up the democratic nation is not perceived in the same terms by all political groups in society, and exclusive ideologies of cultural nationalism influence the way minorities and migrants are perceived.

Despite this challenge, the policy at the level of curriculum in all three countries does not articulate undemocratic goals and requires a critical and reflective approach to history, necessary for educating democratic citizens. The ability of history educators to maintain the critical, reflective and democratic approach, however, depends on a number of factors, and the situation is different in Denmark on the one hand, and in Latvia and Slovakia on the other hand.

In Denmark, history teachers feel sufficiently independent and professionally equipped to present a balanced and critical approach to history to their students, and feel that they have sufficient didactic and methodological base and on the whole sufficient time to do so. The feedback from students (and indeed some aspects of didactics communicated by teachers

and experts) suggests that there are still some areas of concern in this approach: e.g. focusing mainly on students of non-Danish ethnic background as those whose views on history might be potentially 'hidden' and intolerant, and viewing the non-Danish education and history narratives of parents as a deficiency. The voice of history educators is almost exclusively the voice of an 'old Danish' academic and professional community, with still insufficient representation of the perspective of 'new' Danes on how history in a diverse society should be taught.

On the other hand, the teachers' proven ability to draw minority students into discussion of world history topics from a different perspective and the students' understanding of multi-perspectivity of history suggest that overall, in Denmark, the reflective and critical teaching of history and its links to human rights education and democratic citizenship are safeguarded by professionalism. This may be largely owing to the existence of a community of practice and a body of research on history didactics.

The situation is different in Latvia and Slovakia, where the concept of the (ethnic and cultural) majority being the 'state-founding' nation that alone is destined to define the state, with 'cultural' citizenship or membership of the cultural nation being required prior to exerting political influence, exerts pressure on teachers engaged in history education. History Teachers' Association of Latvia has been criticised in the media for a 'cosmopolitan' position, and the daily media 'test' students, in order to see whether their knowledge of dates deemed important in national remembrance culture is adequate to what the media expect. When they fail, the teachers and policy makers are blamed for not teaching history well enough. Such pressures, that have already led to the separation of the subject of History of Latvia from world history, do not encourage the teaching of critical and reflective approach to historical knowledge.

Unlike teachers in Denmark, teachers in Latvia and Slovakia do not feel protected by a sufficient

21 M. Kaprāns, in the weekly IR, www.ir.lv, 20.06.2012.

professional autonomy from immediate political pressure, and experts suggest that the ‘hidden curriculum’ of history teaching is still based in cultural nationalism, even though official curriculum is not. Consequences of such hidden curriculum may include a narrow perception of relations between different groups in society as exclusively a struggle for power, leading potentially to hostility and xenophobia.

The politicised use of history and corresponding pressure on history educators could be best of all countered by professionals – researchers and didactics specialists and history teachers’ associations, however, despite their efforts and professionalism, their organisations are under-resourced. The negative consequences of this lack of professional safeguards against populist rhetoric and political pressure can be seen in the discussions with students in Slovakia and Latvia, who appear at times confused about the stress created by opposing history narratives, and at times simply uninterested.

It is important to provide support to teachers’ capacity to resist political and xenophobic pressures and to enable them to continue as professional and creative educators with their task of educating critical and tolerant citizens.

## 6 Recommendations

Given the difference of conditions faced by history educators in Denmark, Latvia and Slovakia, but the similarity of challenges posed by political rhetoric, it is important to use flexible approach in capacity building for teachers in each country, while maintaining the common goal of empowering teachers to resist political and xenophobic pressures and to educate their students for democratic citizenship in diverse and equitable societies.

- I. In Latvia and Slovakia, the emphasis should be primarily on building up the teachers’ capacity to promote a professional and

critical approach to the goals and methods of history teaching. This should also enable them to withstand pressures that seek to make history teaching a simplistic tool for imposing any given political ideology.

This capacity building may include (but not be limited to):

- Trainings in media literacy and critical analysis of discourses;
- Trainings in history didactics with particular focus on dealing with conflicting historical narratives in the students’ personal and school environment;
- Trainings in history didactics with particular focus on linking history with issues of social memory and analysis of remembrance cultures;
- Trainings in history didactics with particular focus on human rights and democratic citizenship.

- II. In Latvia and Slovakia, it is also necessary to support and build the capacity of social memory researchers and history teachers’ associations to become safeguards of a professional and socially responsible approach to history teaching. This can be achieved through joint projects, seminars and conferences, bringing together researchers and practitioners and developing methods of history education that live up to high professional standards and are not easily vulnerable to political manipulation.

- III. In Denmark, the professional autonomy of teachers and associations seems to be at no risk from immediate political pressures, and

their participation in the development of new history curricula has been reported as satisfactory. However, their voice is almost exclusively the voice of an 'old Danish' academic and professional community, with still insufficient representation of the perspective of 'new' Danes on how history in a diverse society should be taught.

In view of this, it is important to continue involving the perspective of new minorities in history teaching not only at the level of students, but also at the level of teachers and other representatives of minority communities, such as parents. Models for such involvement exist also outside Denmark, and even outside history education - for instance, in Canada, in the approach of 'Community as curriculum'.<sup>22</sup>

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22 J. Cummins, P. Chow, S. Schechter (2006) Community as Curriculum. National Council of Teachers of English, Canada.







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