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HISTORY REVISION, TEXTBOOKS AND IDENTITY SCIENCES
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Participants:

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Moderator: Aleksandar Rastović, PhD

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The third panel within the cycle Identities in Focus jointly organised by the Kolarac Endowment and the Science Fund of the Republic of Serbia was called Revision of History, Textbooks and Identity Sciences. Speakers on the subject were dr Miloš Ivanović, senior research associate at the Institute of History, dr Biljana Stojić, senior research associate at the Institute of History and Jelena Ivanović from the Public Institute for Textbooks and Teaching Aids.

The subject of textbooks, textbook revision and the status of identity sciences in Serbia which essentially comprises three segments is at the same time current and challenging. The revision of the Serbian history or its deconstruction i.e., non-scientific interpretation of historical events and facts from the more recent or distant past emerged in the acute form in late 80s and early 90s of the 20th century. A surge of contemporary revisionists i.e. historical engineering re-examined all key events and facts from modern and contemporary history of the Serbian

people, Serbian and Yugoslav state (Serbian revolution, Great Eastern crisis, Serbian-Turkish war in 1876/77, the Congress of Berlin, the Balkan Wars, World War I, the alleged Great Serbian hegemonism between the two world wars, World War II, constant diminishing of Serbian victims in Jasenovac concentration camp, abolishing the autonomy of Kosovo and Metohija and Vojvodina in 1988/89, the so-called Serbia's responsibility for the breakup of SFRY and causing the civil war). In these efforts, the contemporary revisionists intentionally abandoned the core methodological principles of historical science. In order to construct their own view of the Serbian past or to confirm theses commissioned in advance, they resorted to a one-sided, selective and biased use and interpretation of historical sources and literature and inadmissible "modernisation" of the past. Obviously, their intention is directed at changing the historical awareness of the Serbian people and ascribing collective guilt to them for something they cannot in any case be held responsible.

A question which is closely connected with the revision of history is: Whether the Serbian history and textbooks in the Serbian history should be written and printed by foreign historians and publishers or by the Serbian historians and domestic publisher or publishers? Finally, all this is related to the status of identity sciences (history, geography, language, literature, cultural and artistic heritage) i.e., the question on what kind of social and humanistic sciences we need in the future.

All these questions were answered by competent interlocutors. Miloš Ivanović, who spoke about the so-called pseudo history and identity sciences, defended his doctoral thesis *Nobility in the State of Serbian Despots* in 2014. From October 2013 until April 2014 he was employed as a research associate at the Faculty of Philosophy in Belgrade. He has been employed at the Institute of History since May 2014, currently holding the title of senior research associate. So far, he has published one monograph and over 40 research papers in the country and abroad. Miloš Ivanović's interests are in the field of social and political history of the

Balkan peninsula in late Middle Ages and he is a member of the Serbian Committee for Byzantine Studies. He currently participates on a COST project “Worlds of Related Coercions in Work”.

The second presenter, dr Biljana Stojić, spoke about the contemporary revision of history. Ms Stojić obtained a PhD degree in 2015 from the Faculty of Philosophy in Belgrade, on the subject France and the Balkan Wars (1912–1913). Her publications to date include two monographs and over 30 research papers in domestic and international journals. She publishes papers in Serbian, English and French. In 2017–2018 she completed post-doctoral studies at the University of Porto in Portugal, under the Erasmus Mundus Green-Tech programme. Since September 2019 she has been engaged on a COST project coordinated by the Vienna University. Ms Stojić’s field of research are international relations in the second half of the 19th and the first half of the 20th century, with the special emphasis on the history of the Balkan Wars and World War I.

Jelena Ivanović who spoke about textbooks’ place in history teaching and educational process as a whole holds the BA in history and works as an associate at the Public Institute for Textbooks and Teaching Aids. In the previous period she held a number of responsible positions at different cultural and educational institutions. Among other positions, Ms Ivanović worked at the National Museum of Kruševac, held the position of the director of the Kruševac National Theatre, director of the Directorate for International Cultural and Educational Cooperation at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, director of the Department for Strategy and Development of the Public Institute for Textbooks.

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Short Communication

REVISION OF HISTORY AND PROPOSALS FOR IMPROVING THE POSITION OF SOCIAL SCIENCES AND HUMANITIES

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It seems to me that we first need to again answer the question on why humanistic sciences are important. The answer is that they are invaluable for the development of critical thinking. Such an answer may seem too general. However, we live in a time of fast information flow, “tyranny of the moment” in the words of Thomas Hylland Eriksen (2003). Another thesis growing in popularity is that this is the age of post-truth. This term is denoting circumstances in which “objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief” (see Word of Year 2016). This adds to the importance of critical thinking which helps to distinguish between true and untrue, relevant and irrelevant. In my judgement, history as a science plays an important role in that regard.

When we talk about historical revision, we need first to clarify what do we mean by that. Namely, revision of historical knowledge is necessary and dates back to the origins of history as a science (Karsner, 2019, p. 15; Kuljić, 2002, p. 441). However, what we mean by historical revision today is usually an attempt to change fundamental knowledge under the strong influence of politics and ideology. The goal of such “revision”, or more precisely *revisionism* is not to increase knowledge on historical events and processes, but to interpret them differently so as to serve political or social interests of the current moment (Kuljić, 2002, pp. 441–442). It needs to be pointed out that this coincided with the development of certain currents in

historiography, such as postmodernism. Radical champions of the postmodernist approach are almost ready to negate any possibility of objective knowledge and to insist upon almost limitless number of possible interpretations of historical sources. Such an approach erases the boundaries between history and fabrication (Evans, 2007, pp. 9–10, 109–118, 132, 262–265). It is clear how negative can be the consequences of such an approach (pp. 262–265).

At first sight, the medieval history has not been subject to revisionist views to such an extent as the history of XX century. However, in the last twenty years or so, there emerged a tendency among non-experts and even among some historians in the Balkans, to completely change the views of medieval history. Part of this tendency are the stories of “oldest” nations. In order to support such alleged theories, long-established events and processes are being negated. The process of Slavic settlement on the Balkan peninsula has been particularly disputed, in an effort to prove that Serbs or some other people have lived in this region for ever (see Šargić & Mitić, 2020). This is done by negating the credibility of sources on this subject, by distorting the facts due to the unfamiliarity with the context or the language in which they are written. An increasing emphasis in these claims is being placed on DNA researches which are used totally unprofessionally and inadequately, e.g. to support the reasoning about some people residing in a particular region since the ice age (Oršolić, 2018)! Endorsement of such thinking is detrimental not only for science but for society as a whole, as it can engender theories such as the racial theory, which has caused an immense damage to the whole mankind. We are very familiar with the suffering it has caused to the Serbian people in XX century.

Any kind of exaggeration about the deeds and achievements of figures from the Serbian medieval history is also unnecessary. Our medieval heritage is sufficiently rich that there is no need to “sweeten” it by exaggerated stories, which only make it meaningless. Achievements in economy, culture and art are not dependant on a state’s territorial size. It is therefore totally unnecessary to attribute to Stefan

Dušan's Serbian state territories which did not belong to it (Srbin.Info, 2019). Quasi historians sometimes deny that medieval Serbian regions looked up at Byzantium, assuming erroneously that such looking up would be disparaging. On the contrary, it shows that there was awareness about the high achievements of the Byzantine civilisation, and indirectly also about the Roman and Hellenistic civilisations.

The proponents of such hypotheses mostly use social networks and YouTube to disseminate their views. Some of them publish their books which unfortunately make it to the shelves side by side with the relevant scientific literature. One should be warned that some of these authors are frequent guests at panels organised by libraries and cultural centres across Serbia. In their appearances, "the new romanticists", as professor Radivoje Radić calls them disparagingly talk about the work of academic historians calling them the proponents of the "Vienna-Berlin School" (Radić, 2005, pp. 9–14), often with a very aggressive attitude. Their aim is to convey the idea that academic historians hide the "truth" and work against the interest of their people and their home state, motivated by personal financial gain. Unfortunately, it can be observed that the younger population is increasingly turning toward the content written by unprofessional authors, prone to placing sensationalistic claims.

Apart from Slavic settlement, some other topics related to the medieval history have also been ideologized and politicized by various so-called history researchers. One of such topics is the Ottoman conquest of Balkan countries. It should be noted that the view of Ottomans, who had previously been perceived as cruel conquerors, has truly changed, thanks to numerous researches. However, this does not mean that the Ottoman Empire may be treated as a predecessor of multiculturalism and contemporary ordered states. In this regard worth mentioning is the reviving of the theory about Muslims as descendants of Bosnian Christians (*sr. krstjani*) (Imamović, 1998, pp. 26–27).

There are similar attempts to relativize the Serbian cultural heritage in the area

of Kosovo and Metohija. Thus, in the first chapter of the book of the German historian Holm Sundhaussen about the Serbian history from the 19th until the 21st century we may read:

And the magnificent legal and cultural monuments from the Nemanjić era – monasteries, frescoes, hagiographies of saints and rulers, or Stefan Dušan's Law Code – can also, like the Serbian monastery Hilandar on the holy hill "Athos", only conditionally be viewed as "Serbian". They are regional embodiments of a comprehensive medieval, primarily Byzantine-Orthodox culture and civilization, which transcends national borders (Zundhausen, 2009, pp. 35–36).

We do not dispute that the Serbian medieval culture belongs to a wider civilization, but this does not in any way diminish its uniqueness and connectedness with the Serbian medieval state. In a certain way, such perfidious strategies may be even more dangerous than the total negation of the Serbian presence in Kosovo and Metohija. Well known are the efforts to present the Orthodox temple of Saint Nicholas on Novo Brdo as a Roman Catholic cathedral. Accordingly, the Archaeological Institute of Kosovo started an unfounded reconstruction of the older part of the Saint Nicholas church, with the support of the German Embassy in Priština (Odeljenje istorijskih nauka SANU, 2019). The Prizren bishop and Bar archbishop served the mass on the remnants of this church on 1 August 2019 (RTS, 2019). Such moves inflict an immeasurable damage to the Serbian and universal cultural heritage in Kosovo and Metohija. It is important to mention this example also in the context of Priština institutions' application for UNESCO membership.

The second problem, to which we will return toward the end of our presentation, is insufficient "visibility" of the Serbian medieval history in international scientific circles. Unfortunately, this subject does not stir major interest of foreign researchers. One of the consequences is that international projects involving the study of the Serbian medieval history tend to engage researchers with inadequate knowledge and consequently produce publications with inaccurate data and interpretations

that are later used as relevant literature. A recent synthesis about the history of the Ottoman Empire authored by the US Ottomanist Douglas Howard and issued by the Cambridge University press contains a wrong date of the Kosovo battle in 1389 (Howard, 2017, p. 19). Also, Princ Lazar and Despot Đurađ Branković are mistakenly designated as kings (2019, pp. 19–20, 40, 61). I myself participated in a scientific gathering dedicated to the Court and Chancery of Emperor Sigismund where non-Serbian participants hardly mentioned his relations with the Ottomans and Balkan Christian states (<https://www.oeaw.ac.at/en/imafo/events/event-details/hof-und-kanzlei-kaiser-sigismunds-als-politisches-zentrum-und-soziales-system>). Apart from negligence, this is surely a consequence of an insufficient number of scientific monographs and articles of Serbian researchers in foreign languages. Particularly noticeable is the lack of synthetic reviews of the Serbian medieval history.

It is not my intention in this text to dwell on the depiction of the Middle Ages in history textbooks. It is well known that textbook contents are determined by the school curriculum and the set of key concepts that pupils are supposed to acquire. I do however feel the need to emphasize that more space in textbooks should be devoted to social and cultural history. Another important recommendation for schools is museum visitation, in order to better acquaint pupils with the cultural heritage.

In view of some of the problems listed above, we deem that it is necessary to improve the position of identity sciences. This can be done in several ways. The design of calls for projects by the Science Fund, such as the forthcoming initiative *Identities* is by all means an indispensable step in that direction. Better financing would provide an opportunity for researchers in social and humanistic sciences to implement a greater number of projects and better disseminate their knowledge. Due to the fact that for a great number of topics covered by our researchers in social and humanistic sciences there are probably no adequate reviewers abroad, I think that domestic researchers should also be included in the reviewing process or, at least, that special eligibility criteria should be considered for reviewers in

such areas, different from the criteria applied in other areas.

It is important not to lose sight of the fact that interest in social sciences and humanities exists in the wider population. Therefore, speaking of science funding, publishing of scientific monographs should be encouraged, as they are the most visible segment of research results in the area of social sciences and humanities. Thus, the regulations on funding and academic title award should encourage the publishing of popular science publications. Researchers' efforts toward popularization of science through appearances in TV and radio shows, or panels and lectures, are not accounted for in the current rulebook. However, it should be kept in mind that the majority of the population gets in touch with science through these channels. The current rigid practice of applying the rules of natural and technical sciences to social and humanistic sciences may cut off that channel, which would open room for all kinds of quasi experts whom I mentioned in the first part of the paper. We must work on building a trust in scientific researchers, so as to dispel the impression about them as an estranged elite. Only in this way will we be able to contribute to the development of critical awareness and the preservation of our historical and cultural heritage.

On the other hand, the efforts toward promoting the results of our historiography abroad should be significantly strengthened. To that aim, it is necessary to ensure funding for the publishing of scientific monographs and synthetic reviews in major world languages with reputed publishers. It would also be good to organise a training in writing project proposals for international calls. Such an approach could increase the number of projects designed by our researchers. It is also worthwhile considering scholarship award to foreign researchers for staying in our country and learning Serbian. Finally, more substantial funds should be approved for organisation of international scientific events which would bring additional contacts with foreign researchers. All these activities would increase the visibility of results of Serbian researchers in the fields of social sciences and humanities and at the same time be a part of the cultural diplomacy of our country.

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REVISION OF HISTORY – YESTERDAY, TODAY, TOMORROW

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Revision is a much-needed process in every science and humanistic sciences are no exception in that regard. Revisionism has always been a decisive indicator of scientific progress and future courses of development. Old conclusions and theses are constantly re-examined in the light of new sources and new methodological approaches, with a view to more comprehensive understanding of the past. However, in the past thirty years historical science has undergone not only a natural process of revision of researches and conclusions, but has increasingly been subject to manipulation and abuse serving different interests, primarily those of daily politics.

The key trigger for the wave of revisionism in foreign academies of science were political changes on a global scale – from the tearing down of the Berlin wall and German reunification, to the collapse of the Soviet Union and the breakup of Yugoslavia, with the accompanying wars. If there were any doubts as to the cause-and-effect relationship between these events, they were dispelled by Morton Abramowitz, the president of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace in 1991–1997 (<https://www.amacad.org/person/morton-i-abramowitz>; <https://history.state.gov/departmenthistory/people/abramowitz-morton-isaac>). It was in the full swing of the Bosnian war in 1993 that Abramowitz decided to republish the Carnegie Committee Report of 1914 titled: *The Other Balkan Wars: a 1913 Carnegie Endowment Inquiry in Retrospect*. Mr Abramowitz explained the motives for the reissue in the introduction: “In November 1992, I read article from Bosnia, which chronicled the horrors of Serbian “Ethnic cleansing” and further clarified: “The driving ambition to create a greater Serbia, a factor in those earlier wars, [Balkan Wars, 1912–1913, remark of the author] could again today engulf Macedonia and totally change Kosovo’s ethnic makeup” (Kennan, 1913/1993, pp.

1–2). In order for the reissue to gain appropriate political weight, he entrusted the US diplomat George Kennan with writing an “adequate” preface, as he called it (<https://www.britannica.com/biography/George-F-Kennan>). To meet the adequacy requirement, Kennan did not hesitate to draw a clear parallel between the Balkan wars and the wars in 1992–1993, emphasizing that “by coincidence, Serbs were the strongest party both in 1912–1913 and in 1992–3” and giving consequently the proposals on how to address “this coincidence” (Kennan, 1913/1993, pp. 10–11).

In order to grasp the degree of instrumentalization of the 1993 reissue, we need to understand the historical background of the original report in 1914. The Carnegie Endowment was a philanthropic and pacifistic organization set up in 1910 by a rich American of Scottish origin, Andrew Carnegie. In summer 1913 the American section of the Endowment started the initiative to send a neutral committee to the Balkans, the battlefield of the Balkan wars which filled the headlines of world newspapers month after month, to investigate the alleged war crimes committed during military operations. War crimes were the burning topic from the very first day of the war, with all parties mutually accusing each other, aiming to alarm the world’s public and to win the sympathies of great forces. Prior to the Carnegie initiative, there were several investigations led by war participants and also by neutral countries which investigated the news about the alleged crimes through their embassies. Those investigations were mainly internal, but some were international in character and involved foreign delegates. The results were published mainly in French, but those reports were not largely publicly promoted, at least not to such a degree as the Carnegie investigation.¹ The Committee set up by the Carnegie Endowment included seven members: the USA, Great Britain, Austria, Germany and Russia delegated one member each, while two members came from France. The Committee spent a month in the field, from August to September 1913. Since they arrived to the Balkans after

¹ Les Atrocités Bulgares. Un Appel au Monde Civilisé, 1913; Atrocités Bulgares en Macédoine (faits et documents), 1913; Some of the states, e.g. France did not publish the results of their internal investigations. The French Foreign Affairs Ministry followed the newspapers’ news on crimes committed during the armistice (December 1912 – February 1913) and carried out its own investigation which proved that the headlines in domestic and foreign newspapers were sensationalistic and that, apart from minor offences, there were no serious breaches of rules of war (AMAE, NS, Turquie, doss. 256, MF, PO 8621, N° 257, Paris, le 8 février 1913).

the ceasing of military operations and conclusion of the peace agreement in Bucharest, the only way they could gather information about the character of the war, directions of military operations and breaches of the rules of war was by talking to the survivors and inspecting the documentation provided by Balkan states.

It was agreed in advance that the most informed Russian delegate Pavel Miliukov would write the major part of the text and it was planned that the report would be published in English and French, already by the end of 1913, while the war impressions were still fresh. The report was released with a several month delay. It was not printed until mid-June 1914, which was coincidentally only few days before Sarajevo assassination. At the time it was released, Grgur Jakšić, the Serbian public relations representative in France said that the report missed the point, and the first impression was poor, "pacifists are no longer in fashion". The key remark was that the holiday season was just beginning, when "nobody reads anything anymore" (NBS, 1914). However, the Sarajevo Assassination and the World War outbreak one month later overshadowed the report, which became marginalised in the post-war period, until the final decade of the 20th century. The reissue attracted all the media attention which the report failed to attract at the time it was first released.² More importantly, in the light of new political circumstances it became the key reference for all revisionist historians in constructing negative narratives about Serbs and the Serbian history. The Balkan wars unjustifiably acquired the reputation of the central point in "Serbian nation's continued crimes against all other nations".

Since the Carnegie report reissue, revisionism has been constantly spreading, taking root in all historiographies, including the domestic one. Regardless of their academic origin, the majority of revisionist researchers share in common the drawing of almost identical parallels on "criminal intentions and acts" of Serbs or the Balkan people in the most pejorative of contexts. In place of a scientific approach comes political reading of history, i.e., reading in theses and conclusions determined in advance. Although giving a pretence of being historiographically well-founded, critical and objective, revisionist papers are predominantly ideologized

² Since the 1993 reissue, a large number of translations into other languages appeared. The Bulgarian translation came out in 1995, and the Macedonian in 2000 (Karnegievata anketa, r. Ekaterina Todorova, Veliko T"rnovo 1995; Poranešni balkanski vojni: (1912-1913): izveštaj na balkanska komisija [Report of the Balkan Commission], Skopje 2000).

and politically functional, and rather than being scientific, they more resemble political pamphlets serving the ends of the daily politics. New analyses are not based on newly discovered sources, but the “new narratives” are based on a careful selection of sources and literature which aims to confirm the pre-defined hypotheses. The style is appealing, courting the taste of broad audiences. The Serbian historiography, with few exceptions, boils down to mythological and nationalistic historiography, burdened by aggressive nationalism and mythomania constructs (Kosovo battle, Serb migration of 1690, Balkan wars, Sarajevo assassination etc.).

In the German historiography we may single out a well-known work by Holm Sundhaussen *History of Serbia from 19th to 21st Century*, published in 2005 and translated into Serbian in 2008. Together with the reissue of the Carnegie report, Sundhaussen’s *History* ranks among the “fundamental works” of revisionism. The goal, importance and purposes served by this book were already discussed in the Serbian historiography and a detailed analysis would go beyond the scope of this paper, but in order to conjure up the book’s goal and importance, we will quote just one sentence with which Sundhaussen concluded the foreword to the Serbian edition: “To that extent, the *History of Serbia* that is before you may not represent a gain for Serbia, but it is a great gain for me” (Zundhausen, 2009, p. 6). A question that unavoidably arises is: Are historiographic works written to satisfy the author’s vanity or the high purposes of historical science?

Similar underlying motives are found in the Anglo-Saxon historiography. The works of Noel Malcolm are also well known in the domestic historiography (Djilas, 1998; Bjelajac, 1998). Malcolm’s book *Kosovo. A Short History* appeared in 1998, at a carefully planned political moment, as a theoretical preparation for the aggressive measures NATO was to take against Serbia and Yugoslavia one year later. As noted by Aleksa Đilas, in one of the first reviews of Malcolm’s book published in the year of its issuance: “Western policies not only encouraged the KLA (Kosovo Liberation Army) [...] Egged on by confused, biased writers like Malcolm, Western pressure is so intense that Kosovo will soon become autonomous” (Djilas, 1998, p. 131). A similar time congruence of Anglo-Saxon literature with important events can be tracked in the later period as well. The 100th anniversary of the Balkan Wars, followed by the 100th anniversary of the World War I, saw an expansion of revisionist historians. Sean McMeekin, Margaret MacMillan, Tim Judah are just few of the names which came into the focus of attention of the world public by bold theories and conclusions which verge on the borders of politicking.

Still, the author who is best known and maybe the most far-reaching in manipulating historical facts is the Cambridge professor Christopher Clark. Clark's book *The Sleepwalkers: How Europe Went to War in 1914*, dedicated to underlying causes and reasons of World War I, was published in 2012 and translated into many languages, including Serbian, before 2014, the 100th anniversary of World War I (Clark, 2014). Much has been written about Clark's book and while a detailed analysis would take up too much space, we will single out one excerpt from Clark's writings in order to illustrate and understand his methodology. In order to bring closer to a contemporary reader, unfamiliar with the World War I history, the situation in the Kingdom of Serbia in the eve of the Great War, Clark unhesitatingly drew a parallel between Young Bosnia and Al Kaida, likening the Sarajevo assassination with the assassination of the US President John F. Kennedy and picturing Austria as a predecessor to the modern European Union. His machinations culminated in comparing the 1914 ultimatum to Serbia with the Kosovo crisis and the negotiations with Yugoslavia at the French château in Rambouillet in February-March 1999. While the thinkers living at that time and the generations of world historians after them interpreted the Austro-Hungarian ultimatum to Serbia in 1914 as "the most monstrous document" to have ever been handed over by one sovereign country to another, Clark claimed the opposite, legitimising it as a document which Serbia well-deserved by its (non)acting and aggressive behaviour toward Austria-Hungary. In the same way Yugoslavia pretty much deserved the outcome of the Rambouillet negotiations in 1999, with its refusal to sign the agreement ushering in NATO bombardment (Šarenac, 2013). The interpretations, parallels, the context and finally the conclusions all testify to the author's deliberate intention to picture Serbs and the Serbian history as outperforming the Nazi Germany by criminal intentions and deeds throughout its whole history. In contemporary words, Clark made the whole Serbian history into a textbook example of cancel culture (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cancel_culture).

Even the historiographies considered traditionally sympathetic to Serbs and the Balkans – the French and Russian historiographies – did not escape revisionism. The revisionist current in the French historiography displays an interesting feature which cannot be found in the German and Anglo-Saxon historiography. In French revisionists, the revision of the Serbian history spills over to the revision of the French history, that is a segment of joint war past and diplomatic cooperation. François Grumel-Jacquignon in 1999 defended a doctoral thesis at the Sorbonne

titled *La Yougoslavie dans la stratégie française de l'entre-deux-guerres* (1918–1935). *Aux origines du myth serbe en France* (Grumel-Jacquignon, 1999), featuring as one of the main theses that the “Serbian myth” is a mistake not only of the Serbian, but also of the French history and that this “mistake” is burdening the present generations of French politicians. In that context, Grumel-Jacquignon pointed out the need to re-examine the French politics toward Serbia and the Balkans in the entire 20th and 21st century (Bjelajac, 2005; Bjelajac, 2013). The second feature that can be observed is the revisionism of the period of French-Russian alliance in 1892–1917 via the Balkans. A renowned World War I historian Jean-Jacques Becker put the blame for the World War I outbreak on “the East”. Namely, this Pierre Renouvin student identifies two problem clusters in the corpus of problems which caused the war outbreak in 1914: problems of the West and problems of the East. According to him, problems of the West were marginal and could have been easily resolved by diplomatic means, while problems of the East, including the Balkan issue, were complex, given the underlying nationalism of aggressive type (Stojić, 2017, p. 436). Underestimating the complexity of the problem, France allowed to be manipulated by its ally Russia and dragged, via the Balkans, into what the author calls the “Third Balkan War” which soon grew into the world war. Becker introduced the periodization of five Balkan wars, calling the wars of 1991–1995 the Fifth Balkan War. In all the wars, the term balkanization is a common denominator for “persecution of population, plunder of territories, ethnic massacres and religious conflicts” (Becker, 2001; Becker, 2003).

The key questions arising from these examples are: Is there an end to revisionism and what can be done to moderate this all-pervasive and overwhelming but very negative trend? It should be clear that though we have been facing revisionism for already three decades, it will not lose steam anytime in near future, because the trend which started with the revision of the causes, course and outcome of the World War I is just the beginning, while the grand finale will no doubt be the 100th anniversary of the World War II and the Cold War division of the world. Since we are already halfway through this period, it is the high time for Serbia to actively and systematically join the processes which inevitably unfold, threatening its historical, as well as contemporary political position. Since revisionism did not emerge overnight, there is not a quick fix for it. Previous short-term solutions such as reactions to already published damaging papers or engaging foreigners to write books “on our behalf” proved unable to solve the problem, aggravating

the situation or only temporarily mitigating the damage already done.

Any thorough solution requires patience and long-term active efforts, not only of historians, but of the society as a whole, because the issues of history as an identity science go deep into the heart of our national identity. The second important point is the need for active engagement of the state, especially the line ministry. Individuals or institutions are powerless in the face of revisionism as a process. What is needed to counter it is state support to domestic researchers and institutions through programmes and projects of professional development, primarily abroad. In the last decades Serbia abandoned the practice of sending government-funded students abroad which throughout the 19th and the first half of the 20th century produced the best statesmen, ministers, scientists, in one word: the elite whose dedicated work was embedded into the very foundation of the modern Serbian statehood. Researchers should be offered training in applying to calls for projects in the country and abroad, which is a practice everywhere in the world. A systematic support should be given to young scientists in learning foreign languages. The researchers mentioned in this paper and the majority of revisionists do not speak Serbian. They use the limited corpus of original materials and historiographic literature with the assistance of translators or domestic colleagues, or reject it a priori. For example, Noel Malcolm in its "Kosovo: A Short History" consulted 31 archives and libraries, but none are in Serbia. Aleksa Djilas also stressed that Malcolm „failed to visit the relevant research centres in other Orthodox countries, like Greece and Bulgaria, restricting himself mostly to Catholic ones, especially in Italy and Austria. Among the international group of people thanked in the acknowledgments, there are half a dozen Albanians but not one Serb“ (Djilas, 1998, pp. 129–130). That is the key advantage of domestic researchers, most of whom speak and write in several foreign languages. Our main weapons must be objectivity, competence and methodological soundness. Further, the state needs to systematically support our researchers' work in foreign archives, because today even the national history cannot be researched without foreign materials. And finally, the state needs to support regular participation of our researchers in scientific conferences and events with a view to ensuring that the voice of domestic researchers is heard outside of the borders of our country and region. Key to ensuring international presence is state support for publishing in foreign languages and with foreign publishers.

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TRIBUNE SERIES IDENTITIES IN FOCUS
HISTORY REVISION, TEXTBOOKS AND IDENTITY SCIENCES*
Short Communication

TEXTBOOK'S PLACE IN HISTORY TEACHING AND THE ROLE OF THE STATE TEXTBOOK PUBLISHER IN EDUCATIONAL PROCESS AS A WHOLE

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Maybe the most important thing is to determine which goals we wish to achieve via textbooks. Are textbooks the primary source of information, teaching aids which stimulate the development of pupils' abilities and reading skills, writing and critical thinking, do they point to ethical role models or promote patriotism? (Fleming, 298–1990, p. 7).

The issue of textbooks is not related only to the educational or cultural policy of a country, it is an issue of far-reaching importance for every society and every state. All advanced societies pay great attention to textbook quality, because that quality impacts the level of general culture, historical and social awareness of the population, the relation toward one's own tradition and state and finally, sound and prudent orientation in the space in which the country is located. Textbooks are not used only to acquire knowledge, but also to encourage pupils to build their own views and capability to evaluate information they receive. This is particularly characteristic of the so-called *identity subjects*, i.e. textbooks in language, history and geography. This was surely the underlying reason for the establishment of the Institute for Textbooks and Teaching Aids in Belgrade 65 years ago, as an umbrella institution for all issues related to the school literature and teaching aids, modelled upon similar institutions founded long ago in many advanced countries.

It is redundant to remind of the importance of the so-called *identity subjects* in the formation of the personality of each individual and views of the social community at large. This is particularly relevant today at the time of globalization and obvious threats to preserving the identity of smaller nations, such as Serbian. Closely related to this issue is the problem of politization of textbooks in these subjects, either by presenting one's own history in a distorted light or undermining the foundations of the identity of one's own nation and thus speeding up the process of decomposition of historical awareness of its members. This can be clearly seen if we look at the textbooks in the countries established at the territory of the former Yugoslav state, but also beyond this space, as well as in some textbooks that are used in the Serbian education system. For example, the most radical measures taken against the Serbian people at the territories of the current post-Yugoslav states, such as language denationalization, genocide or massive ethnic cleansing are justified by seeking the culprit in the victim, due to the alleged "Serbian aggression", "Serbian occupation" and "great Serbian hegemony". That is why the key issue that we are discussing this evening, and that has also been discussed in the past years in our society is how to ensure high-quality textbooks as a result of verified scientific knowledge and objective interpretation of historical processes based on the latest results of scientific historiography and contemporary educational practice?

This is not the first time that textbooks and teaching of history are instrumentalized for the sake of achieving certain political objectives of the state or particular social groups. Between the two world wars this issue was addressed by the League of Nations (a predecessor of the United Nations) aiming to ensure better understanding between nations and states. The year 1937 may be considered a turning point, because that is when the representatives of 26 countries signed the *History Teaching Declaration* (revision of history textbooks) and set the principles for achieving a deeper mutual understanding between nations and states through history teaching. The key three principles of the Declaration were: 1. Dedicating as much room as possible to the history of other nations 2. Finding ways, through

textbook selection, for reliable protection of children from interpretations and claims which could engender unjust prejudices about other nations, and 3. Setting up separate committees in charge of expert analysis of textbooks (Pingel, 2005, p. 10). The understanding of the importance of textbooks is evidenced also by a large project which connected the East and the West, the USA and USSR in the period from 1977 until 1989. The research results confirmed the existence of a deep ideological gap between the two superpowers, which was obvious from the title of the US report on the project work: *School Textbooks – Cold War Weapons* (2005, p. 15). The principles of the *Declaration* were adhered to also after the World War II, especially by the end of the last century, with the attempts to write joint textbooks, i.e., French-German, or to analyse “dark spots” in historical interpretations of relations between the Polish and Russian people. In April 2010 the news also appeared in our region that Belgrade and Zagreb “if God wills it, will have a joint history textbook”. According to one analysis of 36 history textbooks in Croatia, published since 90s until the present time, Serbs and the Serbian history were presented in utterly negative terms: pointing out that Croats have been a part of the European culture since the early Middle Ages, while Serbs have been – Balkan people, that Dubrovnik has been under the Serb siege for centuries, and that “great Serbian hegemony” has also threatened Croats for centuries. In the majority of textbooks, the whole 19th century is depicted as the time of realization of the idea on “Great Serbia” (Kerbler, 2019).

At the First General Conference of UNESCO held in 1946, the title of a part of the Preparatory Commission report was *Looking at the World Through Textbooks*. The occasion was the fact that textbook authors, as deemed at the time, continued to pay the greatest attention to issues of national and not of global interest. In the last decades of the 20th century, another organization also joined the efforts to improve the history textbook writing process and modernize history teaching – the *Council of Europe*. The programme title of the *Council of Europe* publication comprising summary results and recommendations of a series of conferences dealing with textbooks was: *Against Bias and Prejudice*. Isn't this also the core

principle of the historical science? – write without “anger and bias”? *The Council of Europe* published a series of brochures for textbook publishers and authors, as well as teachers, aiming to complement the foundations of their work. But here in Serbia and the Balkans aren't we still facing the double standards of some leading European environments and a multitude of stereotypes in interpretation of the Serbian history?

The key issue in every dispute about textbooks is the issue of *educational curriculum*. Just recently the academic Ljubodrag Dimić and a group of history professors urged for the re-examining of the reformed history curriculum in secondary schools, insisting upon the formation of the scientific historical awareness in the Serbian society, otherwise the young generation “will seek the explanations about the events and phenomena that interest them outside of the school and historians” (Begenišić, 2021). Academic Dimić deems that the results achieved through implementation of the current school curricula are in many respects devastating. That is why on this occasion we will devote more attention to the adoption of school curricula and the textbook writing methodology based on such curricula. The contents, scope and quality of teaching curricula are under the competence of the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development, Institute for the Improvement of Education of the Republic of Serbia and National Educational Council. Therefore, when we speak about textbook writing and their quality, we should not lose sight of how many hours per year are planned under the school curriculum for the coverage of a certain topic, at what educational level and in what grade. It is also incomprehensible that according to the currently applied so-called *thematic principle* our pupils are first taught about Serbia and Montenegro operations in the Balkan wars or the World War I, and only afterwards, in the second semester, they are taught about the liberation from the Ottoman rule, the emergence and building of the Serbian state. It is paradoxical that they learn about World War II before Nazism and fascism.

On the other hand, a very important question is not only how school curriculum

is defined or reformed, but also how the *textbook approval* procedure is carried out. The most important institution in the approval process is the Institute for the Improvement of Education (ZUOV). Of course, the facts presented in the textbook are the responsibility of the author and the publisher which hires authors and reviewers, but the main institution professionally responsible before the state is the Institute for the Improvement of Education. However, it often happens in practice that due to certain errors in textbooks, the public's attention is erroneously directed toward the publisher instead of the institution which approved the textbook's use in teaching. Therefore, the procedure is clearly defined and goes as follows: the publisher submits the textbook proposal to the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development, the Ministry forwards it to the Institute for the Improvement of Education, which forms an expert committee tasked with assessing the textbook. Once the expert committee has reviewed and positively assessed the textbook, the decision to use the textbook in teaching is signed by the minister of education, science and technological development. The expert committee may give certain suggestions and critical remarks and require that they be implemented by the author – and finally, it may also decide not to approve the textbook content. Given the complex procedure of textbook approval, a question arises: how is it possible that a textbook may contain material errors or explanations and interpretations that are totally unscientific?

In the past 18 years, since the *school textbooks market was liberalised* and the textbook was equalised with any other kind of commercial goods, we witnessed numerous material errors and sometimes even scandalous interpretations and explanations. On this occasion, we will mention only few out of numerous examples: the geographic map of the Republic of Serbia without Kosovo and Metohija, a photo of the Serbian policeman in a Croatian uniform, “the most correct language was spoken in the Independent State of Croatia”; “Belgrade and the whole of Šumadija, as well as parts of Pomoravlje, used to be parts of Croatia” (Beta, 2020); “the blood tax enabled the boys to climb on a social ladder, so that many of them

became members of the important and influential elite of the Ottoman Empire” (Begenišić, 2019); the NATO Alliance is a peaceful “military community whose goal is to resolve disputes between parties in war” (Telegraf, 2020). Having this in mind, we should not be surprised by secondary school pupils’ responses to some very important questions about the history of the Serbian people in the 20th century, such as for example the genocide against Serbs in the Nazi “Independent State of Croatia”. When asked what is Jasenovac, some of the secondary school pupils gave the following answers: “some place, a town in Serbia, a summer resort” (Bogdanović, 2018). It should be noted that in 8th grade textbooks Jasenovac is covered by a single paragraph of less than ten lines.

A special problem in this whole process of textbook writing and teaching is teachers’ choice of a textbook, given that primary school teachers are offered a choice between 36 history textbooks which are currently in use, according to the current Catalogue of approved textbooks for 5th – 8th grade. A question may be raised: Do we really need to choose between nine different history textbooks instead of two or three for each grade?

Introduction of competition to the state publisher and designing of free market concept and a model of teacher choosing the textbook led to the consequences which are best reflected in the *Analysis of the results of the final exam of primary school pupils 2019/2020* which was published by the Institute for Education Quality and Evaluation of the Republic of Serbia: If we look at the poorest performance of pupils who achieved the minimum final exam results, we find the greatest number of 8th grade pupils – a total of 157 – who did not score a single point in the Serbian language, 142 pupils – in mathematics, while 98 pupils did not score a single point in the combined test (Simić Miladinović, 2020). The second important information is that from the whole territory of Belgrade not a single pupil from 1st, 2nd and 3rd grade of grammar school did not qualify for the republic competition in history! Only six 4th grade pupils

qualified who were the last generation to have studied according to the old programme. It should also be said that such results are not only the consequence of textbook quality, but also of the organisation of the whole teaching process and teacher qualifications.

By its existence and work the state textbook publisher – the Public Institute for Textbooks and Teaching Aids meets the five interests of highest importance for the nation: educational, scientific, cultural, public and economic interests. With the change of the political system in 2000 all five interests were put into question. It is a generally known fact that in the Serbian textbook market state publisher's textbooks are no longer dominant regardless of the fact that at this moment the Institute's textbooks in identity subjects are written by 50 authors: 12 for the Serbian language, 22 for history, 16 for geography. These are the renowned names in these fields who above all follow the results of verified scientific researches, take care about the balanced choice of the content and unbiased presentation of sensitive topics. Nevertheless, according to the data of the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development, 82.5% of the Serbian language textbooks in 8th grade are issued by a private publisher with the foreign founding capital, while this publisher's history textbooks participate with 49.8%.¹ There are no similar examples in none of the neighbouring countries.

Carefully following the scientific, educational and cultural life of our country, the Department of Historical Sciences of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts (with the support of the Academy's Executive Board) issued a *press release* on 27 November 2020, pointing out the following: "The textbook market is outside of the state control, which is inconceivable and for many reasons detrimental and unacceptable for any legally regulated, free and independent state. The textbook selection method causes corruption and violates the Anti-monopoly

¹ Excerpt from the information system of the Ministry of Education about the number of textbook sets in the textbook selection procedure at the school level for the Textbook Catalogue which has been used in primary schools from the school year 2016/2017 until 2018/2019.

Law. It is very important and should be emphasized that not a single one truly independent and serious state would allow that the textbooks that are of key importance for education and upbringing (e.g. Serbian language, history, geography, arts, music culture) and for preserving and cherishing national awareness be ceded to any foreign state. This is also true of the home countries of the foreign publishers which came to Serbia.”²

From its foundation until today the Institute published close to 400 million textbooks, monographs, manuals and out-of-curriculum literature. Gathering the most reputed authors, reviewers and associates in all areas and at all levels of the educational system, the Institute ranks among the oldest and largest textbook publishers in the Balkans. For more than six decades the Institute has successfully cooperated with the leading institutions such as the Serbian Academy of Sciences And Arts, Matica Srpska, the Ministry of Education, the Institutes and Universities in Belgrade and across Serbia and other important institutions in the fields of science, education and culture. The textbooks published by the Institute meet high European schoolbook standards both in terms of the form and presentation of contents. This is evidenced by more than four hundred recognitions and awards which the Institute won at reputed domestic and international fairs of schoolbook literature, with over 7 000 titles, 9 000 authors, reviewers and external associates, 88 thematic libraries and *Special* and *University issues*, 40 authors of collected works and selected works of the greatest Serbian thinkers such as Nikola Tesla, Mihajlo Pupin, Milutin Milanković, Stevan Mokranjac, Stojan Novaković, Miloš Đurić, Aleksandar Belić, Jovan Karamata... The Institute is still guided by the public interest, regardless of the uncritical introduction of other publishers into the market.

In March this year a very reasonable idea was presented – to entrust the state publisher with publication of textbooks in identity subjects and to ensure that as of the next year these textbooks should be uniform for all pupils in Serbia

² Press release of the Department of Historical Sciences of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts about the public enterprise Institute for Textbooks, 27 November 2020.

and the Republic of Srpska. In order to realise this idea and proceed with this extensive and responsible task, the Law on Textbooks needs to be amended first.

All the mentioned issues related to the preparation and publishing of textbooks in identity subjects confirm that this is a very important consideration for the overall educational process which deserves a wider public discussion among experts, such as this one, and, by all means, greater attention by the state, given the strategic importance of this issue for the country's future. Therefore, if we want to preserve our national identity and further encourage the development of science and culture, and simultaneously strengthen the position and reputation of the state publisher which engages the most knowledgeable experts, leading university professors and researchers from institutes, then the state should boldly and self-confidently entrust the textbooks in subjects from the identity corpus to the Institute for Textbooks and Teaching Aids.

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