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## **Unity and Diversity: A Basic Issue of European History and its impact on education**

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## **UNITY AND DIVERSITY: A BASIC ISSUE OF EUROPEAN HISTORY AND ITS IMPACT ON EDUCATION**

### **1 The Historical Framework**

Had I been asked to deal with the present theme only two years ago my conceptual approach must have been entirely different from the following one. It is true that the "European" orientation would not have been as hesitant and cautious as it was five years ago. Yet, I should have had to lay my emphasis more on "possibilities" and "hopes", whereas today I feel stimulated to tackle the theme under the incentive of "challenges" and "perspectives". The radical changes in Eastern Europe at the end of the eighties and the fade-down of the West-East conflict have opened new contours for a "wider" Europe.

When using this term we should be clear in raising no claim to any "hegemonial", let alone "imperialistic" policy against the "rest of the world". The notion is only used as a working concept to underline the "return" of the countries which had been welded into the "Eastern Bloc", to the community of European nations. In this view the notion expresses the third dimension of Europe against the "EC-Europe" (first dimension) and the "Council of Europe region" (second dimension), as it existed until 1990. In the meantime this second dimension has become expanded by Czechoslovakia and Hungary having become full members of the Council of Europe; other "East European" countries are likely to follow in the near future. The Perestroika in the Soviet Union, the peaceful ("velvet") revolutions in East Central Europe and, though to a lesser degree, the recent changes in South-East Europe have made the previous "West-East demarcation" questionable. I will resume this point later when discussing the impacts of these changes on education. In any case, the notions of "West" and "East" have lost their distinctive connotations which had been legitimated by the demarcation determined by the political

and military power structure as one of the most significant and one of the most inhuman outcomes of World War II.

Of course, the fade-down of the Post-World War II division does not mean the abandonment of internal demarcations and tensions inside Europe which has always been a continent marked by the dichotomy between unity and diversity. Furthermore, the frontiers of Europe have always been controversially discussed. It is true that the South-West frontier has been definitively fixed since the end of the Reconquista in Spain. Identifying Europe's Eastern frontier, however, has turned out to be much more complicated due to the fact that geography does not offer any "natural" demarcation line – although the Ural mountains have been given this fictive function until today, for example in geography syllabi and textbooks and also in simplified slogans used by politicians.

Today nobody will question the "European" identity of all nations tracing back their inheritance to Catholic and Protestant Christianity. This agreement is likely to include the Orthodox nations of South-East Europe; however, controversial debates may arise with regard to the allocation of the Muslims having lived in South-East Europe for centuries. Let alone Turkey (with its "bi-continental" extension), we have to think particularly of the Muslims in Yugoslavia, Albania and Bulgaria. In this connection it should be worth adding that today Muslim "Europeans" are living in West European countries as well, and that as migrants with many years of residence, apart from Muslim citizens in the United Kingdom and in France.

The last issue in this fundamental consideration is raised by the question whether the Soviet Union should be allocated to Europe according, for instance, to Gorbachev's slogan of the "European House". This question itself has a long history dating from the Middle Ages and, in its "modern" version, from Peter the Great. In 19th and 20th centuries the idea of including Russians, Ukrainians and Belorussians and also Georgians and Armenians in the "wider" range of European nations, has been permanently and distinctly discussed by natives and foreigners and has gained actual significance in these days, let alone the Baltic nations whose place in Europe has never been questioned. As far as Russians are concerned, the in-depth and passionate debates between the "Zapadniki" (Westerners) and "Slavjanofili" (slavophiles) gives a paramount and representative example of this retrospect. Yet, the multinational (and multicultural) composition of the Soviet Union proves to complicate the "European" option in view of its "Asian" nations and nationalities and the coherence of the State as a whole.

Essential weight for the identification of "Wider Europe" is given by the religious criterion, insofar as it transcends the contemporary people's com-

mitment to a specific religious creed or denomination. It includes not only lukewarm and solely "registered" church-members, but also agnostics whose education has taken place in an environment shaped by Christian culture and tradition. That is to say that Europe's Christian "substance" has affected its "heirs" until today, which becomes evident in its interaction with Humanism, Rationalism, Enlightenment and Modern Democracy. It is this moving and, at the same time, oscillating interaction which discloses the principles of unity and diversity and the permanent tension in which they are interwoven. Yet, in the centre of this texture we discover the singular approach of European nations to conquer the "rest of the world" and, furthermore, to subdue man's animated and inanimate environment. With the end of this century coming nearer, both sides of this approach have growingly seized our consciousness and our concrete existence in an alarming ambivalence.

Summing up this overview, we must be aware of the specific aspect we have in mind when talking about "Europe": in economic, sociopolitical, cultural, philosophical or educational terms. It goes without saying that the many-faceted shape of "Europe" has its impacts on identifying internal structures to be associated with societal areas (or sub-systems) which are expressed by these terms. Instead of indulging in details, however, let us state that the breakdown of the politically and ideologically dominated "West-East demarcation" has paved the way for new demarcations inside this continent, in some cases connected with "old" patterns which have survived the "Socialist" period and are experiencing a renaissance in our days. For instance, we observe the emergence of new debates about "Central Europe" whose advocates, in their turn, are far from unanimity in defining its frontiers. Furthermore, the disappearance of the previous West-East conflict has opened the space for new problems which can be exemplified in a drastic way by the recent and increasing migrations of people across the borders of hitherto "Eastern" and "Western" countries. In this context we even become aware of the existence of ethnic groups without a state, particularly the Roman (gypsy) people having migrated from Romania and Yugoslavia to the "West", e.g. to Germany.

## **2 Impacts of the Recent Changes on Education**

The recent changes in Eastern Europe have already had great impacts on the education systems in that region. The immediate effects became manifest soon after the breakdown of the totalitarian régimes; in Hungary – with her "gliding" advance towards democracy – they had been introduced already since the beginning of the eighties. The "revolutionary" awakening was signalled by the banishment of the Marxist-Leninist instruction from schools

and universities, by the election of new rectors and deans at the universities as well as of school inspectors and headteachers at primary and secondary schools and, to give a third example, by the purification of syllabi and textbooks from Marxist-Leninist and anti-democratic doctrines. The more or less spontaneous initiatives have opened the door to planned innovations aimed at the enactment of reform laws. May it suffice to remember this vivid scene whose lights are, of course, obscured by the gloomy shadows of anti-reformatory indolence on the one hand and the propagation of chauvinistic nationalism on the other. My background paper enters into this contradictory fabric, and the papers to be given at this workshop are likely to provide us with manifold evidence for comparative discussion.

Instead of repeating, respectively anticipating, this train of thought, let me raise the following question. It is evident that the disappearance of the "Iron Curtain" has invalidated the existence of or the postulate for a cross-national "Socialist Education System", although it had been more or less fragile all over the past four decades. The countries of the former "Eastern Bloc" are already about to reform organisational structures and syllabi of schools, universities and teacher training institutions. Yet, does all this mean that the East-West demarcation has become obsolete for education?

The attempt to answer this – apparently provocative – question points, first of all, to the cross-national economic crisis all the East European countries have been confronted with by the collapse of their rigidly state-planned policies. The impacts on the education systems immediately show up everywhere. Budgetary curtailments, down to insolvency of the public treasuries, cause radical cuts in the expenses for school building and repair, for acquisition of teaching and learning equipment, for adequate remuneration of teachers and other staff. The absence of private agencies, particularly in the area of textbook publishing, aggravates the critical situation. The emergence and growth of unemployment among parents must be identified as another factor of influence; it must appear paradox in view of the introduction of fees to be paid for admission not only to kindergartens and universities, representing the "poles" of the education systems, but also to regular "schools" at the secondary and even primary level. All these phenomena, as exemplified here, indicate the continuation of features distinct from "Western" patterns and images and, for the time being, allow the identification of a specific "East European congruity".

Although these features must be taken seriously they seem to reveal only the top of an iceberg. What may exist below it, has primarily remained a field of conjecture until now, although it is being gradually completed by empiric evidence. Let me enter the discussion of this basic issue by quoting from the

speech the Deputy Chairman of the Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD), Wolfgang Thierse, made on May 28th, 1991, on the recent Party Rally at Bremen (quoted from *Der Tagesspiegel*, May 29th, 1991, p. 8):

"Nine months ago, in September 1990 ... the SPD was revived as a common party in and for the whole of Germany. An extraordinary event in the history of Germany's Social Democrats and also in my own biography, in the life-history of many among us. I remember it with emotion. After the pathetic start in the common party and in the common State the prosaic normality has caught up with us. Are we really an all-German party (already)?

This question is legitimate, because the answer in the affirmative is far from being self-evident. After all, the SPD is – of course, fortunately and unfortunately – part of the German population as reflected by their frame of mind and awareness ... Assessing the unification process raises bitterness. The unification of the State has been completed, but for economic, social and, above all, human aspects, we could not have imagined the split in our worst nightmares, and we should not have wished to do so. The Wall (i.e. the Berlin Wall) – it was not only a brutal fact and, at the same time, the symbol of the split; apparently it has, moreover, concealed the depth of the actual split.

Now, since it has luckily disappeared, prejudice and alienation strike against each other, abrupt and undisguised. The reproaches are both superficial and embittered. 'Egoism, arrogance, lack of consideration, colonialist mentality' – these reproaches are directed against the 'Besser-Wessis' (i.e. the West German know-alls). 'Laziness, helplessness, tearfulness, impatience, immodesty' – all this is to hit 'Ossis' (i.e. the East Germans)."

It is true that Thierse's panorama is related to the present-day internal *German* situation, i.e. to the immediate effects of the East-West division on the socioeconomic and attitudinal coherence within *one* nation. If we, however, transfer this panorama to the whole of Europe, may we not be asked to look for analogies? I think we may. At any rate, Thierse's argumentation is full of implications which are *per se* educational indeed, affecting schools as well as the wide range of nonformal education, from the families to the mass media. It opens access to the wider field of "East European congruity" to be symbolised by the mass of the iceberg which is not – or, at any rate hardly – visible to the superficial observer.

The structural and curricular features of the East-West division are likely to be smoothed or even extinguished in the foreseeable future. What is likely to remain for a long time yet, are those "hidden" features of the individual and collective socialisational and attitudinal processes. They, though indirectly, flash up in Thierse's speech and call for educational analysis and action.

The breakdown of the socialist régimes in Eastern Europe has sharply denounced the doctrinaire teaching structure which existed before the revolutionary changes. Teachers found themselves concerned with the task of imparting *the* values which were legitimated by the official version of the Marxist-Leninist ideology to pupils. Most of them, at the same time, were confronted with alternative or even contrasting value codes in their families and peer-groups or in extraneous engagements in religious communities or even in groupings of an apparently "apolitical" character. In cases, and there were many, where teachers themselves were not committed to the official values they had to impart, the interpersonal conflict was reinforced by an intrinsic, intra-personal conflict. This situation resulted in the wide-spread existence of schizophrenic attitudes among teachers and, of course, also among pupils who had to make statements during their lessons which ran against their own convictions.

Now, after the revolutionary events, it seems that adolescents can overcome the dissociation more easily than their teachers including the "intrinsic opponents" among them. At this point we come back again to Thierse's argumentation in that we can make out that teachers' attitudes reflect those of the adult society as a whole. That means that even political dissent has not prevented people from internalising certain basic – so called "Socialist" – values and attitudes, as has been criticised, though in highly exaggerated and even distorted form, by many West Europeans.

On the other hand, we should also become aware of the contribution education can make in overcoming this gloomy heritage both in retrospect to the national, European and universal assets to be discovered in the past and by orientation toward the challenges of defining Europe's place in the "global village" of to-morrow. The task of synthesising these retrospective and prospective criteria points the way to new relationships and relational networks which will gain increasing relevance for comparison. Therefore I want to conclude my introductory paper by drawing some conclusions from my hitherto expressed thoughts for comparative education.

### 3 New Tasks for Comparative Education

In the past decades social scientists took a great interest in "intersystemic comparison" as related to "Western" and "Eastern" countries and nations of the Northern hemisphere. Alongside with their colleagues in sociology and political science comparative educationists were strongly engaged in this approach which was based upon the assumption that the – nationally organised – education systems could be subsumed under the superordinate dichotomy of "Western" (or "democratic") and "Eastern" (or "socialist") systems. Thereby education was conceived, in system-theoretical categorisation, as a sub-system of the overarching societal system. West German comparativists were distinctly represented in this group; among them Oskar Anweiler deserves special reference all the more so, as his own studies and lectures have stimulated many colleagues and disciples – not only in his own country.

Investigations devoted to "intersystemic comparison" either concentrated on deductive analysis rooted in identifying "core features" in both the "big" societal systems, or they achieved this goal through inquiries about all or some of the national education systems on "both sides". In most cases such inductive studies were focussed on the isolation of structural sectors (e.g. school types or levels) or of subject-oriented curricula and problems (e.g. political socialisation) as "system-representative" approaches.

On the other hand, this "intersystemic" type of comparison was supplemented (and sometime contrasted) by three alternatives in regard to East European studies, namely

- "system-immanent" analyses aimed at relating the reality of educational directions and practices to the norms set up by the supreme political and ideological bodies;
- "intra-systemic" inquiries devoted to making comparisons among the member-systems of the "Eastern Bloc" and aimed at identifying specific "national" features with explicit regard to the historical antecedents of the "Socialist" period;
- "cross-national" studies whose comparative objects were defined again on "both sides" of the East-West demarcation without making specific – or, at least, dominant – reference to the superordinate "systemic core".

Studies within this third group are especially stimulating, insofar as they are focussed on educational features and problems which can be made out inside the "systemic" frameworks. They give insight into surviving, opposing or revolutionising powers or potentials whose impulses may be embedded in



national commitments or also in functional demands. As regards the latter challenge, Wolfgang Hörner's research over several years on the interdependence between technical education and employment in West and East European countries can claim particular attention, because he has related his findings to the concept of "autonomy" which is suitable for explaining analogous structures and processes under the umbrella of convergent as well as divergent societal systems.

Such cross-national studies are likely to attain growing importance in the near future. In this respect Wolfgang Hörner's assessment of analogies in the field of technical education in France and the Soviet Union has anticipated the suitability of comparative objects in education across the former East-West demarcation. Now, since the segregational coercion of this demarcation has ended, such studies have gained a higher degree of attractivity, because they can be based upon the availability of hitherto sealed data and upon the access to field observations to be conducted in areas which had been forbidden to foreign and, in many cases, to native researchers too.

As a first proposition let me identify the following fields of research for such comparison:

- Concepts of pre-school education between "kindergarten" and "école maternelle";
- comprehensive and parallel school systems with special regard to the secondary level of education;
- the relevance of Humboldt's concept of "Allgemeinbildung", including its modified and modernised variations until today, to contemporary educational philosophies and policies which are conceived and developed in Eastern Europe;
- vocational education between school-bound and "dual" concepts, whereby the inheritance of the Austrian "technical school" (Fachschule) in East Central and South East Europe offers a revealing case;
- universities as places of teaching *and* research with regard to the fact that in Eastern Europe this traditional unity had been widely restricted or even destroyed in favour of concentrating research in extra-university institutions.

Inquiries in these fields are likely to revive comparative issues which have been neglected or "forgotten" during the past decades. For instance, it is questionable to confine the presentation of the German notion of "Allgemeinbildung" in English to the literal translation without raising mis-

understanding, because the English notion of "core curriculum" must be seen in another, namely pragmatically oriented, context. On the other hand this difficulty will not arise with the translation of the German notion into East European languages, for example into Russian (obshchee obrazovanie).

The "intersystemic" dimension will, however, not become obsolete. Apart from its relevance for comparative historical research, this conclusion leads back to what I discussed before when referring to the overall impacts of the political changes on education on the whole. It seems to me, however, that the category "intersystemic" should be abandoned, together with its underlying theory, in order to be replaced by the category "inter-regional" with regard to educational comparison. This categorical transfer should denote the reduction of differences having resulted from the events of 1989 and 1990. At least, this modification is entirely applicable to comparisons between Western countries and the (re-)established democracies in East Central Europe and, in a lesser degree, to the countries of South East Europe. Whether and to what extent this applicability refers to the Soviet Union, should remain open in the context of this paper. In particular, this question should remind us of the complexity of Russia's difficult attitude towards Europe – and vice versa.

Let me end by directly linking the new tasks awaiting Comparative Education with the specific purpose of this Workshop. In realising this linkage we will become aware of two manifestations of interrelationship comparative educational research has been involved with during its overall history of two centuries. Each of them is ambivalent in itself, and both are interrelated.

At first we feel reminded of the interrelationship between studies of educational phenomena in at least one country by a national of a country other than his own ("Auslandspädagogik") on the one hand, and comparative studies in the proper sense. It seems that the long-standing controversy about whether the first type may be allocated to Comparative Education or not, can be overcome, provided that the country study concerned has been conceived upon the base of comparative criteria or, to use another expression, in a "comparative view" in order to be utilised for comparison. In this case one should not hesitate to allocate it to the first stage of Comparative Education.

The second manifestation is even more intricate, insofar as it includes studies written by native educationists in Comparative Education which increasingly happens in international projects, such as this Workshop. Here again, there should be no objection to acknowledging them as introductory contributions to comparative studies, as long as they fulfil the aforementioned demands. Moreover, this standpoint lays the ground for encouraging native (internal) and foreign (external) researchers to make joint inquiries

into educational phenomena of the *same* country, to discuss comparative issues and, at best, to conduct comparative projects. Comparative Education needs both: the native with his / her insider's knowledge, and the foreigner with his / her distance and alienation from "national" bias – which, of course, does not necessarily prevent his / her being involved in other kinds of bias whichever.

This Workshop offers a splendid opportunity of coping with both of these manifestations of interrelationship for the purpose of cognitive progress and mutual understanding as well as for confrontation with new arguments and new perspectives.