



The 'Historical Policies'?: Public Debate and Reforms of History Teaching in Contemporary Poland

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Abstract

The paper will address the issue of the future of school history education in the perspective of further European integration as reflected in the recent violent public debate in Poland on the occasion of the implementation of a new educational reform.

Since the fall of communism in Poland (1989) two paradigms of history teaching have always been in sharp contrast. The 'European', liberal vision of history provoked fierce protests from Polish conservative and nationalist circles. They blame their adversaries for spreading nihilism, ridiculing the country's traditions, presenting its wrong image abroad, in an attempt to subordinate Poland to foreign institutions and financial lobbies. The conservative government, in power in the years 2005-2007, launched the slogan of a 'new historical policy', whose intention was to re-define the vision of the past in order to sustain the national pride and promote the image of a strong, proud Poland in Europe. A number of initiatives followed, earning much sympathy for the project in some sections of the country's society. The liberals, with the support of important media and intellectuals, did their best to reverse these steps, whenever they returned to power.

The actual problem in question seems the philosophical notion of history as such: either a nation-building, at times fictional, narration, deprived of controversial or negative facts; or an impartial research in order to explore and understand the complicated past. The second perspective is being implemented at present by the Ministry of Education, with the spirit of the International Baccalaureate Organisation (IBO) global, problem-solving history teaching as one of its main sources of inspiration. The paper will analyse this reform as an attempt at teaching a common European history within a national educational system.