

The Slovenian case: 1989 and its role for EDC/HRE in adult education

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BACKGROUND SITUATION IN SLOVENIA IN 1989

When speaking about historical situation in Slovenia in 1989, at that time a federal republic of the former Yugoslavia, we have to start with the fact, that Yugoslavia was never really part of the »Eastern block« and as such never under direct Soviet influence. Although communistic and socialistic, it was independent from Soviet rule since 1948 when Josip Broz Tito restrained from official Soviet policy. As unallied country between East and West Yugoslavia played quite a significant role in global policy in the period of 1948-1978 e.g. through leading position in "Unallied Movement", as a model of brotherhood and unity of different nations and, not to forget, as a quiet partner in global deals with weapons, nuclear technology and information among countries on both sides of the Iron Curtain. Its last mentioned role will probably be highlighted more by the next generations of historians because the majority of involved key players are still alive or even at power.

The situation in Slovenia was thus different as in other Eastern European countries: people in Slovenia had freedom of travel and study, a high economic standard, well organised welfare with free education, medical and social care, granted jobs, an interesting model of workers self-management in companies and already free private initiatives. Slovenia was the most developed republic in Yugoslavia with the highest GDP (GDP Per Capita in US Dollars for Slovenia in year 2008 is US\$ 28,893. This makes Slovenia No. 30 in world rankings according to GDP Per Capita in year 2008. In 1992, after becoming independent, it was ranked 40.)³

On the other hand in 1980's in Slovenia we had faced some severe problems, connected with the crisis of one-party communistic system and loose of global status and "deals" after Tito's death: the bad economical situation in Yugoslavia as a whole which was caused by unsustainable economic policy (central state planning, growing state debt after president Tito's death, channelling 90% of profits and taxes to so called "underdeveloped" regions of Yugoslavia – which were actually all except Croatia and Slovenia, and series of unpopular economic recovery tools as electricity and petrol reductions, deposits for crossing the border etc.).

³ Economy Watch http://www.economywatch.com/economic-statistics/Slovenia/GDP_Per_Capita_PPP_US_Dollars/year-2008/

The International Social Survey Programme for Slovenia "On Citizenship Opinions on the Role of Government" in 1989⁴ showed that people were ready for radical changes in economy and political system, heavily irritated by growing inflation and high income taxes and on the other side for maintaining the social welfare. People strongly felt that they should have more control over the politics, should be given more freedom regarding the freedom of speech and organisation, more space for private initiatives. 48% believed we should not obey existing Yugoslav laws and further 36% that we should not obey some of them, but follow ones conscience and create new laws instead. The majority of residents of Slovenia in 1989 also supported changes of constitution and at that time believed that some loose form of confederacy with the rest of Yugoslavia might be possible, if not total independency.

It is no wonder that in such situation changes were inevitable. Already in 1987 and 1988 the first open calls for state independency were articulated, especially through Slovenian Youth magazine "Mladina", whose young reporters (today influential politicians and businesspeople) were even imprisoned and brought before military court in Ljubljana while becoming national heroes. The "Slovenian Democratic Alliance (of reason)" was established in 1989 by intellectuals gathered at "Nova revija" and Slovenian Writers' Society. Its goal was transformation into an independent political party and soon this was done. They were followed by other new parties. Together under the name DEMOS they won the first democratic elections in Slovenia in 1990. This was followed by national referendum and ratification of the new Slovenian constitution in Parliament and finally, after a year of unsuccessful political negotiation with other Yugoslav leaders, with Slovenian independency in 1991.

The European happenings in 1989, especially the spectacular fall of the Berlin Wall, had without doubt a great influence on changes of the general opinion in Slovenia at that time, and also on the independence-gaining processes.

STATUS OF DEMOCRACY AND HUMAN RIGHTS EDUCATION IN SLOVENIA

Before 1990s there was no education for democracy or human rights present in any form or level of education in Slovenia. There were obligatory school subjects as "Basis of Marxism and Self-government" or "National Defence" present from primary to university level and the basis of them all was celebration of Marxist ideology and obedience to Yugoslav Communist Party.

⁴ ISSP Slovenia, 1989: Role of Government I (ADP IDNo:ISSSPSJ89) <http://www.adp.fdv.uni-lj.si/opisi/issp96/>

Primary and Secondary Education

After gaining independent a school reform in Slovenia was introduced and with it massive curricular changes. But of course – fast and without needed teachers' pre or in-service education. The first results were poor. In that time civic society started to organise itself strongly and among the first in the field of EDC/HRE in Slovenia were Amnesty International Slovenia and EIP – School for Peace. Soon they got in contact with UNESCO ASP Net Schools and the first local and national HRE programmes were started. After the year 2000 more support and efforts were given from the state itself, also because Slovenia at that time wanted to join EU. Today there is a special compulsory subject called "Ethics and citizenship education" in 8th and 9th grade of compulsory education, but when I browsed its curricula the European events in 1980's are not mentioned. The same goes for the history lessons in compulsory education: after the Second World War topic the period of living in Yugoslavia is briefly mentioned and followed by a larger chapter on Slovenian independency and Slovenia in EU. The fall of Berlin Wall and related European events are mentioned in one sentence⁵.

Post Secondary education – vocational and gymnasiums

The neo-liberal capitalistic tensions in the last ten years influenced heavily the development of vocational curriculums: subjects as History, Geography or Sociology were largely crossed out or, in exceptions, merged into some forms of "Civic Lessons". EDC or HRE is not present in any official form, except through extracurricular activities such as European programmes or exchanges or in the work of school student's parliaments. The result is generations of young people, who have no idea about the history of the world they are living in, are active consumers but passive citizens.

In gymnasiums (students aged 15-19) subjects as History or Sociology still exist. I went through the curricula⁶ and found out that they mentioned the 1980s events in Europe including the fall of Berlin Wall with its consequences on forming the new Europe.

Adult education

⁵ Source: <http://www.zrss.si/default.asp?link=predmet&tip=6&pID=34&rID=411>

⁶ National Curricula for History in Gymnasiums. UČNI načrt. Zgodovina [Elektronski vir] : gimnazija : splošna gimnazija : obvezni predmet (280 ur) / predmetna komisija Vojko Kunaver ... [et al.]. - Ljubljana : Ministrstvo za šolstvo in šport : Zavod RS za šolstvo, 2008
http://portal.mss.edus.si/msswww/programi2008/programi/media/pdf/un_gimnazija/un_zgodovina_280_ur_gimn.pdf

In official adult education the curricula for “History” and “Ethics and citizenship education”⁷ include special recommendation that regarding the age, social, moral or other level of adult participants the learning of active democracy and democratic procedures should derive from real examples, authentic sources and based on respect to human rights values. Again, the historical focus is on topics such as gaining Slovenian independence, Slovenia as part of EU or being a Slovenian citizen. 1980’s events are not mentioned in the curricula.

Other adult education programmes, connected with EDC/HRE and financed by Ministry of Education, are mostly oriented into work with migrants, asylum seekers and/or new residents of Slovenia. Aimed to foster assimilation they concentrate on learning about Slovenia, its constitution, legal instruments and moral and social codes of Slovenians.

GENERAL PRESENCE OF HISTORICAL MEMORY ON 1989 EVENTS IN SLOVENIA

The older generations of Slovenians, who witnessed the events in 1989, still remember well the excitement, thrill and joy connected to events in Europe at that time. For them phrases “Berlin Wall” or “iron curtain” have a specific meaning, connected with memory on hardships and mistakes of the totalitarian communist regimes in Europe in the second half of 20th century.

In my opinion, for the younger generations of Slovenians, born in 80s or later, these words unfortunately have no real meaning or no meaning at all. Born at the end of this era and educated in the consumers’ environment of plenty, they were and are not taught (much) in schools about it and mostly associate the Fall of Berlin Wall with some popular culture events (concerts).

As a teacher and HRE activist I am afraid the official educational system in Slovenia is making a huge mistake by not introducing these topics into curricula (the same goes also for other important topics like for example holocaust education) and concentrating mostly on Slovenian process of gaining independence and EU integration.

THE ROLE OF 1989 EVENTS IN EDC/HRE FOR ADULTS IN SLOVENIA

As last I will present work on the field I am most active in – non-formal education for democratic citizenship and human rights for young adults, youth workers and teachers.

⁷ Source: www.zrss.si/doc/OSO_drzavljska_vzgoja_in_etika.doc

As in Slovenia are no official educational programmes regarding mentioned target groups that would concentrate on teaching about, for and through human rights while using HRE methodologies (e.g. participative learning, learning by doing, activism, volunteer work, civil society activism) EIP has developed a national long term educational programme in expert cooperation with Council of Europe / Directorate of Youth and Sport.

As our main tool we use the Council of Europe's manual COMPASS⁸ and since 2004 we have not only translated and published it in Slovenian, but also educated over 40 licensed national trainers who are performing EDC/HRE workshops for young people at schools and in non-formal settings. The programme is co-financed by Council of Europe and Slovenian Ministry of Education.

EDC/HRE topics are very broad and complex – as human life itself. Compass programme so offers workshops on active citizenship, democracy, discrimination and xenophobia, right to quality education, right to living in healthy environment, children's rights, gender equality, globalisation, rights to health and human security, media, poverty, sport and social rights. As debriefing discussion and input on additional information on a subject are integral parts of every of our workshops, our trainers have often an opportunity to discuss historical events, especially recent and those from 20th century as causes and/or triggers of related contemporary events or situations. The trainers I have talked with reported the issue of Berlin Wall and European events in the 1980s and 90s to come out quite frequently as young people have no idea about them and usually show interest to learn more.

As there is no pre-service teachers' education on EDC/HRE we are also active in this field. As one of the private in-service education organisations we cooperate with Slovenian Department of Education in expert education of EDC teachers. The situation regarding the fall of communistic regimes in Europe and establishment of new democracies is also reported to be often tackled by participants, with the difference that teachers usually have knowledge and/or personal experience and formed views on the topic. In this case it is interesting to observe, how in the actual global economic crises (in Slovenia accompanied with severe cut-backs in social welfare) the older adults/teachers tend to glorify "old communistic/Yugoslav days of stability and security" completely forgetting about economical and political hardships mentioned in the introductory part of this article.

Part of EIP's mandate is also capacity building in other non-governmental organisations and the result is an increasing number of NGO youth- and adult programmes that include EDC/HRE as one of its components or even a main theme. Of course. this is also due to human rights priorities declared by

⁸ Official COMPASS website <http://www.eycb.coe.int/compass/>

UN, EU and Council of Europe over and over again in the last ten years and which are also financially supported.

Apart from EIP Slovenia and before mentioned Amnesty International, there are numerous other established NGOs and INGOs in Slovenia that are very active and successful in EDC/HRE with young adults, especially with vulnerable groups of society. Nevertheless, in such a short time it was not possible for me to find out how much the content of 1989's European events is present in their work. Maybe the fact that internet surfing on key words of our topic did not reveal any results on activities or programmes in Slovenia speaks by itself.

CONCLUSION

I would like to conclude that the fall of Berlin Wall and related European events in 1980s and 1990s had a huge impact on Slovenia. Unfortunately, now 20 years later, I have to admit that they are not as much present in general historical memory or in formal educational system as they should be. The tendency of forgetting them or reducing them to empty word phrases is especially present with younger generations, born in that time or later.

If there had not been consistent efforts of NGOs in the field of non-formal education for democratic citizenship and human rights for young adults, youth workers and teachers over the last ten years the results in Slovenia might even been worse.

My recommendation for this forum would be to appeal to educational ministries and governments to do more so that this important part of human history would not be forgotten.

Note on the author:

Alenka Elena Begant is a full time teacher, HRE trainer and activist, translator and author of numerous expert papers and manuals on HRE, project director and since 2000 president of NGO EIP Slovenia – School for Peace.