

## PREFACE

COSTA CARRAS

***E**VEN BEFORE the official foundation of the Center for Democracy & Reconciliation in Southeast Europe, its Greek associate, the Association for Democracy in the Balkans, had organized a conference in July 1997 under the title «Culture and Reconciliation in Southeast Europe», which included a session on history textbooks. Later that year, our Chairman, Matt Nimetz, made the suggestion we follow up on this conference by initiating a «Southeast European Joint History Project» (hereafter JHP) as the Center's first programme. By autumn 1998, mainly as a result of inspired work by Professor Maria Todorova, who had agreed to chair its Academic Committee, the first outline plan had been prepared. Meanwhile, I had been asked by the Board to act as Rapporteur and oversee the JHP's development, which I continue to do.*

*The first important event was the Halki Conference of June 1999 where, once again, Maria Todorova was responsible for the academic planning. The conference was noteworthy for its high quality and a book of essays based on contributions at the conference is due to be published within a few months.*

*When the Halki Conference was planned, it represented an act of faith. Adequate financing only became available in March 1999. When it did become available however it came mainly in the form of an extremely generous donation by the British Government, for which the Center is most grateful. This covered the Halki Conference, most of the activities of the Academic Committee until September 2001 and all those of the History Education Committee in respect of textbooks which were successfully concluded in March 2001. There was also an important contribution from the Austrian Government which, in addition, together with the Governments of Switzerland and Norway, supported the second set of workshops devoted to history teaching rather than to history textbooks. These draw to a close at the end of 2001.*

*From the private sector, we gratefully acknowledge a donation from the Winston Foundation which covered the first seminar organized by the Academic Committee in May 2000, while the Cyprus Federation of America made a generous donation to help cover the costs of activity that concerned Cyprus. We are grateful also to those private donors, anonymous and named, who have provided the Center for Democracy and Reconciliation in Southeastern Europe with all its core finance to date. These include the Hellenic Bottling Corporation, Mr Alex Spanos and Mr Stacey Politis.*

*Finally, generous support from the US State Department has covered the work of the Senior Scholars, whose core is made up of members of the JHP's Academic Committee. This has enabled even more young historians in the region to gain valuable experience at two conferences attended by senior and by younger historians both from within the region and outside it.*

*It was at Halki in June 1999 that the leadership of the other JHP committee, namely that of the Textbook Committee, now renamed the History Education Committee, was elected by those participants at the Conference who had an interest in this area of work. Professor Christina Koulouri was elected as chair, with Dubravka Stojanovic as vice-chair. Soon, Professor Halil Berktaş, who had not been in Halki, became a second vice-chair, and within a short period of time every country in the region was represented by at least one member on the Committee. Some more were elected at the Committee's second full meeting in September 2000, and there is now a total of seventeen. Collaboration between members has been marked by a genuine sense of a shared enterprise aiming to give expression to a common interest and common ideals of people in all the countries of the region.*

*The fifth textbook workshop, in two connected parts, was held in September 2000 in Istanbul, and the interest of television stations and newspapers was a clear proof that public opinion well beyond the Center has become aware of the significance of our work. There was also a Board Meeting in Istanbul, which decided to extend the Joint History Project into a third phase. This will, we hope, involve the formation of committees in each country to argue for the adoption of those changes in approach, whether in textbooks or in teaching methods, that the History Education Committee will be proposing after the end of 2001, when it will have completed its program of seven text-*

*book and seven teacher training workshops. It also now proposes to create a series of four teachers' «packs» on subjects of crucial importance in regional history, namely on the Ottoman Empire, the Creation of Balkan Nation-States, the Balkan Wars, and World War II.*

*Also in Istanbul, the History Education Committee itself decided to produce an Interim Report, which was published in February 2001, and this Final Report, after all the Textbook and History Teaching Workshops would have been completed. Unlike the Interim Report, the present one contains essays that go into some depth in their particular areas of concern. Professor Christina Koulouri has coordinated the whole effort with an admirable combination of personal warmth, diplomatic skill and wide knowledge of the history of history textbooks.*

*The JHP is a long-term project. It is not about replacing an accurate picture of the past with one that is less accurate but more friendly to traditional adversaries. Nor is it about replacing an inaccurate picture of the past hostile to other countries with an equally inaccurate picture of the past friendly to them. The commitment to truth comes above all else, but it is combined with an acknowledgment that whereas particular events may be established or disproven, there will always be room for differences in the interpretation of whatever has in fact occurred. Hence, to learn historical method, one must acquire both a respect for the rigour necessary to establish truth and the combination of sympathy and subtlety required to appreciate but also critically to evaluate differing interpretations of events.*

*Most of the textbooks and history teaching in Southeastern Europe, as elsewhere, have been developed as part of the enterprise of creating nation states. Since the nation represents such an important focus of identity in our region, and indeed in most of today's world, it would be both undesirable and unrealistic to try and deprive it of its place as the centre of the history curriculum. There is however a need, explored and illustrated by the articles in this Report, to combat stereotyping, which is the result of omitting less admirable episodes in one's own past and stressing those in the past of others, while omitting their achievements. There is certainly a need to give greater prominence to cultural history, which tends to be less divisive. Finally, there is no reason that history of nation-states should not be balanced by the teaching of histories focused on other potential focuses of identity as, for instance, local or regional. Even more radically, one might*

*envisage a history of such institutions and concepts as citizenship, the rule of law, liberty and democracy, which would no longer be geographically focused but would bring together communities of differing time and place which remain however part of one intelligible «story». Radical though this may seem, it is not so different from what many histories of religion must do already.*

*In the alternating mood of hope and despair that has characterized Southeast Europe in recent years, it is important to remember that our task is not easy. Nor yet is it impossible. It will require years, if not decades, of dedicated work to combat the damage done by historical stereotyping, to establish the values of democracy, tolerance and open-minded historical enquiry, and to achieve reconciliation in those places where today hostility and misunderstanding prevail. We can at least say with confidence, on the basis of the achievements both of the Academic and the History Education Committees to date, that it has begun more energetically, enthusiastically and effectively than we could ever have anticipated.*