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## **Civic Education in Albania during the first decade of democracy**

*Teuta Mati, Shpresa Petrela and Gent Mati  
(Albania)*

As every other aspect of life until the beginning of the 1990s, civic education in Albania clearly incorporated the ideology of the regime in power, and it was considered very important. At the core of the education of those times was the formation of the new generation under the 'light' of the Marxist-Leninist ideology and with the Party of Labour, under the Constitution the only party in existence, ruling the country with an iron hand. This ideology was required to be reflected in the authentic social subjects such as Civic Education, History of the Party of Labour, Philosophy, History, and Literature as a 'red thread'. Furthermore, for every scientific notion taught at school in Mathematics, Chemistry, Biology and Astronomy, it was necessary to insert slogans and citations from the classics and the leaders of the Party in introductions, the beginnings of chapters, in summaries or at the meeting points of these subjects with dialectic materialism.

Textbooks provided for the social subjects were overcharged with formulae and dogmas, monotonous and uninteresting to study and leading to a very formal style of education. The deficiencies of this became clear as soon as the regime collapsed, as evidenced by the behaviour of the Albanians on gaining freedom. After 1990 Albania experienced radical political and economical changes that influenced the life and social position of every individual. This included positive examples, of honest people who perceived freedom as the possibility to work and to express themselves better, and to develop their knowledge and culture: but the society of that regime, proud to have conquered the highest levels of education, also produced within a very short period of time delinquents, smugglers, prostitutes and traffickers of all kinds.

One of the first acts of the new Albanian Ministry of Education and Science (MES) was to order the depoliticisation of school textbooks. This was straightforward for the scientific subjects, because of the superficial and formal character of the material, but for the social subjects the work was much more complicated. Each text had to be redrafted from the beginning. Work began with the subjects of social and civic education for elementary and middle schools, and continued with 'Knowledge for Society', 'The Economy' and 'Introduction to Philosophy' for the gymnasias (high schools). This process of rewriting the textbooks was based on the following principles:

- a new general educational philosophy, based on the actual needs and perspectives of economical and social reality, and cultural traditions, etc.;
- the elimination of the Marxist-Leninist ideology that had been integrated into several disciplines, particularly in those subjects that could be adapted for political indoctrination;
- the inclusion of new competencies necessary for life in a democratic society and a market economy, that had been forbidden under the previous regime;
- the inclusion of new social fields, such as the application of economics, social knowledge, global intercultural dimensions, and so on.

### **The mission of the school in the democratic Albania**

The Law for the Pre-university Education (1-12), approved by the Albanian Parliament in 1995, defines the objectives of Albanian schools as follows:

*Article 1:* The mission of the school is the spiritual emancipation, the material progress and the social evolution of the individual

*Article 23:* The period of compulsory education leads to the development of intellectual, creative, practical and physical skills, and to the equipping of students with the basic elements of cultural and civic education.

Democratic society, while facing difficult but continuing development in Albania, has for us new social norms and attitudes. In this new society, considerable space for action by individuals is created, but there is still also emphasis on the important social and civic education that individuals are expected to gain from family, school and society. Our schools now have the important mission of providing an efficient civic education to students at every level, that must reflect changes in society, the philosophy of the new times, vision and hope for a better future, and the social necessity of approaching European standards of life and values.

### **Through which books does civic education take place in Albania?**

As well as transmitting knowledge, all subjects that are taught in schools need to consider the social, political and cultural development of students. However, a group of subjects has civic education as its principal objective. The texts for these subjects are:

Elementary schools (Grades 1 to 4):

Social Education 1, 2, 3, 4.

Middle schools (Grades 5 to 8):

Civic Education 1, 2, 3, 4.

High schools:

Knowledge for Society 1, 2.

Applied Economy

Introduction to Philosophy

#### *Textbooks used in the elementary and middle schools (Grades 1-8)*

The textbooks for 'Social Education' (for the elementary schools) and of 'Civic Education' (for the middle schools), now contain important ideas and principles based on concepts of freedom, tolerance and co-operation. The educational goal of these text-books (illustrated and enriched with practical examples) is to develop positive virtues and values that will make the student responsible, skilful, and able to achieve what s/he wishes for his/herself, their family and for society. These textbooks not only give full knowledge of the subject, but also meet the national strategic goals for education in Albania. The level of knowledge is geared to the age of the students, who are encouraged to discuss personal experiences in class to increase their interest and participation in learning. Knowledge gained from other subjects, especially from literature, history, geography and natural sciences, is used in order to make the learning of Social and Civic Education as interesting as possible. Important fields of social knowledge are considered through all phases of education in this focus on civic education: these are:

- the individual and society
- citizenship and the law
- the rights, duties and responsibilities of citizens
- the organisation of the state
- economic relations in Albanian society
- Albania's internal problems and its relations with the world.

In the elementary school the following items predominate:

First year: family, school, and time;

Second year: family, the public environment, change;

Third year: school, community and communication, public services, health;

Fourth year: humanity, society, environment, work and money, information and communication resources.

The focus of the texts is directed at the formation of the student as an individual, who is seen in close relationship with her/his family, school, community and the environment where he/she lives and studies. In this context, the Albanian educational system has tried to:

- increase the intellectual abilities of the students;
- improve their practical skills (with the help of knowledge and examples, students are encouraged to participate as much as possible in the activities of the community where they live);
- enrich their personality with stable knowledge and valid elements of civic education;
- enable the growth of the student, embodying in them respect for the values of democratic society.

Respect for work and for critical thinking is also encouraged, through the simple analysis of tasks and duties. Texts provide important and primary knowledge, necessary for the preparation and development of the student as a citizen of an advanced society, as an active member of a democracy and as a member of a family. Discussions between students on problems of concern, both inside and outside school, are encouraged; teachers will recommend further reading to improve the vocabulary and the expressive capacity of students to argue on different topics and to make judgements.

In the middle school, the following themes are treated:

First year: civic education regarding groups, families, school and community;

Second year: the law, the judiciary system, human rights and freedoms, the law related to actual problems of society;

Third year: the nature of the state, the role and the organisation of the Albanian democratic state, central and local government,

participation in government, international organisations and world-wide problems;

Fourth year: further study of law; enterprises and organisations; social class; studies of markets and costs, the distribution of goods, advertisement and promotion, and the organisation of production; basic banking and accounting, information technology, etc.

There is a gradual progression in this, from topics close to the individual towards more detailed explorations of society, its structure, organisation and conflicts. As students become more familiar with the foundations of society they begin to understand their integral and interactive part within it.

There are many topics not included, and there is an emphasis on economic ideas: this is because in Albania only the elementary and middle schools are compulsory. The concentration and variety of subjects taught at these levels creates an excessive load for the student: we think that the number of subjects should be reduced and simplified in order to make learning more attractive, and that there are issues that remain strange and incomprehensible to students.

#### *Textbooks used in the high school*

In the 1990s subjects such as ‘Knowledge about Society’, ‘Applied Economy’, and ‘Introduction to Philosophy’, now free from the indoctrination of party-state policy, were introduced in high schools for the first time. The process of introducing these new subjects was characterised by:

- a lack of experience of text book authors in dealing with these issues;
- a lack of professional training for the authors, who in general graduated in Albanian Universities which were over-politicised and isolated from contemporary information about other social systems;
- a lack of understanding and knowledge of the structure of Albanian social, economic and cultural reality, because of the absence of valid scientific social studies, free from political influence;
- a tendency to translate western European and American texts, without making necessary adaptations for the age and intellectual capacities of the students;
- a tendency to value theoretical and scholastic teaching rather than independent learning, writing papers, projects, etc.

Because these texts were prepared under these conditions, students find some difficulties in assimilating them, and the teaching methods of many of their teachers is affected. More than 95% of the teachers of Civic Education graduated before 1990. Despite efforts made to develop their training and specialisation in the past decade, many still have significant gaps in their knowledge, especially in the newer fields. One of the new texts, *Knowledge about Society*, is the first attempt to give high school students generalised, integrated and contemporary social and civic knowledge about the main aspects of modern social development and functions. Conceptual, social and sociological structures are developed through the analysis of concrete examples drawn from different countries, especially western European and the USA. Examples are also taken from Albanian society. This

approach and treatment not only makes possible the development of students' theoretical knowledge but also develops the ability to resolve practical problems in daily life in accordance with advanced contemporary and national democratic standards.

The absence of a national strategy for complex General Studies makes it impossible to analyse Albanian examples, which would have simplified the understanding of these subjects by students. The text *Applied Economy*, for example, is a translation of an edition with the same title by Junior Achievement, an international corporation (located in Colorado, USA) with 75 years of activity across 68 countries. The title in itself demonstrates its ambition: to provide knowledge, understanding and skills for students so they are orientated in the market economy. The theoretical treatment of basic concepts is accompanied by illustrations from the developed countries; unfortunately the difficult transitional period that Albania is experiencing means that they are incompatible with the use of summaries and practical examples from our own economy. However, making connections between pragmatic concepts in economy and the general concepts of human sciences will affect positively the education of students as consumers and citizens, able to understand the economic processes in the country.

The text *Introduction to Philosophy*, drafted after 1990, was an adaptation of a high school text in use in western countries. The students found the understanding of the subject as presented through this text as difficult as did their teachers: but, in the absence of editions and of specialists in the field, the use of this text was justified in the short term. However, a new text was seen as a necessity. The new version of *Introduction to Philosophy* took into consideration comments and suggestions of specialists and students. Philosophical theories, from ancient times to the present, are now presented in historical sequence, allowing students to familiarise themselves with key philosophical concepts such as conscience and its elements; the nature of existence; and the elements of society.

New texts for Civic Education in the high schools are now in preparation, for example *Sociology* and *Citizenship 1* and *2*. The texts of *Citizenship 1* and *2* deal with social and political environments and the structure of the political and institutional organisations of society. Working within the context of the further democratisation of the state and of the law, these texts educate students about human rights and an understanding of responsibilities, thus enabling the development of civic consciences leading to responsible, well-informed and active citizens. *Sociology* presents the contemporary sociological knowledge necessary to explain principal social processes and phenomena, the fundamental laws on the formation and transformation of human behaviour, and the development and functioning of social relations. This text links theoretical treatments with an analysis of concrete information, not only from the social experiences of other countries, but also from Albanian society. Such a structure has the following advantages:

- an easier assimilation of sociological knowledge by students (characterised by a high degree of generalisation);
- it is possible for the student to achieve a better understanding of the social, economical, political and cultural development of Albania and other countries, directing students towards practical solutions of social problems and consolidating their awareness of their position and role in the society;
- it equips students with the necessary psycho-cultural knowledge and skills to orient themselves in other cultural systems.

The reformulation of these texts on Civic Education as part of the educational reform process is seen as a long-term activity which interacts with the opinions, structures, statements and social liaisons and relationships of educational institutions. It is important to transmit knowledge of our way of life, and to reduce the distance between theory and daily reality to prepare students for a better adult life.

### **Conclusion**

In spite of all the efforts described here, the didactic processes used in our civic education are still far from those used in western European models. The first models and structures introduced in educational reforms in the 1990s were taken from the American experience, and were not appropriate to Albanian society and the problems it is facing. The experience of the Albanian specialists who prepared these texts was modest in such 'new' subjects. Generally, they did not have the necessary know-how for this transition, and tended to be teachers and students from the Faculty of Political Sciences, which had been heavily grounded in Marxist-Leninist ideology. There was only a short time for most of them to convert and adapt themselves to the philosophy of the new Albania, so their texts still contained stereotypes and were driven by moralism. Taking as an example the transformations achieved in other eastern European countries, we now need to encourage comparisons with them, and treat civic education differently in the future, benefiting from and taking as a blueprint the EU experience.

This paper was drafted inside SHBLSH (the publishing house in Albania which is responsible for textbooks) and the association (NGO) *Education and school in the XXI century*, many of whose members are specialists of the educational system in Albania. The association welcomes help and collaboration in these fields because its goal is to make serious efforts and achieve concrete results in the field of civic education, a very important component of the Albanian school and life.