

Teaching materials on anti-Semitism in seven European states

Imagine you are a teacher and the only association your pupils make when talking about Jews is concentration camps. Imagine that the kids you are working with say they do not want to hear anything more about National Socialism and a colleague explains to you that “the Jews” are also to blame for the Holocaust. Imagine a Jewish girl was a pupil in your class. Would you recommend her to talk openly about being Jewish? Many teachers in many regions are confronted with questions like this today. Many countries have excellent teaching materials on National Socialism and the Holocaust. However, by comparison, there are hardly any materials which describe the entire history and extent of Anti-Semitism and the role it plays in creating individual and collective self images. We need resources to learn about and to teach what this concept of an ‘enemy’ means today for our personal attitudes and political beliefs.

In this respect valuable experience has been gained in a number of countries across the OSCE region where teaching materials on anti-Semitism were introduced on schools, which were developed by the ODIHR and the Anne Frank House in Amsterdam in conjunction with experts from these countries. If you work as a teacher in one of these countries you are lucky - providing you are familiar with the teaching materials.

1. What role was played by the OSCE and ODIHR in this?

The fact that these materials exist is a success story and is thanks to the Conference on Anti-Semitism in Berlin and Cordoba. The OSCE was instrumental, firstly by preparing and taking on the Berlin Declaration, which called for specific action, namely educational programmes to..... [01]BERLIN DECLARATION had called for “educational programmes to combat anti-Semitism and promote remembrance of the Holocaust”. Secondly, following the declaration the Adviser on Anti-Semitism Issues could initiate the programme, present it to relevant authorities, and bring together the necessary experts. Experts on innovative pedagogical methods, specialists on anti-Semitism and contact partners from the individual countries. Together they were in a position to develop pedagogical material which deals with the history of anti-Semitism from an international perspective. In this way, the ODIHR as an international political organisation, is in the unique position to engender a

multinational approach which relates to the subject of Anti-Semitism as a common negative European legacy. This approach makes it possible to create material of very good quality and to adapt these materials to the needs of the individual countries. One needs a great deal of patience as well as structures which can withstand a certain amount of stress before one can develop innovative pedagogical material within a multinational approach which deals with a complex and sensitive subject like anti-Semitism. The ODIHR was able to provide the necessary contacts and resources for a project of this kind, so that experts from different countries, from academic organisations, on behalf of whom I am speaking here today, from NGOs and, to some extent, also representatives from the national education systems could cooperate.

What contribution can the OSCE make towards implementation in the individual countries?

Let me introduce the next steps by taking Germany as an example. Of course, the education systems of the individual partner countries are different, however, there are several similar problems with regard to content and structure. Education and school are fundamental aspects of any modern state. Education systems are like large ships: changing their course requires time and stability. When we completed the German teaching materials, we were met with good will from the competent political offices.

After Germany was responsible for the attempt to completely destroy European Jewry, the Republic is nowadays politically committed to no longer tolerating anti-Semitism. And yet, despite the support for our project, we have met with a number of problems at the practical level: teaching materials are compiled in Germany by publishing companies who specialise in school books and their authorization lies within the administrative sovereignty of the individual federal states and the national agency does not generally have the opportunity to publish concrete teaching materials for teachers and schools. Anti-Semitism as a subject plays a role in many individual subjects and it is an interdisciplinary problem which spans many eras.

With a great deal of effort, we had put together innovative new material, but how were we now to deliver this into the hands of teachers and school pupils? In this process, the cross-departmental high-ranking political contacts from the OSCE as well as the those from the Federal Foreign Office and Prof. Weisskirchen, as the

personal representative on combatting anti-Semitism for the OSCE, were extremely helpful. Not all governments see themselves equally obliged to support projects against anti-Semitism. What is more, in addition to the political will which governments display to a greater or lesser degree, there are numerous formal difficulties which have to be overcome. It is our intention that the finished teaching materials serve as a pilot model for other countries: this is already the case in Slovakia, Spain and Russia. All three themes of the materials have been printed and have become available in a number of OSCE participating States. They are contemporary and attractively designed and should be available to all teachers. Pupils who are interested in looking at the present situation and the history of anti-Semitism in Europe should be able to get a hold of them. To make this happen, we need the political and practical support of the OSCE.

Back to the implementation in Germany: in the meantime, we have managed to publish the materials in large numbers and make these available to all German high schools free of charge. We have put together a teacher's guide which provides the teachers with the necessary background information and recommendations. This year, more than 20 further training courses for teachers have already taken place. While doing these, we found out that the training courses are a necessary supplement to the materials. Teachers need to have opportunities to reflect upon their own ideas about Jewish life in Europe and supposed Jewish characteristics. The need to have the chance to train methods for practical interventions against anti-Semitism.

We have other plans which cannot be realised at national level. We need the support of the OSCE to make sure that the completed materials are fed into the national education systems. We would also like to have support in implementing the materials multinationally. We live in a heterogeneous society with diverse cultural, ethnical and religious traditions. The pupils and their everyday experiences provide a multinational input into classrooms. The teaching materials offer points of reference both with respect to the personal experiences of the pupils and for the different European narratives on Jewish history and anti-Semitism. We need an evaluation of all the countries that have introduced the materials into the educational system and the challenges that were faced. That means bringing the experts from different countries again together.

The experiences made here in the different countries and the critical question as to

how much we are actually able to manage when dealing with the various forms of anti-Semitism using pedagogical materials must be backed up continuously by a multinational and scientifically based concept. It makes sense during the implementation to continue the cooperation of the specialists and pedagogical experts from the development phase. With a focus on the implementation process and teachers trainings we would like to have support from an international report on the implementation phase and an expert meeting of those involved in the implementation in each country. We need the continued support of ODIHR for a continuously functioning infrastructure which secures the implementation in the countries and coordinates the international exchange.