

Languages and historical communication in the European past

Foreign languages have always had a great role in society life. Although communications in the past were not at contemporary level and as active as they are now, people have found different ways to make contacts between each other. Those contacts have left deep traces in human consciousness and in the culture of the nations. Except for the official and intellectual communications, there have always been influences out of them: people have adopted many foreign words and names, concerning their daily life, social relationships, and even nature. Today, we do not think about them as foreign, but mostly as our own, national. Only specialists know in details their origins and original meanings. Talking about that I do not mean to analyze the etymological and lexical features of the languages, but only to remind you that there are a number of names around us that have come from other languages and cultures. It is an aspect, which is suitable to use in the teaching of European history in school.

The first and maybe the closest to us is the field of personal names. If we survey a class only, we will understand how many of the names come from other nations. The most popular of them like *Maria, John, Elijah, Peter, Paul, Anna, Simon, Tom, Joseph, Adam, Eve, Samuel, Daniel, David, Elisabeth, Mathew*, and many others are Jewish names, which come from the Bible. Others, popular in the whole world, are Greek: *Alexander, George, Kristina, Angel, Andrew, Nicholas* etc. The names *Maxim, Luke, Constantine, Mark, Anthon, Julia, Helena* and there are similar ones from Latin origin. These three sources of the tradition of human names form the fundamentals of the European civilization. Certainly, the famous German philosopher Karl Jaspers had enough reasons to say: "*Europe, it is the Bible and the Antiquity*". Of course, each country has its own system of personal names, formed on the basis of its national tradition. In each one there are many specific names, which have its ethnical origins and they are very often connected with its past. In these cases, many of the names belonged to different historical individuals. They are usually

names of kings, saints and other national heroes. Such name is for example *Arthur* - the name of the legendary English king, which has Celtic roots. Such name is *Olaf* - the first Christian king and now Patron Saint of Norway. There are some names, which have one origin, but they have different pronunciation, for example Charles. The Germans pronounce it [karl], the English - [tʃɑ:lz], the French - [ʃarl]. Common origins have the names *Henry* (in English) and *Heinrich* (in German). In practice, we can find many similar cases. In Bulgarian tradition very popular are historical names: *Asparuch* (the first Bulgarian ruler), *Boris* (the baptizer of the Bulgarians), *Asen* (the king, who liberated Bulgaria from the Byzantine domination), *Kalojan*, etc. In Bulgaria, there are too many Greek names, but pronounced in a bit modified manner and also Russian, English, German, French and s. o. Students in class can organize a survey about their names; after that, they can group them according to their origins; finally, they can connect the names with some historical persons.

The situation, in those European countries, where other minorities live, except the national majority, and especially when they profess other religions is too different. There we can find exceptional variety of names: *Arabic, Chinese, Japanese, Turkish, Indian* and many, many others. However, they do not always have a connection with national or European history. So for instance, some Arabic names in Spain could have historical origins, but in Sweden or Norway, they do not have a historical origin. Similar are the cases with the Turkish names in Bulgaria, Greece, Serbia and other Balkan countries. On the other hand, nowadays the migration processes in the whole world are so intensive, that students should know very well the past in order to be able to understand the origin of a name.

The above said is valid for many geographical and local names too. Unlike that, in these cases most of the names are a result of the historical communication between two or more nations and

countries. Indicative is the instance with the name of the Bulgarian capital - *Sofia*. That name has Greek origin and means “*wisdom*”. In Bulgaria there are many such names, as a consequence of the historical contacts with its neighbours or coming from the ancient people, who inhabited its lands long time ago. Such name is *Plovdiv*, which has Thracian’s root. Very rarely, the names could come from contemporary migrants: it can occur if a considerable number of people settle down in a place or a quarter of a town. If students in any country look at them, they would encounter enough similar examples of names, which have historical roots: they could be found both on the street-boards and on other signs of different places, also on the maps, guide-books, etc. This aspect of learning about the past in school is too appropriate for understanding the role and the significance of the languages in the human’s social development.

Learning European history, students get acquainted with large lists of terms and concepts, many of which have foreign origins. Some of them are inherent in all historical epochs such as *monarchy, monarch, king, queen, crown, throne, empire, republic, elections, vote, politics; war, peace, treaty, army, weapons*. Others are typical for some epochs only: *Antiquity, slavery, aristocracy, feudal, castle, church, pope, patriarch, bourgeoisie, revolution, parliament, democracy*. Thirds are, connected with concrete languages: *Senate, senator, forum, villa* (Latin); *caliph, sultan, vizier* (Arabic); *Renaissance, Enlightenment* (French); *Armada* (Spanish); *Reichstag, Kaiser, Fuehrer* (German), *fascism* (Italian), *Tsar* (Bulgarian), *knjaz* (Slavonic) etc. However, some have common origins: for example *Kaiser* and *Tsar*, come from the Latin *Caesar*. So that richness of names shows how much the people, nations and languages were related in the past.

maybe, the main problem is how to involve and how to use this aspect of history in the classroom work. In these cases, it depends very much on the teacher’s activity and on his or her ability to apply appropriate methods and approaches for connecting history teaching with

language knowledge. Languages are fundamental means for social communication and an analysis shows that Europeans have common origins.

according to their languages, most of the European nations belong to the so called Indo-Aryan pre-historical community. Later, they formed three main language groups: *Germanic, Romance* and *Slavonic*; the *Greek* one is individual; *Hungarian* and *Finnish* are exceptions. In the Ancient times, Greek was the first common official and literary language for the people who lived in South-Eastern Europe and even in some of the Southern parts of the continent. The best literary works - epic and drama - written in the Early-European epoch were in Greek. Centuries later, the Romans imposed the Latin language on the large territories surrounding the Mediterranean, reaching beyond the Channel and North of Danube. Even until now, many scientific, medical, juridical and other terms and concepts are Greek or Latin. During The Middle Ages, Latin continued to be official for the West, and Greek became again common for Eastern Europe. In the middle of the 9th century, the brothers Cyril and Methodius created the Slavonic alphabet and thus, the Slavonic became the third classical language in Europe. Christianity united the Europeans, despite of the division of the Christian church. After the Renaissance and Reformation, many nations started using national languages as literary, but in Europe, there have always been a dominant language. The great ideas of the Enlightenment and the French Revolution spread out French. After 18th century, it became the official language of the diplomacy and the most popular for international use. Since the 20th century until today, English has gradually taken primary place as an international language and has been used elsewhere. We cannot imagine contemporary life without English: it is used in politics, economy, computers, etc., it is an unalterable part of our everyday life. All this, as common historical and cultural heritage for us, the Europeans, unifies Europe and the European nations.

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