

History Education in Europe: Contested Issues and Teaching Tools

**Group 10
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1. Introduction

“The student came to school in Torsteiner...a brand with a Neo-nazi logo...the student’s father said he didn’t know, it was a present from a friend...I just think the father was pretending not to know.”

This quotation, drawn from a teacher's response during an interview, serves as a particularly illustrative example of the implicit dilemmas afflicting European schools and educational systems, which are witnessing an increase in the prevalence of historical misinformation. This project is concerned with the thorough undertaking of the range of contemporary challenges encountered by European history teachers, with the primary research question being: *What problems do educators face when teaching sensitive topics and why do they face these challenges?* Along with its specifying and central question: *How would the educators like to learn to tackle these issues/situations / how can Euroclio best provide those tools or information?*

The project’s topic aims to comprehensively explore and understand the roots of contemporary educational issues that teachers have to navigate, and offer said educators the necessary tools to address sensitive and controversial subject matters from a perspective that promotes a multifaceted approach to learning. More specifically, the area of interest focuses on educators from Eastern and Central European countries, both within and outside of the European Union. The reasoning behind this particular focal point stems from both individual and demographic factors. Individually, the majority of the group involved in this project happens to be from Eastern Europe themselves, giving a sense of familiarity with the regional culture, history, and public issues. This conversance partially inspired and motivated Eastern and Central Europe to be the geographical focus of this project, as the group was able to recall and identify a variety of educational concerns that have been understudied and underaddressed in said countries. Demographically, much of the research and insight into European history education was led by data from Western or Northern European countries, which tend to differ both culturally and historically from Eastern and Central Europe, therefore highlighting issues and solutions predominantly associated with Western and Northern ways of educating. Our team’s approach to uncovering said information was through personally interviewing current and

previous in-system teachers and facilitating open discussions that would lead to identifying commonly faced issues, their root causes, and possible solutions. The interviews consisted of both educators from the Euroclio database and from personal contacts to combine pedagogic knowledge from different pools and levels. The specific countries involved in this research are based on the educators who have responded to our queries about the research, consisting of Slovakia, Lithuania, Romania, and Estonia.

Moreover, through this project, the group strives to use coding strategies to classify and categorise the issues Central and Eastern European educators face. The categorisation coding is employed to determine the source of the challenges, whether they are driven by a lack of access to digital resources, personal, systemic or parental pressures that hinder discussions, structural exclusion of sensitive topics based on governmental ideology, or scarcity of time or space in the existing curricula. This approach attempts to organise these issues in sections to tackle them respectively, so as to fully comprehend the causes of omitting needed but controversial classroom discussions of history. The goal and importance of this project stem from the educational benefits that the closing of this pedagogic gap can bring in schools across Central and Eastern Europe. The promotion of open discussions, intellectual debates, critical evaluation, and empathetic thinking may encourage similar inquisitiveness across the board in studies and personal life, teaching European youth the multidimensionality and impact of history.

2. Previous Research

Prior to conducting the interviews, the team conducted secondary research and disclosed the information on how the educational systems of said countries operate and what they consider controversial and sensitive topics.

A study by Kaarlõp, Oja, and Poom-Valickis (2022) revealed that the most controversial topics in Estonia centre around the 20th century. After the Second World War, Estonia acquired a large Russian-speaking immigrant population, currently forming 27% of the population, which led to the construction of segregated schools under the Soviet Union, which continued likewise until the late 1990's. With the new unified curriculum in 1996, Estonia emphasised nation-building through history classes, with the curriculum accentuating multiperspectivity, however, not addressing ethnic and cultural divides between Estonia's populations. Some of the

sensitive and controversial topics that are undermanaged or more or less omitted derive from WWII issues and atrocities, such as the Holocaust, the Gulags, and mass deportations and repressions. Whereas some other topics centre on the ethnolinguistic divide of Estonia's Russian-speaking and Estonian-speaking populations, specifically subject matters like the Great Northern War, which are found controversial in Russian-instructed schools as biased.

The teacher's methods tended to avoid said topics due to a lack of knowledge about how to approach them, disagreements with the curriculum's information or its view, and a variety of other reasons. The study identified five strategies that educators used to approach this information: neutrality of the teacher, emphasising the heterogeneity of history, distancing from the topic, or possessing no strategy at all (Kaarlõp, Oja, & Poom-Valickis, 2022). The most commonly observed strategy was 'none at all', as certain educators had to consistently approach delivering said topics. With the ethnolinguistic difference highlighting this issue, as the topics would be taught differently by Russian-speaking and Estonian-speaking schools, divergent presentations based on language, methods, and perspectives. The article also discovered that many teaching styles were shaped by personal views of the educators, which took differing approaches to viewing historical events, with some perceiving them relative, while others viewed them as the truth (Kaarlõp, Oja, & Poom-Valickis, 2022).

The Romanian/Moldovan study by Vacarciuc (2025) outlines a Moldovan educational tool that aims to cover historical curricular content while evaluating gaps between the written curriculum and actual classroom practice to identify any difficulties or errors. The sensitive topics that have fallen into said difficulties have focused primarily on similar 20th-century time frames, with prominent traumatic events and occurrences being the Holocaust, the communist regime, the Union of 1918, Transnistria, and national minorities and their treatment. Such themes are considered politically delicate and are typically flagged as potentially sensitive topics in the classrooms.

Teachers found it particularly difficult to integrate digital resources and cooperative learning activities into the school curricula, stating that translating resources-rich modern methods into real classrooms has proved challenging (Vacarciuc, 2025). Although these countries have begun altering their curricula to include more critical and analytical thinking, open discussions, and contemporary teaching tools, closing the gap between the written curricula and the classroom outcome has been an obstacle (Vacarciuc, 2025).

A study by Kanclerienė (2024) addresses Lithuania's foreign-based education system that was established after the country entered the European Union. The new curriculum shifted towards cultivating digital, analytical, creative and other competencies, as well as attempting to include Lithuanian cultural history. However, cultural history remains a controversial topic of discussion around Lithuanian educational systems, as much debate centres around culturally free and international coursebooks which did not cover Lithuanian historical contexts. This created a sensitive issue around the underrepresentation of Lithuanian culture and identity in its own educational curriculum.

Although the Lithuanian school curricula have been gradually modified, the educators frequently find issues with teaching low-proficiency students based on the textbooks, as well as critiquing the controlled structure of the course manuals, which are more difficult to adapt to real-life dynamic classrooms (Kanclerienė, 2024).

Council of Europe (2025) mentions that the educational curriculum in Slovakia is based on a centralised system, with the Ministry of Education, Research, Development and Youth responsible for designing the historical program of study. History is taught as a separate and compulsory subject in lower and upper secondary schools, which is given an optional final examination. Since 2023, new pedagogical syllabuses have been launched, introducing a combined humanities subject that amalgamates geography, history, and civics. Both private and religious schools have to follow the same history curriculum that contains and addresses minority groups of the country. No particular controversial or sensitive topics have been identified by the educators of this study. The teaching methods that are applied by Slovak teachers typically vary per school, yet are still expected to be within Ministry guidelines. Teachers employ combinative approaches, utilising oral history interviews, textbooks, and some digital archives to encourage diversity rather than adherence to a specific written course manual (Council of Europe, 2025).

Conclusively, the educational challenges that Central and Eastern European countries face vary both based on the personal histories of countries, with certain similarity overlap, and in the approach to fixing said issues within the curricula.

3. Method

3.1. Research Design

The research was part of a broader project conducted in collaboration with EuroClio, which sought to better understand the obstacles teachers face when discussing controversial issues in history education across Europe. More specifically, this research focused on identifying the difficulties teachers experience in practice, the factors contributing to those difficulties, and the types of resources, training, or support they believe would help them navigate teaching contested topics in the classroom. Given the nature of these research objectives, a qualitative approach was considered most suitable. The project sought to explore teachers' experiences and perceptions rather than measure the frequency of opinions and/or behaviors. National context, curriculum requirements, political developments, school environments, and interactions with students and parents often influence challenges associated with controversial topics. As a result, understanding these experiences required participants to explain and reflect on their professional backgrounds in their own words. Therefore, interview-based research was selected as the primary method of data collection. This approach enabled teachers to discuss their experiences in detail while giving researchers the flexibility to explore relevant topics that emerged during the conversation.

3.2. Research Preparation and Participant Recruitment

Before beginning the primary research phase, the research team conducted a review of existing academic literature related to controversial topics in history education and the challenges educators face when addressing politically sensitive issues in the classroom. This preliminary research was undertaken to establish a broader understanding of the topic and to support the development of our interview questions. The reviewed literature mainly focused on history education in Central and Eastern Europe and addressed issues relevant to the project's research objectives. The preliminary research served as the basis for the development of the interview guide used by all members of the interview team. The interview questions focused on several key areas, such as controversial historical topics within participants' national contexts, the classroom experiences, teaching challenges, available teaching materials, and the types of support teachers consider necessary when addressing sensitive issues. Particular attention was given to understanding how teachers navigate disagreements in the classroom, external influences such as parents and the media, as well as the resources they believe would help them approach

controversial topics more effectively. The interview guide underwent several revisions during the preparation phase to ensure that the questions remained aligned with the aims of the project.

Participants were recruited through a combination of EuroClio's professional network and the personal and professional contacts of several members of the research team. Initially, our team aimed to focus on teachers from Central and Eastern European countries. This decision was influenced not only by the project's objectives but also by the research team's backgrounds, as most team members came from Central and Eastern European countries and were familiar with the historical, political, and educational contexts of these countries. Such familiarity was considered beneficial when engaging with nationally sensitive topics and interpreting participants' responses. Moreover, an additional advantage of this approach was that interviews could be conducted in languages other than English, when necessary, which allowed the participants to communicate more comfortably. Although the initial intention was to include teachers from a wider range of countries, securing interviews proved more difficult than expected. Many of the teachers that we contacted were unavailable or did not respond to participation requests, which resulted in a smaller and less geographically diverse pool than initially planned. As a result, the final participant pool consisted of teachers from Romania, Slovakia, Estonia, Lithuania and Croatia.

3.3. Data Collection

Following the recruitment phase, interviews were conducted by members of the interview team using Microsoft Teams and Zoom. Microsoft Teams was generally preferred because its transcription function provided written transcripts of the interviews. These transcripts were later used as the main source of data for the coding stage of the project. Most interviews lasted between 45 and 60 minutes, although the exact duration varied depending on how much participants chose to elaborate on topics. Before each interview, participants received a consent form via email. The form explained the purpose of the project, how the collected data would be used, and informed participants that their responses would remain anonymous. No personal information was collected or included in the final report. Most interviews were conducted in English. However, some participants preferred to communicate in their native language. In these cases, interviews were conducted by team members who shared the participant's language. The transcripts of these interviews were later translated into English to ensure that the interviews

could be coded together. All interviewers used the same interview guide developed at the beginning of the project. The team agreed that the main interview questions should be covered in every interview, while follow-up questions could be adapted depending on the direction of the conversation and the time available.

The interviewed teachers represented a variety of educational contexts, including public, private, and international schools. They taught at different educational levels, ranging from primary and middle school to secondary education, and had between seven and twenty-nine years of teaching experience. In total, fifteen interviews were conducted. However, only eight met the requirements for inclusion in the coding process. While complete transcripts supported most interviews, several relied primarily on notes taken by the interviewer rather than full transcripts. Because the coding process relied on detailed interview transcripts, these interviews could not be coded alongside the rest of the data. Moreover, some interviews contained relatively short responses, which made it difficult to identify patterns and themes during the coding process. As a result, seven interviews were excluded from the process. All excluded interviews were conducted with teachers from Croatia, leaving a final dataset of eight interviews from Romania, Slovakia, Estonia, and Lithuania.

3.4. Data Coding and Analysis

The coding process was conducted using the eight interviews that were retained after the data collection stage. Before coding began, all interview transcripts were anonymized to protect the identities of the participants. Rather than using names, teachers were referred to by their country and interview number (e.g., Romania 1, Lithuania 2). The coding team first read through all interview transcripts several times in order to become familiar with the data and identify parts of the interviews that were relevant to the research question. Not all parts of the interviews were included in the coding process. Introductory remarks, demographic information, and other sections unrelated to the project's objectives were excluded so that the focus remained on participants' experiences of teaching controversial historical topics. The selected sections were then examined in detail and assigned initial codes that reflected the main ideas discussed by participants.

As the coding process progressed, several recurring themes began to appear across interviews from different countries. Teachers frequently discussed issues such as limited time to

teach history, a lack of teaching materials, student reactions to controversial topics, the influence of family and social media, political polarization, and the importance of democratic values and human rights in history education. Similar codes were therefore grouped and organized into broader categories. This process resulted in five main categories: Solutions, Polarization/Radicalization, Reaction, Democracy and Human Rights, and Controversial topics. Some of these categories also contained smaller subcategories. For instance, the category Reaction included references to students, families, and media influence, while Controversial topics included related identity politics and nationalism. The category about Solutions included subcodes such as critical thinking and access to sources. The coding team then examined these categories and compared them across all eight interviews to identify broader patterns and connections. Particular attention was paid to issues that appeared repeatedly across different national contexts. This made it possible to explore not only the specific challenges encountered by individual teachers but also a wider trend that appeared across the dataset, such as concerns about nationalism, political polarization, and media influence.

4. Findings

This chapter will showcase and expand upon the findings our project managed to obtain from analyzing all of the interview transcripts by using our coding system, both in terms of the issues the interviewees identified and also the solutions or help needed that they requested.

To start out, we believe that in our position as researchers on this topic we should also consider elements, and thus potential findings, that are revealed to us to be from outside of the direct transcriptions or content of the interviews, and thus attempt to use that information as well in putting together the findings. The foremost example of this is that, owing to our mixed participant pool that had representation from public school teachers as well as private or international schools as well, we were able to identify distinct advantages and benefits that some of the latter enjoyed. Namely, these were: better and more direct communication with parents; less formalized and thus less tense, or potentially tense, hierarchies with headteachers, headmasters etc.; a more friendly and welcoming working environment, both for teacher and students, which might have helped preempt or lessen disagreements or tensions flaring in the classroom when difficult topics were discussed; and finally a greater freedom, relative to their public schools colleagues, to modify and particularize the curriculum at large but also individual

lessons and materials used in teaching them. We believe these points to be notable and important, for one because it is difficult for the teachers themselves to actually identify them unless they have extended experience in both environments, but also because by highlighting these differences, reports such as this one and organizations like EuroClio might convince national governmental forces to at least consider the implementation of such measures if not actually begin rolling them out.

One of the main goals of our research was identifying which were the controversial, difficult topics the teachers we interviewed struggled with, and why. Interestingly, two participants stated early on in their respective interviews that they did not feel as if any of the topics they taught were controversial for them, or in their experience. This was both surprising to us and contrary to expectations shaped by the other interviews but it does provide a valuable finding, which is that identifying controversy or difficulty through a personal lens is prone to individual sensibilities, outlooks and perspectives, but also to external reactions, by the students themselves, parents or hierarchical structures, and can thus yield unexpected results. Nevertheless, our participants were able to reflect and comment on their handling of such topics, and as a result, we found that the most common underlying controversy is nationalism. This should be understood to mean that topics which might be received or perceived as insulting or damaging to the personal association with a national culture or society tend to be received with increased hostility, create impassioned arguments in the moment, and potentially incite latent reactions from entities outside of the classroom (parents, school staff etc.). Such topics could be anything from more general national history to specific events or periods, such as the Second World War and the Holocaust, communism and liberation from it, or even the presence and treatment of certain ethnic minorities in the history of the nation (particularly the Russian minority in the Baltics, or the Roma people in Romania). It is notable that such nationalistic sensibilities are amplified by contemporary (geo)political tensions, for example the Russo-Ukrainian War, and this can have an effect both on how the students themselves react but also on how the teachers build their lesson plans or how (or even if) they approach some of these topics. Interestingly, several teachers pointed out to us that progressive social topics, such as the LGBT community and their rights, feminism and social justice, are seen as controversial and can elicit the same sort of negative reactions or tense atmosphere, with some believing this to be the result of the very same nationalistic protectionism.

Having mentioned this aspect several times already, we would now like to turn to discussing reactions, not just by the students but also by their parents, whether collectively or individually, and institutional staff. In covering the various reactions they have had to deal with, our participants' experiences varied wildly, however there were still commonalities. The two extremes were roughly equally present, but also comparatively limited in number to the more moderate outcomes. This is to say that while very occasionally students were either completely tranquil or egregiously riled up by controversial topics, the more common response was moderate, with a slight lean in either direction. We consider this to be an important finding primarily because it shows that the students' reactions are manageable with the proper training, resources, and preparation. The extreme response should not be dismissed entirely but even in those situations the teachers can draw significant benefit from being prepared to deal with such eventualities. Amongst the moderate yet still engaged responses our interviewees identified: spirited debates (sometimes punctuated by dubious historical 'knowledge' which we will discuss shortly), adversarial disagreements between two or more students with each taking one particular side of the argument, and even individual, anecdotal stories being told with significant emotional content. In addition to these reactions by students, several of the teachers mentioned having to deal with parents, usually after teaching a particular lesson. Their reactions varied similarly, some had little to none, or were even positively praising the teacher (as mentioned initially, the public-private difference is also present here) while in other cases the parents complained either directly to the teacher, by email or phone, or to the school. Interestingly, at least one teacher mentioned that the parents' disapproval was relayed through the student themselves, during the next class or several, thus pointing to the fact that those students would go home and discuss the lesson with their parents. It is important to mention that as far as our interviewees told us, all such disagreements or reactions were eventually resolved, either by them and the parents 'agreeing to disagree' or simply the parents accepting the teacher's authority and prerogative in the classroom. If and when the schools became involved, little to no action was actually taken however it was clear to us that the teachers who brought those instances up did so because they did feel at least some pressure by potentially having this higher authority getting involved in such situations.

Connected to the issue of how parents (might) react is something that our participants repeatedly emphasized, and that was their evaluation of increasing radicalization amongst

students. These two elements are connected since the teachers we interviewed mainly fault social media for driving radicalization however they maintained that it should be the parents' duty to monitor their children's access to material that is damaging to their emotional, intellectual and societal well-being, to have the tough conversations when they notice their children slipping into potentially extreme niche ideologies online and thus to take or begin taking corrective action. A few teachers also identified the fact that, in several cases they encountered, the parents themselves agreed with or endorsed the viewpoints the students were encountering on social media, showing that such situations at home can validate and enhance the radicalizing effect of negative media exposure by adding approval and authority by the people most present in a child's life, and then by the time such students attend school there is little that the teacher can do to rectify the situation. As for the actual radical or extremist content, the teachers identified racism, in several cases anti-Roma as well as well antisemitic views that were openly shared, discussed and professed by students, both in conversations with each other and also during discussions or debates on class topics; hostility towards the LGBT community was also noted, through use slurs or demeaning comments; and finally some mention was made of pro-Russian or more generally pro-authoritarian political positions and leaders specifically because of their anti-democratic character. This is a meaningful point because it highlights that the students acknowledge and understand what they are supporting and endorsing, thus not being completely unaware vessels of propaganda, shaped purely by misunderstood online content, rather having an at least decent comprehension of their positions and their implications for society. According to our interviewees, generally media literacy remains low, both among students and their parents, and several also said among fellow teachers or staff, which should not be surprising considering the aforementioned revelations, however these teachers were fairly confident that including media literacy lessons inside existing courses, or even putting together a full on media literacy course would have a markedly positive effect on this issue, and thus wholeheartedly recommended this to be further explored as a potential option by EuroClio. Another notable issue was brought up by several teachers: isolation and closedness – which is to say that some of our participants identified encountering students whose reluctance to speak up and be heard, either because of having been reprimanded without being educated on those topics previously, or because of other personal circumstances like family tension or bullying, resulted in their radicalization going unnoticed and therefore unaddressed, which they felt was a significant

problem that should inform any solution so as not to create even more and deeper pockets of isolated radicalization further down the line. The interviewees were asked how capable they felt of actually addressing the radicalization, both generally and on particular topics; what became immediately clear for us was that some were uncertain to what extent their actions (engaging the students in conversation, discussion and debate, reaching out to school staff that might be able to help or even contacting the parents) were successful, mainly because of the aforementioned isolation issue, but also because oftentimes they were simply not meant to continue teaching the same group of students for long enough to see whether the students' views actually improved over time.

As part of our interview process, we made sure to keep an open and inviting atmosphere so that our interviewees would feel comfortable stating ideas we might not have thought to ask about. This is why we decided to place additional focus on something that several of our participants specifically requested for us to include in our report, and that is the civic responsibility that these teachers felt came with the study of history for their students, and seeing them not merely as school-going children but future citizens, voters and members of a community. To this end, our teachers felt an increased sense of duty in actually discussing and treating the controversial issues during class, since they believed those moments or topics contained invaluable lessons and covered values becoming of a healthy modern democratic citizenry. They placed increased emphasis on their desire to honestly analyze, discuss and critique totalitarian or authoritarian regimes present in the history of their respective nation and how the rise of those regimes or politicians was facilitated, including by regular people, that did once also go through the education system just like their own students are. Human rights were brought up several times as an 'included' topic some of the teachers would cover as part of classes on the Holocaust for example or more generally the Second World War, as well as various inter-ethnic conflicts in recent history. These teachers emphasized that they wished to ennoble their students with an appreciation for this sort of political philosophy that centers human rights, peace and collaboration while not ignoring that humans have not always behaved as such – in others words, they did not wish to pretend this is the only way, but they did genuinely believe in the importance of getting across to the students that this framework of thought is unique in human history and has brought with it incredible benefits for everyone. We believe that particularly in Central and Eastern Europe, where an unfortunate reality of the

teaching profession is a systemic, societal underappreciation as well as teachers being underpaid, inspiring such duty and responsibility for those who see their position as history teacher to be simply another job that keeps the bills paid would potentially help create commitment to quality pedagogy for those teachers who might otherwise have little interest in actually following or using EuroClio reports, advice and materials.

Finally, we sought to determine the sort of solutions or help our interviewees thought would benefit them most from EuroClio, and thus make our recommendations. The aforementioned media literacy and source criticism, manifested through various resources such as course plans, reading or video material and even parent-side pamphlets or information, are highly desired and endorsed, particularly for addressing growing radicalization. In fact, additional resources and teaching materials were highly requested across the board, specifically when it comes to lesson planning, in-class worksheets and activities, manuals (EuroClio's "Who were the victims of National Socialism" was said in one interview to be very helpful and that can inspire what they teach in class), and even reliable, factual explanatory videos – one interviewee in particular suggested short snippets than can be used to draw the attention of students – on various topics. Several teachers pointed out that, particularly as far as concerns lesson plans and worksheets, differences in the level of difficulty and involvement should be considered for students enrolled in humanities and non-humanities (vocational, math etc.) while still maintaining the civic and democratic value teaching emphasis, as previously discussed. This point was additionally strengthened by suggestions regarding hands-on approaches rather than purely theoretical work, including potentially activities outside of the classroom, museum visits or interactive sessions with expert communicators. We believe making such resources available and promoting them broadly can be a significant benefit, both in terms of actually equipping teachers with the skills and practical tools to deal with sensitive topics, but also in terms of helping them with time management and being overworked, relieving more mental capacity for quality pedagogy and better student engagement during class.

Teacher-side professional development and training was a particular concern for all interviewees. We received plenty of requests and general interest for additional training, especially on dealing with sensitive or controversial topics, managing students', parents' and others' reactions on those issues and specific focus on young or initiate teachers with little

personal experience. In addition to this, the teachers we interviewed felt that sometimes they were not equipped with the skills needed to deal with prejudice or biases or bigotry, particularly when it came to such opinions being outright voiced by students inside of the classroom setting, and so they felt their unpreparedness might have negatively affected the outcome of their intervention, thus highlighting and requesting guidance on developing skills to tackle stereotyping, hatred and intolerance. Some teachers also expressed interest in experience exchanges with fellow teachers from other regions in Europe and who operate in other educational systems, face other challenges and issues, and said that while methodology was important for them to discuss, other elements such as access to resources and dealing with students and parents should also be included. EuroClio can, in our opinion concurring with that of our interviewees', function as an intermediary and facilitator in putting such exchanges together and opening up more channels for communication and collaboration in the future. As a final comment, some of the teachers we interviewed felt compelled to impress upon us that both themselves and the students they are teaching are, at the end of the day, human after all, and empathy is a very powerful human emotion that can easily come about when approaching such controversial and difficult topics. These teachers noticed that oftentimes the students strongly felt a deep sense of injustice towards victims of crimes against humanity or oppressive regimes, sometimes in spite of their rejection or dismissal of the historical truth of the matter, usually as a result of radicalization or mis/disinformation. When such strong feelings appeared, the students became, in the evaluation of our interviewees, much more receptive to at least the moral implications of the events or periods being discussed, and the ethical obligations citizens and voters hold nowadays not to allow those atrocities to repeat. We believe this to be a highly lucrative element that can and should be further worked into any lesson plans or other resources developed and made accessible to teachers by EuroClio, and thus centering the suffering and injustice experienced by victims can become a pathway to circumvent the strong grip that extreme online and mundane content can sometimes have on young students, making the teachers' job a lot easier in turn.

5. Conclusion and Discussion

This project aimed to explore the challenges history teachers face when teaching controversial historical topics and the forms of support they believe would help them address

these challenges more effectively. Through interviews with teachers from Romania, Slovakia, Estonia, and Lithuania, the project focused on understanding both the topics that are considered controversial in different national contexts and the difficulties educators encounter when discussing them in the classroom. The findings demonstrated that although specific controversial topics varied between countries, many of the challenges described by teachers were quite similar. Participants frequently mentioned the influence of family, social media, and political polarization on students' understanding of history. Many also focused on practical challenges, such as a lack of time, resources, and support when addressing controversial topics. In response to these issues, many emphasized the importance of critical thinking, media literacy, democratic values, and human rights when discussing controversial issues in the classroom.

One of the main conclusions that can be drawn from the interviews is that identifying controversial topics is often less difficult than teaching them. While the topics themselves differed according to national context, teachers across different countries repeatedly described similar concerns about misinformation, encouraging respectful discussion, and managing competing narratives. The project, therefore, indicates that history education is not only concerned with understanding the past but also with helping students develop the skills to critically engage with the world around them. The interviews also showed that teachers are mainly concerned with finding practical solutions to the challenges they face in the classroom. They expressed the need for materials such as in-class worksheets and activities, manuals, and opportunities to exchange ideas with other educators. Many also emphasized the importance of resources that help students develop critical thinking and media literacy skills. These responses suggest that organizations such as EuroClio could provide valuable support by providing classroom-ready resources and creating opportunities for the exchange of knowledge and experiences between teachers of different nationalities and backgrounds.

The findings and recommendations developed throughout the project were presented to EuroClio during the final project meeting, providing an opportunity to discuss their practical relevance and potential application. While the study was based on a relatively small number of participants and does not claim to represent the experiences of all history teachers in Europe, it nevertheless provides an important insight into how they approach controversial historical topics in different contexts. The findings suggest that while controversial historical topics may differ

from one country to another, many of the challenges surrounding their teaching are similar, emphasizing the importance of international cooperation on issues related to history education.

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