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**SOCIAL MEDIA AND POLARIZATION OF TEACHING AND LEARNING  
HISTORY: SAMPLE CASES FROM BULGARIA AND TURKEY**

History is one of the main humanitarian sciences, which not only gives broad knowledge for past epochs providing lessons for the future but also creates abundant notion of the nations and people surrounding us. Regarding this, history is inexhaustible source for multispectral useful information for social, cultural and economic development of different nations. Nowadays with a stunning speed, the social media is also turning

into a source for such information – alternative, supplementary, but sometimes also tendentious and speculative. As history is occupying more and more space in the social media, a quite natural issue for discussion in the modern society becomes the question how social media affects the processes of learning and teaching history and more precisely does it create any polarization in these processes. It is well-known that many social media websites contain information which can provoke discontent and even conflict situations and intensify the negative historical stereotypes concerning for instance Bulgarian-Turkish relations during the centuries. Subjectivity, tendentious points of view, conformity with the political conjuncture can lead to creation of strong prejudices, wrong concepts of history and the past as a whole, false knowledge and as a result discriminative behavior toward other nations, i.e. polarization in perception of the others. This can also cause deterioration in the international and multicultural communication between different countries and their societies.

Unfortunately, exactly some websites, part of social media are supportive of such unfavorable effect and turn history into a tool for pursuing of personal interests. With regard to this, we should take into account the bulk of information related to history, its professional selection and use in the process of teaching<sup>1</sup>. No one can reject the fact that history being made by people is subjective and that there are some difficulties for teachers, lecturers and researchers to shed an objective light to some events. Namely, here comes the opportunity of these people to show their professional attitude and professional experience while using social media in teaching history without tolerating extreme contents. On one hand, they

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<sup>1</sup> Generally, the topic of using web-based technologies and social media in the process of teaching not only history but all educational fields on all educational levels, is highly discussed by scientists-pedagogues as well as specialist in Computer Systems and Technologies. For example, see: *Пейчева-Форсайт, Р., Й. Сариева*. Въвеждане на УЕБ 2.0 технологиите във висшето образование: митове, реалности, съображения. – В: Списание на Софийския университет за електронно обучение, 2012/1–2, 2–7, [http://journal.e-center.uni-sofia.bg/f/downloads/2012/Broi\\_1\\_2/RPecheva%20Iona%20Sarieva\\_2012\\_1-2\\_online.pdf](http://journal.e-center.uni-sofia.bg/f/downloads/2012/Broi_1_2/RPecheva%20Iona%20Sarieva_2012_1-2_online.pdf) [viewed 06.10.2015]; *Смрикаров, А., А. Иванова*. Концепция за въвеждане на информационните и комуникационните технологии в системата на училищното образование. Русенски университет, 2011 (The conception was developed at the request of the Bulgarian Ministry of Education, Youth and Science), <http://ciot.uni-ruse.bg/static/downloads/Концепция-AS.pdf> [viewed 06.10.2015]; *Милтенев, П., Цоков, Г., Шнелерт, Г., Хувър, Дж.* Социални мрежи в образованието. – В: Библиосфера [онлайн]. 2011, № 15, <http://bibliosphere.eu/?p=1308> [viewed 06.10.2015]. (The article is publish also in English under the title “Social Networking Sites in “New Europe 2020” education: A Bibliographic Overview” in Academia.edu., [https://www.academia.edu/4948243/Social\\_Networking\\_Sites\\_in\\_New\\_Europe\\_2020\\_education\\_A\\_Bibliographic\\_Overview](https://www.academia.edu/4948243/Social_Networking_Sites_in_New_Europe_2020_education_A_Bibliographic_Overview) [viewed 06.10.2015]).

can use the speculative information, relying on the principle for the pluralism of points of view and thus show examples of distortion of proven historical facts. On the other hand, the same principle can be basic for creation of a new point of view especially if there is doubt about the reliability of the information and thus stimulate a further research on a concrete historical topic.

Such example can be given with the information about the city of Edirne (Odrin in Bulgarian) in Bulgarian and Turkish Wikipedia, which can provoke keen discussion about the destruction of historical and cultural monuments during the period of Balkan Wars respectively by Turks in Bulgarian version and by Bulgarians in Turkish version of the page. It should not be forgotten that the possibility for anyone to become contributor in Wikipedia questions, not unreasonably, the accuracy and reliability of the content but it would be very fruitful if it becomes a base for constructive discussion and research instead of a means for polarization. It also concerns the question of proper usage of Wikipedia as a teaching tool and as Piotr Konieczny wrote, "...it is the task for educators to teach the students how to responsibly engage with Wikipedia."<sup>2</sup>

Another example can be given from a Turkish newspaper (also available on the Internet and its social media accounts) called "Vakit" ("The Time") which continually disseminate hate-speech oriented news to the public<sup>3</sup>. Via comics, blog shares, newspaper columns, this newspaper exports polarization not only about Turkish society (from religious (Sunni versus Alevi), political (Right versus Left), or Secular versus Islamist perspectives) but also about issues like Anti-Semitism and Xenophobia. Through informal learning, youth learns historical facts or issues via this polarization oriented newspaper which stimulates hate speech toward the Turkish society. As a result, this newspaper was subjected to legal cases in Turkey and was banned in Germany.

When the Internet users are taken into consideration in Bulgaria and Turkey (among all other 198 countries) at the end of 2014, it can easily be seen that Internet penetration and Internet user statistics are above the

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<sup>2</sup> *Konieczny, P.* Wikis and Wikipedia As a Teaching Tool: Five Years Later. – IN: *First Monday*, Vol. 17, № 9–3, September 2012, <http://firstmonday.org/ojs/index.php/fm/article/view/3583/3313> [viewed 06.10.2015].

<sup>3</sup> *Gümüş, B., A.B. Dural.* Othering Through Hate Speech: The Turkish-Islamist (V)AKIT Newspaper as a Case Study. – IN: *Turkish Studies*, Vol. 13, № 3, September 2012.

average (Table 1)<sup>4</sup>. Therefore, there is a clear opportunity toward using the Internet for instructional activities including history education which assists diminishing polarization and hatred among and toward societies.

**Table 1. Internet users in Bulgaria and Turkey at the end of 2014**

Country	Internet Users	1 Year Growth %	1 Year User Growth	Total Country Population	1 Yr Population Change (%)	Penetration (% of Pop. with Internet)	Country's share of World Population	Country's share of World Internet Users
Bulgaria	4,083,950	1%	59,858	7,167,998	-0.76%	56.97%	0.10%	0.14%
Turkey	35,358,888	3%	1,195,610	75,837,020	1.21%	46.62%	1.05%	1.21%

The mentioned pluralism unfortunately is used sometimes in a very narrow sense and is misunderstood as a right to press a concrete point of view based on tendentious interpretation of information. In this respect, the use of social media with historical content, especially for educational purposes, should be cautious. The process of learning history can be affected by polarized social media content depending very much on the age, socio-cultural background and educational experience of the user. When less experience, limited knowledge and unhealthy influence by the surrounding environment are present, this process can really lead to extreme notion of historical facts and to searching only of a relevant content in order to back with arguments the rightness of this extreme notion. If somehow learning history through social media is supported and guided process (especially in school) until the user of the information gain the needed experience to shift out the useful from suspicious sources, it really can decrease the level of the possible polarization. In direct connection with this comes the statement of Assoc. Prof. Roumiana Peytcheva-Forsyth that: "A given technology justifies its pedagogical purpose only in terms of its

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<sup>4</sup> Statistics from Internetlivestats.com [viewed 05.09.2015].

realized potential possibilities in supporting learning and improving the learning experience.”<sup>5</sup>

It should be also remarked that there are good examples of well-prepared historical content, which can contribute to the enrichment of knowledge, maintaining of patriotic feelings – definitely one of the aims of history education, without provoking any conflict situations. Such content can be found in Facebook on the pages “Bulgarian history”<sup>6</sup> (Bulgaria) and “Ottoman History Podcast”<sup>7</sup> (Turkey). The historical content is based on academic achievements, which make it more reliable and not so subjective. More professional in this direction are the pages of Bulgarian academic magazine “Anamnesis”<sup>8</sup> and Turkish “Tarih”<sup>9</sup>. Publications, photos, videos and other materials in these pages can be used in the process of teaching to visualize a new educational material as well as an additional source for more detailed information in the process of learning. Just the opposite, a lot of Facebook pages unite part of the society on the ground of exaggeration of historical facts combining them with the political situation in the country<sup>10</sup>.

Mentioning videos, we cannot omit Youtube that gives the opportunity to make the history more attractive, the given new information clearer and more understandable, and even to succeed in creation of a historical background for a moment in order to support assimilation of this new

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<sup>5</sup> Пейчева-Форсайт, Р. Електронното обучение – теория, практика, аспекти на педагогически дизайн. – В: Списание на Софийския Университет за електронно обучение, 2010/1, с. 22, <http://journal.e-center.uni-sofia.bg/f/downloads/2010/Broi%201/R.Peicheva.pdf> [viewed 06.10.2015]; See also: Kist, W. Class, Get Ready to Tweet: Social Media in the Classroom. – IN: Our Children: The National PTA Magazine, Vol. 38, № 3, pp. 10-11, Dec 2012-Jan 2013, <http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ991339.pdf> [viewed 06.10.2015].

<sup>6</sup> The Facebook page of “Bulgarian History”: <https://www.facebook.com/bulgarian.history1?fref=ts> [viewed 06.10.2015].

<sup>7</sup> The Facebook page of “Ottoman History Podcast”: <https://www.facebook.com/OttomanHistoryPodcast?fref=ts> [viewed 06.10.2015].

<sup>8</sup> The Facebook page of “Anamnesis”: <https://www.facebook.com/Anamnesisinfo-119983591880/timeline/> [viewed 06.10.2015].

<sup>9</sup> The Facebook page of “Tarih”: <https://www.facebook.com/tarihdergi?fref=ts> [viewed 06.10.2015]

<sup>10</sup> The Facebook page “Bulgaristan Milliyetçi Türkleriyiz” (previous name was “Bulgaristan Türk Cumhuriyeti”): <https://www.facebook.com/Bulgaristan-Milliyet%C3%A7i-T%C3%BCrkleriyiz-344482989021128/?ref=ts> [viewed 17.11.2015]; The Facebook page of “BMPO” (a Macedonian page for “Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organisation”): [https://www.facebook.com/%D0%92%D0%9C%D0%A0%D0%9E-306383366144422/?ref=br\\_rs](https://www.facebook.com/%D0%92%D0%9C%D0%A0%D0%9E-306383366144422/?ref=br_rs) [viewed 17.11.2015].

information and its transformation in knowledge. At the same time, videos with provoking content and scenes of violence possess the potential of enhancing the hate speech in social media and Internet as a whole and thus putting into frames the process of leaning history. Examples can be given with sharing fragments of historical or history-based films showing brutal scenes concerning the past of the Bulgarian and Turkish people. Here the veracity of these inhumane acts is not argued but the way they are presented to the users and the high level of division and hatred they are stimulating between the nations. Similar is the situation with the sharing of videos with speculative and offensive information. In 07 March 2007, Youtube was banned by Turkish courts as a result of complaints on a video prepared by a Greek group on the purpose of kidding with Mustafa Kemal Atatürk (Founder of Turkish Republic). After a certain time, Youtube deleted that video and Youtube was free in Turkey. Unfortunately, Turkish youth had prepared similar videos against Greek hate-speech oriented videos. Therefore, humiliation on one single video of a historical figure accelerated and promoted similar hate-speech on social media, especially on Youtube, which is overtly unrivalled video platform<sup>11</sup>.

As a contrast, a video which concerns “the real” history of Macedonia, shared on Youtube, became very popular in the Bulgarian society. Accepted, to put it mildly, as an absurdity by Bulgarians, but made by and showed on the Macedonian National State Television (MTV), it addresses to the citizens of the FYROM trying to show them the ancient origin of their nation and to give them confidence in their past. Instead it polarizes too much the process of learning history or if someone decides to use it in teaching process, putting an exceptional prevailing role of the so-called Macedonian race. The superiority of one nation or race not only changes the perception of history during the both mention processes but also can provoke strong sense of discrimination<sup>12</sup>.

At the same time, the process of learning can be put in a controlled environment through the possibilities given by the same social media. For

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11 *Erol, C. Yeni Medyada Nefret Söylemi Ve Fanatizm: Video Paylaşım Sitelerinde Nefret Söylemi Analizi [Hate Speech and Fanatism on New Media – Hate Speech Analysis on Video Sharing Web Sites]– Unpublished Master Thesis, 2012,*  
<http://openaccess.bilgi.edu.tr:8080/xmlui/bitstream/handle/11411/547/Yeni%20medyada%20nefret%20s%C3%B6ylemi%20ve%20fanatizm%20Video%20payla%C5%9F%C4%B1m%20sitelerinde%20nefret%20s%C3%B6ylemi%20analizi.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y> [viewed 16.10.2015].

12 “Macedonian pray”: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PZJ62MGF7xl> [viewed 05.10.2015].

example, YouTube EDU is becoming more popular nowadays, which changes the “file-sharing Web site typically known more for recorded stunts and home-video confessionals than for educational wisdom” to one that “can help students engage in an exploration-based approach to learning”<sup>13</sup>. Still, the important question is how we use this tool and to what extent in order not to polarize the consumers of the information. Similarly, TED Talks (which is a platform for ideas worth spreading from science to business to global issues in more than 100 languages) can be watched via YouTube for providing historical information and perspectives in a multi-dimensional approach.

By looking at these examples, the power of social media becomes more obvious for promoting or preventing polarization among societies. From social medial tools’ usage distribution at the Table 2 from Bulgaria and Turkey, it could be concluded that Facebook is too dominant in Bulgaria whereas Facebook and Twitter seem highly use in Turkey. It is also visible that Tumblr is becoming popular in both countries<sup>14</sup>. Hence, these social media tools could offer educational stakeholders opportunities for using them in history education yielding less polarization and hatred among any societies.

**Table 2. Top 7 social media sites from January to April 2015**

Social Media Tools	Bulgaria	Turkey	Europe	World
Facebook	94,92	70,41	83,90	80,63
Twitter	1,00	19,94	6,88	6,40
Tumblr	1,38	3,42	2,99	2,26
Pinterest	1,09	1,46	2,82	7,54
StumbleUpon	0,44	1,16	0,82	1,11
Google+	0,33	0,61	0,30	0,31
Other	0,29	1,22	0,60	0,39

Many examples can be given in order to depict the role of social media in polarizing the processes of learning and teaching history. However, we still should not forget good ones that can decrease the level of

<sup>13</sup> *Cardine, S.* Is Education Ready For YouTube? - <http://www.centerdigitaled.com/edtech/Is-Education-Ready-For-YouTube.html> [viewed 06.10.2015].

<sup>14</sup> Statistics from StatCounter Global Stats [viewed 26.09.2015].

this polarization. When not limiting polarization or stimulating it, no one is protected and can be affected by the Hate speech – a violation of Human Rights online. According to the Council of Europe’s Committee of Ministers “Recommendation 97(20) on “hate speech”, the term “shall be understood as covering all forms of expression which spread, incite, promote or justify racial hatred, xenophobia, anti-Semitism or other forms of hatred based on intolerance, including: intolerance expressed by aggressive nationalism and ethnocentrism, discrimination and hostility against minorities, migrants and people of immigrant origin.”<sup>15</sup> Unfortunately, history is also used as an instrument of spreading Hate Speech and the process is accelerated with the means of social media.

The presented sample cases clearly showed that social media has its important role in teaching and learning history. It can polarize public opinion as a result of tendentious and speculative implementation of historical facts in education process or just the opposite – be a corner-stone for developing pluralism and analytical thinking. With its innate nature, educational stakeholders (including policy makers, politicians and all levels/workers of educational institutions) could utilize social media like a knife where they can kill a person as in the form of mass murder or they can operate a patient as in the form of surgeries. Therefore, educational stakeholders must be aware of using social media tools for their instructional activities. To serve this essential purpose, the following recommendations are unfolded:

- Educational stakeholders of Bulgaria and Turkey should understand the power of social media both on psychological and sociological aspects on public and develop strategies on managing social media for their instructional activities.
- Mainly X generation (who are older than 35 years old) educational stakeholders must learn social media jargon and context before developing an action plan. In other words, they must realize the power of hashtag “#” in order to realize how people state their ideas (on history or any other topic) by using hashtags.
- Educational stakeholders of Bulgaria and Turkey should develop strategies to monitor social media activities toward creating hate-speech or polarization in their countries and act

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<sup>15</sup> Recommendation 97(20) of the Committee of Ministers to Member States on "Hate Speech". - [http://www.coe.int/t/dghl/standardsetting/hrpolicy/other\\_committees/dh-lgbt\\_docs/CM\\_Rec\(97\)20\\_en.pdf](http://www.coe.int/t/dghl/standardsetting/hrpolicy/other_committees/dh-lgbt_docs/CM_Rec(97)20_en.pdf) [viewed 17.11.2015].





with a crisis management policy to diminish their adverse effects. Besides, these two states should cooperate for the social media strategies.

▪ Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and Educational stakeholders of Bulgaria and Turkey must initiate social media movements (as in the form of Facebook groups, Instagram posts, # including tweets and so forth) toward teaching objective history and history related issues and must monitor how they progress (such as number of Likes, Retweets and etc.). Otherwise, hate-

oriented and polarization-aimed groups will lead the situation and progress where it will be too late in the future.

- Educational stakeholders of Bulgaria and Turkey must integrate social media into instructional activities, such as creating Facebook groups to share lecture notes and make discussions. Afterwards, they should find opportunities to create cross-cultural projects on/via social media tools.

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