

Reviews

MACHÁČEK, Ladislav – ŠŤAVA, Ervin: Občianska výchova a vzdelávanie mládeže k občianstvu. Bratislava : NÚCEM, 2012, 108 pp.

The issue of political and civic education is one of intensely monitored topics in Western democracies. It is because education to democratic citizenship belongs to the elementary preconditions of enhancing democracy and serves as prevention from possible success of non-democratic forces. Civics is given attention especially in the countries with past experience with a certain form of a non-democratic regime. For example, German federal governments, regardless of their party and political composition, have acknowledged, since the end of WW2, political education as one of the key factors suppressing influence of anti-systemic parties. And it is the function of political education that is the decisive reason why governments provide financial support to, not limited to, youth organizations of political parties or political foundations closely cooperating with party factions. Along with school facilities, both such organizations are considered to be an important environment where the youth not only receives information but also can adopt the basic principles of democratic government.

The natural question that arises in this context is: What is the condition of political or civic education in Slovakia more than two decades after the system change? Such questions as well as many other ones are answered in the publication by Ladislav Macháček and Ervin Šťava titled *Civics and education of the youth to citizenship* with the subtitle *National Report from international survey of civics – ICCS 2009*. As indicated by the above name of the book, the authors have brought, on 108 pages, the results of an international survey whose goal was it to find out how young people in Slovakia are prepared to manage public affairs in their country.

From the formal viewpoint, the publication is divided into six chapters. The first one presents the current results in the field of research; the second one introduces the basic shifts in education to democratic citizenship in the two decades from the system change until 2009. The third chapter introduces knowledge of 14-year-old students in civics. The two following parts present opinions of young people on a whole range of selected issues (such as religion, minorities, European and national identity, or international migration), as well as the level of trust in the selected institutions, where, similarly to the Eurobarometer surveys, political parties receive the lowest level of trust. The last chapter of the publication provides teachers's view of the condition of civics.

The above implies that data concerning the level of civics was obtained using three methods of empirical survey – in the form of knowledge tests, in the form of questionnaire inquiries with young people at the age of 14 years, and with teachers. Commenting on the results of the survey would exceed the scope of this review. However, it is worth highlighting the findings of the last part, i.e. the chapter that discusses the level and forms of civic or ethical education by means of a questionnaire to teachers. Although we could assume that citizenship education is carried out in the form of discussions about the current topics and by highlighting the positive facts reflecting the current situation in the society and possible engagement of students in the school self-government, the survey results show that the topics of civics and ethical education lessons preferred by teachers and directors are the environment, followed by the rights and obligations of citizens with human rights and voting and elections ranking afterwards. As stated by the authors: „School directors and teachers of civics prefer environment protection and they also feel comfortable in this field. They have serious problems with copying with the issue of fighting racism and xenophobia. It is a huge challenge in the situation when coexistence of majority society with certain ethnic groups (e.g. the Roma) is getting more complicated. That is also influenced by the growth of right wing extremism in the whole Europe, not only in the former post-socialist countries” (Macháček-Štáva 2012, p.100)

There is a growing inclination of young people in Slovakia towards radical up to extremist formations, and young people are confronted with increasing influences of foreign migration and permeation of different cultural patterns of behaviour. In such circumstances, a question arises why we do not pay attention to the theoretical and methodological preparation of teachers for this field of study in order to make them feel more comfortable and be able to communicate with their students in a more competent manner.

However, we should not neglect the finding that, on the one hand, most young people openly express their opinions on problems at school but, on the other hand, their willingness to express their opinions in public decreases if such stance assigns them to a minority. Anyway, democratic societies are based on the rule of the majority but it is necessary to add: with guaranteed rights of minorities. That applies not only to ethnic, sexual and religious minorities but also to political and ideological ones. Democracy presumes a variety of opinions with the requirement to respect minority opinions that, at a certain moment, may win a majority of population.

The publication by Ladislav Macháček and Ervin Štáva brings plenty of new information. Therefore it is a valuable material for any researcher in the field of young people civil engagement. Thanks to its valuable content, however, it may serve not only to the academia, but it is suitable also as an

information source for authors of curricula of civics and ethical education. The survey also implies that Slovak students, on the one hand, have good command of civil and political knowledge but, on the other hand, they reflect issues of the present day Slovak society insufficiently. Growing support of radical groups among young people indicates that civics and citizenship education do not achieve the desired results.

Support expressed in favour of extremist organizations is usually attributed to several factors; *inter alia* also to the disappointment with the domestic political elite which is subsequently reflected in dropping trust in domestic institutions. One of the questions in the presented survey in the publication by Ladislav Macháček and Ervin Šťava also referred to the above issue. Similarly to the surveys carried out by the European Union's Eurobarometer, political parties ranked at the end of the trusted political institutions. As parliament ranked one but last, we should ask if the responsibility for maintaining the democratic rule is only borne by the employees of primary and secondary schools, or whether it also rests with the political elite and its approach to the values of parliamentary democracy.

Radoslav Štefančík

Fakulta aplikovaných jazykov, Ekonomická univerzita, Bratislava