

Laura Lapina from Riga and Dita Betere from Balvi in Latvia worked on this contribution. Laura gives a brief report about the situation in Latvian schools and about how Chernobyl is represented in Latvian school books. Additionally she shows how the Chernobyl catastrophe is presented in a History school book. Dita allows a short review to her own time in school.

Laura Lapina:



I gave most of my school books back to the library after graduating and, honestly, I don't even remember which one was the official history book because we used quite a few of them for various topics.

Also I must agree with Vojta- school books comprise more topics than lessons. I hardly can remember us discussing Chernobyl in history lessons.

As I remember we didn't focus on the catastrophe itself much. It was mentioned when talking about such topics as perestroika and the demise of USSR. Chernobyl was mentioned as one the reasons that increased the political activity of the citizens of Latvian Soviet Socialist Republic. In 1986 due to the protests the building of Duagavpils HES (hydro-electric power station) was canceled. In 1987 one of the first active NGOs was founded- *Vides aizsardzības klubs (Environmental Protection Club)*. It has

been said that the environmental issues were the first to be discussed and dealt with publicly.

Basically- not so much about the accident, more about the political processes that happened at the time.

As I don't have my original school book anymore I decided to look through my mother's library (she is a history teacher). Most of the books mention Chernobyl very briefly. However it is easily noticeable that newer books (published in 21st century) include quite a bit more information than the older ones.

My favourite was *History for elementary schools. Jaunākie laiki* (basically includes time period from 1st World War to George Bush). The book is published on 2006 and written by *S.Goldmane, J.Klišāne, A.Kļaviņa, I.Misāne* and *L.Straube*.

The book contains a chapter: **Global problems.**

The chapter explains what is a global problem and afterwards mentions: nuclear weapons and weapons of mass destruction, depletion of natural resources, ecological problems as the consequences of economic and technological progress, demographical problems, consequences of globalisation- diseases etc.

After the introduction the chapter moves on to various sources. 3 of them are about Chernobly.

#### 1. Chernobyl after 20 years (2006)

A historian writes when, where, how the accident happened, about the pollution it made (and how it was found even in Japan). Then he writes that there still are discussions about the actual number of victims and then mentions that World health organization and International nuclear energy association have estimated that in the former USSR 600 000 people were affected by radiation. 4 000 lost their lives prematurely.

#### 2. Threat of nuclear holocaust- first acknowledged problem

There isn't a mention of the author but this article discusses the way how nuclear weapons played a huge part in Cold war. Then it mentions nuclear weapons nowadays in the context of North Korea. Afterwards acknowledges that nuclear energy is used also for peaceful purposes and counts the cons of nuclear energy while mentioning that there are still protests against it because of the possibility of accident.

From the third paragraph the text is about the Chernobyl accident. Compares it to the effect on nuclear bombs in Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Writes how the accident was portrayed differently in Soviet regime countries and other European countries. It states that *Moscow* hid for the long time the actual number of deceased victims and that much more people were affected by living in the contaminated areas. Then it writes about liquidators mentioning that they were from many Soviet countries including Latvia. Then it writes about evacuations and how the size of contaminated areas is almost equal to territory of Greece. Then it concludes that the most affected were the territories of Belarus, Ukraine and Russia but that the effects on nature and forest animals are still noticeable also in Baltic and Scandinavian countries.

#### 3. Picture of Chernobyl after the catastrophe

Altogether the chapter includes 22 sources about various topics. Including a survey from *Der Spiegel* in 1999 where people are asked to explain what are they the most afraid going into 21st century. 49% answer- nuclear war, 43%- climate catastrophes, 36%- pollution etc.

**Dita Betere:**

I remember that we didn't talk about Chernobyl when i was learning history because this topic was prepared for May, but teachers skipped it as less important topic because we were out of time and delayed with preparation for last tests of the year. It was said to find some information, read it at home and think about it.

But it's not like we didn't talk about Chernobyl at school at all – physics teacher dedicated whole lesson for this topic and i remember one lesson when Russian teacher started a discussion about it – it wasn't her responsibility to do that, she just mentioned it and we all started to discuss the accident instead of Russian literature.