The success of democracy depends on the formation of the social capital conducive to the maintenance of democratic patterns of behavior. Civic education is the most important instrument of the formation of such social capital and is, therefore, an essential responsibility of the democratic state. The concept of social capital, introduced in the social science theory by such authors as Pierre Bourdieu (1984) and James Coleman (1988), implies that the quality of democracy depends on the relations between citizens, particularly on the acceptance of such values as trust in others and willingness to accept them as equals. Consequently, the way in which human rights are perceived in a society has profound importance for the quality of political life and constitutes the crucial component of democratic political culture.

Human rights are a relatively new concept in the sense that they are now considered as universal and fundamental. They are considered fundamental in the sense that there are rights which are inalienable and that there are no circumstances whatever in which they are to be denied, except in specific conditions defined by law. Their universality means that they are rights to which all human beings are entitled simply as humans, that means – regardless of their individual or collective characteristics such as gender, race, ethnicity, religion, social status, type of sexuality. Human rights are universal also in the sense that they are based on the concept of moral obligation which we all, as humans, share, and not on the legislation of a state (Fawcett 1985). In this, they are fundamentally different from citizens rights, which are based on the constitution of a given state and can be defined more or less broadly, depending on the will of the legislators.
The idea of fundamental and universal human rights came to its full formulation after the Second World War. It is true that we can find its early elements in such documents as the American Declaration of Independence (1776) or the French Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen (1789), which expressed the belief in the fundamental equality of men. There were, however, implicit restrictions in the universality of such concept. “All men are born equal”, declared the Founders Fathers of the American republic, but they did not extend this concept to the Negro slaves or to the Indians, whose rights were flagrantly ignored. Gunnar Myrdal, in his monumental sociological study of race relations in the United States, observed that the popularity of the racist concepts in American society resulted from the conflict between the moral standards expressed in the Declaration of Independence and the reality of slavery and, after 1865, of the caste system. “The influences from the American Creed” – wrote Myrdal – “thus had, and still have, a double-direction. On the one hand, the equalitarian Creed operates directly to suppress the dogma of the Negro's racial inferiority and to make people's thoughts more and more 'independent of race and color', as the American slogan runs. On the other hand, it indirectly calls forth the same dogma to justify the blatant exception to the Creed…The need for race prejudice is, from this point of view, a need for defense on the part of the Americans against their own national Creed, against their own most cherished ideals” (Myrdal 1944, p. 89).

Race has not been the only criterion for the exclusion of some categories of people from the declared principle of human equality. Both in the United States and in France women had to wait a long time before they were granted the right to vote and to run as candidates in elections. In France they won this right as late as in 1947, long after several other European states. What is even more difficult to comprehend is that for a very long time their exclusion from the most important democratic right was not even considered inconsistent with the declared human equality.

Exclusions are not the only difference between these early declarations and the contemporary concept of human rights. Both in the United States and in France of the late XVIII\textsuperscript{th} century (as well as of later years) human rights were considered the rights of the \textit{citizen}, as the French document made clear in its very name. This not only meant that the right applied to citizens only, but also that they have their source in the constitution. They were considered rights bestowed upon the citizens by the democratic state. The contemporary concept of human rights is based on the opposite idea. Human rights are fundamental in the sense that they are derived from natural law and not from the will of a state. It is the legislation of a state that can and should be judged in terms of its accordance with the standards of human rights. In this sense human rights stand above the legislation of a state. “Once security is achieved” – writes the American political philosopher John Chapman – “... men
who have come to think of themselves as individuals demand more from their political arrangements. No government is legitimate unless it has their consent; their obligation to obey is conditional upon the performance of government, upon its protection of their natural rights, especially the right to freedom in all its various forms” (Chapman 1970, p. 150). This is the modern formula for fundamental human rights and their implications for democratic states. It puts the human rights above rights and obligations based on the laws of the state, not vice versa.

The source of this concept is the Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in December 1948. The President of the General Assembly, Dr H.E. Evatt from Australia expressed the feelings of this world body, when he stated that the Declaration was “the first occasion on which the organized world community had recognized the existence of human rights and fundamental freedoms transcending the laws of sovereign states” (Osler & Starkey 1996, p. 2). The Declaration is composed of “four pillars”. The first concerns personal rights (life, freedom, security, justice), defined in articles 2 to 11. The second concerns rights regulating relations between people (freedom of movement, rights to found a family, asylum, nationality, property), defined in articles 12 to 17. The third deals with public freedoms and political rights (freedom of thought, religion, conscience, opinion, assembly, participation, democracy), defined in articles 18 to 21. The fourth concerns economic, social and cultural rights, such as social security, work, equal wages, trade unions, rest and leisure, adequate standard of living, education, cultural life, defined in articles 22 to 27. The final part of the Declaration (articles 28, 29 & 30) refers to the international order and defines the duties of the world community of nations to implement the provisions of the Declaration (Osler & Starkey 1996, p. 4–5).

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights initiated the series of other documents in which human rights have been given further elaboration. Europe has become the cradle of several initiatives to push forward policies protecting human rights. In an important sense, European efforts to promote human rights can be considered the model for other parts of the world, including the United States. (Rifkin 2004, p. 6–7). It is, therefore, understandable why special attention should be devoted to the history of the European efforts to promote human rights and to use education for this purpose.

In May 1949, the Council of Europe composed at that time of ten countries only, adopted the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights (signed in 1950 and entering into force in 1953), which with the passing of time became the foundation of the European policy of protecting human rights, presently shared by forty-six member-states of the Council of Europe. In 1959, the General Assembly of the United Nations adopted the Declaration of the Rights of the Child and on Novem-
ber 20, 1989, the United Nations adopted the Convention on the Rights of the Child, extending the concept of human rights to the specific conditions of children. With great pride I should like to mention that the initiative to adopt such convention came from the government of Poland. In 1975, the Helsinki Agreement on Security and Cooperation in Europe contained the so-called “third basket” concerned with the protection of human rights. Contrary to the pessimistic views expressed by many, the Helsinki Agreement became an important tool in the struggle for human rights in the then communist states of Europe.

The Council of Europe was the first international institution to systematically address the question of the role of education in promoting human rights. The most important documents of the Council of Europe dealing with the education for human rights are:

2. Recommendation 1401 on education in the responsibilities of the individual adopted by the Parliamentary Assembly on 30 March 1999.
3. Declaration and programme on education for democratic citizenship, based on the rights and responsibilities of citizens, adopted by the 104th Session of the Committee of Ministers on May 7, 1999.
5. Recommendation of the Committee of Ministers on education for democratic citizenship adopted at the 812th meeting of the Ministers’ Deputies on 16 October 2002.
6. The decision of the Committee of Ministers, (adopted in March 2004), to declare 2005 the European Year of Citizenship through Education and to establish the Ad Hoc Committee of Experts (CAHCIT) to monitor the implementation of this decision.

The formal proposal was submitted by the government of Poland in 1979. The initiative came from the former Chief Justice of Poland and my friend of many years Professor Adam Łopatka (1928–2003).

The Cracow conference continued the work done in this field by the 19th Standing Conference of the European Ministers of Education, Kristiansand (Norway) 22–24 June 1997. I had the honor to represent Poland at the Kristiansand Conference and to propose that the next conference takes place in Poland and deals with the progress in education for democratic citizenship and human rights.

CAHCIT has been chaired by Dr Krzysztof Ostrowski, former chair of the Committee on Higher Education of the Council of Europe and my advisor during my term as Poland’s
In addition, education for democratic citizenship and human rights have been discussed at the Conference of the European Ministers of Culture and of Education held in Wroclaw, Poland, to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the Cultural Convention of the Council of Europe. As the General Rapporteur of the Wroclaw Conference I have summarized this aspect of the Conference in the following way (Wiatr 2004, p. 76–82):

Civic education has two main components, which: education for democratic citizenship and education for human rights. Human rights must be based not only on the respect for law and for legal guarantees but also on the attitudes protecting the groups and individuals whose rights are endangered by intolerant attitudes and behaviors because of their race, ethnicity, religion, gender, sexual orientation and other group characteristics. Education for democratic citizenship and for human rights must realistically take into account several problems confronting both the older democracies in Western Europe and the new democracies in the Eastern part of the continent. It would be unrealistic to assume that education alone can solve these problems but sustained educational efforts are indispensable, if we are to deal with them effectively.

Tolerant attitudes are essential components of democratic political culture. They are now under attack because of the rapid increase of intolerant behavior, hostility and fanaticism. Ethnocentrism and xenophobia are old ills in Europe, but recently they became a growing danger. The growth of anti-Semitism in the Europe of today is caused by the aggressive propaganda of some militant groups hostile to Israel and to Western civilization as a whole and ready to go beyond legitimate criticism of the policies of the Israeli government to the generalized attacks on Jewish communities. Simultaneously, in some parts of Europe, there has been a wave of hostile, often violent acts directed against the Muslim minorities in the aftermath of the 9/11 terrorist attacks.

Education for democratic citizenship and for human rights must face this challenge. It is not enough to denounce such behavior as inconsistent with the values of democracy. It is necessary to remind people, and particularly the young generation, of the horrors to which xenophobia in all its forms brought Europe only 60 years ago. The experience of the Holocaust has already become an important part of education. The year 2005 has been commemorated to this tragic chapter of history.
and, under the recommendations of the Council of Europe, teaching about Holocaust has become part of the school curriculum.

In many parts of the world we observe an alarming increase of xenophobia, including manifestations of anti-Semitism, and of religious fanaticism. There are also – in the aftermath of 9/11 terrorist attacks – manifestations of hostile, even violent acts directed against the Muslim minorities in some Western societies.

Civic education for human rights should include teaching of history, with special emphasis on the history of the Holocaust and of other crimes against humanity committed in recent history. It is important to teach young people about the crimes against humanity committed by the representatives of their own nations and to show the ways in which reconciliation between former enemies has become a reality.

Protection of the rights of religious and cultural minorities is essential, particularly in the world in which we observe an increase of religious fundamentalism and fanaticism. The tradition of tolerance and understanding for others exists in all great religions but in all of them there are also currents of fanaticism. When educating young people in the spirit of tolerance and understanding we should rely on the best tradition of each of the great religions.

Civic education for human rights should be based on intercultural dialogue. It is important to promote contacts between people from different cultures. It is particularly important to enrich school curriculum by an informed and balanced presentation of the history and contemporary problems of Islam and of the relations between Europe and the Middle East. Europeans often have problems with understanding why the memory of the crusades, idealized in European literature, has an ominous character for Arabs and other Muslims. In such a context, intercultural education becomes an essential element of democratic education in the sense that it helps to overcome a limited and one-sided understanding of history and of its impact on contemporary politics.

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4 In this context I should like to point to the importance of dealing with the role played by some segments of the conquered nations in the German Nazi’s policy of genocide. In July 2001, under the auspices of the president of Poland Aleksander Kwasniewski the 60th anniversary of the massacre of entire Jewish population by its Polish neighbors in the Polish town of Jedwabne was commemorated. The case was discussed publicly and has become part of teaching about Holocaust. As could have been expected, such an approach was strongly attacked by those from the political Right who refuse to acknowledge Polish responsibility for crimes committed during the last world war. It is essential, however, that other nations, without denying the principal responsibility of the German Nazi regime, deal honestly with the much more difficult question of the co-responsibility of some segments of their own societies.
Most important is the role of education in reconciliation between former enemies. More than 30 years ago, under the auspices of UNESCO, the governments of the Federal Republic of Germany and of Poland undertook pioneering work to review school textbooks from the perspective of eliminating material detrimental to the process of German-Polish reconciliation and strengthening the positive image of the other side. Such an educational effort has contributed to the improvement of relations and helped build an atmosphere of friendship between the younger generation of Poles and Germans. Later on, the experience of the German-Polish Commission on Textbooks was replicated in several other countries.

Education for human rights has three basic components. The first is knowledge. It includes information of the very concept of human rights, of the ways in which they are or can be protected, of the history of the struggle for human rights as well as of the history of crimes committed against humanity. In this component, education for human rights. The second is formation of attitudes. Teaching human rights is not like teaching mathematics. It involves formation of values and norms conducive to the behavior consistent with the principles of universal human rights. Finally, education for human rights has its practical component. It should teach people how to effectively struggle for their rights, how to protect those who need protection, how to use national and supra-national institutions designed for this purpose.

It is an education of all - not only school children and students, but adults as well. At the XVII World Congress of the International Political Science Association held in Seoul in 1997, I have chaired the plenary session devoted to civic education and presented an introductory paper on this subject (Wiatr 1998). I have recommended the following six principles for educating students and adult citizens in democratic citizenship and human rights:

1. Fundamental values of democracy and the rule of law must be explained in their interrelationship.
2. The quality of good citizenship must be defined and presented as the model of civic education.
3. The functional knowledge of democratic mechanisms, of laws and procedures is important for the ability of citizens to perform in the political area.
4. Civic education should make people aware of the way the system of their country works and allow them to find proper information themselves.
5. Civic education should also address moral issues of politics, one of which is the question of limits of political obligation. The universal concept of human rights dictates the acceptance of such limits if the dictates of policies run counter to the moral commandments of human rights.
6. Civic education should promote respect for the adversary, the willingness and ability to argue without hatred and to seek compromise.
All these recommendations are important for the way in which education for human rights should be conducted. It is a very central part of civic education, very much as human rights are the cornerstone of democracy.

At the end, let me address the question of who should have the primary responsibility for human rights education. While governments bear primary responsibility for civic education and education for human rights, independent social initiatives are most important as well. Voluntary associations, institutions of learning and mass media have a major role in educating people in human rights. In many cases they complement the educational policy of the government. But sometimes they must take upon themselves the role of the principal educators. It is particularly so, when governments, captured by extremist political forces, fail to meet their responsibilities. In some states, intolerant attitudes of the ruling politicians run counter to the principles of universal human rights. A recent Polish example illustrates this point.

In the Spring of 2006, the new minister of education in the Right-wing government (and himself the leader of the extreme nationalist Rightist League of Polish Families) dismissed the director of the Center of Improving Teachers’ Education for having published the Polish translation of the Council of Europe’s textbook on civic education Compass. The offending part was a paragraph in which ways to combat homophobia have been discussed. The minister’s decision caused a widespread controversy in Poland and made clear that - endangered by the action of the government – human rights education should be taken care of by institutions of civic society. Fortunately, such institutions have grown during the years of democratic transformation and they are now the principal guardians of human rights.


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