

DOI No: <http://dx.doi.org/10.14225/Joh307>

PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS OF TEACHING ‘TWENTIETH CENTURY TURKISH AND WORLD HISTORY’ TO HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS IN TURKEY

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Abstract

It has been ten years since a public discussion began on the necessity of adding a twentieth century history course to the curriculum of high schools in Turkey. In addition, the debate also included public discussion on improving the contents of existing history textbooks used in high schools. The whole question was also tied to an increased awareness of human rights and elimination of prejudices in the texts. The first objective of this study is to examine and analyze the aims as well as the program outline of the course as depicted in the report of the commission, and second, to take the *only* textbook approved by the Ministry which is currently used in all the high schools throughout Turkey, and appraise and scrutinize the contents of it with a view to establish its merits or faults in achieving and fulfilling the aims of this course in the classroom.

Key words: *curriculum, world history, textbook*

Türkiye’deki Lise Öğrencilerine “Yirminci Yüzyıl Türk ve Dünya Tarihi” nin Öğretimindeki Sorunlar ve Beklentiler

Özet

On yılı aşkın süredir Türkiye’de lise ders müfredatına Yirminci Yüzyıl Tarihi dersinin eklenmesi hususunda devam eden bir tartışma söz konusudur. Aynı zamanda liselerde okutulan ders kitaplarının iyileştirilmesine yönelik tartışmalar da devam etmektedir. Bu tartışmalarda ki asıl mesele metinlerde yer alan önyargıların kaldırılması ve insan hakları konusunda bir farkındalık yaratmakla ilgili idi. Bu çalışmada öncelikli olarak komisyon raporu doğrultusunda hazırlanan dersin, taslak programı ve amaçları

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incelenecektir. İkinci olarak, günümüzde liselerde okutulan ve bakanlık tarafından onaylanmış olan tek ders kitabının içeriğinin, dersin amaçlarını yerine getirmesi bağlamında ne kadar başarılı olup-olmadığı, kitabın içeriğinin eksileri ve artıları incelenerek aktarılmaya çalışılacaktır.

Anahtar kelimeler: *müfredat, dünya tarihi, ders kitabı*

1. The Birinci Commission

In 2008 the Commission appointed by the Minister of National Education Hüseyin Çelik submitted its proposal for the establishment of a ‘Contemporary Turkish and World History’ course to be taught in the 12th grade of the high schools. The report as well as the proposed curriculum for this new course was approved on the August 4, 2008 meeting of the Talim ve Terbiye Kurulu—the council responsible for the primary and secondary school curricula attached to the Ministry of National Education (Birinci *et al*, 2008; Birinci *et al*, 2011). The commission members specifically appointed for this task included Ali Birinci, Yılmaz Kurt, Bülent Arı, and Tahir Kodal. All of them are academics specialized in history and working for various universities in Ankara. However, *none* of the members have *any* academic interest in contemporary or Twentieth Century world history. Ali Birinci, who had just been appointed to the highly political position of the president of the Türk Tarih Kurumu a month before the approval of the Commission’s proposal, is an expert on early Twentieth Century Turkish political history. He holds a Ph.D. with a thesis on Hürriyet ve İtilâf Fırkası—the Entente Libérale, the main opposition party in Turkey before the First World War. His published works mainly deal with issues in Turkish political and intellectual history of the pre-war years. The second member of the Commission, Yılmaz Kurt, is currently the Chairman of the History Department at Dil ve Tarih-Coğrafya Fakültesi, Ankara Üniversitesi. His Ph.D. thesis is on Ottoman state records concerning Sixteenth Century Adana. He has exclusively published on Sixteenth Century Ottoman history. Bülent Arı, whose M.A. and Ph.D. theses deal with the Seventeenth Century diplomatic and commercial relations between the Ottoman Empire and the Netherlands, has completed his undergraduate studies in international relations, and, therefore, can be presumed to have some knowledge on contemporary world politics. The fourth member of the Commission is Tahir Kodal, another academic whose Ph.D. thesis is on early Republican Era. His academic studies deal *exclusively* with Turkish military and political history between the two world wars.

2. Birinci Commission on 'Historical Thinking Standards'

The Commission stated that the main purpose for the new course was the desire "to understand the effects of foreign political, social, cultural and economic developments on Turkey, and Turkey's role in Twentieth Century world affairs." (Birinci *et al*, 2011, p.6) "The aim," the Commission stated, "was to equip students with national history and national culture that would make them sensitive to these issues, and yet be able to communicate and interact with other cultures in the world" (Birinci *et al*, 2011, p.6). According to the Commission's report, the new course on contemporary Turkish and world history "must place national values at the centre, while teaching students to be respectful to universal values" (Birinci *et al*, 2011, p.7).

The Commission's report then goes on to cite in detail the 'Historical Thinking Standards' In fact, the five pages on 'Historical Thinking Standards' in the Birinci Commission's report is a selection and *verbatim* translation of the basic features of the 'Historical Thinking Standards' developed by the National Center for History in the Schools at UCLA under Charlotte Crabtree and Gary B. Nash's supervision: 'Chronological Thinking,' 'Historical Comprehension,' 'Historical Analysis and Interpretation,' 'Historical Issues-Analysis and Decision-Making,' and 'Historical Research Capabilities' (Crabtree, & Nash, 1994). Therefore, the best and most satisfying parts of the Commission's official report turns out to be, by the Commission's own admission (Birinci *et al*, 2011, p.9n), nothing but the main principles of the National Center for History in the Schools at UCLA.

The Birinci Commission, following the 'Historical Thinking Standards' developed by the National Center for History in the Schools at UCLA, seems to fully 'adopt' a contemporary understanding of historiography—which the Commission members have not, individually, adhered to these principles in their own academic studies. On 'Historical Comprehension' the Birinci Commission 'accepts' the American viewpoint:

"Comprehending historical narratives requires ... that students develop historical perspectives, the ability to describe the past on its own terms, through the eyes and experiences of those who were there. By studying the literature, diaries, letters, debates, arts, and artifacts of past peoples, students should learn to avoid 'present-mindedness' by not judging the past solely in terms of the norms and values of today but taking into account the historical context in

which the events unfolded” (Crabtree, & Nash, 1994, p.23; Birinci *et al*, 2011, p.9).

“Beyond these important outcomes, students should also develop the skills needed to comprehend historical narratives that *explain* as well as recount the course of events and that *analyze* relationships among the various forces which were present at the time and influenced the ways events unfolded. These skills include: 1) identifying the central question the historical narrative seeks to answer; 2) defining the purpose, perspective, or point of view from which the narrative has been constructed; 3) reading the historical explanation or analysis with meaning” (Crabtree, & Nash, 1994, p.23; Birinci *et al*, 2011, pp.9-10).

The Birinci Commission also surprisingly upholds the *conditionality*, or *relativity*, of historical explanation—which is, again, *not* the dominant understanding within the conservative tradition from which all of these Commission members have come from:

“Students need to realize that historians may differ on the facts they incorporate in the development of their narratives and disagree as well on how those facts are to be interpreted. Thus, "history" is usually taken to mean what happened in the past; but written history is a dialogue among historians, not only about what happened but about why and how events unfolded. The study of history is not only remembering answers. It requires following and evaluating arguments and arriving at usable, even if tentative, conclusions based on the available evidence” (Crabtree, & Nash, 1994, p.26; Birinci *et al*, 2011, pp.10-11).

“Well-written historical narrative has the power to promote students' analysis of historical causality—of how change occurs in society, of how human intentions matter, and how ends are influenced by the means of carrying them out, in what has been called the tangle of process and outcomes. Few challenges can be more fascinating to students than unraveling the often dramatic complications of cause. And nothing is more dangerous than a simple, monocausal explanation of past experiences and present problems” (Crabtree, & Nash, 1994, p.26; Birinci *et al*, 2011, p.11).

“A related trap is that of thinking that events have unfolded inevitably--that the way things are is the way they had to be, and thus that individuals lack free will and the capacity for making choices. Unless students can conceive that history could have turned out differently, they may unconsciously accept the notion that the future is also inevitable or predetermined, and that human

agency and individual action count for nothing” (Crabtree, & Nash, 1994, p.26; Birinci *et al*, 2011, p.11).

The Birinci Commission members, for some unexplicable reason, repudiate their own understanding of historiography when they translate—again, *verbatim*—the passage below from the ‘Historical Thinking Standards’ developed by the National Center for History in the Schools at UCLA:

“Issue-centered analysis and decision-making activities place students squarely at the center of historical dilemmas and problems faced at critical moments in the past and the near-present. Entering into such moments, confronting the issues or problems of the time, analyzing the alternatives available to those on the scene, evaluating the consequences that might have followed those options for action that were not chosen, and comparing with the consequences of those that were adopted, are activities that foster students’ deep, personal involvement in these events” (Crabtree, & Nash, 1994, p.31; Birinci *et al*, 2011, pp.11-12).

“If well chosen, these activities also promote capacities vital to a democratic citizenry: the capacity to identify and define public policy issues and ethical dilemmas; analyze the range of interests and values held by the many persons caught up in the situation and affected by its outcome; locate and organize the data required to assess the consequences of alternative approaches to resolving the dilemma; assess the ethical implications as well as the comparative costs and benefits of each approach; and evaluate a particular course of action in light of all of the above and, in the case of historical issues-analysis, in light also of its long-term consequences revealed in the historical record” (Crabtree, & Nash, 1994, p.31; Birinci *et al*, 2011, p.12).

The recommendations in the passages the Birinci Commission have translated from the ‘Historical Thinking Standards’ developed by the National Center for History in the Schools at UCLA stands as a total repudiation of what the Ministry of National Education has prescribed for decades in secondary schools. Let alone the secondary schools, the following standards are still vehemently opposed by a majority of the members of the academic profession in the history departments of Turkish universities:

“Historical inquiry proceeds with the formulation of a problem or set of questions worth pursuing. In the most direct approach, students might be encouraged to analyze a document, record, or site itself. Who produced it,

when, how, and why? What is the evidence of its authenticity, authority, and credibility? What does it tell them of the point of view, background, and interests of its author or creator? What else must they discover in order to construct a useful story, explanation, or narrative of the event of which this document or artifact is a part? What interpretation can they derive from their data, and what argument can they support in the historical narrative they create from the data?” (Crabtree, & Nash, 1994, p.29; Birinci *et al*, 2011, pp.12-13).

“For these purposes, students' ongoing narrative study of history provides important support, revealing the larger context. But just as the ongoing narrative study, supported by but not limited to the textbook, provides a meaningful context in which students' inquiries can develop, it is these inquiries themselves that imbue the era with deeper meaning. Hence the importance of providing students documents or other records beyond materials included in the textbook, that will allow students to challenge textbook interpretations, to raise new questions about the event, to investigate the perspectives of those whose voices do not appear in the textbook accounts, or to plumb an issue that the textbook largely or in part bypassed” (Crabtree, & Nash, 1994, p.29; Birinci *et al*, 2011, p.13).

“Under these conditions, students will view their inquiries as creative contributions. They will better understand that written history is a human construction, that many judgments about the past are tentative and arguable, and that historians regard their work as critical inquiry, pursued as ongoing explorations and debates with other historians. On the other hand, careful research can resolve cloudy issues from the past and can overturn previous arguments and theses. By their active engagement in historical inquiry, students will learn for themselves why historians are continuously reinterpreting the past, and why new interpretations emerge not only from uncovering new evidence but from rethinking old evidence in the light of new ideas springing up in our own times” (Crabtree, & Nash, 1994, p.29; Birinci *et al*, 2011, p.13).

In one seemingly innocent passage, however, the Birinci Commission rejects both the word and the spirit of the ‘Historical Thinking Standards’ developed by the National Center for History in the Schools at UCLA. By wilfully *mistranslating* a crucial passage in ‘Historical Issues-Analysis and Decision-Making’ the Birinci Commission recommends that teachers *should* impose their own moral choices and preferences on students. The Commission takes an unusually strong moralistic position by making some *crucial* changes

in the ‘Historical Thinking Standards.’ The ‘Historical Thinking Standards.’ developed by the National Center for History in the Schools at UCLA explicitly states that,

“Teachers should not use historical events to hammer home their own favorite moral lesson. The point to be made is that teachers should not use critical events to hammer home a particular "moral lesson" or ethical teaching. Not only will many students reject that approach; it fails also to take into account the processes through which students acquire the complex skills of principled thinking and moral reasoning” (Crabtree, & Nash, 1994, p.31).

“When students are invited to judge morally the conduct of historical actors, they should be encouraged to clarify the values that inform the judgment. In some instances, this will be an easy task. Students judging the Holocaust or slavery as evils will probably be able to articulate the foundation for their judgment. In other cases, a student's effort to reach a moral judgment may produce a healthy student exercise in clarifying values, and may, in some instances, lead him or her to recognize the historically conditioned nature of a particular moral value he or she may be invoking” (Crabtree, & Nash, 1994, p.31).

Whereas, the same passage is *mistranslated* as follows in the Brinci Commission report:

“Important historical issues/events are often controversial and loaded with value judgments; therefore, these events create opportunities to comment on the influence of moral judgments which figure in the measures taken to suppress them. Teachers should use historical events to hammer home their own favorite moral lesson while lecturing on critical events. In addition, the moral/religious philosophy behind the good deeds—as performed by hospices, alms houses run by religious foundations—should be cited as good practices of the past” (Birinci *et al*, 2011, p.12).

“When students are invited to judge morally the conduct of historical actors, they should be encouraged to clarify the values that inform the judgment. ... [A] student’s effort to reach a moral judgment on a past event produces a healthy student exercise in clarifying values, and will, in some instances, lead him or her to recognize the historically conditioned nature of a particular moral value he or she may be invoking” (Birinci *et al*, 2011, p.12).

3. The Curriculum of ‘Contemporary Turkish and World History’

The ‘Contemporary Turkish and World History’ course proposed by the Birinci Commission contains five units. The first unit deals with world events in the early decades of the Twentieth Century. The second unit is about the Second World War. The third unit is intended to cover the Cold War Era, while the fourth unit is about the *Rapprochement/Détente* and the end of the Cold War. The fifth unit is reserved for globalization of the world.

According to the detailed list of topics to be covered in the First Unit, students are expected to be informed on the causes of the First World War, and the peace conferences that shaped the post-war world. The establishment of the Soviet Union is to be taught with special emphasis put on the Basmachi Movement—a national-liberation movement that sought to end Russian rule over the Central Asian territories then known as Turkestan (Birinci *et al*, 2011, p.17). The Middle East interests the Birinci Commission for inclusion into the curriculum so long as it deals with the British and French mandates. Meiji Restoration in Japan, and Japanese military might and her role in international relations is to be emphasized (Birinci *et al*, 2011, p.17). The Great Crash of 1929 and the Depression that followed is to be related to the economic and social developments in Europe between the two world wars. ‘The Rejuvenation of Germany’—the title the Commission prefers and uses instead of the commonly used epithet, ‘Nazi Germany’—is to be studied along with Italian and Spanish ‘regime changes’ during this period (Birinci *et al*, 2011, p.18). These developments are to be considered in conjunction with Turkish foreign policy preferences and the success with which Atatürk executed Turkish foreign policy until his death in 1938 (Birinci *et al*, 2011, p.18). The annexation of Hatay is part of the curriculum; but, of course, without relating it to the annexation of Alsace-Lorraine to Nazi Germany.

The Second Unit covers the Second World War. In this unit the usual topics such as the military campaigns, alliances, etc. are expected to be covered—but special attention is expected to be given to ‘Operation Barbarossa’—Nazi Germany's invasion of the Soviet Union in June of 1941—and the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in December of 1941 (Birinci *et al*, 2011, p.19). Along with such military operations as the total destruction of Hiroshima and Nagasaki with atomic bombs, which had widespread repercussions on the following events, the curriculum also specifically mentions

Einstein’s letter to Atatürk—which precedes the war—and the Churchill-İnönü meeting at Adana in December of 1943, as if they had the same degree of significance for the outcome of the Second World War (Birinci *et al*, 2011, p.20). Although this unit seems to deal exclusively with the war, students are required to focus on the establishment of the United Nations as well as the ‘The Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide’ adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on 9 December 9, 1948, and the ‘Universal Declaration of Human Rights’ adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on 10 December 10, 1948 at Palais de Chaillot, Paris (Birinci *et al*, 2011, p.20).

The Third Unit opens with the emergence of the United States and the Soviet Union as two superpowers. This unit deals with the Cold War. It starts out with Soviet Russia’s intentions on Eastern European countries, the Iron Curtain, the Berlin Blockade of 1948, and the establishment of the Warsaw Pact, and NATO (Birinci *et al*, 2011, p.21). Marshall Plan—officially, the European Recovery Program—launched in April of 1948, and the Schuman Declaration of May 9, 1950 are also listed, without emphasizing their importance for the story. Although not defined as the ‘Arab-Israeli Conflict,’ the Commission reserves a sub-section for this issue in the Third Unit (Birinci *et al*, 2011, p.22). Political developments in the Far East are to be covered—again, the Commission emphasizes that Maoist China and the Korean War be analyzed in terms of their impact on the balance of power between the USA and the Soviet Union. (Birinci *et al*, 2011, p.22) According to the Birinci Commission, the Korean War interests Turkey so far as it involves the participation of a small Turkish military force which fought side by side with the American troops against the Communists (Birinci *et al*, 2011, p.23). This unit also includes the anti-colonial struggles of the colonies in Africa and Asia. According to the Commission, anti-colonialism is to be studied not in its own right but with reference to the “impact of the Turkish example on colonial peoples of the world” (Birinci *et al*, 2011, p.22)—a highly debatable proposition. The Turkish multi-party politics after the Second World War is also included into the topics to be discussed within the framework of the Cold War (Birinci *et al*, 2011, p.23).

The Fourth Unit dates the beginning of the end of the Cold War to the meeting in Vienna between Kennedy and Khrushchev in June 1961 (Birinci *et al*, 2011, p.24). According to the Birinci Commission’s proposal, the final

outcome of the Cuban Missile Crisis of October 1962 should be evaluated in light of the *rapprochement* between the superpowers (Birinci *et al*, 2011, p.24)—a very awkward sounding formulation at best. Vietnam War and Kashmir Conflict are bundled together for no apparent reason in the formulations of the Birinci Commission (Birinci *et al*, 2011, p.24); and the Afghan Civil War between 1978 and 1992, and thereafter is also mentioned in the Fourth Unit (Birinci *et al*, 2011, p.24). The 1973 Oil Crisis and the role of OPEC is mentioned along with the Arab-Israeli Conflict (Birinci *et al*, 2011, p.25); but the Commission members have not tied them together in their curriculum proposal. As if added to the Fourth Unit as an afterthought, the Birinci Commission includes a discussion of the ‘appearance’ of labour unrest, student activism and feminist movements of the 1960s (Birinci *et al*, 2011, p.25). The rest of the Fourth Unit focuses on Turkish military and political history from the 1960s to the 1980s (Birinci *et al*, 2011, p.26). The *coups d’état* of 1960 and 1980 are labelled as ‘military interventions,’ and the Birinci Commission permits teachers to ‘touch upon’ these ‘developmentst’ as well (Birinci *et al*, 2011, p.26). Having remained silent on the Cyprus issue during the 1950s and 1960s, the Commission talks about the ‘Cyprus Peace Operation’ of 1974 (Birinci *et al*, 2011, p.25)—commonly known throughout the world as the ‘Turkish Invasion of Cyprus.’ The Turkish Cypriot leader Rauf Denктаş is brought to limelight in this sub-section (Birinci *et al*, 2011, p.25). The Commission includes ASALA and the Armenian terrorist activities against Turkish diplomats to its list of international problems Turkey faced during the 1970s and 1980s ((Birinci *et al*, 2011, p.25).

The Fifth Unit is, ostensibly, on the world we live in today, at the ‘Age of Globalization.’ This unit starts with Gorbachev’s new policy of *perestroika* and *glasnost*, and the dissolution of the Soviet Union (Birinci *et al*, 2011, p.27). The ‘liberation’ of Turkic lands from the Soviet yoke and formation of independent Turkic states in Central Asia take precedence over the regime changes in Eastern Europe, and the unification of Germany (Birinci *et al*, 2011, p.27)—the destruction of the Berlin Wall, perhaps symbolizing best the opening up of a new era in the contemporary world, is *not* even mentioned once. European Union is tied to the political changes in Eastern Europe and to the political entity, *i.e.*, unified Germany. Although Turkey is now officially a candidate to become a member of the European Union, interestingly enough, the Birinci Commission chooses to marginalize the historical record of Turkey’s relations

with the European Union and its predecessor—an economic and diplomatic history which dates back to the early 1960s. Instead, the Commission puts primary emphasis on the establishment and functioning of TİKA—acronym for ‘Turkish International Cooperation and Development Agency’—established by the state in 1992 with a view to develop ties and provide technical assistance to Turkic states of the former Soviet Union (Birinci *et al*, 2011, p.27). Turkish involvement with the European Union seems to be of secondary importance in the eyes of the Birinci Commission. The main idea behind the Fifth Unit seems to be arranging the contemporary world affairs with a view to justify the new expansionist policy of Turkey—‘Neo-Ottomanism’—rather than providing high school students with a better understanding of the world in the post-modern ‘unipolar’ world. The dissolution of former Yugoslavia and the following Bosnian War in the 1990s is used by the Commission as a vehicle to point out the religious antagonism and hatred between Islam and Christianity (Birinci *et al*, 2011, p.28). The Palestinian Question, too, is to be treated here in similar fashion (Birinci *et al*, 2011, p.28). The chaos in Afghanistan and the Iraqi War sums up the confrontation between Islam and the world (Birinci *et al*, 2011, p.28). The general tone of the Fifth Unit constitutes almost a defense and justification of AKP government’s foreign policy objectives at present. Karadeniz Ekonomik İşbirliği Teşkilatı—Black Sea Economic Cooperation Organization—is another topic to be included in the new curriculum (Birinci *et al*, 2011, p.29). The Commission demands that fundamentals of Turkey’s new foreign policy preferences in this unipolar world be addressed, discussed, and assessed. Even reference to Kızılay—the Turkish equivalent of the Red Cross—and its role in the world is not omitted in the curriculum (Birinci *et al*, 2011, p.29).

4. The Fundamental Flaw of the Birinci Commission’s Curriculum

Despite what the Birinci Commission defends at the introductory discussion of the report concerning the ‘Historical Thinking Standards’ and how beneficial those standards would be for raising a new generation of students equipped with a better understanding of the world we live in. One of the stated aims of the new course is to instill students in the highly regarded ideals of democracy, human rights, and tolerance, in order to achieve a peaceful world where differences among nations should not lead to animosity (Birinci *et al*,

2011, p.5). Yet, the whole arrangement within the five units of the course almost betrays this ideal; instead, a heavy dose of instilling ‘national pride,’ ‘national unity,’ ‘national identity’ and ‘national culture’—which are cited as the other stated aims of the course—takes precedence over a ‘humanistic’ approach and an ‘intellectual’ curiosity towards the world around us (Birinci *et al.*, 2011, p.5).

An important shortcoming of the curriculum as a whole is the lack of unity in the general framework of the course. There seems to be no unifying principle, or point of view, that relates the units together. Three distinct eras of the Twentieth Century history seems to have three different ‘operating philosophies’ behind them. The period from the First World War to the end of the Second World War closely follows the logic of the already existing ‘Principles of the Turkish Revolution’ course—with a high dose of nationalist discourse in telling the story of the establishment of the Turkish Republic. The period from the end of the Second World War to the collapse of the Soviet Union has been designed and framed according to the now outdated worldview—that is, Cold War ideology. The final era from 1990s onwards is organized around the present government’s official expansionist Neo-Ottoman ideology which prescribes an important role for Turkish involvement in the Balkans, the Middle East and Central Asia. Since these three different eras have so different justificatory principles, which are totally unconnected to each other, the internal coherence of the whole story of the Twentieth Century lies in shambles. Thus, the curriculum lacks the fundamental coherence and harmony with which each distinct era relates to one another.

5. The Textbook for the ‘Contemporary Turkish and World History’ Course Currently Used in Classrooms

After ratifying the Birinci Commission’s report for the establishment of a ‘Contemporary Turkish and World History’ course to be taught in the 12th grade of the high schools the Ministry of National Education made a public announcement, calling for prospective textbooks written according to the guidelines as depicted in the Commission’s report. The Ministry has so far accepted *only* one textbook for teaching this course in high schools. The book in question—*Çağdaş Türk ve Dünya Tarihi*—is written collectively by six individuals under the general supervision of Osman Köse, an academic in Ottoman history of the Eighteenth Century (Okur, Sever, Aydın, Kızıltan,

Aksoy, & Öztürk, 2010). Since Köse's main field of study lies in the diplomatic relations between the Ottoman Empire and Russia in late Eighteenth Century, his role in judging the correctness and/or the relevance of the chosen reading materials in the textbook is most likely to have been minimal; and this lack of adequate supervision manifests itself in the carelessness of the preparation of the whole text.

There are factual errors in the text and accompanying maps. The arrangement of the reading and visual materials seems to be haphazard and does not follow a clear cut logic. The use of Turkish language is totally careless, and at times it is outright wrong. One telling misuse of the Turkish language appears in a passage where the authors talk about occupied France during the Second World War. The textbook prints a declaration Pierre Laval made in May of 1942 with the heading 'State Cooperation.' Nowhere in the textbook the students get a chance who Pierre Laval is. There is no explanation as to what Vichy government is, and, of course, no hint that he was one of the most important politicians of the Collaboration. His role in assisting the Nazi occupation of France, and his trial for treason after the War and his subsequent execution is *never* mentioned. This creates a highly suspicious situation where the use of the word 'cooperation' was misused when the aim was to tell about the French Collaboration. One wonders whether it is just an unforgivable misuse of the Turkish language or whether it reflects the shared worldview of the authors of the text? (Okur, Sever, Aydın, Kızıltan, Aksoy, & Öztürk, 2010, p.54).

When the authors refer to a reading material which claims that communism and fascism were "children of the the misery and debacle after the First World War," and that they were "born out of unemployment and famine, and that they represent an uprising against these miserable conditions," their intentions must come under closer scrutiny (Okur, Sever, Aydın, Kızıltan, Aksoy, & Öztürk, 2010, p.26). In Spain, the Civil War is explained away as "the outcome of the disorder caused by groups opposed to one another" (Okur, Sever, Aydın, Kızıltan, Aksoy, & Öztürk, 2010, p.29). A reading piece which is inserted as a way of explaining the Nazi rule in Germany tells the students how the regime worked for the benefit of the underprivileged social groups in Germany and how the Nazi public policy benefitted the poor. Public housing and production of cheap cars—Volkswagen—for the *volk* are given as examples of how the Nazis made themselves popular (Okur, Sever, Aydın, Kızıltan, Aksoy, & Öztürk, 2010, p.28). Hitler's belligerent policy towards the

neighbouring countries of Germany are told as if the Nazis' aim was to 'protect' the rights of their German brothers living under foreign yoke (Okur, Sever, Aydın, Kızıltan, Aksoy, & Öztürk, 2010, pp.46-47).

The carelessness, or insensitivity, to the language used while writing about world affairs that have affected the lives of millions of people can also be detected in the unit on the Cold War Era. The language and tone of this unit reeks of unadulterated Cold War ideology. This unit starts with the 'formation of the East Bloc' and reaction of the West follows suit (Okur, Sever, Aydın, Kızıltan, Aksoy, & Öztürk, 2010, pp.79-89). The whole unit is peppered with standard arguments of Cold War ideology. The Fourth Unit that follows the unit on the Cold War starts off with *Détente* but quickly the subject matter reverts to the threat that the Communist Bloc poses for the West, or the United States. A Map on p.125 of the text shows how Cuba threatens a large portion of the United States in terms of the range of nuclear weapons to be deployed there. Here, the relevance of the Cuban Missile Crisis to Turkey could have been mentioned; but the authors seem to be totally unaware of the real threat the Crisis posed for Turkey at the time.

The textbook tells a very outdated history of the Vietnam War. According to the textbook South Vietnam had no choice but to ask for American military help when it was threatened by North Vietnam in 1957 (Okur, Sever, Aydın, Kızıltan, Aksoy, & Öztürk, 2010, p.127). The textbook also mentions the Gulf of Tonkin incident of August 1964. The outcome of these two incidents was the passage by the US Congress of the 'Gulf of Tonkin Resolution,' which granted President Johnson the authority to assist any Southeast Asian country whose government was considered to be jeopardized by 'communist aggression.' The resolution served as Johnson's legal justification for deploying American military forces and the commencement of open warfare against North Vietnam. Whereas here, in the textbook, the controversial nature of the incident—there is almost inrefutable evidence that the alleged second confrontation never took place—is never mentioned; and American government's allegations are taken at face value in explaining the escalation of the war in Southeast Asia (Okur, Sever, Aydın, Kızıltan, Aksoy, & Öztürk, 2010, p.127).

The brief explanation about the Iranian Revolution of 1979 obscures the facts about this event. The textbook *never* mentions the nature of the political rule of Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi. The events in the 1950s are not mentioned *at all*. Not a single line can be found on the overthrow of the

democratically elected government of Iranian Prime Minister Mohammad Mosaddegh on August 19, 1953, orchestrated by the intelligence agencies of the United Kingdom and the United States—which resulted in the reinstatement of Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi’s absolutist rule. Having failed to mention the collaboration of the politically repressive regime with foreign oil companies’ interests, the textbook attributes the overthrow of Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi solely to increasing dissatisfaction among the people with increasing influence and infiltration of Western culture in Iran, to increasing alienation of religious groups and their exclusion from the political system, and to rising discontent of the underprivileged poor in society (Okur, Sever, Aydın, Kızıltan, Aksoy, & Öztürk, 2010, p.142). Here, the intention seems to be more on the justification of the Iranian Revolution on its own terms than on the causes and consequences of this important event in contemporary Middle Eastern history.

It goes without saying that the authors of the textbook follow the Turkish official line in portraying and interpreting recent history. The ‘pro-Greek attitude’ of the Johnson Administration is cited as one of the main causes of distrust between Turkey and the United States (Okur, Sever, Aydın, Kızıltan, Aksoy, & Öztürk, 2010, p.151). The whole Cyprus Question is stripped of its past history—except for highly charged negative references to various Greek governments’ actions with regards to this important question—and, therefore, the students are left with no clue as to what went on in the island either before the 1960s, or after the 1970s. Turkish military campaign of 1974 is presented in its official title—‘Cyprus Peace Operation’ (Okur, Sever, Aydın, Kızıltan, Aksoy, & Öztürk, 2010, pp.151-155).

There is a rather curious reference to the ‘tragedy of 1915’ in a section of the textbook where political events of 1970s and 1980s are discussed. The authors mention of an ‘Armenian Question,’ but what constitutes the fundamentals of this question is *never* explained to the students. Students are told that there are ‘some allegations against Turkey’ brought forth by the Armenian terrorist organization ASALA, but students are left in total darkness as to what these allegations consist of. Then, the authors write that Turkish governments have presented the Turkish ‘thesis’ to the world at large in response to the allegations of the Armenian terrorists. Again, there is no mention, even in a single sentence, what the Turkish ‘thesis’ is all about (Okur, Sever, Aydın, Kızıltan, Aksoy, & Öztürk, 2010, p.159).

6. Conclusion

The necessity of totally overhauling and re-writing history textbooks to be used in Turkish classrooms has been expressed many times in the distant and recent past (Özbaran, 1995; Özbaran, 1998; Saydam, 2009). The preliminary discussions had started in the 1970s and a ‘congress’ convened on this specific issue had produced a published book identifying problems and listing recommendations. The *coup d’état* of 1980 halted public discussion on this issue for almost two decades. With the establishment of the Türkiye Ekonomik ve Toplumsal Tarih Vakfı the whole discussion on Turkish historiography gained a new momentum. From late 1990s onwards this foundation has been on the forefront of opening up the debate on re-writing Turkish history textbooks according to modern and up-to-date standards (Silier, 2003). Various meetings, involving history teachers and the Ministry bureaucrats, were held during which both general problems of writing history and specific problems concerning the history curricula at secondary schools were addressed (Türkiye Ekonomik ve Toplumsal Tarih Vakfı and Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, 2000).

The outcome of these public debates organized by Tarih Vakfı were on the whole positive. Building a public awareness of the problem prompted several organisations to get themselves interested in the problem. The most influential business association of Turkey, TÜSİAD—Turkish Industrialists' and Businessmen's Association—was one of these organisations that got interested in the issue. Their interest in this issue resulted in the physical production of two exemplary history textbooks dealing with the Nineteenth and Twentieth Century Turkish and world history (Kuyaş *et al*, 2002; Kuyaş *et al*, 2006). They also produced a geography textbook for the use of high school students. The two history textbooks produced by TÜSİAD were written under the general supervision of Ahmet Kuyaş, a highly respected academic teaching Twentieth Century history in one of the prestigious universities—Galatasaray Üniversitesi—in Turkey and a member of Tarih Vakfı. His team, consisting of leading academics on sociology, political science, economics, and history, has adapted Hachette’s history textbooks for French high school students to the Turkish audience by writing original chapters on Turkish history, and reworking chapters on world and European history. These two history textbooks have been highly regarded in educational circles where quality education counts.

Another successful attempt at producing a usable history textbook on Twentieth Century Turkish and world history was made by Tarih Vakfı. Here

the team was led by Gökçen and Faruk Alpkaya—academics specializing in late Ottoman social history and international law, and contemporary Turkish history, respectively—who are both faculty members of Ankara Üniversitesi. This textbook, in a sense, corresponds more closely to the now established course on ‘Contemporary Turkish and World History’ curriculum than either of the books produced by TÜSİAD (Alpkaya & Alpkaya, 2005). An accompanying guidebook for teachers of this course has also been prepared and published by Tarih Vakfı (Kahyaoğlu, Özkaya, Alan, & Üstüner, 2007). This guidebook prepared under the guidance of Dilara Kahyaoğlu, who is a seasoned high school teacher with twenty-five years of teaching experience in history, is the *only* guidebook of its kind in Turkey now. It is a great help for history teachers who are interested in getting themselves informed about how to teach history in general, and Twentieth Century history in particular.

Although TÜSİAD and Tarih Vakfı spent considerable effort in producing these textbooks and fully demonstrated that quality textbooks could be at the reach of Turkish students, all efforts to have these textbooks approved by the Ministry of National Education failed. Representations to the Ministry produced no concrete results, and today these ‘textbooks’ privately circulate among the interested parties, but publicly unavailable for sale to high school students. For the interested parties in this issue, the whole question of total disregard for these exemplary textbooks in official circles remains a mystery. This is especially worrying when the *only* textbook approved by the Ministry and used in the classrooms falls so far short of minimum standards.

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