

## ***SEEING GREECE THROUGH THE TURKISH SCHOOL TEXTBOOKS***

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Despite the shadow of historical rivalry and significant political disagreements, Greece and Turkey enjoy a relatively neighborly relationship. The personal relations linked to tourism, culture, music and food constitute the backbone of this fragile stability. However, these alone are insufficient to form a complete picture of one state and its citizens in the eyes of another. Thus, alongside the platform of civic dialogue, states' education systems and their auto-biographies - i.e. the school textbooks – act as complimentary tool in shaping a country's reputation.

Indeed, due to the textbooks' narrative of the Turkish Independence War that was predominantly fought between the Turkish and the Greek armies, Greece's and the Greeks' portrayal in Turkey have never been positive. This picture began to be worsen in the aftermath of the September 12, 1980 coup d'etat when the Turkish Armed Forces (Türk Silahlı Kuvvetleri –

TSK) re-wrote the school textbooks based on a "threat-based education perception". Accordingly, Turkey was surrounded by series of historical internal and external enemies while the TSK functioned as the watchdog of the state. In other words, by creating an education system centered on the idea of "Turkey under attack", the TSK has legitimized its role as a decision maker in the eyes of Turkish citizens.

By portraying foreign countries as Ankara's adversaries, the TSK sought to rally its people around the flag. This policy became evident when Greece began to appear in the National Security Studies textbooks' "External Threats" section alongside with Turkey's other neighbors. In this context, post-1998 textbooks portrayed Greece as the primary threat against Turkey. The rapprochement that took place in 1999 following consecutive earthquakes both in Turkey and Greece did nothing to change this attitude towards Athens. The textbooks accused the Hellenic republic of an aspiration to establish greater Greece by conquering western Turkey – the "*Megali Idea*" (Μεγάλη Ιδέα - The Great Ideal) – and a policy of assimilation that was carried out against Turks living in western Thrace. In addition, as Greece was accused of attempting to turn the Aegean Sea into a "Greek lake," as the 1989 textbook put it,<sup>1</sup> disagreements over the Aegean isles and the Aegean continental shelf were identified as crucial issues.<sup>2</sup> Cyprus was another issue of contention. The Republic of Cyprus, not recognized by Turkey as a sovereign state, was lumped with Greece, where unification attempts by Greek Cypriots with the mainland were covered under the term "Enosis" (Ενωσις - Union in Greek). In this respect, accession attempts

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<sup>1</sup>Milli Güvenlik Bilgisi 2-3 (Istanbul, Milli Eğitim Basımevi, 1989) p. 205

<sup>2</sup>Milli Güvenlik Bilgisi (Istanbul, Milli Eğitim Basımevi, 1999) pp.91-93

by Republic of Cyprus to the European Union was portrayed as the continuation of “Enosis,”<sup>3</sup> as an anti-EU indicator.

However, this negative portrait began to change under the Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi – AKP). In 2005 AKP-affiliated Minister of National Education Hüseyin Çelik declared the end of the TSK's education system centered on a perceived threat.<sup>4</sup>

Indeed under AKP, Greece and other neighboring states were no longer listed as external threats. Thus, the National Security Studies school textbooks gradually began to lose their importance, until they were finally removed from the curriculum in 2012 due to the AKP's demilitarization efforts. However, the content of the old-school threat-based education was not completely obliterated from the school textbooks. The Contemporary Turkish and World History (2008) and the International Relations courses (2009) re-filled this gap. Both textbooks did not classify Greece as a national threat and narrowed the *Megali Idea* significantly. Despite this, Cyprus Question; "the Enosis", the sovereignty transfer of Aegean islands from Italy to Greece, their armament by Athens, territorial waters, the Aegean continental shelf problem and the disagreement on the flight information region (FIR) line were highlighted as "issues of Turkish foreign policy", and were significantly expanded upon.<sup>5</sup> While the Greek theses were briefly addressed, unsurprisingly, textbooks adopted a pro-Turkish discourse especially, when it came to the Cyprus Question. In this regard, the 1974 campaign was named as "The Peace Operation", while informational boxes summarizing the Enosis, the Akritas Plan, letter of Turkish Cypriot

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<sup>3</sup>Milli Güvenlik Bilgisi (Istanbul, Milli Eğitim Basımevi, 1999) p.93

<sup>4</sup>Dursun Dilek and Gülçin Yapıcı Dilek, "Does History teaching contribute to showing respect and sympathy for others? in Irene Nakou and Isabel Barca (Eds.) *Contemporary Public Debates Over History Education* (Charlotte, Information Age Publishing, 2010) p.211

<sup>5</sup>Yasemin Okur and et.al, *Çağdaş Türk ve Dünya Tarihi 12*, (Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı, 2016) pp.149-159

leader Rauf Denktaş to the Turkey's İsmet İnönü, clippings of Turkish newspapers, and memoirs of a 1974 war veteran were all provided to students to justify the Turkish discourse.<sup>6</sup> However, it is also vital to note that simultaneously the textbooks ignored Turkey's violations of twenty-three United Nations resolutions on Cyprus since 1974.<sup>7</sup> In the same spirit, the anti-Greek Istanbul Pogroms of September 6-7, 1955 as well as the emergence of the 1974 war displaced Greek refugees' question and their property rights, were expunged. This whole discourse inevitably reflected Turkey's non-recognition of the Republic of Cyprus. The map of the divided island, on it the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (Kuzey Kıbrıs Türk Cumhuriyeti - KKTC) and the "South Cypriot Greek Administration" (Güney Kıbrıs Rum Yönetimi), reflects Ankara's official policy whilst denying historical reality to students.<sup>8</sup>

This denial is not only limited to political issues such as Cyprus. The Turkish school textbooks also reject any connection with what the Greeks call the Pontiac Genocide. In this regard, the textbooks adopt a similar line to its official thesis on the 1915 Armenian Genocide. Accordingly, the Orthodox Greeks formed gangs and attempted to snatch territory from the Turkish homeland. The textbooks declare Greek allegations as baseless, and seek to divert the attention of the students to the massacres that the Greeks carried out against the Turks.<sup>9</sup>

Besides these known historical disagreements, the Hagias Sophia remains today another crucial fault line between the two states, as conservative Turkish nationalists wish to turn the site from a museum into a mosque. The Turkish Directorate of Religious Affairs (Diyamet İşleri

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<sup>6</sup>Erdoğan Sağdıç and Zafer Araz, *Uluslararası İlişkiler* (Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı, 2014) pp. 139-144 and Yasemin Okur and et.al, *Çağdaş Türk ve Dünya Tarihi 12*, (Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı, 2016) pp.149-159

<sup>7</sup>Maggie Farley, "UN Resolutions Frequently Violated," *Los Angeles Times*, October 17, 2013. [http://articles.latimes.com/2002/oct/17/world/fg-resolution17\\_](http://articles.latimes.com/2002/oct/17/world/fg-resolution17_)[Accessed: August 13, 2017]

<sup>8</sup>Erol Ünal Karabıyık, *Sosyal Bilgiler - 5. Sınıf Ders Kitabı* (Evren, 2015) p. 122

<sup>9</sup>Komisyon, *Türkiye Cumhuriyeti İnkılâp Tarihi ve Atatürkçülük* (Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı, 2014), p. 30.

Başkanlığı – "Diyanet") has already turned the two "Hagia Sophias" into mosques in 2013, one in the city of İznik and the other in Trabzon.<sup>10</sup> Since then the Diyanet gradually increased its activities in the site by broadcasting prayers during the Ramadan and the Laylat Al-Qadr.<sup>11</sup>

In such a context, the portrayal of Hagia Sophia in Turkish school textbooks is worth analyzing. 2014 Turkish Language textbooks that covered the story of Hagia Sophia are a good example. While the site's Byzantine basilica past was very briefly covered, the textbook highlighted the linkage between the site and Prophet Muhammad and sought to underline Hagia Sophia's connection with Islam:

*. . . the priests collected saliva from the mouth of the Prophet, some Zamzam water and some of the clean soil from Mecca and came to Istanbul. They started the repairs on the collapsed section of the Hagia Sophia. The location where it was repaired with the saliva of the Prophet is located in the kiblah side of the dome. . . After the conquest, Fatih (Mehmet II) stated 'This dome was kept alive with the water from the Prophet's mouth.'<sup>12</sup>*

Having seen the evolution of Greece's and the Greeks' portrayal in the Turkish school textbooks, it is possible to state that the rhetoric towards the Hellenic Republic became more peaceful under the AKP. However, this improvement was shadowed when the sections on the core disagreements were broadened while significant historical traumas of the Greek side were expunged. Moreover, the Islamization of the historical narrative that can be seen in the case of

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<sup>10</sup>"Ayasofya cami mi oluyor?", T24, November 15, 2013, <http://t24.com.tr/haber/ayasofya-cami-mi-oluyor,244082> [Accessed: August 13, 2017]

<sup>11</sup>Diyanet TV Kadir gecesinde Ayasofya'da, Yeni Şafak, July 1, 2016, <http://www.yenisafak.com/diyanet-tv-kadir-gecesinde-ayasofyada-h-2489506> [Accessed: August 13, 2017]

<sup>12</sup>Fatma Karabıyık Ün, *Türkçe - 8. Sınıf Ders Kitabı* (Evren, 2014) pp. 82–84.

Hagia Sophia may pave the way for future tensions between the two since both sides claim the historical site as a landmark of their national religious heritage.

Inevitably, the curriculum will likely lead students towards a more prejudiced world-view towards Greece and the Greeks. According to February 2017 research that was conducted by Istanbul's Kadir Has University, 89% of today's Turkish elite do support the rapprochement with Greece, while only 28% of them trust their Greek counterparts.<sup>13</sup> Given this fact, tomorrow's elite - that will be the product of today's mass education system - may turn out to be less collaborative when it comes to strengthening relations between the two countries.

*\*\*\*Institute for Monitoring Peace and Cultural Tolerance in School Education (IMPACT-SE) contributed to this article by providing some of the school textbooks that were used as a source in this article\*\*\**

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<sup>13</sup>"Türk Elitlerinin Türkiye Dış Politikası ve Türk-Yunan İlişkileri Algıları Araştırması Sonuçları Açıklandı", Kadir Has Üniversitesi, February 10, 2017, <http://www.khas.edu.tr/abaum/218> [Accessed: August 13, 2017]