



Compatibility of Armenian Church History Textbooks with State Educational Standards

Authors: Hovhannes Hovhannisyan, Armine Davtyan

Main problems identified through qualitative and quantitative research methods are: Practice of religious rites or some elements of religious rites during Armenian Church History classes, incitement of hate speech and preaching against religious organizations other than Armenian Apostolic Church, (henceforth Church) indoctrination of Church's belief system in the educational content and absence of alternative teaching mechanism for students of other beliefs, as well as strong linkage and association of Church belonging and national identity.

The Armenian Apostolic Church has an absolute privilege and domination in **teacher trainings and development of educational materials** for the Armenian Church History course thought throughout the secondary school. This becomes possible through anti constitutional interference into what was prescribed to be Ministry of Education's primary and sole responsibility. Particularly one direct function of Ministry's National Institute of Education is to organize trainings for teachers while teachers' trainings for the subject History of Armenian Church are conducted by the 'Center for Christian Education and Propaganda' that belongs and directly responds to the Church.

Attendance of Armenian Church History classes is mandatory which contradicts to the Article 2 of the Protocol 1 of the European Convention of Human Rights given that the study has revealed the incompatibility between the content and the name of the subject and explicit elements of religious preaching and practice of religious rites. According to the Convention, the States, in order to prevent the conflict between the religious and philosophical views of pupils and parents are obliged to establish alternative mechanisms in their educational system.

Content analysis of Church History textbooks was conducted by a team of experts against several pedagogical criteria. See Annex below for the brief summary of several selected criteria.

Given study reveals that methods of teaching religion are aimed at indoctrinating the belief system of the Armenian Apostolic Church which is prohibited under Article 2 of the Protocol 1 of the European Convention of Human Rights. In the course of the teaching process the creed of Armenian Apostolic Church is taught very actively which is a widespread phenomenon supported by authorities. This approach violates the secular nature of the education defined under part 3 of the article 4 of the Law on Education of the RA. Moreover the Armenian Apostolic Church has absolute privilege in teaching and developing educational content and organizing teacher trainings at secondary educational institutions which is in a direct contradiction with the Constitution of the Republic of Armenia.

Survey measuring Church History textbooks' impact on the level of religious tolerance of students was conducted in six schools of Armenia, total of 254 students participated (2 schools in Yerevan, 4 in marzes). Sample was driven via random multistage cluster sampling. When asked to name a religious organization 97% of respondents mention 'Jehovah's witnesses', with less than 1% of respondents mentioning Armenian Apostolic Church as a religious organization. Predominant majority of students (98%) think that religious minorities are a serious threat for solidarity of Armenian nation, with 69% calling to violent actions to 'fight' those. 98% of respondents didn't allow the possibility that there can be a Muslim Armenian. 42.8% report that they will terminate any connections with a friend who turns out to belong to a religious minority.

Annex: Compatibility of Church History textbooks with Selected Pedagogical Criteria

Relevance: Textbooks are qualified as nation centered rather than student centered, no references to the value of individual as such are found, inconsistency with Toledo principles, contain biased questions: i.e. what threat did Protestantism contain for Armenian Nation and Armenian Church? Misinterpretations of such philosophical concepts as cosmopolitanism, eudemonism are widespread throughout the textbooks.

Clarity: No thematic coherence amongst textbooks of different grades is observable, language varies. Many statements are presented as dogmas, for example, no alternative narratives of 'creation' from other religions are presented, not to mention that nothing on this theme is found in the subject standard for teachers thus giving wide opportunities for teacher's 'creativity' on this immensely comprehensive theme.

Flexibility: Textbooks are meant for students from other religions.

Compatibility with OSCE Toledo Principles on Teaching Religions and Beliefs: Absolute domination of one religious direction is by itself in contradiction with Toledo principles. Via vast majority of the content textbooks do not provide sufficient information on the values systems of other religions, practice of religious rites is included in the educational curricula.

The Open Society Foundations work to build vibrant and tolerant societies whose governments are accountable and open to the participation of all people.

Starting from February 2011, Open Society Foundations – Armenia’s policy unit has launched a Policy Fellowship Initiative. In the framework of this program policy briefs that focus on the most critical issues in the country and provide timely contributions to the current policy dilemmas are produced and widely disseminated.

For more information visit www.osf.am

This product was made possible through the full support of Open Society Foundations – Armenia’s Policy Fellowship Program Initiative. Ideas, thoughts, and arguments presented in the paper are the sole expression of the authors’ views and do not reflect those of Open Society Assistance Foundations – Armenia.

Contact for this policy Brief is:

Hovhannes Hovhannisyan PhD in History hovhannes.hovhannisyan@gmail.com