

## CHANGES IN THE TURKISH HISTORY CURRICULUM AND THE PLACE OF EUROPEAN HISTORY

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### **ABSTRACT:**

*This paper examines four versions of the Turkish secondary school history curriculum and several history textbooks used in different times to find out the changes occurred in the selection of European content in each version and the place allocated to European history since 1930s. The movements in history and history teaching in Turkey in the given period and their impact on the content of history curricula and textbooks are reviewed. It also discusses the emphasis given to Europe and European history in the curriculum that has changed within the time along with the changes in the socio-cultural and political ambiances of the country.*

**Key Words:** history curriculum, history textbooks, European history

## TÜRK TARİH ÖĞRETİMİ PROGRAMLARINDA DEĞİŞİKLİKLER VE AVRUPA TARİHİNİN YERİ

### **ÖZET:**

*Bu bildiri ülkemizdeki tarih öğretimi anlayışının 1930'lardan günümüze kadar gösterdiği değişimleri ele almaktadır. Tarih yazımı ve anlayışında çeşitli dönemlerde görülen genel değişmelerin tarih öğretimimizi nasıl ve ne yönde etkilediği müfredat programları ve dolayısıyla ders kitaplarında farklı dönemlerde uygulamaya konulan değişikliklerle karşılaştığımızı göstermektedir. Bu çalışmada, cumhuriyet döneminin başından günümüze kadar çeşitli dönemlerde yürürlüğe konulan müfredat programları ve yine bu dönemlerde okutulan çeşitli ders kitapları incelenerek söz konusu değişmelerin Avrupa tarihine nasıl yaklaşıldığını ve bu alana programlarda ve ders kitaplarında ayrılan yer ve saatlerin artırılıp kısıtlanması üzerindeki etkileri ülkemizin geçirmiş olduğu sosyo-kültürel ve siyasal değişimler de dikkate alınarak değerlendirilmiştir.*

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Tarih müfredat programları, tarih ders kitapları, Avrupa tarihi

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In many educational systems, history is regarded as one of the important school subjects. Its importance is generally recognised and attached to functions of history that are determined through the aims and objectives of the course (Slater, 1995). However, the functions attributed to history teaching by different groups of academics, educators and educational policy makers show distinctive characteristics and consequently cause disagreement (Slater, 1995).

According to Slater (1995) the functions of history teaching have been determined in two ways. They are 'intrinsic' purposes and 'extrinsic' purposes. Intrinsic purposes of history teaching are the ones that arise from the nature of the discipline of history and aim to develop learners' abilities and capacities of historical and critical thinking skills that are related to some specific educational objectives (Husbands *et al*, 2003). Whilst, extrinsic purposes are concerned with broader educational objectives and aim to socialise pupils in order to maintain the status-quo in socio-political order (Apple, 1979) or to change the society in a specific way (Lee, 1992; Slater, 1995; Phillips, 1998).

In Turkey, the functions and purposes of history as a school subject have been debated and mostly determined on the basis

of above extrinsic purposes since the First History Congress in 1931. The content of the secondary school history curriculum has been selected according to the criteria set by the extrinsic purposes, such as developing a national sentiment and building a national identity (İnal, 1996; Behar, 1996, Dinç, 2004). The selection of historical content therefore, has shown distinctive characteristics, which has caused various debates and controversies. Particularly, the selection of European history for the secondary schools shows different features in various versions of history curriculum that have been introduced since 1930s. This study examines four versions of Turkish secondary school history curriculum to find out how and by which factors the selection of European history has been changed within the time.

## 2. EDUCATION AND HISTORY TEACHING

The Turkish Education System itself was built on the principles that could serve to form a national identity, national awareness; and promote citizenship and patriotism (Behar, 1996; Dilek, 1998; Copeaux, 1998; Kaplan, 1999). Based on these general purposes, the Turkish school curriculum was constructed on a mixture of theories developed in the Western countries. According to Dilek (1999: 24) the Turkish curriculum was firstly formed

from a mixture of French encyclopaedism, Russian polytechnicalism, American pragmatism and the Turkish nationalism.

However, it must be considered that the Turkish curriculum blended all those perspectives in the pot of nationalism (Kaplan, 1999), which was first formulated as a systematic theory by Ziya Gökalp in the early twentieth century (Turkish Review, 1989). Starting from the theory of classical nationalism, Gökalp's theory was made to unify the Turkish public and the new nation-state and to create a new vibrant society, which would be based on the dynamics of the Turkish nation, the religion of Islam and the European civilisation (Turkish Review, 1989).

This perspective had a big impact on the formation of the first Turkish school curriculum in 1924. Nevertheless, the components of Gökalp's theory were slightly changed in later periods as it started to stress secularism instead of the unifying role of the Islamic religion (Dilek, 1999). Turkish nationalism has especially had impact on the formation of history curriculum. However, the perspective of nationalism concerning the history and history teaching in Turkey and the sense of national identity which is the central objective of the education system and consequently history teaching have shown some distinctive features within the process

of time (Yuvalı, 1987; Millas, 1997; Dilek, 1998; Dinç, 2004).

Positioning national awareness and national identity as the main purposes of history teaching indicated the crucial function of the selection of historical content for the curriculum and textbooks (Copeaux, 1998; Özbaran, 1998; Tunçay, 1998). Predictably, national history attracts the most attention in this context, whilst the selection and presentation of non-national content demonstrates how other cultures and nations are viewed and how non-national history is utilised in the presentation and explanation of Turkish history. The investigation of several versions of the history curriculum and textbooks published since 1930s indicates that European history constitutes the largest portion of non-national history in the Turkish school curriculum (Kabapınar, 1992; İnal, 1996; Behar, 1996). However, the quantity of European history and the criteria for its selection have been changed several times along with the changes on overall history curriculum.

### **3. DATA AND METHOD**

In this study, official publications of Turkish secondary school curriculum have been introduced since 1934 and eight history textbooks were analysed in a descriptive way. The criteria used to analyse different versions of the curriculum are: the status of history in the whole school

curriculum, weekly hours allocated to history teaching, the main focus of each version of the curriculum, aims and objectives of history teaching, the portion of European history (and the world history in some cases) and the periods where the European history were selected. Only the last two criteria were utilised in the examination of history textbooks.

#### **4. CHANGING VIEWS OF HISTORY TEACHING AND THE PLACE OF EUROPEAN HISTORY**

History has been one of the compulsory subjects in Turkish primary and secondary school curriculum since the foundation of the republic in 1923. Although its name and status has changed several times in the primary level, history courses in secondary schools have maintained their status throughout the republican period. From time to time, some minor changes have been made on the weekly hours allocated to history (MONE, 1934; 1938).

Starting from the initial versions, the Turkish curriculum has focused on the transmission of historical content knowledge, which is still evident on the current versions (MONE, 1998a; 1998b; 1998c). Apart from that, nothing mentioned about the purpose, aims and objectives of teaching history or anything on the attainment targets and assessment in the

versions put into force before 1971. The 1971 revision of the secondary school history curriculum introduced the aims and objectives of history teaching for the first time (MONE, 1971). Some of these aims and objectives are:

*To teach pupils the importance of the Turkish nation in world history and their contribution to universal culture and civilisation and to enhance pupils' national feelings;*

*To teach pupils the main characteristics and features of the Turkish nation...*

*To teach Atatürk's and other great Turkish men's contribution to humanity* (MONE, 1971: 17-18).

The aims and objectives introduced in this revision have been reintroduced several times (MONE. 1976; 1983) and are still in force in the current versions of history curriculum with some additions (MONE, 1992; 1998a). The purposes added to the history curriculum can be summarised as:

*- To help pupils to acquire information about the past and understand it;*

*- To help pupils to develop a historical perspective and understanding;*

*- To help pupils to acquire and blend the historical information, understanding and skills to be productive and conscious*

*citizens, and to develop an international understanding* (MONE, 1998a: 1-2).

Although these new purposes of history teaching convey introduce advanced ideas other than the transmission of content knowledge and national sentiment, their practicability in the context of Turkish education has still been an issue. Moreover, starting from the 1934 curriculum, teachers have been recommended in various versions of the curriculum to allocate one hour in every two weeks for the history of Turkish Republic and its Revolution. History of Turkish Republic and its Revolution was converted into a special history course in 1981 (MONE, 1981) and started to be taught as a separate history courses since 1986.

Furthermore, the place allocated to European history in Turkish curriculum has shown some changes within the time along with the changes in the general perspective and understanding of history and history teaching in the Turkish context. In the coming sections, four different perspectives of history and history teaching that have been influential in Turkey are examined with reference to the place given to European history in each one.

#### **4.1 The Turkish History Thesis**

After the foundation of the Turkish Republic, history in secondary schools was being taught in the same way it was taught

in the Ottoman period. Some minor changes were made on the explanations of historical concepts, such as the monarchy and democracy and a new section on the republican period and the Turkish revolution was added to history syllabuses and textbooks (İnal, 1996). However, starting from the early 1930s history, school history curriculum and textbooks were written according to new regime's ideology, called ' the Turkish History Thesis' (THT) (İnal, 1996; Behar, 1996; Aktın, 2005). It was taught in schools for approximately two decades as the official and valid version of history within the structure of the centralised Turkish Education System (Behar, 1996; Aktın, 2005).

The THT was based on the argument that Turks had contributed to the development of civilisation long before they arrived in Anatolia in the eleventh century. They had a highly developed civilisation in Central Asia. This civilisation was spread out all over the world by the Turkish originated people who were forced to emigrate from central Asia to many parts of the world as a result of a drastic climate change (Behar, 1996). According to the THT the immigrants brought their high culture with them and created many civilisations of Antiquity, such as those of Sumer, Hittites, Egypt and so on. The thesis inferred that as a highly

civilised nation, the Turks created many civilisations of the Ancient world (Behar, 1996; Copeaux, 1998). The objective of this thesis was to establish that Anatolia has been a Turkish homeland for thousands of years and many civilisations of the Ancient world had been created by the Turks. Therefore, the Turks played an important role in the creation of the modern civilisation (Copeaux, 1998). Moreover, the main purpose of the THT was to form a Turkish national consciousness (Behar, 1996; İnal, 1996; Aktın, 2005).

The THT had had a big impact on the definition of the purpose of history teaching and the content of history curriculum from early 1930s to late 1940s with the intention of developing a national identity amongst the new generations (Copeaux, 1998; Yuvalı, 1987) The results of Turkish part of the European-wide ‘Youth and History Project’ also demonstrates that the THT’s influence on the general understanding of history and the perspective of history teaching has still been evident in Turkey (Tekeli, 1998).

**Table 1.** The place of European history in 1934 curriculum [revised in 1938, 1941 and 1943] (MONE, 1934).

Main features	European content	Share of European history
* Stresses the transmission of the historical content.	<b>Year I.</b> * Ancient Greece and its civilisation (History of Aegean region), * Ancient Italy, Etruscans and the Roman Empire	<b>Year I.</b> European history forms 30%. World history constitutes another 40%
* Emphasis is given to Turkish history.	<b>Year II.</b> * Medieval Rome and its surroundings, * Europe from the fifth century to the 12 <sup>th</sup> century and the Crusaders	<b>Year II.</b> Approximately 35% European history. World history is only 5%.
* European history in whole secondary school curriculum ends around the beginning of 20 <sup>th</sup> century.	<b>Year III.</b> * Europe and the Middle East in the 16 <sup>th</sup> century, * Europe in the 17 <sup>th</sup> century, * Europe in the 18 <sup>th</sup> and 19 <sup>th</sup> centuries	<b>Year III.</b> European history is 5%
		<b>In total</b> European history is 23% of the content of history courses.

Although it aimed develop a national sentiment and a national identity through history teaching, the investigation of history curriculum and textbooks from the period revealed that the THT had moderate and tolerant perspectives about the other cultures and nations. As the Table 1 demonstrates 23% of the content of overall secondary school curriculum was allocated to European history while another 15% was covering the world history. Textbooks used in the same

period also show similar patterns. The first history textbook for secondary schools, consisting of four volumes, was written in accordance with the perspectives of the THT by the members of Turkish Historical Research Association in 1930s (Bıyıkoğlu *et al*, 1931). A second history textbook for secondary schools was later written in a similar way (Mansel *et al*, 1942). They both reflected the curriculum’s provision about the content of European history through which

the proportion of European history was gradually increased.

The analysis of textbooks from the THT period also reveal that while Turkish history before the Ottoman time was strongly emphasised, Ottoman history was given a limited space. It is argued that the effect might arise from the emerging ideology of the new regime, which was built as a countermovement to the Ottoman governance and its ideology (Behar, 1996; İnal, 1996).

#### **4.2. The Humanist Movement**

Starting from the late 1940s, Turkish history teaching was also influenced from 'the humanist movement' (Yuvalı, 1987; Tehmen Sarı, 2005). However, some research traces the Humanist movement in earlier periods, like late 1930s (Aktın, 2005). Taking European countries as a model this movement stressed the importance of ancient Greek and Roman civilisations in the formation of the world history (Copeaux, 1998). Its aim was to establish a humanistic approach to culture through teaching the themes and periods of history that can be described as the products of human intellect (Yuvalı, 1987). However, according to Copeaux (1998) the proponents of humanist movement took this perspective as far as to a position that Greco-Latin

civilisation is the source of Anatolian and consequently the Turkish culture. Therefore, the emphasis on national history took a different shape through the inclusion of the history of other cultures and nations in this framework. However, the traces of the THT were still evident in some textbooks (Behar, 1996; Copeaux, 1998).

As a consequence of diminishing influence of national history, the place of European history in the curriculum increased in the era of the humanist movement. Table 2 displays that the place allocated to European history in overall secondary school curriculum increased to 26% in 1956 curriculum (12 May 1956 Turkey- Greece cultural agreement, Safran, 2006). Besides, the presentation of European history topics was made coherent and meaningful for pupils by introducing them in connection with Turkish history and the presentation of the contemporary European history. Textbooks used in this period also show similar features. For example, Akşit and Oktay's (1966; 1970) and Oktay's (1975) textbooks, which were used by the majority of teachers in that period (Kabapınar, 1992) presents a significant amount of European content (over 20%), while stressing on the history of ancient Anatolian civilisations.

**Table 2.** The place of European history in 1956 curriculum [revised in 1960, 1970 and 1971] (MONE, 1956).

Main features	European content	Share of European his.
* Stresses the transmission of the historical content.  * European history is located synchronically with Turkish history.  * European history in the whole secondary school curriculum includes the periods very close to the date.	<b>Year I.</b> * Ancient Greece and its civilisation (History of Aegean region), * Ancient Italy, Etruscans and the Roman Empire [History of Rome introduced after 1960]  <b>Year II.</b> * Europe and the Middle East between the 5 <sup>th</sup> and 8 <sup>th</sup> centuries, * Eastern Roman Empire, * Europe between the 8 <sup>th</sup> and 13 <sup>th</sup> centuries.  <b>Year III.</b> * Europe from 15 <sup>th</sup> to 20 <sup>th</sup> centuries: five separate study units divided on the century basis.	<b>Year I.</b> Approximately 30% is European history. World history constitutes another 40%  <b>Year II.</b> Approximately 25% European history. No place for world history.  <b>Year III.</b> European history 25% percent. There is small space for world history.  <b>In total</b> European history is 26% of the content of history courses.

### 4.3. The Synthesis of Turk Islam

From the late 1970s, a third perspective of Turkish history became more influential on school history curriculum. This new perspective was called the Synthesis of Turk-Islam (STI) and mainly stressed on the cultural essence of Turkish nation (Copeaux, 1998, Tehmen Sarı, 2005). The STI regarded national culture as the main unifying element of Turkish nation that needs to be transformed to new generations in order to maintain the nation's existence. In this perspective, the national culture is made up of the old Turkish tradition and the Islamic religion (Tekeli, 1998; Copeaux, 1998). The STI emphasises that Turkish and Islamic History are closely tied to one another (Yuvalı, 1987). Therefore, it is only worth teaching pupils the historical periods and regions in which Turks and the religion of Islam met (Copeaux, 1998). The curriculum and textbooks refer to the world or

European history when they are related to Turkish History or have an impact on it (Copeaux, 1998).

This view also includes some secular and western ideas taken from the ideology of Atatürkçülük to legitimate itself in the socio-political context of Turkey (Özbaran, 1997; Copeaux, 1998). The impact of the perspective on Turkish history curriculum reached its peak in 1980s, after being given legitimacy by the leaders of 1980 Military Coup (Kabapınar, 1992; Tekeli, 1998; Güngör, 2005). As an example of the influence of the STI on history teaching, it is noteworthy that the Social Sciences courses, consisting on topics selected from History and Geography, in upper primary school level were changed to 'National History and 'National Geography' courses in 1984 (Tekeli, 1998).

**Table 3.** European history in the curriculum during the era of the STH (MONE, 1976; 1983; 1998a; 1998b; 1998c).

Year	Main features	European content	Share of European history
1976 curriculum (slightly changed in 1983)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Transmission of the historical content.</li> <li>* Turkish and Islamic history is strongly emphasised.</li> <li>* European history in whole secondary school curriculum ends with the First World War.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Year I.</b> * Aegean and Roman civilisations</p> <p><b>Year II.</b> * Europe in the middle ages</p> <p><b>Year III.</b> * Europe in the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries, * Europe in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, * Europe in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.</p>	<p><b>Year I.</b> Only 5% is allocated to European history.</p> <p><b>Year II.</b> Approximately 7% European history.</p> <p><b>Year III.</b> European history 15% percent.</p> <p><b>In total</b> European history is 9% of the content of history courses.</p>
1993 (revised in 1996 and 1998)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* The main emphasis is on content of history lessons, particularly on Turkish and Islamic history</li> <li>* European history in whole secondary school curriculum ends with the 19<sup>th</sup> century.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Year I.</b> * Turkey and its environment in ancient times: This study unit in year one touches history of Ancient Greece and Roman and Byzantine Empires.</p> <p><b>Year II.</b> * Europe from 1300 to 1600. * European History from 1600 to 1918.</p>	<p><b>Year I.</b> Less than 5% European history. World history constitutes another 4%</p> <p><b>Year II.</b> Approximately 10% European history. No place for world history.</p> <p><b>Year III.</b> No place for European or world history.</p> <p><b>In total</b> European history is 5% of the content of history courses.</p>

The presentation of European history in the curriculum and textbooks was dramatically changed during the time of the STI. Table 3 reveals that the content assigned to European history was reduced to 9%, which was 26% before. Textbooks written in this period also show the decrease in the presentation of European history. For example, Öztuna's (1976) and Kafesoğlu and Deliorman's (1977a; 1977b) history textbooks only include a total of 10% for European history for the overall three years of secondary schooling. In contrast to the THT and the humanist movement, the STI stressed particularly on the Ottoman history and the space allocated to it increased substantially. In the early 1990s, the critiques on the STI started to increase, which led to alterations of history curriculum in 1993.

Nevertheless, the alterations made on the curriculum did not meet the expectations of pupils, teachers and other groups (Özbaran, 1998). Only some parts of the curriculum content were changed and the weight of history in overall secondary school curricula increased by bringing forth some optional history courses. The decrease in the European content of history took another step with this revision. Currently, only 5% of the secondary school history curriculum content is on European history. Moreover, the portion of European history in history textbooks decreased accordingly.

#### 4.4. A New Perspective of Opposition

In addition to the three influential trends of history teaching above, there is a fourth view in Turkey that expresses itself as an 'independent and liberal' perspective. Being

influenced by the THT and the humanist movement, this perspective emerged in the early 1990s as an opposition to STI. The proponents of this perspective accuse the STI by “*monopolizing and directing history according to a centralised point of view, and interpreting the past by dividing its content as ‘good-bad’ or ‘ours-others’*” (Özbaran, 1997: 182). Holders of this perspective argue that the content of history lessons must be chosen from a wide range of topics such as the ancient world history, the ancient history of Anatolia, medieval Europe, modern European and world history and so on (Kabapınar, 1992; Ertürk, 1998; Yıldırım, 1998).

Another aspect of their view is opposing the idea of the ‘national history’, which connects the nationalistic and Islamic point of views. However, the idea they propose as an alternative to national history contains more nationalistic and oppressive arguments demonstrating the traces of the THT and the humanist movement (Copeaux, 1998). For example, one of its supporters asserts that

*as a historical phenomenon or value, Anatolia has belonged to our nation from the ancient times to today. Therefore, inculcating the consciousness of Anatolian civilizations as the product of this country is an important duty of the government that may be passed to the public and next generations by means of formal education* (Yıldırım, 1998: 165).

This view is also strictly bound with the ideology of Atatürkçülük, because it

particularly opposes the synthesis of Turk-Islam, and defends the principles and revolution of Atatürk, particularly its secularist aspects (Copeaux, 1998). Although this perspective has proclaimed its existence for many years, it has not even found place to become influential on history curriculum or textbooks in the country.

## **5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**

It has been demonstrated that the emphasis of Turkish history teaching in secondary schools has been changed several times since 1930s. These changes have generally been motivated by political and ideological thoughts and movements also influencing Turkish historiography and the common perception of the past (Kabapınar, 1992; İnal, 1996; Behar, 1996). Besides, they mostly occurred in the context of history curriculum as the emphasis given to varying masses of historical knowledge.

In the early periods of Turkish Republic, history teaching was seen as an apparatus to develop a national sentiment and shape a national identity amongst the citizens of the republic (Behar, 1996; Copeaux, 1998; Dinç, 2004). Therefore, the content of history courses were mainly selected from Turkish history, particularly from the pre-Islamic periods, to stress the construction of Turkish nation, which is considered as one of the crucial aspects of a nation building process (Smith, 1999). However, non-national

history, particularly European history, was given a substantial space in the curriculum during the time of the THT.

The drastic results of the Second World War have led many countries to seek peace and stability in their environment that originated some new approaches to history and history teaching particularly in Europe. Being influenced from the trends of that time the emphasis of Turkish history teaching inclined towards the humanism and consequently the history of ancient Anatolian civilisations starting from the late 1940s. During this period, European history in the curriculum and textbooks was located synchronically with Turkish history. The contemporary European history was also included in the curriculum.

The national history movement came into agenda once more with the political counter-movements against communism and socialism in Turkey during the early 1970s in the name of STI (İnal, 1996). However, national history in this movement was in a different format. In contrast to the THT's emphasis on pre-Islamic Turkish history, the STI highlighted the connection between Turks and Islamic religion (Copeaux, 1998). As a result, it focused on the periods, in which Turks were serving for the religion (Kabapınar, 1992; Tehmen Sarı, 2005). Particularly, the Ottoman history was given importance in the curriculum and textbooks. Another

reflection of the STI in history teaching was the gradual decrease of the European content.

The last movement of Turkish history teaching stress the importance of national history like the STI, but puts secular elements in place of Islamic ones as the unifying factors of the nation.

The above discussions conclude that history teaching in Turkey has been influenced by socio-political thoughts, that bare categorised as extrinsic purposes of history teaching (Slater, 1995). Although the last version of the curriculum suggests some aims and objectives that can be categorised as intrinsic, the investigation of the views of professionals in the field indicates that they are not actually materialised in the classroom (Dinç, 2005). Different versions of the secondary school curriculum and various textbooks analysed in this paper also prove this assertion. It has also been shown that the selection of European history in Turkish curriculum and textbooks has also been an area of controversy within the context of socio-political pressure and change. Moreover, the examination of the current version of the curriculum reveals that the place of European history in Turkish school curriculum is under threat.

On the other hand, the recent political developments regarding to the process of Turkey's membership into the European Union and the European-wide collaborative

works on history teaching indicate a contrasting prerequisite. These developments specify that a better understanding of the other side and enhancing co-operation can be provided by teaching more European history in Turkey and more Turkish history in European countries. Thus, this study suggests that it is necessary for Turkey to reconsider the history curriculum in general and the proportion of European history in the curriculum in particular. Furthermore, seeking appropriate means to put the intrinsic purposes of history teaching in use can create a solution for diminishing the impact of those socio-political movements from history teaching.

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