

# IMPACT-se

In Conjunction with:



## The Erdoğan Revolution in the Turkish Curriculum Textbooks

First in a Series

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## Executive Summary

IMPACT-se's past reports on the Turkish curriculum have stressed the tolerance inscribed therein, which included the introduction of a Kurdish language elective program, the teaching of evolution, expressions of cultural openness, and displays of tolerance toward minorities.

However, in recent years, the tolerance has dwindled as the curriculum has been radicalized. *Jihad* war has been introduced into textbooks and turned into the "new normal," with martyrdom in battle glorified. There is teaching of ethno-nationalist religious objectives in the spirit of neo-Ottomanism and Pan-Turkism. Thus, Islam is depicted as a political matter, with science and technology used to advance its goals.

The textbooks appear to offer no caveats to their support for the radicalism inherent within these interpretations of historical resurgence. There is an emphasis on concepts, such as "Turkish World Domination" and Turkish or Ottoman "Ideal of the World Order." According to the curriculum, the "Turkish Basin" stretches from the Adriatic Sea to Central Asia. Both Ottoman-Turkish and Arabic language studies are offered.

The curriculum adopts an anti-American stance, displaying sympathy for the motivations of ISIS and Al-Qaeda, while remaining staunchly anti-PKK (*Partiya Karkeren Kurdistan* - Kurdistan Workers' Party). Turkey assumes anti-Armenian and pro-Azerbaijani stances. The Kurdish minority's identity and cultural needs continue to be largely neglected. The Alevi tradition is acknowledged, but religious studies encompass Sunni teachings only; the 1955 pogroms against Istanbul's Greek community are ignored. Elective programs such as Kurdish have been neglected and largely replaced by religious "elective" courses, which are often mandatory in practice. The theory of evolution has been removed from materials.

The curriculum conveys subtle anti-democratic messaging, describing former political allies as terrorists, and suggesting that civil activism—such as the Gezi Park protests—is manipulated by suspect capitalist and foreign powers.

Some anti-Christian and anti-Jewish sentiment has been introduced; in both cases the pejorative *infidels* is used, rather than the traditional term, "People of the Book." The curriculum demonizes Zionism and verges on antisemitic messaging by describing some Jewish schools in post-WWI Turkey as hostile to the country's independence. Conversely, respect is shown for the Jewish civilization and the Hebrew language. For the first time, there is mention, albeit brief, of the Holocaust, including Auschwitz, the gas chambers, death squads, as well as the widespread killing of Jews, Roma and others (six million "victims").

Islamic education had been present in Turkish curricula since the 1980s and 1990s, when secular governments were in power and this contributed to the ascendance of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's Justice and Development Party (AKP) in 2002. Once in power, the AKP moved cautiously to

further Islamize the curriculum with cover from the – ultimately unsuccessful - European Union accession process and at the same time as weakening the secular-leaning army. Many resources were channeled to the Imam Hatip vocational-religious schools; their curriculum spread to other schools through the system of "mandatory elective" courses. Radicalization accelerated rapidly in the aftermath of the 2015 failed coup.

Main Findings:

- The Turkish curriculum has been significantly radicalized in recent years.
- *Jihad* war is introduced as a central value; martyrdom in battle is glorified.
- Islam is depicted as political, using science and technology to advance its goals.
- An ethno-nationalist religious vision combining neo-Ottomanism and Pan-Turkism is taught.
- Concepts such as "Turkish World Domination" and Turkish or Ottoman "Ideal of the World Order" are emphasized.
- The curriculum adopts an anti-American stance and displays sympathy towards the motivations of ISIS and Al-Qaeda.
- There are anti-Armenian and pro-Azerbaijani stances. The Kurdish minority's identity and cultural needs are largely neglected. The 1955 pogrom against the Greeks is ignored.
- Religious studies are dramatically enhanced via the Imam Hatip vocational-religious schools and "mandatory elective" courses system. The theory of evolution has been removed.
- Subtle anti-democratic messaging is conveyed (e.g., Gezi Park protests).
- Christians and Jews are characterized as *infidels* instead of People of the Book.
- The curriculum demonizes Zionism and verges on antisemitic messaging by describing some post-WWI Jewish schools as hostile to Turkey's independence. Conversely, the curriculum continues to show respect for the Jewish civilization and the Hebrew language.
- For the first time, the Holocaust is specifically mentioned (briefly).



## **Foreword**

I grew up in Turkey and went to public schools there in the 1980s; studying the IMPACT-se report on the curriculum currently offered in Turkey's public schools has shocked me, to say the least.

Certainly, Turkey's twentieth century social science and history curriculum left much to be desired, from its frequent depiction of women primarily as mothers in society, to the omission of post-WWII history from textbooks. However, even by the standards of Turkey's past curricula, the new textbooks still leave much to be desired, while also raising alarm bells.

From introducing the concept of "*jihad* war," to glorifying Islamic martyrdom, to using the pejorative term "gavur" [infidel] to refer to Jews and Christians (including Turkish citizens), the new curriculum raises concerns on many levels.

In the United States and Europe, Sharia law is often associated with corporal punishment, such as beheadings carried out by political Islamist extremists and the likes of the Islamic State. But in fact only a few countries, such as Iran and Saudi Arabia, enact Sharia in this form.

Most Muslim countries have a mix of religious and secular laws, which invite other, and less draconian forms of Sharia. In these instances, Sharia law feeds into a complex web of legal, political and administrative policies, including education policy and curricula. Blending with state power, it imposes perceived conservative Islamic practices and values on the public. It also demonizes those who do not practice and punishes speech or acts deemed offensive to Islam.

Therefore, in its widely seen practice, Sharia is not a black cloak or the ax of the executioner, but rather an impermeable veil that envelops the entire society. Many pious Muslims individually choose to abide by some or all tenets of Sharia law, which guides their religiosity. But, as a political force, Sharia draws its power from governmental and societal pressure mechanisms. Together, they coerce citizens to adhere to the conservative spectrum of Islam.

Turkey, established as a secularist republic by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk at the end of World War I, long managed to hold Sharia out of the official sphere, making it an outlier among Muslim-majority countries. Although the secular constitutional system remains, my own research, polls, and recent developments in Turkey together demonstrate a dangerous shift.

In recent years, the government led by Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has been limiting individual freedoms, as well as sanctioning individuals who "insult Islam" or neglect Islamic practices. Since November 2017, the national police—controlled by the central government—has been monitoring online commentary on religion and suppressing freedom of expression when they find such commentary "offensive to Islam."<sup>1</sup>

Off-screen, it has become commonplace for the police to arrest those who speak critically of Islam in public. For example, world-renowned Turkish pianist Fazıl Say has been prosecuted twice for "provocative commentary" on Islam.<sup>2</sup> His crime was to gently mock the Muslim call for prayer on Twitter.<sup>3</sup>

Education is a prime pillar in Erdoğan's efforts to drape the country in the cloak of Sharia. Turkey's education system, like the police, falls under the control of the central government, and the Ministry of Education has been pressuring citizens to conform to conservative Islamic practices in public schools.

The government is formally inserting religious practices into the public education system<sup>4</sup> by requiring all newly built schools in Turkey to house Islamic prayer rooms.<sup>5</sup> Recently, for instance, a local education official in Istanbul demanded that teachers bring pupils to attend morning prayers at local mosques.<sup>6</sup>

More specifically, the new Turkish curriculum as taught in official textbooks, such as the 2019 *Fundamental Religious Knowledge*, stresses "fighting and struggle," sometimes through violence, as fundamental pillars of Islam and, by extension, the Turkish nation. In this textbook and others, *all* non-Muslims are described as "infidels." This also applies to Christians and Jews, including some of Turkey's own citizens, who were previously introduced in textbooks as

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<sup>1</sup> "Emniyet özel birim kurdu ... ve devlete hakaret' edenleri izleyecek," (The [General Directorate of] Security Established a Special Unit ... to Monitor Those Who 'Insult Religion and the State'), *Cumhuriyet*, December 4, 2017, <https://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/haber/emniyet-ozel-birim-kurdu-dine-ve-devlete-hakaret-edenleri-izleyecek-879206>.

<sup>2</sup> "Piyaniist Fazıl Say'ın yeniden yargılanmasına başlandı," [Pianist Fazıl Say's Trial Has Started Again], *Milliyet*, May 24, 2016, <https://www.milliyet.com.tr/yerel-haberler/istanbul/piyanist-fazil-say-in-yeniden-yargilanmasina-baslandi-11388518>.

<sup>3</sup> Constanze Letsch, "Turkish Composer and Pianist Convicted of Blasphemy on Twitter," *The Guardian*, April 16, 2013, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/apr/15/turkish-composer-fazil-say-convicted-blasphemhy>.

<sup>4</sup> Zia Weise, "Turkey's New Curriculum: More Erdoğan, More Islam," *Politico*, February 13, 2017, <https://www.politico.eu/article/erdogan-turkey-education-news-coup-analysis-curriculum-history-istanbul/>.

<sup>5</sup> "Yeni okullarda mescit zorunlu," [A Mosque is Mandatory in New Schools.] *A Haber* [TV], June 25, 2017, <https://www.hurriyet.com.tr/egitim/ogrencilere-sabah-namazi-cagrisi-4069899>.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

"People of the Book," using an Islamic reference underlining that Muslims, Jews, and Christians believe in the same God.

Those who expect Erdoğan to formally declare Islamic law in Turkey will have to wait for quite some time. The change will not happen overnight. It is taking place gradually, as pointed out by IMPACT-se's report, with the diaphanous veil of Sharia descending over citizens, especially younger ones, through education policy.

The sadder point, of course, is that this curriculum is not preparing Turkey's citizens to be competitive globally in the twenty-first century. Erdoğan's dream of "Making Turkey Great Again" may have to wait for many more decades after him.

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## **Preface**

The present report on the Turkish curriculum is the first in a series of publications aimed at examining the relationship between curricula and domestic and foreign policy priorities.

To date, IMPACT-se has focused mainly on assessing curricula and their correspondence to international standards of peace and tolerance. This type of research seeks to contribute much needed data and analysis to peace education with the aim of effecting positive change.

Our findings have shown that curricula reflect deep trends within governments and societies. We believe that the study of peace and tolerance in curricula can serve as a powerful tool for strategic assessment and prediction. Indeed, the very question we pose—whether a curriculum teaches peace and tolerance—immediately raises other questions, including but not limited to:

- What are the consequences for Turkey's students of being taught in an education system that ignores values of peace and tolerance? What are the consequences for Turkey's neighbors?
- What is the likelihood that a country implementing this type of curriculum will remain peaceful and/or flourish?
- What particular worldview is provided by a given curriculum with reference to a society's culture, origins, and future? Does it have any particular objectives? Which ones?
- Which domestic and foreign policies are derived from or, conversely, reflected in a particular curriculum?

We consider this series a first step on the road toward developing the necessary tools for curriculum-informed strategic assessment. The case studies in the series will try to present possible connections between the curricula and the world around them. The structure of each



project has been largely left to the discretion of the authors in the hope of fostering creativity and identifying new possibilities for curriculum-derived insights.

The current report concludes that Turkey's curriculum is radicalizing and asks whether it acts as a blueprint for the worldview of Turkish decision makers. We invite our readers to judge for themselves.

**Eldad J. Pardo, PhD**  
**Director of Research**

## **Introduction**

With its affinity towards ethno-nationalism and secularism, the Republic of Turkey differs from other Middle Eastern Muslim-majority states. Certainly the charismatic leadership of the founder of the republic, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, supported by the Turkish Armed Forces (TSK—Türk Silahlı Kuvvetleri—hereafter "military"), played a crucial role in Turkey's nation-building process.

Inevitably, education—more precisely mass schooling—played a decisive role in the formation of the new Turkish citizen. After World War I, the newly-established government in Ankara set out to detach Turkish society from the ways of the former Ottoman regime. In 1928, in an effort to disengage from the past, Atatürk made crucial changes to Turkish education. The abolition of the Ottoman alphabet in favor of a Turkish-Latin alphabet, and gradual secularization of the entire education system were of great significance. Following these revolutionary reforms, a new Turkish curriculum was designed in accordance with the movement of secular ethno-nationalism, also known as Kemalism.

After Atatürk's death in 1938 and the transition of Turkey from a single party regime to a multi-party democracy in 1946, Kemalism gradually began to weaken. The 1960 military *coup d'état*, introduced military power into the political arena for the first time. Yet, despite the military's best efforts, in the aftermath of the 1980 military coup, it was clear that Kemalism was eroding rapidly and needed to undergo significant transformation. In an effort to end the fragmentation of society between the left- and right-wing, between Islamists and Kurds, the coup's leaders fine-tuned classical Kemalism, adapting it to reconcile secularism with a state-supervised, less marginalized form of Islam.

This new amalgamation of Kemalism with Islam is also known as the "Turkish-Islamic Synthesis." This modification gave birth to a more tolerant, secularist understanding of Islam, providing increased room for religion in the public sphere. In order to legitimize this worldview in the eyes of citizens and to turn it into a non-partisan state policy, this new ideology was introduced to the Turkish public as "Atatürkism."

Particularly during the 1980–2002 period, Atatürkism—mainly based on Kemal Atatürk's cult following—facilitated the union between secularism and religion. In retrospect, the Turkish-Islamic Synthesis ideology, based on the Atatürkist education agenda and its indoctrination of the populace, likely contributed significantly to the rise of conservative tendencies among the Turkish citizenry. The ascendance of the Justice and Development Party (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi* [AKP]) in the 2002 general elections should not be seen as a coincidence but rather as the consequence of a long social, political and educational process.

### **Strategic Evolution of the Education System under the AKP**

Despite the AKP's rise to prominence, it was initially unable to make significant changes in the education system, given the limitations on power imposed by the military. As the balance of power began to shift gradually toward the AKP, it prioritized further reduction of the military's control of the government; only then did it seek to make significant changes in the education system. Such policy changes would have been impossible without legislating reforms that significantly weakened the military.<sup>7</sup> During this period, the "Sledgehammer" and the "Ergenekon" (2003–13) scandals occurred, in which many high-ranking generals were accused of planning coups and were imprisoned. This further diminished the military's authority in Turkish politics.

In retrospect, the AKP gained the necessary leverage to make drastic changes in the country's education policy following the resignation of Chief-of-Staff Işık Koşaner in July 2011 in protest over the arrests of generals. On then-Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's instructions, Koşaner was replaced by General Necdet Özel. With this, the military could no longer act as an obstacle to the reforms that Erdoğan wished to implement.

It was not until its third term in government (2011–15) that the AKP openly adopted a more conservative stance and began to Islamize the curriculum and the education system. There were warning signs, however, as to the impending Islamization of the education system; for example, in AKP's slogans: "We are placing the individual at the very center, since we love the ones who were created thanks to the Creator" and "We are conveying the values of the society to the next

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<sup>7</sup> I.e., within the framework of Turkey's European Union accession process.

generations."<sup>8</sup> Apart from the party's Islamic character, many regarded its conservative stance as vindictiveness toward the February 28, 1997 military memorandum.

The AKP's most important act was the eradication of Atatürkism as the official ideology of the Turkish national education system in 2012.<sup>9</sup> In addition to the removal of Atatürkism as an official guideline, the removal of the army and the removal of the "National Security Studies" course from the curriculum the same year were significant victories for the AKP over the military and can therefore be acknowledged as a clear milestone.<sup>10</sup> These developments led the AKP to implement its own agenda in the education system.

In 2008, with AKP's control of the Ministry of National Education secured, "Contemporary Turkish and World History" was introduced as a subject. This was an important adjustment in the curriculum, foreshadowing future changes. The next year, "International Relations" was added as an elective course. Since the pre-AKP period (1980–2002), textbooks had excluded historical events that occurred after Atatürk's death. The incorporation of these two courses, prior to the curriculum's Islamization, was seen as a positive step toward updating and modernizing the Turkish curriculum. Simultaneously, it also indicated an important shift in the historical perception of the ministry, since it no longer placed Atatürk at its center, although he did remain on the front cover of every schoolbook.

With Atatürk's diminishing influence in the aftermath of these reforms, the course "Turkish-Islamic Civilization" [Türk-İslam Medeniyeti]—introduced following the 1980 coup—inevitably came to form the backbone of Turkey's educational system. However, for Erdoğan this was insufficient, and he launched a campaign to solidify the new and religious educational direction. In this framework, the introduction of optional courses such as "Life of Prophet Muhammad," "Holy Qur'an,"<sup>11</sup> (2012) and "Ottoman Turkish" (2014) are perceived as the most important indicators of the increased presence of religion in the new education policy (The *Ottoman Turkish* book was published in 2019).<sup>12</sup>

A clear example of this direction can be seen in Erdoğan's speech delivered at the Fifth Religious Council in December 2014, where he criticized Atatürk implicitly for relying only on rational thinking and science. In the same event he stressed the need to add religion as part of the

<sup>8</sup> Elif Gençkal Eroder, *Dindar Nesil Yetiştirmek* [Raising a Pious Generation], (Istanbul: İletişim, 2019), p. 80.

<sup>9</sup> The decision refers to the 1997 memorandum by military leadership which led to Prime-Minister Necmettin Erbakan's resignation. "Atatürk ilkeleri kitaptan çıkarıldı" [Atatürk Principles are Removed from the Book], *Hürriyet*, Sept. 15, 2012,

<https://www.hurriyet.com.tr/gundem/ataturk-ilkeleri-kitaptan-cikarildi-21459983>.

<sup>10</sup> "Milli güvenlik dersi kaldırıldı" [National Security Studies was Removed], *Hürriyet*, January 25, 2012, <https://www.hurriyet.com.tr/gundem/milli-guvenlik-dersi-kaldirildi-19765864>.

<sup>11</sup> "Kur'an müfredata böyle girdi...", [This is How the Qur'an Was Added to the Curriculum], CNN Türk, August 29, 2012,

<https://www.cnnurk.com/2012/turkiye/08/29/kuran.mufredata.boyle.girdi/674656.0/index.html>.

<sup>12</sup> Erkan Taşdelen et al., *Osmanlı Türkçesi* [Ottoman Turkish], Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı, 2019.

education system's fundamental principles.<sup>13</sup> It is important, therefore, to note AKP's identity as "conservative democrats," which manifested itself through this government policy. The party declared that it was "the cultural values that make us who we are" [bizi biz yapan kültürel değerler], which act as the ultimate guidelines for its education policy.<sup>14</sup> By adopting these values at this time, the Justice and Development Party sought to legitimize the introduction of Islamic values, all while - almost paradoxically - stressing the fact that Western universal values remain in the curriculum.<sup>15</sup>

In line with Erdoğan's statements, the curriculum under his Ministry of National Education began to further emphasize the compatibility of Islam and science. New textbooks challenged Western and Turkish secularists and their long-standing conviction that the Ottoman Empire and Turkish society had fallen behind technologically due to the influence of Islam.<sup>16</sup> The new curriculum was strongly influenced by the teachings of Fuat Sezgin—a scholar of the history of science in Islam. Sezgin describes the Turkish-Islamic civilization as equal, and in some cases superior, to the Western world.<sup>17</sup> Turkish-Muslim scientists are shown alongside their Western counterparts to present an image of their mutual contribution to world civilization. Much praise is showered on Turkish-Islamic culture in general and the Ottoman Empire in particular.

Amidst the growing influence of the Turkish-Islamic Synthesis during the AKP era, the Education Ministry introduced new elective courses in seven different categories: religion; morals and values; language and narration; foreign language; science and math; art and sports; and social sciences. Students were supposed to choose a minimum of two tracks.

Religion, morals and values already contained three elective courses taught in İmam Hatip Schools.<sup>18</sup> These schools were designed to produce enlightened, religiously tolerant students who were knowledgeable in Islamic studies. After graduating, these students were expected to occupy religious posts that benefit the nation, including the role of imam or Qur'an instructor. The category also included previously required courses, such as "Holy Qur'an", "Life of Prophet Muhammad," and "Fundamental Religious Knowledge," which were re-introduced as elective courses in the 2012 curriculum.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>13</sup> "Osmanlıca 'seçmeli ders' olarak ortaokulda okutulacak," [Ottoman Turkish will be Introduced to the Secondary Schools as an Optional Course], *Habertürk*, December 11, 2014,

<http://www.haberturk.com/gundem/haber/1018014-osmanlica-secmeli-ders-olarak-ortaokulda-okutulacak>.

<sup>14</sup> Elif Gençkal Eroler, *Dindar Nesil Yetiştirmek*, [Raising a Pious Generation] (Istanbul: İletişim, 2019), p. 80.

<sup>15</sup> Yalçın Akdoğan, *AK Parti ve Muhafazakar Demokrasi* [AKP and Conservative Democracy] (Istanbul: Alfa, 2004), p. 128.

<sup>16</sup> For More Details: Akın Sever et al., *İslam Bilim Tarihi* [Islam Science History] (Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı, 2019).

<sup>17</sup> Emrullah Alemdar and Savaş Keleş, *Çağdaş Türk ve Dünya Tarihi* [Contemporary Turkish and World History] (Devlet Kitapları, 2019), p. 250.

<sup>18</sup> As of 2018 there are officially 4,891 İmam Hatip secondary education schools. For more details: "İmam hatip okullarının sayısı kadar başarısı da artıyor mu?," DW, August 6, 2019,

<https://bit.ly/38HpV7>.

<sup>19</sup> "Kuran müfredata böyle girdi, CNN Türk."

Despite the "elective" classification, in many cases these courses were referred to as "mandatory elective courses" by school administrations. In such instances, schools would arbitrarily refuse student requests to choose courses like drama, chess or journalism, alleging a "lack of teachers to teach those subjects." School principals instead designed "elective course modules" comprised mainly of "elective religious courses." Some secular groups claimed that the pressure from administrators originated from outside the schools. News reports described how Turkey's Directorate of Religious Affairs (Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı) had promoted the elective religious studies package during Friday mosque sermons. Such actions paved the way for various religious officials (i.e., muftis and imams) to aggressively try to persuade parents to choose the religious studies modules for their children.<sup>20</sup>

The "targeted audience" of the "elective" religious studies module broadened when non-Muslim students were obliged to choose this "elective package." The most striking incident took place in Diyarbakır, when the daughter of the Protestant pastor was automatically registered to study the "elective religious studies program".<sup>21</sup> It should be noted that non-Muslim students were exempted from mandatory religious studies classes. However, since these courses are considered electives, no regulations were introduced to protect the rights of non-Muslim students. As seen in the Diyarbakır case, children of non-Muslim families became victims of this policy. The Alevis also fell victim to this approach, as they are not recognized by Turkey as a separate religion or faith; therefore, they are required to take "elective religious studies" as if they were Sunni Muslims or non-Muslim students.<sup>22</sup>

Beyond the elective religious studies courses, another significant public debate took place around language courses, particularly the Ottoman Turkish, Arabic, and Kurdish courses, which, under secular governments, had been considered taboo. While Ottoman Turkish and Arabic were portrayed as the languages of the Ottoman Empire and reactionary Islamists, respectively, the Kurdish Kurmanji and Zazaki dialects were designated as separatist languages. In this sense, the inclusion of these languages in the curriculum can be seen as revolutionary.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> "'Zorunlu seçmeli din dersi' Meclis gündeminde" [The Mandatory Elective Religion Course is on Parliament's Agenda], *Cumhuriyet*, February 9, 2018,

<https://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/haber/zorunlu-secmeli-din-dersi-meclis-gundeminde-922924>.

<sup>21</sup> "Papazın kızına zorunlu seçmeli din dersi" [Mandatory Elective Religion Course to Pastor's Daughter], *Radikal*, January 16, 2013,

<http://www.radikal.com.tr/turkiye/papazin-kizina-zorunlu-secmeli-din-dersi-1117075/>.

<sup>22</sup> "'Din dersi seçtirin' talimatına tepki" [Reaction against the Instruction for Selecting Religion Studies Course], *Gazete Duvar*, January 10, 2020,

<https://www.gazeteduvar.com.tr/gundem/2020/01/10/din-dersi-sectirin-talimatina-tepki/>.

<sup>23</sup> Eldad J. Pardo, "Two Languages One Country: Turkey's Elective Kurdish Curriculum," IMPACT-se, April 2019, <https://www.impact-se.org/wp-content/uploads/Two-Languages-One-Country-Turkeys-Elective-Kurdish-Curriculum.pdf>.

Many regarded the Ministry of Education's 2014 decision to include Ottoman Turkish as another vindictive act by Erdoğan to erase Atatürk's legacy.<sup>24</sup> The secularist teachers' union, Eğitim-Sen, accused the government of introducing the Ottoman language course as an extension of the elective religious studies course. Erdoğan was hardly indifferent; he described Ottoman Turkish as a language of science, determinedly lending his support for its instruction, despite secularist opposition.<sup>25</sup>

The same year the secularist outcry resounded loudly in response to the AKP's new regulation allowing primary school students to wear a hijab. This spirit of this new regulation found echoes in the curriculum. In contrast to pre-AKP-published content, the 2014 *Basic Religious Knowledge* text advocated veiling and offered an explanation with the image of a girl with hijab. The passage below can be seen as a first in the curriculum:

Veiling, which started with Prophet Adam and Eve, is a reminder to all the nations by the prophets, as an order of Allah. Likewise, the last Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) also put forward a set of principles in this regard. With the needs of social life, the main purpose of these principles was to keep social relations between men and women at a human level.<sup>26</sup>



As seen in Image 3, taken from the *Fundamental Religious Knowledge* textbook, the headscarf and veiling are depicted as common practice.<sup>27</sup>

Secularist objections were not limited to Ottoman Turkish and the hijab. The elective Arabic language—first introduced to the curriculum in 2016—also brought criticism, predominantly due to its focus on teaching Arabic through religious texts and verses from the Qur'an. Many secular Turks regarded the course as an extension of the elective religious studies program, rather than foreign language study.<sup>28</sup>

Image 3: Respect and love are necessary for the family's internal peace. için saygı ve sevgi şarttır.

<sup>24</sup> "Osmanlıca 'seçmeli ders' olarak ortaokulda okutulacak" [Ottoman Turkish will be Taught as an Elective Course in the Secondary Schools]. Habertürk, December 11, 2014,

<https://www.haberturk.com/gundem/haber/1018014-osmanlica-secmeli-ders-olarak-ortaokulda-okutulacak>.

<sup>25</sup> "MEB, harekete geçti: İsteseler de istemeseler de Osmanlıca!" [Ministry of National Education Takes Action: Whether They Want it or Not: The Ottoman Turkish!], Evrensel, June 3, 2016,

<https://www.evrensel.net/haber/281603/meb-harekete-gecti-isteseler-de-istemeseler-de-osmanlica>.

<sup>26</sup> Ramazan Altıntaş and Vehbi Dereli, *Temel Dini Bilgiler - İslam 1: Öğretim Materyali* [Fundamental Religious Knowledge—Islam 1: Learning Material] (Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı, 2014), pp. 130–32.

<sup>27</sup> Sabahattin Nayir et al., *Temel Dini Bilgiler - İslam 1: Ders Kitabı* [Fundamental Religious Knowledge—Islam 1: Learning Material] (Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı, 2019), p. 17.

<sup>28</sup> "İlkokul 2'nci sınıflarda Arapça dersi başlıyor!" [Arabic Courses Instruction Starts in Second Grade of Primary School], Sözcü, July 11, 2016,

<https://www.sozcu.com.tr/2016/egitim/ilkokul-2inci-siniflarda-arapca-dersi-basliyor-1309406/>.



As for the Kurdish language, problems arose from various quarters. Most Turkish Kurds protested the curriculum's inclusion of Kurdish as an *elective* language. The large Turkish-Kurdish population had long sought instruction of all primary education in Kurdish. Because of this, many Kurds boycotted the elective Kurdish courses. Obstacles were encountered even by those not participating in the boycotts, when the school principals in various provinces produced a variety of excuses for not allowing the students to choose the Kurdish elective course. Further exacerbating the issue was the Education Ministry's unwillingness to hire a sufficient number of Kurdish teachers.<sup>29</sup>

The recently published Turkish textbooks show a slight improvement toward recognizing the Kurds, given that "Kurd" was barely mentioned in pre-2003 texts - except in a derogatory manner. The Kurdish language is now recognized and, for the first time, there are two elective elementary Kurdish culture textbooks written in the Kurdish language, despite ongoing Kurdish objections to the "elective" designation. Significant issues remain, however. By way of example, the Newroz (Nevruz), widely-known as a Kurdish holiday in Turkey, is instead represented in the textbooks as an ancient Turkic tradition, a less-than-subtle way to deny the existence of a separate Kurdish identity

AKP's radical reforms were not limited to the national public curriculum. Many private schools (*dershane*)—once regarded as one of the most important venues to succeed in university entrance exams—were shut down. Such an act was certainly political and not the result of any educational philosophy. Since the privatization of the education sector in the early 1980s, Fethullah Gülen's Hizmet Movement had mostly recruited new followers through these institutions. Given the bitter rivalry between Erdoğan and Gülen, a law was enacted (no. 6528), permitting the administration to shutter the *dershane* and weakening the Hizmet Movement significantly.

Not all private schools belonged to the Hizmet Movement. To deal with the large numbers of schools, Erdoğan decided to transform them into "basic high schools" (*temel lise*). With this new designation, the former *dershanes*, unaffiliated with the Gülen movement, were given an exemption from requiring recreational areas such as gardens or playgrounds and other similar criteria. Such flexibility can only be explained by understanding the political background behind this decision.

## **Failed Coup—Post-2016**

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<sup>29</sup> "Seçtirilmeyen seçmeli ders: Kürtçe" [The Elective Course that was not Permitted to be Selected: Kurdish], *Evrensel*, September 9, 2019, <https://www.evrensel.net/haber/386372/sectirilmeyen-secmeli-ders-kurtce>.

Following the harsh consequences of the 1980 coup, Turkey took many promising steps toward Westernization and democratization. Many Turks perceived the failed coup of July 15, 2016—which claimed two hundred forty lives—as an unexpected, extraordinary event.<sup>30</sup> Certainly the abolition of trade barriers, increased mobilization of people, proliferation of satellite TV channels, widespread internet and social media platforms, played a crucial role in distracting most Turks from the potential for another (attempted) coup. The military's reduced role in decision making over the previous decade almost certainly contributed to this lack of attention.

Without missing a step, the AKP used the failed coup as an opportunity to consolidate more power. The popular resistance against the coup's participants in the streets also contributed to this political environment. With the state of emergency and Turkey's transition from a parliamentary to a presidential system, the Justice and Development Party amassed enormous power. On the heels of such momentum, the ruling party began to make important amendments to legislation along with significant changes to the national education system and curriculum.

The extensive changes in the school curriculum were first apparent with the publication and distribution of a booklet, "In the memory of July 15 Victory of Democracy and the Martyrs", given to students on the first day of the academic year. This provided information about the coup, the struggles of those who died—now considered martyrs—as well as "democracy" rallies held in an attempt to correlate with Turkey's War of Independence. A "coup attempt timeline" was provided for students to better understand the chronology of events as well as a section called "July 15 Dictionary," which explained concepts like coup, republic and junta. Since Fethullah Gülen's Hizmet Movement was considered primarily responsible for the coup attempt, the group was delegitimized and renamed "Fethullahist Terrorist Organization" [Fethullahçı Terör Örgütü—FETÖ].<sup>31</sup>

To create further awareness of the attempted coup in the schools, Turkey's Ministry of National Education declared the first week of the academic year (September 19–23) to be the "July 15, Democracy Victory and Commemoration of the Martyrs" week. In this context, teachers of Turkish literature, history, social studies, and religious studies were assigned to explain the coup attempt in their classrooms.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>30</sup> "15 Temmuz darbesinin acı bilançosu açıklandı" [The Bitter Balance Sheet of the July 15 Coup was Announced], *Sabah*, July 19, 2016,

<http://www.sabah.com.tr/gundem/2016/07/19/15-temmuz-darbesinin-aci-bilancosu-aciklandi>.

<sup>31</sup> "15 Temmuz Demokrasi Zaferi ve Şehitlerimiz Anısına" [In Memory of the July 15 Democracy Victory and Our Martyrs], Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı, 2016.

<sup>32</sup> Ministry of Education, "Okullar '15 Temmuz Demokrasi Zaferi ve Şehitleri Anma' etkinliğiyle açılacak" [The Schools Will be Opened with July 15 Democracy Victory and Commemoration of Martyrs' Ceremonies], Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı, September 9, 2016,

<http://www.meb.gov.tr/okullar-15-temmuz-demokrasi-zaferi-ve-sehitleri-anma-etkinligiyle-acilacak/haber/11877/tr>.



This post-2016 coup education policy stands in contrast to what was implemented following Turkey's 1960 coup. The post-1960 coup books (used from 1960–80) glorified the military intervention, hailing it as the "White Revolution" [Ak Devrim]. The 1960 participants proclaimed May 27 a holiday of Freedom and Constitution, celebrated until the 1982 constitution was enacted, following the coup of 1980. Thus, the AKP's agenda to design an imagined community by creating its own national holiday was not a new phenomenon. However, unlike the White Revolution of 1960, the AKP's "2016 White Revolution" did not seek legitimization or common cause with Atatürk's legacy, but rather adopted a Neo-Ottoman, ethno-nationalist religious agenda that reflects the ruling party's post-2015 domestic and foreign policy priorities.

### **Major Changes in School Textbooks**

With the transition of Turkey to a presidential system of government, the AKP was able to enact its agenda with little to no opposition or checks and balances. The failed coup provided a legitimate excuse for the education minister, İsmet Yılmaz, to introduce a new curriculum on July 17, 2017.<sup>33</sup> The attempted coup, along with diminished Atatürkist influence, provided an opportunity to introduce revolutionary concepts to the Turkish curriculum. The following were of particular note: the removal of the theory of evolution in favor of a theological explanation for the creation of the world;<sup>34</sup> the inclusion of "*jihad*," as an essential concept of "our religion" [İslam]; and Pan-Türkist notions.<sup>35</sup>

### **Jihad and Victimization of International Terrorist Organizations**

The addition of *jihad* must be considered the most controversial part of the current Turkish curriculum. When asked about this, Education Minister Yılmaz openly justified and legitimized its inclusion by stating:

*Jihad* is an element which is found in our religion. The task of the Ministry of National Education is to teach every element in the right way. The real meaning of *jihad* is loving our country, homeland and to act accordingly in order to achieve national unity and togetherness. Our ministry is entitled to teach what *jihad* is and what it is not. Even in the Holy Qur'an there is a verse on this subject. Therefore, imparting the fundamentals about *jihad* in a complete manner will be the greatest gain of this country. Another dimension

<sup>33</sup> "Evrin yok cihat dört başı mamur" [Evolution is Removed, Jihad is Flourishing], *Hürriyet*, July 18, 2017, <https://www.hurriyet.com.tr/gundem/evrim-yok-cihat-dort-basi-mamur-40524324>.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> "FETÖ, PKK, İŞİD ve cihat yeni müfredatta: '15 Temmuz cihattır'" [FETO, PKK, ISIS and Jihad are in the New Curriculum], *Birgün*, July 19, 2017, <http://www.birgun.net/haber-detay/feto-pkk-isid-vecihat-yeni-mufredatta-15-temmuz-cihattir-170526.html>.

of *jihad* could be seen on July 15, when our nation protected its rights. *Jihad* means protecting the law and rights, and winning hearts.<sup>36</sup>

The AKP members in parliament supported the curriculum's reform. Ahmet Hamdi Çamlı, a party member of the body's education commission, summarized his government's stance:

*Jihad* is the primary component of Islam. It even outranks prayer (Namaz—Salaat). As for the Ottoman sultans, in order to not abandon *jihad*, they chose to not go on Hajj. Our ministry made a very good decision. If prayers are religion's tent pole, then *jihad* is the tent itself [...] It is useless to teach mathematics to a child who has no idea of *jihad*.<sup>37</sup>

The Republican People's Party (Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi—CHP) offered a notable response to *jihad*'s inclusion in the curriculum. Metin Lütfi Baydar, a secular opposition member of the education commission, accused the government of raising a vindictive generation of future militia members.<sup>38</sup> Despite CHP's outcry, instruction on *jihad* had already been incorporated into the 2013 *Islamic Law (Fıkıh)* textbook of the İmam Hatip Schools,<sup>39</sup> perhaps a further indication of the influence of İmam Hatip's curriculum on the secular curriculum; thus, it appears that İmam Hatip's values are becoming those of the Turkish national education system.

This was the first time the concept of *jihad* appeared in religious studies books. The 2019 volume can be seen as a remarkable example. It introduces this concept to the students under a separate chapter called "Some Concepts in the Qur'an. Here, *jihad* is described as:

[...] an effort for the sake of something. It is working, being exhausted and making a verbal and active effort. As an Islamic term, *jihad* has many different meanings. The armed struggle against enemies to protect the homeland is one of the most commonly known meanings of *jihad*. The effort to replace evil with good is also known as *jihad* in Islamic literature [...] In this regard it [*jihad*] is the struggle of the human being against evil and Satan. It is the effort to defeat the sins and 'haram' [unlawful acts]. In other words, *jihad* is a challenge of the human being with himself.<sup>40</sup>

With this framework, the text further describes *jihad* as a type of worship of Allah, summarizing it as the effort of believers who seek to gain Allah's favor by fulfilling and implementing the principles of Prophet Muhammed in their daily life. The same book also teaches that *jihad* is the struggle to share Islam's teachings while reaching out to unbelievers.

<sup>36</sup> "Evrin yok cihat dört başı mamur."

<sup>37</sup> "Cihat, temel ibadetler başlığı altına alındı" [*Jihad* was Placed under the Fundamental Worship Category], *Habertürk*, July 22, 2017,

<https://www.haberturk.com/gundem/haber/1571787-cihat-temel-ibadetler-basligi-altina-alindi>.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Ahmet Ekşi et al., *Fıkıh* [Islamic Law] (Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı, 2013), p. 168.

<sup>40</sup> Bekir Pınarbaşı and Fikri Özdemir, *Din Kültürü ve Ahlak Bilgisi 11* [Religious Culture and Moral Knowledge 11] (Ankara: SDR Dikey Yayıncılık, 2019), pp. 85–86.

With respect to this call to missionize, the curriculum teaches students that the struggle that is *jihad* requires the Muslim believer to remove all obstacles to Islam's active practice. Seen from another perspective, *jihad* means to fight with life and property when necessary, and to protect and preserve religion, homeland, flag and national and spiritual values.<sup>41</sup> To support this idea, the text references the Qur'an's Al-Furqan verse (25:52): "So do not yield to the infidels, but strive diligently against them with this Qur'an."



Image 3.10. Improving oneself and working for the progress of our country

In this sense, the textbook provides the Qur'an with an "extended meaning" of *jihad*: that of war, conflict and fighting.

The 2019 *Fundamental Religious Knowledge* text gives an interpretation of *jihad* for war, and underscores a very cautious dictum—that Muslims are entitled to fight only if others

declare war against them. The new curriculum stresses the importance of fighting in the name of Allah as a fundamental pillar of Islam by relying on one of Prophet Muhammad's hadiths: that a Muslim cannot be considered a believer unless he fights in the name of Allah. The text also lauds historical figures such as Corporal Seyit from the Galipoli War, and Ömer Halisdemir, who was killed during the failed coup and became the symbol of the resistance to the coup.<sup>42</sup> Despite the many considerations of *jihad* for war, the curriculum nevertheless maintains that the essence of *jihad* is a peaceful, individual act.<sup>43</sup>

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., p. 86.

<sup>42</sup> Abdullah Açıık and et al., *Temel Dini Bilgiler* [Fundamental Religious Knowledge] (Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı, 2019), p. 111.

<sup>43</sup> Bekir Pınarbaşı and Fikri Özdemir, *Din Kültürü ve Ahlak Bilgisi 11* [Religious Culture and Moral Knowledge 11] (Ankara: SDR Dikey Yayıncılık, 2019), p. 87.

The textbook refers to Prophet Muhammad's hadith that a Muslim cannot be considered as a true believer if he/she refrains from conducting and engaging in *jihad* or at least does not think about it theoretically.

**Picture 4.14: The homeland is grateful to those who engage in *jihad* and sacrifice their lives. (Ömer Halisdemir who was martyred while fighting against the traitors during the July 15 failed coup d'etat)**

arasında sayılmaktadır. Peygamber Efendimiz de (s.a.v.) şu hadisinde cihati amellerin en üstünleri arasında zikretmektedir: "Ebû Zer (r.a.) anlatıyor: "Hz. Peygamber'e (s.a.v.) 'Hangi amel daha faziletlidir?' diye sordum. 'Allah'a inanmak ve O'nun yolunda cihat etmek.' buyurdu."<sup>31</sup> Hz. Peygamber (s.a.v.) cihata o kadar önem vermiştir ki cihattan kaçınmayı mümin olmakla bağdaştırmamış ve "Allah yolunda savaşmadan yahut da bunu (en azından) gönülünden geçirmeden ölen kimse bir çeşit münafıklık üzere ölüdür."<sup>32</sup> buyurarak müminleri cihata teşvik etmiştir. Bir diğer hadisinde ise Peygamber Efendimiz (s.a.v.) cihatla ilgili olarak şöyle buyurmuştur: "Ey insanlar! Düşmanla karşılaşmayı temenni etmeyin, Allah'tan âfiyet (eslenik ve barış) dileyin. Fakat düşmanla karşılaşınca da sabredin ve bilin ki cennet kılıçların gölgesi altındadır."<sup>33</sup>



GörSEL 4. 14. Vatan, bu topraklar için cihat eden ve bu uğurda canını verenlere minnettardır. (15 Temmuz darbe girişiminde vatan hainlerine karşı savaşırken şehid olan Ömer Halisdemir)

*The Life of Prophet Muhammad* further explores the idea of peaceful *jihad*, explaining that *jihad* was defined by the Prophet as an effort to achieve what is good and pleasant. The text summarizes this by citing another hadith attributed to Prophet Muhammad: "Believing in Allah and conducting *jihad* in his name is the most virtuous practice."<sup>44</sup>

<sup>44</sup> Hadi Gündür, *Peygamberimizin Hayatı 10* (Our Prophet's Life) (Ankara: Ata, 2019), p. 72.

The new curriculum avoids references or any warnings regarding the misuse and exploitation of *jihad* by global Islamist terrorist organizations. By not drawing clear lines in such a sensitive issue, the Turkish curriculum appears to want students to decide for themselves when and against whom they might declare *jihad*.

Added to the explanation of *jihad* in religious studies courses, the 2019 *Contemporary World and Turkish History* book gives a worrisome explanation of global terrorism:<sup>45</sup>

In the aftermath of the Cold War, with self-confidence, the US began to see itself as "first among equals." It began to dominate international relations and comply less with international agreements. US definitions and references began to determine whether the states would be punished or which systems were to be eliminated. These abovementioned practices of the US constituted one of the reasons for the Al-Qaeda terrorist organization's attack on September 11.

This presentation is ambiguous, defining Al-Qaeda's attack on the US as a terrorist act, while also justifying it. In other words—it blames the US—a NATO ally. A similar approach is also seen with respect to ISIS. While condemning the Islamic State as a terrorist organization, the text decries "US practices in Iraq" as the reason for ISIS' birth.<sup>46</sup>

## PKK

On the subject of terrorism, unsurprisingly, the Turkish schoolbooks also use this term to refer to the Kurdish separatist PKK (*Partiya Karkeren Kurdistan* - Kurdistan Worker's Party). In contrast to Al-Qaeda and ISIS, the *Contemporary History* book avoids any discussion of the "dynamics behind the terrorist acts." Instead, it condemns the PKK as a bloody terrorist organization, labeling it "as the most serious threat against Turkey." Iran and Syria's support of the PKK is highlighted by showing PKK bases in Lebanon. The negative characterizations of Iran and Syria in the *National Security Studies* volumes from previous curricula are similar to the depiction of the two countries in the current Turkish curriculum.

The introduction of the United States as a state sponsor of terrorism in the current *Contemporary History* book owes much to recent US logistics and arms support to the Syrian Kurdish PYD (Democratic Union Party) and YPG (People's Protection (Defense) Units), seen by Ankara as extensions of the PKK in Syria.<sup>47</sup> This marked the first time the USA has appeared negatively in a Turkish curriculum—similar to the portrayal of Russia, Iran or Greece in the 1990s.

<sup>45</sup> Emrullah Alemdar and Savaş Keleş, *Çağdaş Türk ve Dünya Tarihi* [Contemporary Turkish and World History] (Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı, 2019), pp. 237–38.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., p. 238.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

### **Failed Coup and Martyrdom**

The curriculum also characterizes the religious cleric, Fethullah Gülen's "Hizmet Movement" as the "Fethullahist Terrorist Organization" (FETÖ),<sup>48</sup> blaming Gülen and his organization for the 2016 coup attempt and for trying to abolish the rule of law and establish an oligarchy. The group is also accused of deception used to "exploit the sincere religious beliefs of the Turkish people." Gülen is thus delegitimized as a heretic and as a man who represents himself to his disciples as a "messiah" and "mahdi."<sup>49</sup>

Students are also taught about the close relationship between Gülen and the coup participants of 1980 and 1997; both of the the military interventions are seen as important milestones in the Gülen Movement's increased influence over Turkish society.

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<sup>48</sup> Also called: "Parallel State Structure."

<sup>49</sup> Bekir Pınarbaşı, Fikri Özdemir, *Din Kültürü ve Ahlak Bilgisi 11* [Religious Culture and Moral Knowledge 11] (Ankara: SDR Dikey Yayıncılık, 2019), p. 118.





**Görsel 5.40: Cumhurbaşkanı Recep Tayyip Erdoğan'ın halkı darbeye karşı sokağa çağırması**



**Görsel 5.41: Demokrasi nöbetleri**



**Görsel 5.42: Şehit Astsubay Ömer Halisdemir**

Image 5.40: President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's call to the people inviting them to the streets against the coup

Image 5.41: The democracy guard rallies

Image 5.42: the martyr Sergeant Ömer Halisdemir

The Gülen group's influence with government bureaucracy, be it within education, finance, civil service, the judiciary and police as well as the media, is further understood through Gülen's close relationship with the coup's supporters, including certain wealthy business leaders. It should be noted that, despite being in power since 2002, the Justice and Development Party never acknowledged any responsibility for the Gülen organization's influence in the state and free market's respective mechanisms.<sup>50</sup>

Students are also taught that the corruption scandal of 2013 (Dec 17–25) represented the first direct coup attempt of the Gülen Movement, which had infiltrated the judiciary and police forces. The government's responses against this movement, especially through the media and banking sectors, are conveyed as legitimate actions to defend society from a terrorist movement; it further describes the 2016 coup attempt as FETÖ's response to the measures taken against the organization up to 2015.<sup>51</sup>

The text provides a timeline outlining the critical events of the 2016 failed coup. Pictures of Erdoğan's conversation with CNN Türk's correspondent Hande Fırat and images from Istanbul's Bosphorus Bridge crowded with pro-Erdoğan supporters, are also included.

There is a special explanatory section for Sergeant Ömer Halisdemir, who became the symbol of resistance against the coup. The text also glorifies the death of other pro-government protestors as martyrs.<sup>52</sup> While the *Contemporary Turkish and World History* books

include information on those now considered martyrs, the various religious studies texts seek to provide an explanation for martyrdom itself, referring to the Qur'an's Al-Baqarah (2:154): "*And do not say about those who are killed in the way of Allah, 'They are dead.' Rather, they are alive, but you perceive [it] not.*" The idea that martyrdom is described as "a supreme post" [yüce

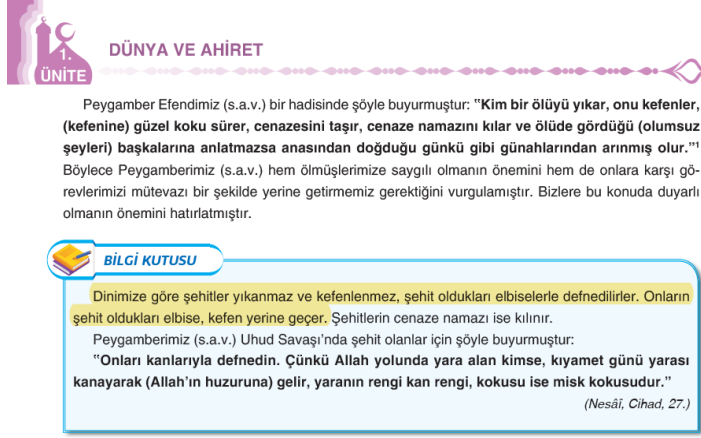
<sup>50</sup> Emrullah Alemdar and Savaş Keleş, *Çağdaş Türk ve Dünya Tarihi* [Contemporary Turkish and World History] (Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı, 2019), p. 247.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., p. 247–48.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

makam] for Islam is presented with an image of the Turkish Armed Forces Gallipoli War Cemetery.<sup>53</sup>

As seen below, the importance of martyrdom is specified in a separate box.<sup>54</sup>



**DÜNYA VE AHİRET**

**1. ÜNİTE**

Peygamber Efendimiz (s.a.v.) bir hadisinde şöyle buyurmuştur: "Kim bir ölüyü yıkar, onu kefenler, (kefenine) güzel koku sürer, cenazesini taşır, cenaze namazını kılar ve ölüde gördüğü (olumsuz şeyleri) başkalarına anlatmazsa anasından doğduğu günkü gibi günahlarından arınmış olur."<sup>53</sup>

Böylece Peygamberimiz (s.a.v.) hem ölmüşlerimize saygılı olmanın önemini hem de onlara karşı görevlerimizi mütevazı bir şekilde yerine getirmemiz gerektiğini vurgulamıştır. Bizlere bu konuda duyarlı olmanın önemini hatırlatmıştır.

**BİLGİ KUTUSU**

Dinimize göre şehitler yıkanmaz ve kefenlenmez, şehit oldukları elbiselerle defnedilirler. Onların şehit oldukları elbise, kefen yerine geçer. Şehitlerin cenaze namazı ise kılınır.

Peygamberimiz (s.a.v.) Uhud Savaşı'nda şehit olanlar için şöyle buyurmuştur: "Onları kanlarıyla defnedin. Çünkü Allah yolunda yara alan kimse, kıyamet günü yarası kanayarak (Allah'ın huzuruna) gelir, yaranın rengi kan rengi, kokusu ise misk kokusudur."<sup>54</sup>

(Nesâî, Cihad, 27.)

According to our religion the martyrs are not washed or shrouded. They are buried with the clothes in which they were martyred. These clothes are functioning as cerements [...]

The *Fundamental Religious Knowledge* text also uses the 2016 failed coup to explain Islamic concepts such as corruption (*fesat*) and the concept of *fitnah* (internal strife) to describe the major internal struggles among Muslims (such as the schism between Sunnis and Shiites). The curriculum builds on this idea within the 2019 textbook, describing the attempted coup as a heretical uprising orchestrated by Fethullah Gülen.<sup>55</sup> The text also accuses Gülen and his supporters of attacking the norms and values of Turkish society through spreading corruption and lies while inciting anarchy. The government, for its part, is described as the source of law and order. The boost the latter's legitimacy and to promote the new Islamic agenda within the curriculum, the text also stresses the need for the government to protect law and order. Resisting the "trouble makers" ("bozguncu") and their malicious *fitnah*-labeled activities was painted as a sacred obligation of all Muslims. Certainly the reference to "Muslim" identity rather than "Turkish citizen" also reveals the new education system's focus on Islamic religious values rather than [Western] secularism.

The emphasis on one's Muslim self-identity provides the opportunity to classify people as believers (Müminin); hypocrites (Münafık)' and infidels (Kafir). Believers obey the Qur'an's rules and maintain order. By referring to the Al-Baqarah (Verse 82), "As for those who believe, and do good deeds, they are the people of Paradise; there they will live forever," the curriculum

<sup>53</sup> Bekir Pınarbaşı and Fikri Özdemir, *Din Kültürü ve Ahlak Bilgisi 11* [Religious Culture and Moral Knowledge 11], (Ankara: SDR Dikey Yayıncılık, 2019), pp. 42–43.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., p. 34.

<sup>55</sup> Sabahattin Nayir and et al., *Temel Dini Bilgiler* [Fundamental Religious Knowledge] (Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı, 2019), pp. 36–37.



teaches students to become believers. Hypocrites are considered to be a more significant threat to believers than infidels; hypocritical Muslims are described in the text as those who believe in Islam superficially but tend to divide believers with their sinful thoughts and actions. The textbooks use this Islamic presentation to brand Fethullah Gülen, his organization, and other apparent participants of the attempted coup as examples of such hypocrisy.

Also of note is that, according to the textbooks, *all* non-believers (i.e., non-Muslims) are considered "infidels," defined here as: "the person who rejects—partially or as a whole—the principles of the religion that Prophet Muhammad brought from Allah."<sup>56</sup> Jews and Christians—who generally had been classified as "People of the Book" (Ehl-i Kitap)—were now also included in this definition.

### Coup Education

While previously published books lacked any information regarding the various coups, those books published after July 15, 2016, such as *Contemporary Turkish and World History*, provide comprehensive information about the military *coup d'états* that impacted Turkey.

In the account of 1960's *coup d'état*, Adnan Menderes' Democrat Party (DP) is seen as the choice of the people while the opposition Republican People's Party (CHP) is painted as a natural collaborator with the coup's participants. The accomplices are described as members of an "exclusive privileged group" (ayrıcılık zümre), a term known to those familiar with Erdoğan's well-known references and accusations against the CHP and pro-coup army cliques.



**Görsel 3.42: Adnan Menderes Yassıada'da tutuklu**

Image 3.42: Adnan Menderes as an inmate in Yassıada

<sup>56</sup> Abdullah Açıık et al., *Temel Dini Bilgiler* [Fundamental Religious Knowledge] (Millî Eğitim Bakanlığı, 2019), pp. 24–27.

The text condemns the executions of Prime Minister Adnan Menderes, Foreign Minister Fatin Rüştü Zorlu and Minister of Finance Hasan Polatkan, highlighting the coup as a blow to Turkey's democratization. By referring to the post-coup coalition governments, the text also describes such secular administrations as a negative side-effect of the coup while at the same time contributing to a very pro-AKP and Erdoğan discourse in the curriculum.<sup>57</sup>

Another important dimension of this curriculum is the anti-American narratives conveyed to students. References are made to Turkish journalist Nur Batur's columns, which accused the US of participating in the 1960 military coup<sup>58</sup> to block Turkey from becoming more autonomous and independent.<sup>59</sup> In *Contemporary Turkish and World History*, the US is also blamed for Turkey's economic deterioration at that time and the Turkish Lira's devaluation.

Students instructed in this manner can easily make direct correlations to Turkey's current environment. Thus, the US is also accused as the mastermind of the July 15, 2016 coup attempt and blamed for the escalation of the recent economic crisis, due to Turkey's unwillingness to release long-time Turkish resident and American citizen, Pastor Andrew Brunson from prison.

Along with the implication of continued American complicity in Turkey's troubles, the text points to numerous similarities between the 1960 coup and the failed attempt in 2016. Most interesting, however, is the exploitation of Atatürkism as an important catalyst for both of the events. Moreover, while the 1960 coup illustrates the struggle between the "center" [*merkez*] and the "periphery" [*çevre*] – references to the secular elite who lived in the urban city centers and those conservatives living in suburbs or rural areas, respectively - the 2016 failed coup is denigrated as "the act of the covert Fethullahist Terrorist Organization" (FETÖ).<sup>60</sup>



**Görsel 5.34: Gazete manşeti**

**Image 5.34: "Tanks in Sincan" (near capital Ankara)**

<sup>57</sup> Emrullah Alemdar and Savaş Keleş, *Çağdaş Türk ve Dünya Tarihi* [Contemporary Turkish and World History] (Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı, 2019), pp. 134–35.

<sup>58</sup> When publishing her articles Batur claimed that she relied on revealed classified British documents.

<sup>59</sup> Alemdar, "Çağdaş Türk ve Dünya Tarihi," pp. 134–35.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., p. 136.

The same textbook also contains descriptions of the 1971 and 1980 coups. As with the discussion of events in 1960, both of these later coups are discussed in the framework of what had become a tense domestic political environment. This included US dissatisfaction with a broad range of events and policies, including an arson attack against the US ambassador's car at Ankara's Middle East Technical University; the opium poppy crisis of the early 1970s; the never-ending dispute with Greece over Cyprus; and Turkey's pro-Palestinian stance in the Arab-Israeli conflict were taught to students as the primary reasons of US support for the 1971 and 1980 coups. In short, the 1960, 1971 and 1980 coups were all represented as US-supported military actions to punish Turkey, (a NATO ally) as it sought more independence while improving relations with Soviet Russia.<sup>61</sup>

Despite this anti-American narrative regarding the three classic military coups, the textbook's explanation for the February 28, 1997 military intervention made no references to the United States but rather concentrated solely on the apparently putschist nature of the military—accused of anti-democratic "practices" against a duly-elected civilian government.<sup>62</sup> It should be noted that these "practices" are not referenced in the texts.<sup>63</sup> Instead, students are given partial information that the military forced the civilian-elected government to resign. There are also discussions relating to the purge against religious officials within the military's ranks.<sup>64</sup>

The new curriculum included another controversial military action that took place in April 2007 and is known as the "E-Memorandum." Students are taught that the military government sought to obstruct the candidacies of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and Abdullah Gül because their spouses wore hijabs. In the eyes of the military, the presidential palace had to remain secular and be free from all religious symbols. There is an account of Chief of Staff Yaşar Büyükanıt's "e-warning," published on the official military webpage. Excluded is the warning that asked the government to protect secularism—implying that only a candidate whose wife does not wear a hijab could be nominated. Instead, the textbook includes a statement subordinating the military to the civilian government. Finally, there is information on the election of Abdullah Gül as the republic's new president and also on the reform that allowed for direct presidential elections by Turkish citizens rather than by parliament.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> (185–90).

<sup>62</sup> Also known as the "Post-Modern Military Coup."

<sup>63</sup> The texts ignore pertinent information such as "The Jerusalem Night" event that took place under the sponsorship of the ruling Islamist Welfare Party (Refah Partisi—RP); the Iranian ambassador who called for the adoption of Sharia Law in Turkey; as well as Prime Minister Necmettin Erbakan's hosting of leaders of religious orders at the Prime Minister's mansion—these were all excluded from the textbook.

<sup>64</sup> Bahattin Demirtaş, *T.C İnkılap Tarihi ve Atatürkçülük 12*, [History of the Republic of Turkey's Revolution and Atatürkism 12] (Ankara: Mevsim, 2019), p. 249.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., pp. 250–51.

## Democracy and Human Rights

The recently published schoolbooks also cover the fundamentals of democracy and human rights. A new textbook for secondary students, *Democracy and Human Rights*, was added to the curriculum. It was designed to promote democratic ideals and it teaches concepts and democratic principles such as the constitution, separation of powers, checks and balances, right of suffrage, elections, independent judiciary, non-governmental organizations and a pluralist political environment. Despite the erosion of the separation of powers and checks and balances in post-2016 Turkey, the textbook still chooses to provide a *sine qua non* explanation of democracy. Thus, even amidst the significant decline in the functioning of Turkey's democratic system after 2016, students are nevertheless given the impression that Turkey remains a democracy.<sup>66</sup>

Despite such an optimistic account, the text's explanation of the "Gezi Park Protests" certainly provides a striking example that democracy is not truly respected. Students are taught that the 2013 Gezi Park protests were a rebellion organized against the government's economic and democratization policies. The environmentalist sensitivities of the protestors were depicted as an excuse for the anti-government demonstrations.<sup>67</sup>

While these actions [protests] were first undertaken to support the Gezi Park project in Istanbul, they [protesters] later expressed opposition to the current government.<sup>68</sup>

By referring to the alleged involvement of "certain business circles" and "foreign intelligence agencies" - implying the US, EU and Israel - in the demonstration, the protests were seen by students as illegitimate.

Even though the cooperation of various capital groups and foreign intelligence forces had an effect on the Gezi Park actions [protests], most of the activists, unaware of these effects, participated in the actions [protests] in line with their own wishes.<sup>69</sup>

Students are therefore given a narrative to discourage them from taking part in future demonstrations, a cornerstone of historical democracies. Students are taught that the majority of demonstrators were unaware of the hidden agendas of alleged organizers and that such protests

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<sup>66</sup> IMPACT-se had invited a particular Turkish scholar to comment on this research. The individual was unable to participate, while awaiting trial for an as yet unclear offense. Also see: Suzy Hansen, "The Era of People Like You is Over: How Turkey Purged Its Intellectuals," *NYT*, July 24, 2019,

<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/07/24/magazine/the-era-of-people-like-you-is-over-how-turkey-purged-its-intellectuals.html>;

Jack Moore, "Erdogan Wants Turkey's Anti-Extremism Law to Include Journalists and Politicians," *Newsweek*, March 15, 2016,

<https://www.newsweek.com/turkeys-erdogan-urges-anti-extremism-law-change-include-journalists-and-437435>.

<sup>67</sup> Emrullah Alemdar and Savaş Keleş, *Çağdaş Türk ve Dünya Tarihi* [Contemporary Turkish and World History] (Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı, 2019), pp. 244–45.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 244.

<sup>69</sup> (245).

created negative effects on the Turkish economy, including the stock exchange and currency rates.<sup>70</sup>

### **Pan-Turkism**

In the aftermath of the political turmoil of the Gezi Park protests, Turkey entered a prolonged period of municipal elections in 2014, followed by nationwide election campaigns in June and November of 2015. During this time, the AKP formed an alliance with the Nationalist Movement Party; the resulting impact was felt in the schoolbooks. In the post-2015 period, especially after the failed *coup d'état*, the detailed Pan-Turkist historical perspective became more evident in the texts.<sup>71</sup> It should also be noted that the current curriculum's Pan-Turkist content first appeared following the Soviet Union's collapse in 1991. The initial evidence for this was the appearance of maps showing the Turkic world in school textbooks. But the adoption of the Turkish-Islamic Synthesis as the official state ideology, and attendant references to "Turkic heritage from the Adriatic Sea to the Great Wall of China" should be seen as the most important indicators of emerging Pan-Turkist content in the Turkish school curriculum.<sup>72</sup>

Turkish cultural artifacts can be seen in a vast region, which starts from the Central and East Asian countries, such as China and Mongolia, and extends to Herzegovina and Hungary.<sup>73</sup>

The *Turkish Culture and Civilization History* text (2019) serves as the most important evidence of the increased influence of Pan-Turkism over the Turkish curriculum. This volume provides an explanation for three important concepts: "Turkish World Domination" (Türk Chian Hâkimiyeti); the Ideal of the World Order" (Nizam-ı Âlem Ülküsü);<sup>74</sup> and the "Red Apple" (Kızıl Elma).<sup>75</sup>

<sup>70</sup> (244–45).

<sup>71</sup> Eldad J. Pardo and Mehmet Ekinci, "The Root of Anti-Chinese Protests in Turkey: Strategic Insights from Education," IMPACT-se, September 2016,

<https://www.impact-se.org/wp-content/uploads/NEIGHBORS-AND-RIVALS-China-in-Turkeys-Educational-System.pdf>.

<sup>72</sup> For More Details: Etienne Copeaux, *Tarih Ders Kitaplarında (1931–1993) Türk Tarih Tezinden Türk-İslam Sentezine* [French—From the Adriatic to the China Sea] (Istanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2006); Pardo, "The Root of Anti-Chinese Protests in Turkey."

<sup>73</sup> Komisyon, Coğrafya -11, Sınıf Ders Kitabı [Geography 11] (Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı, 2013), p. 136.

<sup>74</sup> The World Order Ideal is officially embraced by the nationalist Great Unity Party (Büyük Birlik Partisi) and its youth organization "Alperenler Ocağı" [Turkish-Islamic Warriors Hearths], and by the Nationalist Movement Party's youth organization "Ülkü Ocakları" ["Idealist Hearths"], also known as the Gray Wolves.

<sup>75</sup> Demirhan Yılmaz et al., *Türk Kültür ve Medeniyet Tarihi* [The History of the Turkish Culture and Civilization] (Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı, 2019), pp. 18–19.

## Kızıl Elma ve Türk Cihan Hâkimiyeti Anlayışı

Türk tarihinde Hunlardan itibaren bir cihan imparatorluğu olma arzusu ve dünyaya düzen verme ülküsünün olduğu görülür. Türk hakanları; "Güneş bayrağımız, gökyüzü kadrimiz." diyerek bu ülküyü ifade etmişlerdir.



Görsel 1.6: Türk Cihan Hâkimiyeti (Temsil)

düzene sokup tertiplerim. Türk Milleti yerinde hiç durmasın... Gece uyuyacağım gelmedi, gündüz oturacağım gelmedi." sözleri, Türklerin vatanseverlik ve dünyaya nizam verme düşüncesini desteklemektedir. Dört taraftaki milletleri düzene koyma çabası da Kızıl Elma anlayışının bir göstergesidir.

Türklerin Kızıl Elma ülküsü, sabit ve belirli bir kavram veya yer değil, soyut bir ülke kavramıydı. Bu nedenle her dönemin kültürü, o dönemin Kızıl Elma ülküsünü belirlerdi. Bu anlayışa göre somut bir hedef belirlenip o hedefin üzerine gidilir, oraya varılsa da Kızıl Elma bu defa daha ileride ve yine belirli bir yere gider, ona hiçbir zaman ulaşamaz.

Türklerde Kızıl Elma düşüncesi, uzun vadeli stratejiler oluşturulmasında ve yeni hedefler belirlenmesinde önemli bir yere sahipti. Çünkü Türkler, bu ülke sayesinde dinamik bir yapıya sahip olmuş ve belirlenen yeni hedeflere doğru yoğunlaşmıştır.

Orhun Yazıtları'nda da ifade edildiği gibi Türk Cihan Hâkimiyeti (Görsel 1.6), Güneş'in doğduğu yerden battığı yere kadar olan coğrafyanın Türk hükümdarı tarafından idare edilmesi ülküsüdür. Türk Cihan Hâkimiyeti anlayışındaki Nizam-ı Âlem Ülküsü, Tanrı adına dünya nizamını sağlama ve Türk adaletini dünyanın her tarafına yayma anlayışıdır.

Orhun Yazıtları'nda Bilge Kağan'ın; "İllyi iliszleştirdik, kağanlıyı kağansızlaştırdık. Dizliye diz çöktürdük, başlıya baş eğdirdik. Tanrı yardım ettiği için gözle görülmeyen, kulakla işitilmeyen yerleri milletime kazandırdım. Tanrı buyurduğu için dört taraftaki milleti

In short, through references to Turkey's imperial past, "Turkish World Domination" is introduced to students as an ideal to be accomplished when a Turkish sovereign rules the whole world. In order to achieve this goal the text also refers to Pan-Turkish unity among all Turkic tribes.<sup>76</sup>

By controlling the entire world, the Turks are obliged to provide order and enhance justice for all the planet's inhabitants. Besides these two concepts, the textbook also provides the most famous and perhaps the most controversial concept – that of the Red

Apple:<sup>77</sup>

*The Turks' Red Apple ideal is not a constant and definite concept but is best understood as an intangible ideal. Therefore, each period's culture determined the Red Apple of that cultural framework, in each period a certain goal is chosen as that period's Red Apple which would in turn guide Turks to accomplish their objective. In the case of success, then a new Red Apple would be determined . . .*

The term Red Apple became extremely important for the Turkish nationalists since the ideological father of Turkish nationalism, Ziya Gökalp described the Red Apple as the political unity of the Turkic world.<sup>78</sup> Since the early days of the republic the concept was synonymous with Pan-Turkism. Despite the fact that the text does not refer to Gökalp's concept of Red Apple, it remains a vibrant ideal; the Turkish Presidency's Directorate of Communications used the theme in an August 2020 YouTube video which named Jerusalem as the next "Red Apple objective."<sup>79</sup>

*Contemporary Turkish and World History* also includes an abundance of Pan-Turkist content, ranging from the "Russian occupation of Central Asia" to the activities of Pan-Turkist thinkers such as Yusuf Akçura, Ismail Gasprinsky and Zeki Velidi Togan. Turkish political organizations such as the "Russian Muslim Congresses", and the establishment of autonomous Turkic republics under Russian rule (i.e., "Idil Ural)," "Alash

<sup>76</sup> Demirhan Yılmaz et al., *Türk Kültür ve Medeniyet Tarihi* [The History of the Turkish Culture and Civilization] (Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı, 2019), pp. 18–19.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., p. 16.

<sup>78</sup> Ziya Gökalp, *Türkçülüğün Esasları* [Principles of Turkism] (Ankara: Elips, 2006), p. 27.

<sup>79</sup> "Kızıl Elma," (Red Apple) T.C İletişim Başkanlığı, August 24, 2020, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ITQ-KD-RMiA&ab\\_channel=T.C.%C4%B0leti%C5%9FimBa%C5%9Fkanl%C4%B1%C4%9F%C4%B1](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ITQ-KD-RMiA&ab_channel=T.C.%C4%B0leti%C5%9FimBa%C5%9Fkanl%C4%B1%C4%9F%C4%B1).



Orda," "Turkistan," "Harezm," "Kyrgyz" and "Başkurdistan" are also covered. In addition to the inclusion of autonomous republics, the textbook also elaborated on the birth of the Turkic republics.

According to the explanation given, Moscow deliberately emphasized Soviet identity in favor of the Uzbek, Kazakh, Kyrgyz and Turkman identities. The text blames the Soviets for having sought to divide the Turks into smaller groups and assimilate them into the Soviet identity.<sup>80</sup>

The curriculum's Pan-Turkist narrative reaches a climax with a presentation on the "Basmacı Uprising" (The Basmachi Movement, 1918–31). A summary discusses the objective of the rebellion as "freeing Turkistan from the Russian occupation." Former Ottoman Minister of War, Enver Paşa's involvement was also praised and he was declared a "martyr" in the armed struggle against the Russians.<sup>81</sup>

Information is also provided about the birth of the independent Turkic republics following the collapse of the Soviet Union, particularly Azerbaijan, which is afforded more depth than other Turkic republics owing to its geographical, linguistic, and cultural proximity; the text proclaims former Azerbaijani president Haydar Aliyev's "We are one nation, two states" motto, affirming the brotherhood between the nations.<sup>82</sup>

Political disagreements in Caucasia are also addressed; the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict is described in a very pro-Azeri interpretation. While accusing Armenia of occupying Nagorno-Karabakh, the texts also claim that the Armenian majority population in the region was the result of Russia's ostensibly pro-Armenian migration policy. There are descriptions of Armenian atrocities against Azeri civilians in 1993, especially in the city of Khojaly (Armenian: Ivanyan).<sup>83</sup> Iran—home to thirty million Azeris—and Russia, are depicted as natural adversaries of Azerbaijan while Georgia and Turkey are natural allies.

Besides Azerbaijan, short histories of Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Turkmenistan are provided. Turkey's eagerness to engage with the Turkic world is further emphasized through presentations to students on the Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (Türk İşbirliği ve Koordinasyon Ajansı Başkanlığı—TİKA).<sup>84</sup>

In addition to the Caucasus and Central Asia, there is also an exploration of the status of Bosniaks in Bosnia-Herzegovina. A similar pro-Muslim account was seen in the section that explained the dissolution of Yugoslavia. Ironically, while Bosniaks and other Balkan-originated

<sup>80</sup> Yasemin Okur et al., *Çağdaş Türk ve Dünya Tarihi*, [Contemporary Turkish and World History] (Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı, 2017), pp. 12–13.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., p. 14.

<sup>82</sup> (181).

<sup>83</sup> (182–83).

<sup>84</sup> (183–86).

Muslim groups are not officially designated as Turks, their "inseparableness" from Turkishness is stressed. More information is also given about the Bosnian War (1992–95), the Srebrenica Massacre, and the personal biography of Bosnia's "wise leader" Alija Izetbegović.<sup>85</sup>

In addition to the Balkans, other Turkish diaspora groups, such as those in Greece and Bulgaria are included. The status of Turks in Greece's Western Thrace (Batı Trakya) region is examined. Here, the text provides a history of the 1960–80 period, when Greece was harshly criticized for its policy of annulling Greek citizenship for those of Turkish origin. The city of Athens was accused of imposing arbitrary bans on the such people, not allowing them to purchase or rent properties. Greece is also denounced for its hostility toward the Turkish language, for laying siege to Turkish villages, confiscating land, looting Turkish properties, and imposing high taxes.<sup>86</sup> By contrast, the September 6–7, 1955 pogroms against the Greek minority in Turkey are ignored.

Bulgarian oppression against the local Turkish population under the leadership of Todor Zhivkov is discussed in detail. Zhivkov's assimilation and restrictive language policies are presented as the primary reason for the migration of 320,000 Bulgarian citizens of Turkish origin to Turkey. The coverage of Turkish non-citizens in neighboring countries, alongside Turkey's openness to receiving refugees of the same ethnic origin, once again reveals the Pan-Turkist stance of the Turkish schoolbooks.<sup>87</sup>

### **Neo-Ottomanism**

Alongside Pan-Turkism, Neo-Ottomanism is another topic to which considerable space is dedicated in the Turkish curriculum. This has been increasingly apparent since the rise of the AKP. Along with *Ottoman History*, the most important indicators of this phenomenon can be tracked in various textbooks such as *Geography* and the *Ottoman Turkish Language*.

The 2019 *Geography* book informs students about the "Turkish Culture Basin" (Türk Kültürü Havzası). Turkish culture is described as a "sea of culture" (kültür denizi) which stretches from Central Asia, Siberia, Africa and the Balkans, constituting a synthesis of the influence zone of the Pan-Turkist and Ottoman legacy. The text also draws attention to similarities in architecture, food and various traditions.

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<sup>85</sup> (194–97).

<sup>86</sup> (179–80).

<sup>87</sup> Emrullah Alemdar and Savaş Keleş, *Çağdaş Türk ve Dünya Tarihi*, [Contemporary Turkish and World History] (Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı, 2019), pp. 229–30.





Görsel 1.9: Türk kültürü havzası

Image 1.9: "Turkish Culture Basin"

The "Turkish basin" expanded even more when the Turks adopted Islam as their official religion, allowing Turkish expansion into the Middle East and Africa. The textbook also refers to China's Xinjiang as "East Turkistan" a name also given to other independent Turkic republics. The Caucasus is named as another center of the Turkish culture. Azerbaijan, Dagestan and Chechnya are all defined as communities that belong to the umbrella of Turkish culture.<sup>88</sup> The new curriculum also apporitions

considerable attention to the Ottoman Empire's five-hundred-and-fifty-year-long domination in the Balkans, emphasizing the depth of the Ottoman influence in the region. Bosnia-Herzegovina and its famous Mostar Bridge are showcased as striking evidence of the Ottoman reach.<sup>89</sup>

The magnificent Ottoman Turkish language that was first embodied under the Karakhanides, began to dominate the three continents and was exposed to the accumulated culture of the three continents, especially under the reign of the Ottomans. First and foremost, Ottoman Turkish was influenced and enriched by Arabic and Persian and by other languages and cultures. But it managed to obtain all these as added value for itself. By doing so it became the most splendid and the strongest language of the Islamic civilization. Our forefathers (ecdadımız) wrote countless masterpieces with the Ottoman language which was enriched from all of the basins of the Islamic civilization. These masterpieces constituted our culture and the collective memory of our civilization.

### Israel, Zionism and the Holocaust

As with the Ottomans, under Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, Turkey sees itself as the protector of all Muslims. In retrospect, the January 2009 Davos Summit, where Erdoğan harshly criticized Israel's "Operation Cast Lead" (2008–09) launched against Hamas positions in the Gaza Strip, is considered as one of the most important symbolic manifestations of the rise of Neo-Ottomanism in Turkish foreign policy. The *Contemporary Turkish and World History* book does not ignore this historical incident and depicts Israeli military intervention in Gaza as the most severe blow

<sup>88</sup> Note that despite the inclusion of the Chechens in the textbook, the Turkish official historiography does not recognize them as a Turkic group.

<sup>89</sup> Cem Erdebil et al., *Coğrafya 12* [Geography] (Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı 2019), pp. 164–65.

to the peace process. Here, the curriculum has chosen to victimize the Palestinians by specifying the number of casualties, while ignoring Hamas' rocket attacks against Israeli civilians.

Moreover, instead of referring to Palestinians in terms of national identity, there is an emphasis on victimhood based on their Muslim identity. There appears to be an attempt to establish self-identification and an emotional connection between Turkish students and the Palestinian cause. To increase sympathy toward Palestinians, the Gaza Strip is described as the "biggest open air prison" in the world.



**Görsel 5.8: T.C. Başbakanı Recep Tayyip Erdoğan'ın İsrail Cumhurbaşkanı Şimon Peres'e gösterdiği tepki**

**Image 5.8: Republic of Turkey's Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's response to Israel's President Shimon Peres**

Turkey's accusation that Israel barred international humanitarian aid to the Gaza Strip is documented and repeated in the heated debate at the Davos Summit between then Prime Minister Erdoğan and former President Shimon Peres. Turkey's response to Israel at the Davos Summit was praised; the textbook proclaims Turkey as "the defender of the Peace Process," implying that Israel is the only obstacle to peace in the region.

Despite this harsh rhetoric against the Jewish State, the need to achieve peace in the Middle East on the basis of a two state solution where Israel and Palestine will live

side by side in security remains in the texts.<sup>90</sup>

However, the rhetoric around coexistence between Israel and the Palestinians does not detract from the curriculum's efforts to delegitimize Zionism. The *Contemporary Turkish and World History* book defines Zionism as an imperialist ideal to amass all world Jewry in "Palestine." It also stresses that Zionists seek to reconstruct "Solomon's Temple" on Mount Zion. By providing such wrong and misleading information, the text attributes religious goals to the secular Zionist movement, as well as distorting history by renaming Mount Moriah as Mount Zion.<sup>91</sup> While this narrative in *Contemporary History* is relatively brief, the *History of The Republic of Turkey's Revolution and Atatürkism* textbook goes beyond its traditional scope and evaluates Zionism in a highly subjective, emotive, and negative manner, labeling it as a plan to bring bloodshed to the Middle East, and calling it "The Zionism Problem."

<sup>90</sup> Emrullah Alemdar and Savaş Keleş, *Çağdaş Türk ve Dünya Tarihi* [Contemporary Turkish and World History], (Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı, 2019), pp. 214–15.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., pp. 73–74.

In retrospect, all catastrophes in the Middle East, including the ongoing conflicts in Syria, Iraq and Yemen, as well as the Egyptian coup d'état, were all attributed to Zionism and implicitly to Jews. The hostile stance of the text reaches fever pitch when it defines the (imagined) borders of so-called "Greater Israel" as stretching from the Euphrates river to the Nile. Students are warned that some parts of Turkey will fall within these concocted future borders of so-called "Greater Israel."<sup>92</sup> It should not be surprising that the same author accuses the Alliance Israelite Universelle and Maccabi organizations as malicious and hostile to the Turkish national independence movement. The desire of both organizations to found a Jewish State in "historic Palestine" are seen as problematic. Both of the movements are also accused of protecting the political and economic interests of local Ottoman Jews.<sup>93</sup>

The same text also covers the Arab-Israel wars. According to the book's author, Bahattin Demirtaş, the Israeli victories against the Pan-Arab armies would not have been possible without American and European support. Therefore all of the victories of Israel against its Arab neighbors are downplayed.<sup>94</sup> Following this anti-Israeli diatribe, Demirtaş poses a question to students asking them to discuss their thoughts on the establishment of the State of Israel and how it had a destructive impact on the Middle East's ethnic, religious and political structure. There is little doubt that such a question is intended to orient students negatively toward Israel.<sup>95</sup> This attitude can also be seen in *Contemporary History* which recalls the Davos, "Low Chair" and Mavi Marmara flotilla crises.<sup>96</sup>

More evidence is found in the *International Relations* elective course book. This book uniquely documents Turkey's resistance to the December 2017 US recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital. The text praised Turkey's stance against this decision, informing students of diplomatic initiatives against the move within the scope of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, the Arab League, European Union and the United Nations.<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> Bahattin Demirtaş, *T.C İnkılap Tarihi ve Atatürkçülük 12*, [History of the Republic of Turkey's Revolution and Atatürkism 12] (Ankara: Mevsim, 2019), p. 263.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., p. 54.

<sup>94</sup> (219–20).

<sup>95</sup> (192).

<sup>96</sup> Emrullah Alemdar and Savaş Keleş, *Çağdaş Türk ve Dünya Tarihi*, [Contemporary Turkish and World History] (Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı, 2019), p. 235.

<sup>97</sup> Işıl Şahin and et al., *Uluslararası İlişkiler* [International Relations] (Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı, 2019), p. 102.



Görsel 2.12: Kristal Gece'de yakılan bir sinagog

"Image 2.12: A synagogue that was set to fire during 'Kristallnacht'"

By contrast, the newly introduced Ottoman Turkish textbook shows respect for the Jewish Civilization and the Hebrew and Aramaic languages associated with it.<sup>98</sup>

Furthermore, despite the mostly negative characterization of the Jewish State, the text's underdeveloped sections on the antisemitic events of the pre-Second World War period and its mention of the Holocaust should be noted. While 2017's

*Contemporary Turkish and World History* did not include such information, the 2019 volume includes an image and brief section on Kristallnacht (Night of the Broken Glass), Auschwitz, and the six million "victims"

(including Jews) who were killed by the Nazis.<sup>99</sup>

## Conclusion

Since its ascension to power in 2002, the Justice and Development Party's slow, consistent and determined policies resulted in a gradual silent revolution in the Turkish schoolbooks. During its first term, the AKP resisted making major changes to the curriculum. Instead it sought to modernize and expand the scope of history education by adding courses on subjects like "Contemporary Turkish and World History" and "International Relations." Later with the Sledgehammer and Ergenekon scandals and the resignation of the military's Chief of Staff, Işık Koşaner, the military's relative weakness became apparent, allowing AKP to more forcefully launch its own agenda—especially in the field of education. During its second term from 2011 to 2016, the AKP began to Islamize the curriculum, while also adopting a vindictive political agenda against the previous secular regime. During this period, the national security knowledge course was removed while elective courses on topics such as the Life of Prophet Muhammed, the Holy Qur'an and the Ottoman Turkish language were introduced to the curriculum. President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's statement at the Fifth Religious Council in December 2014 revealed the guiding principles behind AKP education policy, namely the intention to introduce religion with rational thinking and science.

The incorporation of "elective course modules," as part of the Turkish government's comprehensive reforms, allowed religion to be incorporated into what had previously been secular schools. In this framework, new courses ("Holy Qur'an," "Life of Prophet Muhammad"

<sup>98</sup> Erkan Taşdelen et al., *Osmanlı Türkçesi* (Ottoman Turkish), Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı, 2019, p. 12.

<sup>99</sup> Emrullah Alemdar and Savaş Keleş, *Çağdaş Türk ve Dünya Tarihi* [Contemporary Turkish and World History], (Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı, 2019), pp. 66–67.

and "Fundamental Religious Knowledge,") were introduced to students. While the Ministry of National Education emphasized the elective nature of these courses, in practice, school headmasters, of their own accord, often did not make other elective courses available to the students, creating a phenomenon which can aptly be summarized as "*mandatory* elective religious courses." This underscores the victimhood of the Alevis and non-Muslims, for whom exemptions from these "elective" courses were not available. And despite the ministry's apparent token decision to include elective Arabic and Kurdish language courses in the curriculum, this has proved unsatisfactory for their intended audiences.

Following the failed coup d'état in 2016, and having eliminated all of its adversaries, the Erdoğan government adopted an educational agenda which included *jihad* as one of the curriculum's most important principles. This controversial shift is taught as an act of "self-improvement" while paradoxically referring to its centrality with respect to war. The textbooks point to historical events when *jihad* appeared to be more important than the Islamic ritual of Hajj, as when Ottoman sultans preferred to be busy with *jihad* rather than visiting Mecca and Medina. This attitude toward *jihad* would appear to make it easier to prepare the foundation for religious wars. Indeed, the exclusion of the negative effects of *jihad* is worrisome; even the curriculum's efforts to rationalize and understand the motives behind the terrorist attacks of Al-Qaeda and ISIS should raise alarms. Not surprisingly, the separatist PKK does not escape condemnation; the text makes no effort to understand the motives behind this group's actions against the Turkish state.

The curriculum gives much attention to the failed coup, portraying it as a heroic epic to students. The delegitimization of Fethullah Gülen's movement as a terrorist organization, as well as the glorification of acts of martyrdom against "hypocritical Muslims," are noteworthy. Through these elements, the government has been able to use religion to demonize its adversaries while creating fragmentation in Turkish society, now viewed in terms of three main groups: believers, hypocrites, and infidels. A deliberate ignorance of the concept: "People of the Book" (Ehl-i Kitap), previously used to differentiate Jews and Christians from pagans and other polytheists, now associates them all as infidels. It's hard to imagine that such narratives will not affect ordinary Turkish citizens in their relations with other non-Muslims and their nations.

Along with its focus on the 2016 attempted coup, unlike previous Turkish curricula, the new Turkish curriculum includes information about the 1960, 1971, 1980 classical coup d'états as well as the 1997 and 2007 military interventions. While emphasizing the importance of elections and democracy, the textbooks also, and paradoxically, discourage students from taking part in demonstrations, strongly criticizing events like the Gezi Park protests of 2013.

In addition to domestic politics, the curriculum provides much information about foreign policy. The AKP's alliance with the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) plays a crucial role in both. As part of Turkey's political vision, Pan-Turkism is taught to students in various fundamental



modules: "Turkish World Domination"; "Ideal of the World Order"; and the "Red Apple." There is an emphasis on the unity of the Central Asian Turkic nations; the descriptions of Turkey's special bond with Azerbaijan includes very anti-Armenian narratives. The curriculum also teaches students how such a Pan-Turkist worldview melds with AKP's Neo-Ottomanism. Hence, narratives on Bosnia-Herzegovina, the Turks of Greece, and Bulgaria—as well as the situation of the Palestinians—are all taught in detail. The "Turkish Basin" that stretched from the Adriatic Sea to Central Asia is also highlighted.

With the synthesis of Pan-Turkism and Neo-Ottomanism, Turkish leaders see themselves as the leaders of the Muslim World. To accommodate such a role—at least within the curriculum—schoolbooks adopt a pro-Palestinian stance on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. While not rejecting the existence of the State of Israel outright, the current textbooks seek to delegitimize the Jewish state by characterizing Zionism to students as a problematic, bloody, imperialistic plan. A negative presentation of the recent Davos and Mavi Marmara flotilla crisis is included, rather than an emphasis on previous positive bilateral relations with Israel, such as Israel's humanitarian aid to the Turkish people during the 1999 Gölcük earthquake or the Turkish aid to Israel during the Carmel fire in 2010, or the multiple trade agreements that have persisted despite numerous Middle Eastern upheavals.

The Turkish school textbooks may act as an important blueprint for the worldview of Turkish decision makers. Despite substantial protests reflecting the deep fragmentation of Turkish society, the AKP administration under President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan seems determined to mold Turks into "ideal citizens" on the way to carrying out its "Twenty-First Century White Revolution." Like the pioneers of the Turkish-Islamic Synthesis in the 1980s, the AKP seeks to appropriate Islam as the glue for its "New Turkey." That being said, the AKP has already surpassed its predecessors, implementing concrete measures that influence the daily lives of Turkish citizens by turning controversial concepts like *jihad* into the "new normal."

## Methodology

IMPACT-se utilizes a content analysis research method to examine textbooks according to the following condensed criteria of UNESCO's standards for peace and tolerance in school education:

1. **RESPECT:** The curriculum should promote tolerance, understanding and respect toward the "Other," his or her culture, achievements, values and way of life.<sup>100</sup>
2. **INDIVIDUAL OTHER:** The curriculum should foster personal attachment toward the "Other" as an individual, his or her desire to be familiar, loved and appreciated.<sup>101</sup>
3. **NO HATE:** The curriculum should be free of wording, imagery and ideologies likely to create prejudices, misconceptions, stereotypes, misunderstandings, mistrust, racial hatred, religious bigotry and national hatred, as well as any other form of hatred or contempt for other groups or peoples.<sup>102</sup>
4. **NO INCITEMENT:** The curriculum should be free of language, content, and imagery that disseminate ideas or theories which justify or promote acts and expressions of violence, incitement to violence, hostility, harm and hatred toward other national, ethnic, racial or religious groups.<sup>103</sup>
5. **PEACEMAKING:** The curriculum should develop capabilities for non-violent conflict resolution and promote peace.<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> As defined in the Declaration of Principles on Tolerance Proclaimed and signed by Member States of UNESCO on November 16, 1995, Articles 1, 4.2. See also the UN Declaration on the Promotion among Youth of the Ideals of Peace, Mutual Respect and Understanding Between Peoples (1965), Principles I, III. Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948): Education shall be directed to the full development of human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial and religious groups and shall further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace.

<sup>101</sup> The goal of education for peace is the development of universally recognized values in an individual, regardless of different socio-cultural contexts. See Ibid., Article 6. See also, on exchanges between youth, the UN Declaration on the Promotion among Youth of the Ideals of Peace, Mutual Respect and Understanding between Peoples (1965), Principles IV, V.

<sup>102</sup> Based on Ibid., Articles III.6, IV.7 and VII.39; and on the Integrated Framework for Action on Education for Peace, Human Rights and Democracy, approved by the General Conference of UNESCO at its twenty-eighth session, Paris, November 1995, Article 18.2.

<sup>103</sup> As defined in Article 4 of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD), adopted by the United Nations General Assembly Resolution 2106 (XX) on December 21, 1965. See also Article 20 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), adopted by the United Nations General Assembly Resolution 2200A (XXI) on December 16, 1966.

<sup>104</sup> Based on the Integrated Framework for Action on Education for Peace, Human Rights and Democracy, approved by the General Conference of UNESCO at its twenty-eighth session, Paris, November 1995, Article 9; and on the Declaration of Principles on Tolerance proclaimed and signed by member states of UNESCO on November 16, 1995, Article 5.



6. **UNBIASED INFORMATION:** Educational materials (textbooks, workbooks, teachers' guides, maps, illustrations, aids) should be up-to-date, accurate, complete, balanced and unprejudiced, and use equal standards to promote mutual knowledge and understanding between different peoples.<sup>105</sup>

7. **GENDER:** The curriculum should foster equality and mutual respect between women and men. It should refrain from stereotyped gender roles.<sup>106</sup>

8. **SOUND PROSPERITY and COOPERATION:** The curriculum should educate for sound and sustainable economic conduct and preservation of the environment for future generations. It should encourage regional and local cooperation to that effect.<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> Based on UNESCO recommendation concerning education for international understanding, cooperation and peace and education relating to human rights and fundamental freedoms, adopted by the General Conference at its eighteenth session, Paris, November 19, 1974, Article V.14.

<sup>106</sup> The preamble to the Declaration of Principles on Tolerance proclaimed and signed by member states of UNESCO on November 16, 1995, notes the Convention on the Elimination of Any Form of Discrimination against Women and emphasizes respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms for all, without distinction as to gender.

<sup>107</sup> Based on UNESCO recommendation concerning education for international understanding, cooperation and peace and education relating to human rights and fundamental freedoms, adopted by the General Conference at its eighteenth session, Paris, November 19, 1974, Articles III.6, and IV.7. On the imperative for developing "systematic and rational tolerance teaching methods that will address the cultural, social, economic, political and religious sources of intolerance," see the Declaration of Principles on Tolerance proclaimed and signed by member states of UNESCO on November 16, 1995, Article 4.2. On education for international cooperation, see also the UN Declaration on the Promotion among Youth of the Ideals of Peace, Mutual Respect and Understanding between Peoples (1965), Principle II.

## List of Textbooks

The following Turkish curriculum textbooks were analyzed for the research in this study. The titles both here and referenced in the text have been translated into English to aid the reader.

1. Akın Sever et al., *İslam Bilim Tarihi* (Islam Science History), Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı, 2019.
2. Emrullah Alemdar and Savaş Keleş, *Çağdaş Türk ve Dünya Tarihi* (Contemporary Turkish and World History), Devlet Kitapları, 2019.
3. Ramazan Altıntaş and Vehbi Dereli, *Temel Dini Bilgiler - İslam 1: Öğretim Materyali* (Fundamental Religious Knowledge—Islam 1: Learning Material), Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı, 2014.
4. Sabahattin Nayir et al., *Temel Dini Bilgiler - İslam 1: Ders Kirabı* (Fundamental Religious Knowledge—Islam 1: Learning Material), Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı, 2019.
5. Ahmet Ekşi et al., *Fıkıh* (Islamic Law), Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı, 2013.
6. Bekir Pınarbaşı and Fikri Özdemir, *Din Kültürü ve Ahlak Bilgisi 11* (Religious Culture and Moral Knowledge 11), Ankara: SDR Dikey Yayıncılık, 2019.
7. Abdullah Açık et al., *Temel Dini Bilgiler İslam 2* (Fundamental Religious Knowledge 2), Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı, 2019.
8. Hadi Gündür, *Peygamberimizin Hayatı 10* (Our Prophet's Life 10), Ankara: Ata, 2019.
9. Abdullah Açık et al., *Temel Dini Bilgiler* (Fundamental Religious Knowledge), Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı, 2019.
10. Bahattin Demirtaş, *T.C İnkılap Tarihi ve Atatürkçülük 12* (History of the Republic of Turkey's Revolution and Atatürkism 12), Ankara: Mevsim, 2019.
11. Komisyon, *Coğrafya -11. Sınıf Ders Kitabı*, (Geography 11), Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı, 2013.
12. Demirhan Yılmaz et al., *Türk Kültür ve Medeniyet Tarihi* (The History of the Turkish Culture and Civilization), Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı, 2019.
13. Yasemin Okur et al., *Çağdaş Türk ve Dünya Tarihi*, (Contemporary Turkish and World History), Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı, 2017.
14. Cem Erdebil et al., *Coğrafya 12* (Geography 12), Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı 2019.
15. Işıl Şahin et al., *Uluslararası İlişkiler* (International Relations), Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı, 2019.
16. Günsu Tüzün, *Demokrasi ve İnsan Hakları* (Democracy and Human Rights), Ankara, Ada, 2015.
17. Feramuz Yılmaz et al., *Din Kültürü ve Ahlak Bilgisi 12* (Religious Knowledge and Moral Culture 12), Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı, 2019.

18. Ali Kuzudişli, *Din Kültürü ve Ahlak Bilgisi 12* (Religious Knowledge and Moral Culture 12), İstanbul: Eksen, 2018.
19. Ali Osman Kurt and Dursun Ali Aykıt, *Dinler Tarihi* (History of Religions), Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı, 2019.
20. Numan Konaklı et al., *Din Kültürü ve Ahlak Bilgisi 10* (Religious Culture and Moral Knowledge 10), Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı, 2019.
21. Faruk Salman et al., *Kuran-ı Kerim*, (Holy Qur'an), Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı, 2019.
22. Erkan Taşdelen et al., *Osmanlı Türkçesi* (Ottoman Turkish), Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı, 2019.
23. Mustafa Koçak et al., *Peygamberimizin Hayatı* (Life of Our Prophet), Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı, 2019.
24. Murat Yurtseven, *Sosyoloji* (Sociology), Ankara: Tuna, 2019.
25. Akif Çevik et al., *T.C İnkılap Tarihi ve Atatürkçülük* (History of the Republic of Turkey's Revolution and Atatürkism), Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı, 2019.
26. Ahmet Yılmaz, *Tarih 10* (History 10), Ankara: İlke, 2018.
27. Erol Yüksel et al., *Tarih 10* (History 10), Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı, 2019.
28. Ayşe Pınar Şahintürk et al., *Biyoloji 12* (Biology 12), Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı, 2019.

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