

Memory Politics and School system in the Postsoviet space

Changes and Challenges in the History education of Armenia

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Abstract

Armenia has a long history and tradition of education. Since its inception, Armenian education has served both as a bulwark for the political and economic existence of the country and as a guarantee for its advancement. The brief first Republic of Armenia (1918–1920) gave rise to the existing educational framework, which was subsequently developed during the Soviet era (1920– 1990). Armenia’s school system consists of the following factors: firstly, the collection of educational initiatives that support continuing education at various levels and domains as well as the state’s education standards. Secondly, the list of many types of educational institutions that are putting certain programs into practice. Finally, the system of educational management bodies, together with the organizations and entities that report to them.

The education system in Armenia is financed and organised by the Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sports. The Armenian Apostolic Church has historically played a significant role in the education of Armenia.

The teaching of Armenian history starts in grade 7 and ends with examinations in grades 9 and 12.

The following topics are described as the final knowledge that a student should acquire at the end of the course: national (homeland, language, religion, family), spiritual and moral values, the role of traditions in the perpetuation of Armenianness; important achievements of national culture and their role in Armenia and the world in the context of culture.

The teaching material covers regional history as a necessary field to study. Students should gain knowledge on regional and global political situation; the current foreign and

domestic political situation of Armenia, learn about the relations between neighbouring countries and the world as well as the people thereof, familiarise themselves with various interstate unions, organizations, find up-to-date diverse connections with the world, supply relations and historical alternative versions of developments, predict their consequences.

Keywords: national identity, monastic schools, Sovietisation, History of the Armenian Church, History of Armenia and world history

Context of the education system

Historical-geographical and philosophical context

The creation of the Armenian alphabet in the fifth century by Mesrop Mashtots was of historically significant importance since it opened a world of possibilities for the establishment of universities, scientific research facilities, and schools (Koryun, 1941). The higher education institutions of Khor Virap, Tatev, Sanahin, Haghat, Gladzor, Haghartsin, Nor Getik (Goshavanq) and other monasteries had conducted a great deal of scientific work in the 6-14th centuries (Abeghyan, 1975).

The first Republic of Armenia established the foundations for the current educational system in the country, which was then developed during the Soviet era. The mass illiteracy of the 1920s and 1930s vanished as a result of these changes. The Resolution of 17th of December of 1921 was called the “Liquidation of Illiteracy in the Soviet Union” (Planned economy, monthly political and economic magazine, 1940). According to this resolution all the illiterate people aged 16-50 had to learn grammar in their native language. The Soviet Government had a popular public platform called “Daloy Negramotnost”- “Get rid of illiteracy!”, and with the help of public organizations they were implementing and showing the ongoing process of giving free education to everyone under the age of 16-50 (Planned economy, monthly political and economic magazine, 1940).

The introduction of compulsory elementary education in 1932 made it possible to reduce the percentage of the illiterate population from 83% to 16% in just 7–8 years. The goal was to create collective memory and to design and shape the ideology of a Soviet Person (Bournoutian, 2013). Additionally, the widespread establishment of schools in the 1960s allowed the transition to secondary education being required. Armenia had only a state education system with preschool, vocational, secondary vocational, and

higher education components during the 70 years of Soviet rule, which guaranteed the republic's advancement in socioeconomics, culture, and science.

It is important to highlight that contemporary education system in Armenia still relies on the Soviet heritage. After the fall of the Soviet Union, the significant advancement in the Republic of Armenia's educational system in the "Project of Development of Education of the Republic of Armenia 2001-2005" (State Education Development Program, 2001-2005) was approved by the National Assembly. The RA law approving both the "2008-2015 state program of education development of the Republic of Armenia" and the "state program" suggests that the growth of the educational system, maintaining its quality, and boosting its competitiveness in the global arena are the most significant state and national issues (State Education Development Program, 2008-2015).

General description of the education system

General education

The education system of the Republic of Armenia is an ordered set of educational institutions and establishments, the main components of which are: pre-primary education provided for children from 3 to 6 years of age; primary general education from 6 to 10 years of age, basic general education from 10 to 15 years of age, secondary general education, secondary vocational education from 15 to 18 years (Figure 1).

Graduates of basic and senior schools have the right to continue their studies in primary, secondary and higher professional educational institutions. There are also non-state educational institutions, schools, colleges, universities, etc. operating in the Republic of Armenia, which not only provide educational services, but also make a significant contribution to the development of the education system as a whole.

The Republic of Armenia ensures the right to education - regardless of nationality, race, sex, language, religion, political or other views, social origin, property status or other circumstances. According to the Constitution of the Republic of Armenia, general education is compulsory, except for cases prescribed by law. A higher level of compulsory education may be established by law. Primary and secondary education in state educational institutions is free of charge and compulsory. The principles of self-governance of higher educational institutions are defined by law. The procedure for the establishment and operation of educational institutions is established by law. Every citizen has the right to receive free education in

State higher and other special educational institutions on a competitive basis in accordance with the procedure established by law. The State, in cases and according to the procedure prescribed by law, provides financial and other assistance to higher and other educational institutions carrying out special educational programmes as well as to their students.

In 1999, the National Assembly of the Republic of Armenia approved the Law “On Education”, thus contributing to the development of the education system. This document also ensures equal rights of men and women to receive education. As in Soviet times, primary and secondary education in Armenia is free of charge, and completion of secondary school is compulsory.

A 10-point grading scale is applied in the educational institutions of the Republic of Armenia. According to the data for 2021, 31 thousand teachers taught more than 380 thousand pupils in 1353 schools in the Republic as a whole. (Система образования в Армении права и обязанности – Education system in Armenia Rights and obligations).

History currently falls under the subject area “Society, social sciences”. The “Curriculum and subject list” is approved by a decree of the Minister of Education and Science each year. In Armenia’s schools there are 34 weeks in an academic year and one lesson is 45 minutes long. Institutions that monitor school curricula in Armenia include the National Foundation for Educational Development and Innovation, the Assessment and Testing Center, the National Center for Educational Technology and the Psychological-Pedagogical Center.

Age (years)	ISCED	Education level	Length of education level	Nature of education level
3-6	0	pre-primary education	3 years	compulsory
6-10	1	primary general education	4 years	compulsory
10-15	2	basic general education	5 years	compulsory
15-18	3	secondary general education	3 years	compulsory
15-18	3	initial vocational training	3 years	compulsory
15-17	3	advanced vocational school	2 years	compulsory
18+	6-7	higher education	BA 4 years MA 2 years	optional

Figure 1. Armenian education system https://education-profiles.org/sites/default/files/inline-images/ISCED_Armenia.jpg (09.12.2023)

The main goal of general education is the comprehensive and harmonious development of children’s mental, spiritual, physical and social abilities, and the development of their correct behaviour. (RA Law on Education, 2015) According to the State General Education Curriculum, it is envisaged to introduce secondary general education in Armenia in a 12-year – the transition to 12-year education began in 2006–2007 – three-level secondary school with the following grades:

- a) primary school, 4 years (grades 1-4)
- b) secondary school, 5 years (5-9 grades)
- c) high school, 3 years (grades 10-12).

The main objective of primary school is to develop the pupil’s mental, spiritual and physical abilities, language skills, literacy, logic and basic work skills. The primary school provides the necessary learning environment, and the level required to continue to a secondary school. The main purpose of the secondary school is to provide pupils with knowledge of man, nature and society, the skills and abilities to apply this knowledge in life, and to acquire the level of moral and spiritual values necessary for pupils to pursue secondary education or vocational training and age-appropriate work, whereas the primary purpose of high school is to provide students with vocational education, knowledge, skills and abilities necessary for their own lives (Система образования в Армении права и обязанности).

The school authorities

In Armenia, the education system is organized by the Ministry of Education, Science, Culture, and Sport (MESCS). Below is a list of some key organisations and their functions in the Armenian education system (see annex for more details): School Boards/School Districts, School Boards/School Districts, Local Municipalities, Church, Private Educational Institutions, International Organizations and NGOs.

Education reform efforts

When defining the quality of education, legislators generally aim to define measurable educational outcomes, which vary somewhat depending on the country and the context, although they generally try to align them with the logic of the documents on the quality of education adopted by various UN structures.

Section 5 of the “State Programme for the Development of Education in the Republic of Armenia until 2030” (March 2023) underlines that the main priority of public educa-

tion and vocational training is to improve quality. The World Bank also tried to define the quality of education in its report “Education Priorities and Strategies” (1995) with the following formulation: “The quality of education is difficult to define and measure. An adequate definition should include student knowledge outcomes. Many educators may include in the definition the educational experiences that help produce those educational outcomes, in other words, the educational environment (World Development Report, 1995, 46.).

At the legislative level, RA school education is assessed as sufficiently developed, but there are gaps in the implementation of this legislation. As a result of the political affiliation of school principals, the main problem is the politicization of schools, which should be addressed through the improvement of legislation. The current system of funding based on the number of pupils in a given school promotes good performance in some schools but creates problems for smaller schools struggling to maintain a minimum level of operations. The needs of schools that cannot be met with the help of the state budget often fall on the shoulders of parents and teachers (Availability of school education in Armenia, 2012).

The success of reforms in the school education system mainly depends on the performance of teachers, as they are the “main carriers of reforms”. Most of the respondents emphasize the urgent need to change educational methods, adapting them to the modern environment, new standards and implemented programs. There is a mismatch between the demands of reforms and the current conditions in schools. The use of new methods requires the presence of appropriate conditions in schools (Availability of school education in Armenia, 2012).

The Position of History and Civic Education

Soviet legacy and external actors in Armenian history education

History education in Armenia today bears the legacy of Soviet Armenian education. The Soviet period provided an opportunity for member republics to create their national history. The narratives were all discursively similar: they started from the ethnogenesis. The development of the nation, followed by the development of the nation’s consciousness and the struggle for national liberation, leading to the development of class consciousness towards which they were guided by communism itself as a better form of social organization.

The teaching of history was also highly centralised, with only one textbook approved per subject and per grade. The aim of teaching history was to ensure that students memorised the historical texts to be taught based on the textbook. After each question, the lesson was designed to test whether the student had memorized the information, as well as the ideological bias that was supposed to indicate the student's adherence to communist ideals (World Bank, 2003).

The independent Armenia had the opportunity to put its history education on a new footing. The reforms of the education system were largely financed by World Bank loan projects. The first project - the "Education Financing and Management Reform Project" 1998-2002 - was designed to develop textbooks based on the existing curriculum but to filter out Soviet ideological content and expand content on Armenian culture. Accordingly, new textbooks were needed, and the methodology and curricula were not detailed. The textbooks were stripped of the ideals of internationalism, and nationalism was given prominence instead. The historical narrative remains strikingly similar to its Soviet predecessor, beginning with the ethnogenesis and then the struggle for national liberation, culminating this time in autonomous nationhood (World Bank, 2003).

The second World Bank-funded project - the 2004-2009 "Quality and Relevance in Education Project" - addressed the curriculum issues left out in the previous phase. As a result of this project, a new National Curriculum Framework as well as the "Subject Standards and Subjects" for all subjects and grades were developed in 2003-2004. Textbooks and teacher's guides were also produced and provided in all schools in the country, and the introduction of the new curriculum in schools started in the 2009-2010 school year.

The 2009-2015 "Second Education Quality and Relevance Project" did not address curriculum reform and textbook production, but advocated a competency-based approach. The results have not been very successful, especially in the integration of subjects (Khachatryan, Petrosyan and Terzyan 2013).

The fourth World Bank-funded project - the "Education Development Project" - was implemented between 2014 and 2019 and has a strong curriculum component. A report on the project in March 2017 stated that *'The curriculum feasibility/needs assessment study has been completed and the draft of the National Curriculum Framework has been developed with the support of the International Curriculum Expert'* (World Bank, 2017, 15).

The involvement of external actors in the shaping of education has also appeared in relation to history. Indeed, the European Association of History Teachers (EURCOLIO) has for several years been leading projects in the Black Sea region, involving Armenian teachers, aimed at training history teachers in critical thinking and teaching multiple perspectives, as well as the joint publication of educational resources. Projects on oral history and memory will play a prominent role in this context. However, these are approaches that are alien to the current closed framework of Armenian education. This is because the state-controlled political narrative is the only legitimate body of historical knowledge in education. (Neyzi and Kharatyan 2010.)

Curriculum and textbook

In public schools, teachers have the flexibility and freedom to choose the teaching methods and content within the time allocated to the subject. Teachers are free to consider or present examples in more depth and to use different approaches and perspectives in teaching history. Teachers conduct lessons according to their own lesson plans. Books and lesson plans remain the most popular teaching tools. The history curricula in Armenia fall under the subject area “Society, social sciences”. Figure 2 provides a more detailed breakdown of the history subject by grade. (Pandemics and Natural Disaster as Reflected in History Teaching).

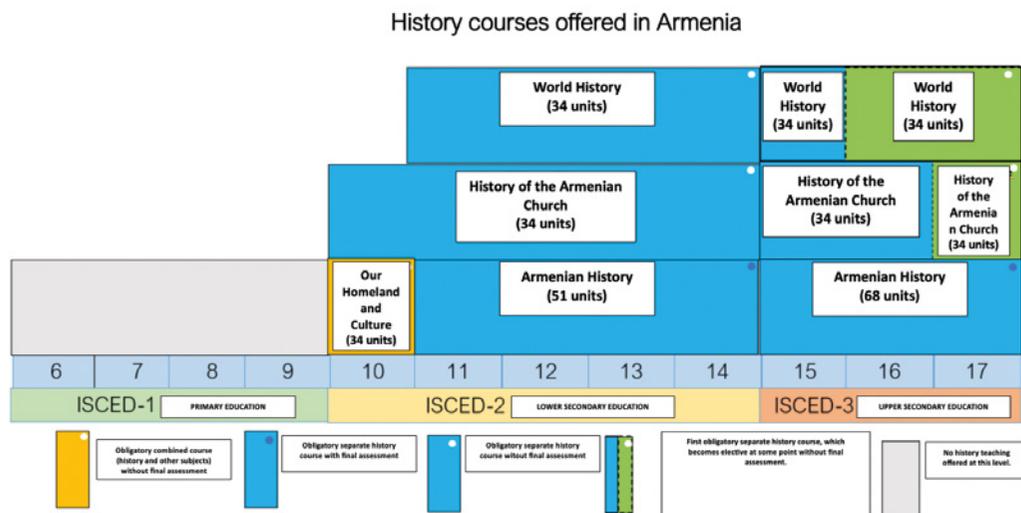


Figure 2: History courses offered in Armenia (own editing, source: OHTe General Report on the State of History Teaching in Europe, Volume 2. 2023, 15.

The subject “Armenian History” is taught in two cycles, chronologically from ancient times to the present day. In secondary school, the basic subject of history (1.5 hours per week, for a total of 51 hours per year) is repeated in secondary school with a more advanced and broader study of history (three hours per week in grade 10, for a total of 102 hours per year, five hours per week in grade 11, for a total of 170 hours per year, and eight hours per week in grade 12, for a total of 272 hours per year). A study commissioned by the Centre for Educational Programmes of the Ministry of Education in the framework of the World Bank-funded “Education Development Project” points out that this repetition could be replaced by an integrated subject of “Armenian history” and “World history”, and by selecting separate subjects from the two subjects in order to develop analytical and critical thinking skills and independent research skills in more depth (EV Consulting and Ayb Educational Foundation, 2016.).

For grade 9 students, there is a state final examination (graduation) in Armenian history, which includes only an oral part. In grade 12, there is a written examination in Armenian history, which takes 120 minutes.

The centralized final examination is organized and conducted by the Appraisal and Testing Centre (ATC). The list of examination centres, heads of centres, ATC representatives, organizers and subject committee members are approved by the ATC director.

The “Subject Standards and Subject Curricula” for both secondary and high school students include a list of primary sources and studies, effectively limiting textbook authors in what they can write. The state is involved in the process of approving history textbooks. The textbooks are not accompanied by a workbook, but there are check questions at the end of the textbook lessons, and what sources they can use. However, the textbooks themselves lack a section on sources. Overall, the ‘subject standards and subject syllabuses’ for middle and secondary schools remain largely ideological and revolve around the development of patriotism and national consciousness, leaving out many important aspects of history learning, such as historical thinking and reasoning, critical thinking, exploring the continuity and changes/interruptions in history, and independent research. (Bilmez, Çayır, Çaykent Karapetyan, Sayan, 2019.)

The textbooks’ single narrative, presented through the authoritarian voice of the textbook authors, focuses primarily on the history of political elites and the wars they fought. This may seem paradoxical in the context of the absence of an Armenian state throughout an extended period of history; the textbook addresses this discontinuity

through a metanarrative of the continuity of statehood or the presumed desire of the Armenian people. The introduction to the grade 10 textbook argues that during the absence of the state, there were different formations that possessed the main features of statehood (power structures, armed forces, etc.) (principalities, melikdoms, semi-independent mountain communities). Thus, even in the absence of Armenian statehood, the textbooks resist a re-centering on social or cultural history, and instead build a continuity of a political elite through the struggles for Armenian statehood, arguing that these political elites throughout the various empires and centuries were aware that their united efforts shall build a future Armenian nation-state. The historical narrative of the textbooks is thus constructed from a narrow perspective, presenting a patriotic image of a people fighting for independence and nation-building. According to the introduction to the 10th grade textbook, the centuries-long struggle to preserve or restore freedom and independence is the axis of Armenian history. In the context of national liberation, textbooks consistently portray Armenians as victims. As Armenian history is taught as a separate subject, without contextualising it in world history, a narrative of repeated subjection to empires and conquests emerges. (Melkonyan, Avetsiyan, 2014).

Textbooks are predominantly just one type of “activity” - “Questions and exercises”, most of which are simply questions. These questions often ask for technical information, such as “How many times did Lenk Temur attack Armenia?” or “Write out the dates from the text and make a timeline”. In general, many questions refer to the text of the lesson and learners are assumed to retrieve the answers from the text and recite them. This is very much in line with the “Teacher’s Manual”, which states that “methodologically, questions and tasks primarily aimed at mastering the content of the textbook are very important.” (Ashot, Gyulbudaghyan, 2013). Armenian history education is primarily dominated by learning the texts of the textbook. There are sources in the textbooks, but there is no analysis or activity linked to these primary sources. The vast majority of these extracts are presented without analysis; and students are not asked to analyse them, either (Bilmez, Çayır, Çaykent Karapetyan, Sayan, 2019).

Study material

At the end of 2023 the Observatory on History Education in Europe (OHTE), the Council of Europe’s history education organisation, published its first report which summarises the state of history education in the Observatory’s 16 member countries, based on

a survey of thousands of participants. The survey included participants from Armenia. The survey shows that respondents consider the Armenian curriculum to be sufficiently flexible and effective in teaching history. Teachers from Armenia (89%) indicated that political and military history is the field of history they teach most often in their lessons. 36% of the teachers in Armenia indicated emphasis on national history as relevant (OHTE, 2023.)

The main purpose of teaching Armenian history is to strengthen national identity. The preservation of Armenian identity is highlighted in the National Security Strategy of Armenia (2007), which defines national identity as a composite of Armenian language, literature, history and culture, aimed at ensuring the continuity of the Armenian intellectual heritage. In addition, it stresses the importance of education in strengthening national identity. “The morals and doctrines of patriotism should begin at home and continue through the formal levels of education.” (RA National Security Strategy, 2007).

The teaching of Armenian history begins with an introduction to the ancient Kingdom of Urartu. Based on the selected criteria, it can be said that all topics and periods are covered. There are periods that are covered in a separate subject. The most detailed and multifaceted history of Armenia in the Middle Ages is presented at school. (Table 3.) Civic education is not included in the curriculum.

The following topics are described as the final knowledge that a student should acquire by the end of the course:

- National (homeland, language, religion, family), spiritual and moral values, the role of traditions in the perpetuation of Armenianness
- Important achievements of national culture and their role in Armenia and the world in the context of culture

The teaching material covers regional history, as a necessary field to learn about:

- The student should gain knowledge on the regional and global political situation.
- The current foreign and domestic political situation of Armenia, learn about the relations between neighbouring countries and the world, as well as the peoples thereof, with various interstate unions, organizations, find up-to-date diverse connections with the world, supply relations and historical alternative versions of developments, predict their consequences.
- The student should separate national problems and the challenges Armenia’s facing, offer suggestion for their resolution and ways to overcome these, predict

their results and consequences, evaluate his/her own role and the need for participation in the establishment of a strong and competitive Armenian state.

- Development of analytical, critical and creative thinking, research, collaboration, self-expression, autonomous learning and working skills and abilities is defined as one of the aims of each topic included in the curriculum
- Observation of turning events in history, phenomena, social and domestic life and customs, relationships between individuals, societies and civilizations from the perspective of the individual, nation and humanity is described as one of the General Crossing Concept of each topic included in curriculum.

Age shift and the emergence of themes in Armenian history

The subject of History of Armenia begins with the description of the ancient Ararat or Urartu Kingdom. Ancient Global History is mentioned within the frames of relations of the ancient Armenian Kingdom and its geopolitical relations with Assyria, Persia, Parthia, etc. Armenian medieval history covers the course of the development of Armenian civilization, compares and analyses the phenomena, prominent figures, important historical and social facts, events, their results and consequences of the period (8th-14th centuries), evaluates the achievements and failures of the period, the place and role of Armenia in history. For the global history section, the curriculum mentions the following countries of the period: the Arab invasions, the Byzantine Empire, the Mongol invasions, the Seljuk Sultanate, the Golden Horde, Georgia, as well as their relationships, prominent personalities, and important historical events.

The course covers the topics related to the development of Armenian civilization in the premodern and modern stages of national history, the liberation of Armenia and the restoration of the state in the period from the second half of the 15th to the middle of the 20th century, compares the manuals introduced for this purpose, discusses the prominent figures, important historical and social facts, phenomena, events of the period, analyzes their results and consequences, evaluates the achievements and failures, their place and role in Armenian history. In the curriculum, this period is referred to as “Armenia on the road to independence”. The division of Armenia between the Ottoman Empire and Persia, the periods of Persian, Ottoman and Tsarist Russia, the First Republic of Armenia and the Sovietisation of Armenia, as well as the Armenian question and the Armenian Genocide are central themes. Such events as the Turkish-Persian wars, and

the Russian-Turkish, or the Russian-Persian wars, the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia, as well as the USA, countries of Europe are mentioned to give a comprehensive geopolitical picture of premodern and modern era.

The curriculum also covers contemporary national history. The curriculum deals with contemporary history from the period of the Sovietization 1921-1991, Armenia's independence in 1991, the Harabakh movement of 1989-1994, the geographical and geopolitical realities of Nagorno-Kharabakh, the Armenian diaspora. It deals with historically and socially important facts, phenomena and events, analyses their results, consequences, causal links, interdependence of historical events, finds and maintains the interrelationship of important events and phenomena of contemporary historical processes. The curriculum mentions World War 2, Armenia's role in the anti-fascism war, and the Collapse of the Soviet Union.

In Armenia, there is no civic education as a separate subject.

Relevant debates on topics of the „Armenian History” textbook

Changing the narratives: Armenians as the native habitants of the Armenian Plateau

Different interpretations of Armenians being native habitants or newcomers back in times to this huge geographical area is one very popular discourse around Armenian History textbooks. The reason for this discourse is the different interpretation of the origins of the Armenian people, presented in various textbooks. In textbooks published before 2023 it is highlighted that Armenians are the natives of Armenian Plateau which – together with the Iranian Plateau and the neighbouring territories – was considered to be the native land for the Indo-European civilization. Under the subtitle “Armenian Plateau: fatherland of the Armenians” there is a description “The formation of the Armenian nation happened in the Armenian Plateau. According to the sources, for 4-2 millennia the Plateau was inhabited by different tribes. The majority of those tribes belonged to the Indo-European language family.... Not only Armenian, but also German, Russian, Greek, Indian, and Persian ancestors inhabited the East of Asia Minor, the Armenian Plateau, and the North-West of the Iranian Plateau.” (Armenian History Textbook 6., 2018.)

It is important to note that Armenians being the native habitants of the Armenian Plateau had been the only narrative or theory presented in history textbooks until the latest textbook was published in 2023 edited by Smbat Hovhannisyan. In the book of

2023, another theory of origins rather than theory of being autochthonous habitants is presented. “According to the Balkan theory the ancestors of the Armenians are from the Balkans, that is, they were Phrygian colonizers who migrated to the Armenian highlands”. Following the description of the origins of the Armenians the textbook suggests another theory as well that is closer to the “traditional hypothesis”; “Another point of view about the origin of the Armenians is based on the myth told by Movses Khorenatsi (Armenian historian of the 5th C.). This approach presupposes the hypothesis of the formation of the Armenian people as locals. The fact that the formation of the Armenian people took place in long-term interactions in the territory of the Armenian highlands is also confirmed as a result of modern genetic research. (Armenian History Textbook 7., 2023.) Then in the same paragraph the textbook discusses the origins of Indo-Europeans relying on “steppe” and “South Asian (Armenian)” theories. As there is a discourse in Armenia right now about this textbook, it is important to note that teachers are not satisfied with the terminology of the text and the ideas described there.

Changing Narratives – The Armenian Genocide

The Armenian Genocide is presented in the textbooks of 8th grade (2023). The problematics of the Armenian Genocide topic is discussed by many historians and teachers in Armenia. The most obvious weakness of the topic is the absence of causality of the events that created the foundation which led to the organized ethnic massacres by the Ottoman Empire (Young Turks’ party) in the borders of the empire. In one of his last interviews of 2020, Artak Movsisyan, historian and head of Armenian History Department in Yerevan State University (2016-2020) has shared his concerns about changing the narratives on the topic of the Genocide and excluding patriotism from “Armenian History” textbooks.

Indeed, the only contextual part in the textbooks covering this period is the one and half page of a small chapter titled “The Caucasian Frontline of World War” (Armenian History textbook 8., 2018.). And then the contextual history about events concerning Armenia is continued with a discussion of the Bolshevik Revolution in Armenia. It is clear that Armenian textbooks of Global History cover more facts and events of this period, especially the aftermath of the First World War, but still, there is a reason why Armenian historians evaluate texts of schoolbooks about this period not equal to their expectations to a deep and more contextual Armenian History. Also, the chronology of

events is not well organized, because as we see in the textbook, there are sharp skips from one decade to another, and then back to the previous period. Thus, this chaos can cause “aversion to Armenian History textbooks and Armenian History in general among the students...when editing and publishing such books the benchmarks of Armenian history had not been discussed with professors from YSU, the Pedagogical University, or the National Academy” (Artak Movsisyan).

Research and the monitoring of relevant interviews and publications shows that there is an inevitable confrontation towards Armenian History textbooks, especially in topics about the origins of the Armenian people, and questions concerning the Armenian Genocide (why this becomes less and less in pages with every new edition of the textbook), and the aftermath of the First World War. According to the new criteria of history textbooks in 2020, the history of the Armenian voluntary partisan movements in the Ottoman Empire from 19th century until the First World War was decreased as well, as Artak Movsisyan says.

Renaming the subject “Armenian History”

In January 2024 the Armenian media space had been filled with the news that there is a suggestion to rename the school subject “Armenian History” into “History of Armenia”.¹ In Armenian language the textbook is called “Hayots Patmutyun”- verbatim it is translated as Armenian History. Even though in foreign languages Armenian history textbooks are called “History of Armenia” and are presented with this title in international platforms, the Armenian name for the textbooks is “Armenian History”.² According to the public comment of Armenia’s National Science Academy’s History Institution, it is unknown who came up with the idea of renaming the subject. Even so, the Ministry of Education and the Prime Minister of Armenia Nikol Pashinyan assured that they had received such a request (again, the identity of the author of that proposal is unknown). Later the project about the Changes in Decision N. 439 of April 8, 2010, of The Government of The Republic of Armenia had been installed in the official page of the Unified website for the publication of legal acts’ drafts. (On the change of the Resolution of the Government of the Republic of Armenia N. 439 of April 8, 2010). Armenia’s Ministry of

¹ In Armenian language the subject is called “Hayoc Patmutyun”, which is translated as “Armenian History.”

² In this article the title of Armenian history textbooks is given as “History of Armenia”, whereas Armenian equivalent for the school textbooks is “Armenian History”

Education, Science, Culture and Sport has clarified that by changing the name of the subject “History of Armenians” to “History of Armenia” “the inconsistency in the definitions of Articles 33 and 35 of the National Academy of Sciences has been eliminated. As a result, the name of the subject becomes clearer, within the framework of which the events that took place in different periods of the history of the Armenian statehood and the Armenian people will be studied.” (The Ministry of Education – Project. It is proposed to rename the subject “History of Armenians” into “History of Armenia”.)

Relevant debates on the topic of “Armenian Church History”

The debates on the subject of the history of the Armenian Church in the Armenian educational and public domain have intensified in recent years. In 2020, the RA Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports issued a statement that changes are expected regarding the teaching of the History of the Armenian Church. Although in the speech of the Minister of Education and Science it was mentioned that the subject will be taught according to the state standards of general education on the principle of integration with other subjects, and it will be a separate subject only in higher grades, the wave of public dissatisfaction rose. Due to the published information on the relevant topic, while discussing the issue in this section, we will also rely on the publicly available public demands, open letters, meetings and discussions held by the Armenian Apostolic Church and the Armenian Apostolic Church on this topic.

“In general, we have changed the approaches to the formation of the curriculum. In the fifth and sixth grades, we have certain integrated subjects, which will soon be discussed. In the fifth and sixth grades, the subject will be taught as a part of the Mother Language and Social Studies subjects, and in higher grades, as a separate subject,” said the Deputy Minister of Education and Culture, Zhanna Andreasyan. In response to this, teachers wrote an open letter to the Minister of Education and Culture, Araik Harutyunyan, saying: *“History of Armenian Church cannot be included in other subjects, because of the educational criteria. Today, we are losing Armenianness in every field. What is Armenian is shrinking, giving way to foreign imports. We are not against reforms, but we want to move forward, preserving the Armenian, taking what will not harm our roots.”* (Harutyunyan)

Armenian Church History has been a separate subject in Armenian schools since 2007. However, the changes have happened during the last three years and now the

History of the Armenian Church subject (former 5th and 6th grade material) is integrated in the textbook of Armenian History 7th grade.

The new (2023) Armenian History textbook for 7th grade of middle school has provoked many discussions and contradictions as we have already analysed. The educational criteria of the Armenian Church History, which was integrated into this textbook, has awoken enough contradictions as well. Recently, on December 26th the press conference was held in Etchmiatsin organized by the educational committee of Mother See of Holy Etchmiatsin. The committee discussed worries and fears of the National Church around the new textbook of Armenian History and the reduction of topics about the Armenian Church included in the textbook. *“This textbook is not acceptable. Not only because materials there are wrong, but also because the textbook has changed all the approaches and methods of education of Armenian church History”* says Father Mikayel, leader of the Diocese of Shirak. The topics of the Armenian Church History that had to be included in the textbook were established in the General education “History of Armenians” subject learning concept (project) of 2020. According to that project the topics are.

1. Foundation and spread of Christianity.
2. Christianity as a pillow of Armenian Civilization
3. Christian Doctrine
4. Holy Bible
5. Increase of the role and influence of Armenian church in the region
6. Structure of the Church
7. Church Councils
8. Armenian Church in 7-8 CC., and during Bagratuni dynasty (“History of Armenians” subject learning concept, 2020.)

In conclusion, it is important to note that the Educational Committee of Etchmiatsin has foreseen such threats when there was a decision to integrate Armenian Church History subject into Armenian History subject. It is obvious that it is not possible to include a 2-year plan of materials of a separate subject into one year textbook.

There are so many topics that are missing from the book, and those topics are important for our generation to learn. Armenia was a part of the Soviet Union and the Armenian Church faced many difficulties and challenges back then. To me it was important to fill in the gap left by the Soviet heritage in the collective memory of the people of the Independent Armenia. It would be good to bring changes and

developments in the field of education and in projects of Armenian Church History. However, everything that we see now happening with these new approaches are not going to become positive changes.” (from an interview with Dr. Edgar Hovhannisyan, historian, Dean of the faculty of History and Social Sciences, ASPU)

Conclusion

Armenia has a long history and tradition in education. Since its establishment, Armenian education has served as both a bastion of the country's political and economic existence and a guarantee of its development. The short-lived first Armenian Republic (1918-1920) created the current educational framework which was later developed further during the Soviet era (1920-1990). Education has long been highly valued in Armenia. Maintaining the competitiveness of the education system on the global stage and its continuous improvement is now a governmental and national priority.

Armenian history education is also about cultivating national identity. Accordingly, prominent role is given in history education to the study of national heroes, historical kingdoms and the teaching of detailed church history is emphasized in the cultivation of Armenian identity. Cross-curricular links are also found in social sciences (world history) and natural sciences (geography). The country has a rich ancient tradition, so the curriculum covers this in detail, as well as medieval and modern history. The curriculum also reflects the issues and challenges of national survival. The importance of the history subject is reflected in the compulsory state examinations in grades 9 and 12. The freedom of the textbook market is regulated by the public authorities, which prescribe and determine the compulsory subjects to be taught. Textbooks play a prominent role in the teaching of history, providing the didactic basis for lessons by requiring students to learn and recall the factual material contained in them. There are no worksheets or exercises in the classical sense; students have to answer the questions in the textbook lesson. External experts point out the lack of didactic versatility and the problem of the division of history into several subjects.

Recent research puts Armenia on the map of education in Europe. The country participates in the work of the European Observatory on the Education of History in Europe (OHTE), the Council of Europe's organisation for history education.

However, as it can be seen from the analyses of interviews and reports of specialists of leading historical educational centres, representatives of the Armenian National Church changes

and transformative tendencies around the criteria of Armenian History textbook, it can weaken historical narratives in minds of younger generations. As several historians like Eduard Hovhannisyan, Artak Movsisyan have noticed, changes in historical narratives are a part of politics of history for Armenian society. Hence, "the restrictions of texts about national heroes, historical kingdoms, geographical origins of a nation, the isolation of the National Church from the frames of Armenian history textbook can become a reason for erratic self-identification and an unstable position in regional geopolitics". (Movsisyan–internet source).

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Ministry of Education, Science, Culture, and Sport (MESCS)	The ministry is responsible for formulating and implementing educational policies in Armenia. It oversees the entire education system, from pre-school to higher education. The ministry plays a crucial role in curriculum development, teacher training, and educational standards.
School Boards/School Districts	The education system is more centralized, and individual schools typically operate under the authority of the Ministry of Education.
Local Municipalities	Local authorities may provide additional resources or support for schools, but the overarching educational policies are set at national level.
Church	The Armenian Apostolic Church has historically played a significant role in education in Armenia. Some educational institutions in Armenia may be affiliated with the church, particularly at the higher education level.
Private Educational Institutions	These institutions operate independently and may have their own governing bodies. They often have more flexibility in terms of curriculum and organizational structure.
International Organizations and NGOs	They may provide support, resources, and expertise to improve educational outcomes, particularly in areas such as curriculum development, teacher training, and infrastructure improvement.

Table 1. Armenian school authorities (own editing)