



The Islamic Religion in Course Curriculums of High School History Textbooks in The Republic of North Macedonia

Zećir Ramčilo¹⁾, M. Sayyidul Abrori²⁾

1) *Institute of National History, Macedonia*

2) *Universitas Ma'arif Lampung, Indonesia*

Correspondence : arori400@gmail.com

Abstract	Article Info
<p>History textbooks besides educating students can also deepen the divisions, prejudices and uncritical attitudes contrary to the goals of education, and the youth population is the most vulnerable group. To that end, the main goal of this paper is to analyze the teaching contents of high school textbooks related to religion. In particular, this paper examines the role of religion in the formation of Balkan nations, which have made it one of the key elements of their national identities. Due to the large volume of content related to the religion, as well as the mere fact that Muslims are the second largest religious group in North Macedonia, this paper analyzes the contents which are related only to the Islamic religion. The literature review and the overview of the legal framework will give an additional impulse to the efforts of eliminating those parts of the teaching contents that create division and prejudices, and thus, its studying can become the key factor in the building of trust between people of different religions.</p>	<p>Article History Received : 02-01-2023, Revised : 20-01-2023, Accepted : 31-01-2023</p> <p>Keywords: Islam; Religion; Students; History textbooks; Education.</p>

A. Introduction

Education is a fundamental human right that enables children, young people and adults to acquire the knowledge and skills that make them useful for themselves and society, with the power to think critically, make choices and improve their lives. Quality education is a key element for the long-term economic and social development of our multiethnic and multi-religious Macedonian society.

History is one of the social sciences, but it is also a humanistic science. It not only offers knowledge of the past, but also influences the modeling of the student (man), his rational knowledge of himself and others. Through history students learn about the notions of democracy, power, peace, war, treaties, and historical processes and so on. Given the fact that the relatively young Macedonian state needed a new historical legitimacy different from the former Yugoslav order, in addition to its basic educational and scientific goals, Macedonian historians had to make a major leap forward, often on the basis of new or reformulated old myths. This is something that is also found in the history of other Balkan countries. But, unlike others, the views of Macedonian historians have been met with strong opposition from foreigners, especially those from

neighboring countries. Because of this, as well as the reactions of other people's living in Macedonia, mainly Albanians, the curriculum has changed three times since independence. The last changes were during 2005/2006, when besides the Macedonian identity, the Albanian identity was promoted, with further minorization of other ethnic communities. It is a matter of time when bilateral agreements with Bulgaria and Greece will cause a revision of the history textbooks. This only speaks to the inconsistent construction of a sustainable historical paradigm strongly influenced by external factors and politics.

Textbook development in the Republic of North Macedonia (later: North Macedonia) is based on the Law on Textbooks for Primary and Secondary Education and the Conception for Textbook Development and Textbook Evaluation Methodology. According to Article 4 of the Law on Textbooks, the textbook is prepared according to the curriculum for the respective grade and subject and the Textbook Concept, which is approved by the Minister in charge of education upon proposal of the Bureau for Development of Education. The Law focuses more on the legal aspects, while in my research the Textbook development concept is more important, as stated in the previous article of the Law.

The Conception has five basic criteria for developing a textbook, whereas the fifth emphasized educational function, positive attitude towards science / knowledge, development of civic and national identity, multiculturalism and gender equality. It clearly states that contents should encourage students to promote and develop the values and benefits of living together and respecting differences between people (regardless of their ethnicity, religion, gender etc.), their culture, language and traditions. In order to ensure that the textbook promotes mutual respect and acceptance, the contemporary textbook should portray North Macedonia as a multicultural and multiethnic society (Conception for Textbook Development, p.22-23).

In addition to the basic general criteria, specific criteria for different subjects are also given in the Conception. For the History subject, it is clearly stated that the textbook should respect the benefits of all the ethnic communities that participated in the construction of the state, in accordance with the Constitution of North Macedonia (Ibid, p.43). That is, when presenting the history of the different ethnic communities living in the North Macedonia, to emphasize their role in the history of the state, and not only the history of the ethnic community. The textbook should have content (texts and illustrations) that reflects the history, culture and tradition of all ethnic communities and religions. The language used in the textbooks should be free of terms and expressions that promote hatred and the creation of image of an enemy (Ibid, p.45). The criteria should present and promote interaction between members of different religions

and ethnic communities in the country through content that is dominated by inter-religious understanding.

Also, according to the Textbook Evaluation Methodology, besides the developmental and educational function of the History textbook, there should be content related to understanding "others", referring to overcoming stereotypes and prejudices; recognizing similarities and differences, behaviors, culture, customs, religion, gender, etc (Elementary and High School, 2009, p.8). According to the Methodology, the textbook must not use terms and expressions that belittle any person, ethnic or religious community, nor should have any content contrary to the Constitution of North Macedonia.

In addition to the Conception, the content in the textbooks is written according to the curricula prepared by the expert teams of the Bureau for Development of Education, composed of members with different ethnicity: 6 Macedonians, 5 Albanians and 1 Turk. Such composition is inadequate and marginalizes other ethnic communities, which is reflected in the curricula and thus in the textbooks. According to the quantity, we have binational history in the history textbooks in Macedonian and Albanian. That is, the balance between the history of the majority (Macedonians) and the communities has been reduced to a balance between Macedonians and Albanians. Also, in the writing of history textbooks one of the authors must be Albanian or Turkish.

It is important to note that for the same year of secondary education there are at least two approved textbooks, which enables selection. This is important because the differences between textbooks by different authors are obvious and significant. The units of instruction are the same, lesson titles are the same, but the volume and contents of the units are different. Therefore, schools and teachers can choose which teaching content to employ. That is, in the 1st year, of the 50 teaching contents provided, professors are required to realize 38 contents. In the 2nd year, of the 56 teaching contents provided, professors are required to deliver 42 contents. In the 3rd year, of the 53 teaching contents provided, professors are required to deliver 40 contents. There is no such clarification for 4th year, and due to the smaller number of teaching contents they should all be processed throughout the year. The choice of topics to be covered is positive, but depending on the professor there is also the possibility that the topics related to the "others" will be bypassed and unprocessed.

The legal and formal prerequisites for textbook preparation in large part provides a good basis for writing quality textbooks based on scientific truths and facts that will help young people build a sense of community, mutual respect, fostering and building a multicultural, multiethnic and multi-religious society. However, the situation is not as simple as it seems at first glance despite all the legal bases and criteria for developing textbooks.

B. Research Method

This article is a type of research in the form of literature (Library Research), namely research that originates from literature related to the research theme. The main data sources used were high school curriculum and history books related to religion in the republic of North Macedonia, This article analyze content related to the Islamic religion. Besides that Data sources also come from various books, scientific journals, published statistical data, reviews of legal frameworks and sources related to the theme (Connaway & Radford, 2021).

C. Research Results and Discussion

Analysis of the curriculum related to Islamic religion

Teacher In the first-year textbook by Milan Boskovski et al (2006), in the topic "Introduction to History", the teaching content "History - Teacher of Life" illustrates well the periodization and the recording of time, where in addition to the illustrative part, the two events according to which Christians and Muslims keep time are mentioned in one sentence. "Christians are recording time since the birth of Jesus Christ, and Muslims since the coming of Muhammad from Mecca to Medina in 622 AD" (Boskovski et.al, 2006, p.9). In the rest of the text, I consider the division of eras in the account of time to be questionable, both in choice and in terminology as given in the textbook: Jewish, Hellenic, Roman, Macedonian, Christian and Muslim era.

In the topic "Prehistory" and in the curriculum of the same name, it is stated quite correctly about the creation of man that "There are many assumptions about the creation of the human being, but two are dominant: the religious and the scientific interpretation". In the following paragraph, in the description of "religious interpretation", it is stated that "the creator of man and of the whole world on earth was God". Furthermore, the whole religious interpretation is reduced to Christian interpretation, where the explanation begins with "According to the Scriptures ..." (Ibid, p.12). In this way, the members of other religions are put in a subordinate situation, especially the Muslims who are additionally put in an uncomfortable situation with one illustration depicting the first humans Adam and Eve.

In the topic "Ancient Rome", for the first time we have a separate teaching content devoted to religion, i.e. "The Rise and Spread of Christianity", written in four pages and accompanied by six illustrations (Ibid, p.103-106). This lesson describes the conditions under which Christianity emerged, its teaching, its spread, symbols, etc., correctly and with exact dates for significant events. In the topic "Balkans and Macedonia under Roman rule", another teaching content on religion called "Spread of Christianity in Macedonia" appears in three pages accompanied by five illustrations (Ibid, p.118-120).

The topic "Early Middle Ages" contains the only teaching content devoted to Islam, "The Rise and Spread of Islam" on four pages (Ibid, p.129-132). The title itself does not correspond with the text of the content, as only a small part refers to Islam, while the greater part is about the Arabs and their state and culture, accompanied by six illustrations, three of which relate to Islamic religion. Part of the lesson on Islam gives some information about Islam, some of which is only partially correct, even wrong. Partially true and certainly not of primary importance is the statement that "The new religion was first adopted by the poor", as well as the statement that "All Muhammad's speeches were written and they composed the holy Islamic book - the Quran." The information in the section concerning Muhammad's successors is incorrect: "Those who believed that only the descendants of Fatima and her husband Ali could succeed Muhammad were called Sunnis. Members of another sect known as the Shiites thought that the best Muslim should be chosen as successor, regardless of his ancestry." This is a highly simplistic interpretation, in which the division of Sunnis and Shiites is wrong and reversed. Two well-thought-out assignments are given for students, particularly the assignment Create a Venn diagram: Identify the similarities and differences between Christianity and Islam. In this way students have the opportunity to see that these two religions are very similar, and the differences are minimal, and that Islam and Christianity as religions are not the reason for divisions in society. In the topic on "Life and Culture in the Early Middle Ages" the entire curriculum abounds with religious content and illustrations of the Christian religion and its impact on education, architecture, art and more. There are several sentences on Islam on p. 144 in which the prayer of the Muslims is presented in a non-essential and simplified manner: "During prayer they kneel and touch the ground with their foreheads, turned to Mecca, their holy city" (Ibid, p.140-144).

The topic "The Balkans in the Early Middle Ages" describes the beliefs and gods of the Slavs, and further down extensively writes about Christianity, where unlike simplified interpretations of Islam, Christianity is always presented as the carrier of cultural development and prosperity (Ibid, p.148-149).

At the end of the textbook, in a Dictionary of unknown words there are also religious words, some of which are inappropriately interpreted and simplified. E.g. Islam - obedience and prophet - the Messenger of Allah on earth (Ibid, p.197). There are very few illustrations related to the Islamic religion in the textbook, especially when compared to illustrations related to the Christian religion. That is, 48 are Christian, as opposed to 4 illustrations related to the Islamic religion. Inappropriate, however it is also a reflection of the vast space dedicated to the Christian religion. I find that some of the content unnecessarily burdens students with religious, i.e. Christian contents.

In the second year textbook by Milan Boskovski et al (2009), in the topic "The World and Europe since the Early and Late Middle Ages to the End of the Eighteenth Century", the teaching content in all sections mentions the benefits of Humanism and the Renaissance, the progress of science and more, while "the old religious views and understandings of the world no longer fit people with the new conditions of life." (Boskovski et al, 2009, p.10). This of course is a simplified interpretation of the emergence of Humanism and the Renaissance.

In the topic "The Balkans in the Developed Middle Ages" some parts of the curriculum contain certain findings related to religion, namely the Crusades and the spread of the Ottoman Empire in these areas. There are several sentences about Islam in the teaching content Ottoman State that are imprecise and questionable. In one sentence it is written that "in the second half of the 12th century they attacked the Baghdad Caliphate from whom they accepted Islam" which are both incorrect and poorly explained, unlike the explanations about the acceptance of Christianity by some Balkan nations (Ibid, p.32). Moreover, on the same page, there are specific statements that: "Using Islam, he succeeded in subjugating the remaining Seljuk tribes" (Ibid, p.32). It is not clear what the authors think and what they want to convey with the abovementioned statement. Even if they thought that because Islam was a more acceptable way of believing and practicing that helped to unite the tribes, the second part of the sentence is contrary to the very tenets of Islam, i.e. "subjugating them."

Such inaccurate statements can lead students to various interpretations of Islam. A similar case is the explanation of the Sultan, for whom it reads "He was an unbounded master of the land and of the subjects, and according to Islamic law he was responsible only before the Prophet Muhammad and under Allah (God)" (Ibid, p.33). The first part of the sentence is not related to religion, but the second part is pretentious. The title of Sultan itself is not properly defined, it does not originate from Islam and cannot be explained "under Islamic law". On p. 35 of this textbook, a special section "For the curious" discusses the Janissaries, a topic that is also very frequent in the elementary school textbooks. The part related to religion is debatable. The textbook states that: "The Janissaries were recruited from young and healthy captured Christian children who were violently Islamized." Without going into a detailed analysis of this statement, it is sufficient to mention that Muslim children were also recruited, especially from Bosnia (Ramcilovic, 2014, p.40-43).

The topic "Balkans and Macedonia under Ottoman rule from the XV century to the end of the XVIII century" contains many incorrect and questionable conclusions, even unacceptable content for a textbook from the point of view of its methodology. On the page that marks the beginning of a new topic, alongside the title on the entire page the Coat of Arms of Macedonia from 1620 is presented,

which is kept in the Museum of Applied Arts in Belgrade, and which as such is found for the first time in the 1340 Stanislav Rupcic Book of Coats. I find that this illustration does not adequately reflect the teaching content (Boskovski et al, 2009, p.57). The first lesson "Organization of the Ottoman State and the Establishment of the Timaro-Spahic System" is divided into three parts: (1) Establishing the Timaro-Spahic System; (2) Colonization and (3) Islamization. Except for the first subheading, the other two subheadings are tendentiously presented in order to make a greater impression on students.

Unfortunately, the text in the content is very poorly conceived, questionable, and even inaccurate. The first page of the lesson provides a nearly half-page excerpt from a text by Ivo Andric's "The Bridge on the Drina". It requires students to analyze the text that speaks of the creation of the Janissary Army (Ibid, p.58). Earlier in the same textbook we considered the section that talked about janissaries on p. 35 is debatable; however, with this text I believe that the authors of the textbook want to impose a picture that creates division and hatred towards those who are considered to be the heirs of the Ottomans in this region or to Muslims in general. First of all, what is methodologically problematic is to put a literature text in a History textbook for the 2nd year of secondary education/high schools. History as a science cannot and should not be based on literature work which expresses the writer's personal views, whereby the author is not a witness to the events. In such works the writer does not refer to witnesses or documents, but most often his writings are the product of his imagination and his knowledge. Very often the intention of the writer is to support some ideology which sends a certain message as a means of accomplishing a purpose, justifying or initiating certain actions. Especially the history textbooks that form the consciousness of the young man must not contain such texts. In this case, the text creates divisions, prejudices and hatred.

1. The misinterpretation of "tax in blood" and "janissaries" in the textbook

Furthermore, the text itself mentions: "Already the sixth year passed since the last collection of this tax in blood". The very wording of the Devshirmeh boys' recruitment law as a Blood Tax is the result of the mythology made by Jovan N. Tomic in the late 19th century, when this term first appeared (Tomic, 1898). This work which does not refer to documents or historical sources was done about two hundred years after the last recruitment of boys in 1705 during the reign of Sultan Ahmed III (1703-1730). Since then, the term has been used tendentiously, first by Serbian scientists and intellectuals, and then by its neighbors. The Devshirme system is heavily popularized as a tax on blood, with particular attention in history teaching material. Thus, it became part of the collective consciousness of the Balkan

peoples and imposed itself as a truth that should not be discussed in order to denigrate a particular community without the existence of scientific evidence. However, given the term used today for the emigration of young people due to better education and job opportunities, i.e. "brain drain", perhaps this term only reflects the awareness and understanding of the population in the region of a particular phenomenon and process at a given moment. Personally, I think that neither of the terms is appropriate and does not reflect the reality today as it didn't then. Or the same text states that "some people really mutilated their children, cutting off one of their fingers". In the same lecture, in the text there is a statement: "However, the heaviest of taxes was considered the blood tax (devshirme), which consisted of taking Christian male children raised like Muslims and making armies of janissaries" (page 58). Along with Andric's text, this sentence also gives a false picture of the recruitment of young boys. Although, here the term "devshirme" is correctly used. But, if we compare with the Andric's text on page 35 of, the fact that the recruitment concerned the children of Muslims, mainly from Bosnia and Albania, is also not mentioned. Devshirme was a well-planned action, coordinated by precisely determined criteria, so that school support was given to a certain number of children for each administrative unit of the state, but on the basis of individual cases of abuse by the local leaders of that time or ideologically motivated writings we cannot educate young generations which would create further divisions in our multiethnic and multi-confessional society. Also, I argue that the subtitle Colonization is deliberately given because the Ottomans did not carry out any significant planning in the colonization of the Balkan Peninsula. The examples cited in the lesson confirm this because as it is written the "colonization has never jeopardized the survival of the indigenous Macedonian population, which remained more numerous throughout the Ottoman rule in Macedonia" (page 59). Thus, the title and the statement "After the conquest of the Balkan Peninsula, the Ottomans began the process of settling the Muslim population in the conquered countries" (p. 59) is farfetched. The Ottomans ruled this region for more than five centuries and it is quite logical to have migrations in both urban and rural areas. The settlements in the Balkans as a result of the loss of territories and the expulsion of Muslims, as well as of Jews, and their expulsion to other parts of the state, including in the Balkans, cannot be generalized as peaceful and planned colonization of space. They were planned according to several factors, opportunities and needs of the state.

Far more controversial is the Islamization section in the book of Boskovski.M et al (2009). Namely, in the first sentence "The Ottomans in the conquered countries, especially in the Balkans besides colonization, also

implemented Islamization (conversion to Islam - Muslim religion)." The very term "implemented" is incorrect because the Ottomans did not Islamize. The fact that certain missionaries have propagated Islam, or that in areas with Christian or Bogomil populations have started to live with people of different faiths, such as Muslims or Jews, cannot be considered a planned operation and implementation of Islamization. This is also inappropriately defined as "passing", I think the most appropriate term is "acceptance". Furthermore, in the second sentence: "Islamization could have been voluntary and forced" (Ibid, p.60). Accepting Islam is not a forced process. It contradicts the very principle of Islam that "there is no compulsion in the faith" (Holy Qur'an, 2000).

I believe that the claim of forced Islamization is unfounded, and there is no evidence of such a violent spread of Islam. The view of most historians, that with the violent spread of Islam by the 19th century there would be no Christians in the Balkans and that the Ottoman administration of other faiths was far more tolerant of many other Christian states, are clear. In the third sentence, "voluntary Islamization was present in the first centuries of the Ottoman rule, and to Islam mostly converted wealthy Balkan feudalists, as it allowed them to retain their possessions and privileges. The poor people converted to Islam often for tax evasion and for a safer life" (Boskovski.M et al, 2009, p.60). According to the authors it is imposed on young people that "voluntary Islamization" could only occur for retention of property and privileges; tax evasion and a safer life. The reason for retaining their possessions and privileges is debatable. The records show that there were also many wealthy merchants with different ethnic background, like Greeks, Aromanians, Armenians, and Jews who never renounced their Christian faith (Malcom, 1995, p.60 & Imamovic, 1998, p.147). Among the Sipahi in the Macedonian villages there were not only Muslims but also Christians, as was the case in other Balkan regions. This is evidence that the "Turks", after the conquest, did not demand a change of faith as a condition for property retention (Trifunoski, 1986, p.132). According to Skaric, it is not true that one has to become a Muslim in order to become rich in the Ottoman Empire. Faith did not prevent anyone from taking a better position in the official hierarchy, the military, and society, except for the highest positions (Skarić. V, 1985, p.79). And the reason "for tax evasion and a safer life" is also debatable (Boskovski et al, 2009, p.60).

The reason for avoiding paying taxes for non-Muslims or kharaj has many inconsistencies. Kharaj was an annual tax for adult men who are able to make money, which in the sixteenth century amounted to four gold coins for the rich, two for the middle class and one ducat for the poor. At that time, a

small ducat could be bought for about 20kg of grain and a little more for an Austrian gold coin. Tax evasion could not have been the major reason for the change of faith, and we must not forget that Muslims, unlike Christians, were giving zakat, a religious annual tax, which is one of the five basic obligations of Islam (Ramcilovic, 2014, p.40). One of the taxes paid by non-Muslims was the jizya tax, which was paid only by adult boys and men who are capable to join the army in order not to join, unlike the Muslims who did not have that opportunity and had to go to the army that sometimes lasted several years. Most often they never returned, leaving their lives on the various fronts of the great Ottoman Empire. Such theories of economic motivation have many inconsistencies. There probably were cases of acceptance of Islam for these reasons, but at no point is there room for the possibility that acceptance of Islam could have been the choice of a particular person because of the conviction that Islam was a more rational, acceptable and better way of believing and living.

As an example of forced Islamization, again and for the fourth time it is stated: "A typical example of forced Islamization was the gathering of Christian children for janissaries"(Boskovski et al, 2009, p.60). As I have mentioned, I am free to state the arbitrary statements that the devshirme system presents. In this section, among other controversial findings is: "The Islamized population in different countries is known by different names. ... and the Islamized are known under the names of Torbes and Gorani people" (Ibid, p.60). These are completely inaccurate statements, because accepting Islam does not change ethnicity, regardless of religion Macedonians are Macedonians, Albanians are Albanians, Bosniaks are Bosniaks and so on. It is completely wrong to associate ethnicity with religion, regardless of which people or religion they are. On the same page there is also a task: Explore and find out: "Where and in which places Islamized Macedonians live" (Ibid, p.60). Quite wrong wording, which can be offensive. For example, what would this question be like: Where and where do Christian Macedonians live?

What one wants to impose on the younger generations is on the one hand that Christianity is a religion that is natural to these areas, and on the other the unnaturally of Islam. In this way divisions are made between young people of different religions, divisions are even made among the Macedonian people, which is unnecessary because religion is the choice of each individual. Macedonians can be Orthodox Christians, Catholics, Muslims, Protestants, etc., and they can also be atheists.

In the next lesson "Resistance against Ottoman rule" there are several questionable statements (Ibid, p.61). Firstly, "the unarmed resistance was expressed through non-payment of taxes and the rejection of Islamization."

Again, a thesis about an Islamization process carried out by the Ottoman government is re-enacted, with no evidence of it. But if the authors want to say that there have been more or less people who have embraced Islam in a given period of time, they have to back it up with facts. Secondly, the textbook for the fifth time discusses the "blood tax" - the devshirme. The authors wrote that allegedly "the strongest resistance the peasants made was against the blood tax. Parents hid their children to protect them, got them married at 8-9 years of age, mutilated them, inscribed a cross on their foreheads, etc" (Ibid, p.61). This fabrication and myth that poisons the younger generations must be adequately presented. Devshirme is a well-thought-out system and action of the Ottoman Empire of recruitment of boys at a certain time, and then their selection depending on their talent and ability for certain positions and duties, and thus career advancement to the highest positions in the state.

What must be emphasized is that both Muslim and Christian children were recruited from different regions of the Ottoman Empire. According to Samardzic (1961, p.708) and Hakki Uzuncarsili (1943, p.14) recruitment took place on a sequence of every fourth year, while Djurovic argues that it occurred on every fifth year (Djurovic, 1933, p.292).. Even the author J. Tomic (1898, p.7) states that the only boys in the family were not recruited, whereas the author Mulic argues that those boys who studied a craft were not recruited as well (Mulic, 2005, p.201). As an illustration, one boy was taken out of 40 houses.

To this regard, I also came across different data regarding the age, ranging from 12 to 18 years, but most authors believe that the age was between 14-20 years. The married boys were not recruited, and because of that parents who did not want to send their child, would get their son married or would send them to study a craft (Ramcilovic, 2014, p.41). In the Firman of 1622 all the Qadi in Rumelia and Bosnia are instructed how to recruit boys. Local leaders should not interfere with the recruitment of boys, and they should be selected personally and independently by the person in charge (Matkovski, 1969, p.296-298). As in any implementation of a particular action in the field, the orders of the Sublime Porte probably were not always followed. Here, of course, the human factor was significant. The way in which the population was gathered and informed about the action depended on local leaders, and some may have taken violent measures and methods. Certain articles, such as those of the already mentioned Tomic, contain a number of abuses, some of which are illogical, most of them unconfirmed, and at least questionable descriptions of the devshirme process. Given the ability of certain local leaders to make money in this way, there have probably been isolated cases of fraud and violence against the population.

Even more absurd is the statement: "Macedonians who refused to accept the Islamic faith were killed. Such is the case with Zlata Meglenska and Gjorgji Kratovski. They were proclaimed saints as Christian martyrs of the church" (Boskovski et al, 2009, p.61). There is a statement saying that "Macedonians who refused to accept the Islamic faith were killed", which I found it as illogical and unjustified claim that any adult would easily dismiss it, but when it comes to 16-year-olds it is a completely different situation. What feelings would be triggered in a young person is more than clear. Isolated cases of violence that often ended in conviction of the local authorities cannot be generalized as done in the textbook. To this end, I would like to address the following question to the authors: If they consider their statement accurate, after more than five hundred years of the Ottoman State, would there be non-Muslims in Macedonia?

2. Religious objects and the study of their significance in History textbooks in secondary education

In the lesson "Archbishopric of Ohrid", there are examples of converting churches into mosques. It emphasizes the fact that "A similar fate has befallen many other churches throughout Macedonia" (p. 86). At the end of the lesson there is a text for those who are more curious, and it is about the demolition of the church of St. Sunday and building a mosque on its grounds. What is also methodologically improper is the fact that the text is a folk tradition.

3. The misinterpretation of the role of Islam in wars in the period from the XIX to late XX century

In the chapter "Macedonia from the end of the XVIII century until the First World War", unlike the previous statements when it comes to the difficult position of the population, the uprisings and other processes are not religiously colored (Ibid, p.152-154). On p.154 are also given some of the points envisaged by the reforms of the Ottoman Empire of 1856, known as the "Hattı Hümayun", which provided for the full equality of all citizens, regardless of religion or nationality.

At the end of this textbook in the dictionary of unknown words are also religious words, some of which are inadequately interpreted (Ibid, p.203). For example, as in the first year's textbook, Islam – obedience; or janissary - new army, an army of Islamized Christian children.

In the textbook for third year of secondary/high school, by Ristovski et al (2016), in the chapter "World, Europe and the Balkans in the First World War" the lecture "Balkan peoples and states in the First World War" is stated that "at the beginning of the First World War Turkey oriented towards the

Central Powers and declared a world war (jihad) of the Entente" (Ristovski et al, 2016, p.16). On the page 17, at the end of the lesson in the Dictionary: Jihad - The Holy War of the Muslims against the "unbelievers". Both statements are unjustified, inaccurate and contradictory. What do the authors think when they talk about the "holy war" of Muslims against the "unbelievers" remains unclear. One of the so-called "unbelievers" were allies of Turkey, whereas the others so-called "Unbelievers" were their enemies. This conclusion is imposed because the term Jihad is not precisely defined. The authors make another mistake and use the term Turkey instead of the Ottoman State.

Unlike this textbook, in the second textbook by Veljanovski et al (2006), in the same lecture "World, Europe and the Balkans in World War I", war and military operations are not associated with any religion, which is completely appropriate. The same is the case with the following lectures for the Balkan states and for Macedonia during the First World War.

In the chapter "Balkan states between the two world wars", in the lecture "Turkey becomes a republic", among others things it is mentioned the exchange of population, the "compulsory eviction of Muslims from Greece and Orthodox Christians from Turkey". On p. 49 is given an illustration of the Hagia Sophia Museum, more precisely under the picture reads "St. Sofia in Constantinople converted to a mosque" (Ristovski et al, 2016). It is wrong to give such an explanation in this lesson because it is precisely at this time when Turkey becomes a republic that it is transformed into a Museum. Such an inscription would correspond to the period from 1453, when it was converted into a mosque.

In the second textbook the lesson "Turkey becomes a republic" correctly states that "In 1937 the Islamic religion was separated from the state, thus Turkey became the first country in the Muslim world with such an arrangement" (Veljanovski et al, 2006, p.62).

In the chapter "Macedonia between the two world wars", in the lesson "Macedonia under the rule of the neighboring countries" the exchange of population between Greece and Turkey is mentioned again. And it is stated that "in this way around 350,000 Muslims were expelled from the Aegean part of Macedonia, including some 40,000 Islamized Macedonians" (Ristovski.B et al, 2016, p.68). Unfortunately, the word "Islamized" is used again to divide the Macedonians or the Macedonian people according to their religious affiliation. It would be correct to say on "that way around 350,000 Muslims were expelled from the Aegean part of Macedonia, of which about 40,000 were Macedonians."

In the second textbook in the same chapter "Macedonia between the two world wars", the same mistake is made, but in a slightly milder form, with the

statement that "about 350,000 Muslims were displaced from the Aegean part of Macedonia, including about 40,000 Muslim Macedonians" (Veljanovski et al, 2006, p.86).

In the chapter "Macedonia in World War II" there is a part of the ASNOM Declaration on the Fundamental Rights of Citizens of Democratic Macedonia in which it promotes equality of citizens regardless of "religion" and guarantees of "freedom of religion" (Ibid, p.158).

In both textbooks in the chapter "Macedonia after World War II", in the lesson "Macedonian Orthodox Church, Islamic and Other Religious Communities in Macedonia" they provide accurate but very little information on the Islamic religious community. More precisely, in terms of quantity, the Islamic Religious Community is mentioned in the section "Other Religious Communities in Macedonia" which is incorrect for the community that is second by number of believers according to the last Census 2022, i.e. 32.17 % of the total population according to the official data by the State Statistical Office of North Macedonia . The second textbook contains only five sentences about the Islamic Religious Community (Ibid, p.221). And for the Macedonian Orthodox Church it is dedicated three pages in the first, and two or more pages in the second textbook.

Third-year textbooks, unlike first- and second-year textbooks, are not burdened with religious content, nor illustrations. The first textbook (Blaze Ristovski and others) still has more illustrations related to religion (Christianity: 11 and Islam: 8), while the second textbook (Novica Veljanovski and others) has 3 illustrations related to Christianity and 1 to Islam.

In the fourth year of high school only one textbook was approved by Petreska et al (2009). The textbook first explains the consequences of World War II. It is positive that it does not link religion with war crimes, the Holocaust etc. Also the formation of the State of Israel or the Cyprus issue are not related to religion, although they are sensitive issues from the religious point of view as well. It usually comes down to just being a part of human rights and freedoms. As on p. 10, in the section on the United Nations, the organisation's goals are to "help preserve human rights and fundamental freedoms for all, regardless of race, gender, language and religion."

In the lesson "Political, Ideological and Other Movements in the World" in the first part of the lesson on anti-racist and separatist movements, which were partly related to religious differences (Petreska et al, 2009, p.26-30). It is positive that the examples given are not related to religion, and we have only one brief statement: "In some countries religious intolerance has also occurred." In contrast, there are serious mistakes in the second part when talking about terrorism. In the paragraph: "But this is a period of increasing

Islamic fundamentalism and aggression in the spread of this religion. Some of the Islamic fundamentalists are organizers of terrorist attacks in many parts of the world" (Ibid, p.28). The statement that this is a period of "Islamic fundamentalism" is biased and inaccurate.

Especially as it next states "aggression in the spread of this religion." Again as in the past it is stated something that is contrary to religion itself and for which there are no cases in the past nor today that have in any way "aggressively" led to the spread of the Islamic religion. The second sentence above with the words "Part of the Islamic fundamentalists ..." wants to dampen the view that terrorist attacks in many parts of the world are organized, that is, not all terrorists are terrorist, just one "part" of them. Terrorists are not have and should not be associated with any religion. An even greater untruth is expressed in: "In Bosnia and Herzegovina, after the dissolution of the SFRY, there was also a mutual genocide among Catholics, Orthodox and Muslims, etc" (Ibid). The intention of relativizing and leveling between criminals and innocent people is evident. In Bosnia and Herzegovina there was genocide against Bosniaks only. The above sentence uses religious terms that are also inappropriate, although religion has had a profound impact on the genocide of Bosniaks who are largely of Islamic religion. In addition, the genocide of Bosniaks is confirmed by international declarations, but also passed in the Parliament of North Macedonia and as such should be presented to the students, and not as "mutual genocide".

In this textbook as well, given the topics it covers, there are not many religious illustrations. Even the ones that are there are more than needed, that is, 8 tied to Christianity and 1 to Islam.

D. Conclusion

Education is the carrier of positive processes in society, and in the educational process knowledge, skills, beliefs and attitudes are acquired. It helps or strives to help each individual build personal identity and self-determination, personalize, and productively act in society, culture, science, and become a person of wide knowledge so that he or she cannot be easily manipulated. Unfortunately, there are still many examples of abuse of education and knowledge that do not help the humanization of human life or the democratization of society. Many of the totalitarian regimes in the world skillfully manipulate with the facts, "truth" and "knowledge" and consciously direct individuals or groups to think and act in a way that fits that particular system or ideology. In such systems there is discrimination on various grounds and people are burdened with prejudice and stereotypes. To eliminate such phenomena in society, they must first be eliminated from schools.

North Macedonia, with its educational institutions and legal procedures, strives to disseminate textbooks with content that causes intolerance, discrimination, prejudice and stereotypes. The analysis of textbooks, including this analysis of History textbooks for secondary education/high schools shows that we still have much more work to do in this field. It is necessary to fully understand the multiethnic and multi-religious reality of the Macedonian society and to acquire knowledge and build a perception of the lower percentage of the population. By creating its own independent state, North Macedonia has no right to exclude nations that are different in religion or nation from the majority of Macedonian population, as some of our neighboring states do. Historians must not build ethnocentrism and exclusivity of the Macedonian people as the sole holder of the statehood of North Macedonia. Historians must not favor one religion at the expense of another.

Historians must not create divisions within a certain group of people according to their religious affiliation. Unfortunately, in the textbooks I came across many inappropriate attitudes and conclusions about Islamic religion. Apart from misinterpretations, Islam is placed in a subordinate position both in terms of quality and quantity of content and illustrations in textbooks. Religion unnecessarily is put into a variety of historical phenomena and processes. We have very few positive findings and assignments for students that enable them to gain knowledge in addition to getting to know each other better. Such an approach creates confrontations and misunderstandings between ethnic communities as well as between Christians and Muslims.

In this way the studying of History in secondary school is not in favor of inter-religious understanding and understanding. The majority of the Christian population are almost unaware of Muslim daily life, and what they teach in textbooks is insufficient and ideologically charged. I believe that the comments made on certain inappropriate content will have a positive impact on the authors of the textbooks. The work of the curricula and textbooks does not tolerate any improvisation and requires utmost responsibility of all subjects involved in the educational process.

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