

NEWSLETTER - FEBRUARY 2004

Synopsis of paper submitted to the session of the Sub-committee on the Middle East, of the Political Committee of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, October 24, 2003 in Paris, on: "Suppression of provocative language and incitements to hatred and violence in Israeli and Palestinian school textbooks and the media".

The Example of Israeli Textbooks

CMIP focuses its research on official policy, i.e. on textbooks and curricula in use in schools that are under the responsibility and/or supervision of the official authorities. In the case of the Israeli textbooks, in that it has also reviewed about 50 schoolbooks of the ultra-orthodox (H'areidi) sector. The reason for this exception being that although being outside government supervision, this sector which encompasses less than 10 % of the Israeli education system, receives public funding.

The Israeli textbooks were examined according to criteria set out by UNESCO and CMIP. CMIP has found that the Israeli textbooks respond positively to all these criteria, despite the deterioration that has occurred in the political situation since the end of 2000.

- **The "other", the Palestinians, are recognized and accepted, and they are not stereotyped and prejudiced.** With the exception of a few examples in ultra orthodox textbooks, CMIP did not find stereotypes, prejudices or patronizing terminology towards the Arabs and the Palestinians, in Israeli textbooks.
- **A particular effort to avoid prejudices and to guard against generalizations.** On prejudice, the following is to be found in a textbook for Grade seven:
"Many people think: The dove is a bird that pursues peace. This belief is incorrect; it is a prejudice: people believe it without checking it. There are a lot of prejudices. For example:
 - 1.The Jews control the world and exploit all those who live in it.*
 - 2.The blacks are inferior; they are incapable of being scientists.*
 - 3.The Arabs only understand the language of force...*

Be ready to explain orally why these are prejudices." (I Understand, 1993, p.259)

- **Regarding generalizations**, an elementary textbook on reading comprehension concludes a story on how a Jewish girl was saved by an Arab woman by stressing: *"The Arabs are like the Jews. ... There are nasty people among them and there are decent people and ... they should not be labeled "* (What is the Interpretation? Comprehension B, pp. 184-188).
- **Generalizations and patronizing terminology** are to be found in H'aredi textbooks, such as: *"We [the Ishmaelites] cannot accept the Torah, it is difficult for us not to steal"* [Everything in its Time, first grade reader, 1995, pp.233-234). *"There is no logical explanation for the strange vision of the flight of the Arab fellaheen ... It seems that they did not strike any roots in this land, did not connect to it in any way. They dwelled in it, for hundreds of years, but did not settle in it They were like foreigners to it, like wayfarers who rest along the way"* (Our Childhood, 1989, p. 350)
- **Recognition and acceptance of the Palestinians** as a people, are to be found: *"The Jews and the Arabs were two national communities struggling over the same piece of land and the British could not establish peace between them... During the 1930's, Arab nationalist movement evolved all over the Middle East. Many of the Arabs of Eretz Yisrael also began formulating a national consciousness – in other words, the perception that they are not just part of the larger Arab nation, but are also Palestinians.."* [The twentieth Century- On the threshold of tomorrow, Grade 9, 1999, p.44). Or a text referring to the content of the Oslo agreements reads *" the PLO was recognized [by Israel] as the legitimate leadership of the Palestinians"*. (Europe without borders, pp. 63-64).
- **Achievements of the other are recognized.** *"However, the Arabs were not simply cultural middlemen, they were also creators of culture. For example, they were the first to discover the existence of infectious diseases. They were also the first to build public hospitals. Because of their considerable contribution to various scientific fields, there are disciplines that to this day are called by their Arabic names, such as algebra. The Islamic religion also influenced the development of culture. The obligation to pray in the direction of Mecca led to the development of astronomy, which helped identify the direction according to the heavenly bodies. The duty to make a pilgrimage developed geography and gave a push to the writing of travel books. These books, and the Arabs' high capability in map drawing, helped develop trade. To this day, merchants use Arabic words, such as bazaar, check and tariff. Since the language of the Koran is Arabic, the Muslims spent much time researching the Arabic language and grammar."* (From Generation to Generation, Vol.b, 1994, p. 220)

Another quote from an eighth grade History textbook refers more specifically to the Arabs of Palestine: *"In general we are mistaken in regard to a great people... This is the mightiest, most excellent people in physical attainments and in the skill of its understanding. We must not belittle its rights [of the Arab people in Palestine]. The Hebrew people respect not only the personal rights of each person, but rather the national right of each nation and tribe"* (From Conservatism to Progress, 1996, p. 374).

- **Political disputes are presented objectively and honestly.**
Controversial issues are addressed: the historian Benny Morris, namely that *" the main catalyst for the flight was the attacks by the Hagana, Etzel, Lehi and Israel Defense Forces and not the calls or instructions of the leaders of Arab countries or of the Supreme Arab Council and the Mufti."* (From Exile to Independence - The History of the Jewish People in Recent Generations, vol. 2, 1990, p. 312).
- **The point of view of the other side** is presented: *"About half a year after Anwar Sadat entered into office he proposed to the Government of Israel to commence political negotiations (February 1971). Israel treated Sadat's proposal with scorn out of the feeling of power and superiority that had taken hold of Israeli society following the Six Day War. After his proposal had been rejected and the political stalemate continued, Sadat decided to go to war. He proclaimed that he was prepared to sacrifice a million soldiers in order to liberate the territories that Israel had captured. He even threatened Israel that, if it did not withdraw from the Sinai Peninsula, it would pay a high price. Israel saw his words as empty boasting. But Sadat continued with his preparations and he and the President of Syria, Assad, decided to launch an attack against Israel during the course of 1973"* (K. Tabibian, Journey to the Past - The Twentieth Century, By Dint of Freedom, 1999, p. 313).
- **Simulation games are used to help the pupil internalize other views:**
*"4. Divide into groups representing Jewish journalists and Palestinian journalists who have been sent to cover the discussion in the United Nations Organization leading to the Partition Resolution.
A. Prepare a report that will include details about the discussion in the United Nations Organization, the position of some of the states participating in it and the results of the discussion, the vote and reactions to the resolution...
C. Discuss with the whole class the differences between the reports of Jewish journalists and those of the Palestinian journalists"*. (K. Tabibian, Journey To The Past – The Twentieth Century, By Dint of Freedom, 1999, p. 294).

"You are to take part in a simulation game, the purpose of which is for you to reach the maximum regional cooperation that will ensure by peaceful means a fair division of water, to understand the special needs of each country in the region ..."... The parties participating in the discussion must reach a rational arrangement that is in accord with the treaties on water rights. The condition for the approval of the

arrangement for the division of water is its acceptability to the representatives of all the countries participating. The arrangement is to be approved by the representative of the United Nations... The game continues until arrangements have been reached between all the countries” (Water in the Era of Peace – Learning Unit about the Water Problem in our Region and Ways to Solve it, 2000, pp. 151-152).

- **Examples of tolerance and respect include** explicit mention of the Arabs and Muslims’ attachment to the Holy Land, to Jerusalem and to their holy sites there: *“The Land of Israel in general, and Jerusalem in particular, have been sanctified more and more in Islamic thought – as Islam has developed and spread, both religiously and geographically. As Islam absorbed more and more of the world conquered by it, so it adapted and Islamized the values that it absorbed, including the holiness of the Land of Israel, its flora and its water, living in it, the sanctity of being buried in it and the like. All these became from that time onwards part of orthodox Islam... The expression of the holiness of the Land of Israel and Jerusalem in Islam can be found in the erection of the pair of mosques on the Temple Mount”*. (H. Peleg, G.Zohar... This is the Land - Introduction to Land of Israel Studies for the Upper Grades, 2000, pp. 161-162.)
- Peace is not advocated as utopia, but depicted as a **concrete achievement resulting from men’s actions, through talks, negotiations and compromises, taking into account the legitimate interests of the other side**. The principles and commitments of the Oslo agreements are provided, including their territorial significance. (This is the Land – Introduction to Land of Israel Studies for Upper Grades, 2000, pp. 20-21).

The presentation was concluded with three major recommendations regarding the Israeli textbooks:

- a) The Israeli Ministry of Education should ensure that generalizations and patronizing terminology is removed from textbooks of the ultra-orthodox sector.
- b) The territorial expression of the agreements with the Palestinians should be indicated clearly on all relevant maps in all the textbooks.
- c) The Israeli textbooks could serve as a source of inspiration especially regarding the prevention of prejudices and stereotypes and the creation of human empathy between conflicting parties.