FRENCH TEXTBOOKS

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Comprehensive inclusion of Armenian genocide allegations in history and geography textbooks to be taught in the schools in France caused grave discontent in Turkey. After François Hollande was elected as President, his moderate approach towards Turkey, talks held with President Gül and Prime Minister Erdoğan, Foreign Minister Davutoğlus visit to his French colleague Laurent Fabius and all of these contacts being carried out within a positive and constructive atmosphere had created the belief in Turkey that the issues between the two countries could be settled. For that reason, the inclusion of the 1915 events in French textbooks has created great disappointment in Turkey.

After the adoption of a law in France in 2001 which recognized the Armenian genocide allegations, these allegations were included in history textbooks only in short paragraphs. However this time these allegations will cover two pages, including photographs and diagrams while former Ottoman statesmen have been displayed as the perpetrators of these events.

Making changes in some of the historical subjects within French textbooks was first decided in 2009 during President Nicolas Sarkozys period. However, President Hollande, with which a Turkish journalist has been able to interview, has stated that he does not know about these changes. This is also the situation with French Minister of Education. Therefore, it is not possible to hold the Socialist administration responsible for this development. However, this does not change the situation. Since the textbooks have been printed, it is expected that they will be used.

Concerning the content of the books, it could be seen that they mostly entail the known elements of Armenian propaganda. Let us provide an example. The Armenians and their advocates had argued for a long time that Talat Pasha, by sending explicit telegraphs, had ordered the Armenians to be killed. However, it was conclusively proven thirty years ago through a book published by the Turkish Historical Society entitled The Talat Pasha Facts: Historical Fact or Armenian Fiction? that Talat Pasha had never given these orders and that the alleged telegraphs were in fact fake. This book has also been translated into French in 1986. However, neither this book nor other Turkish sources has been addressed in the textbooks.

It could be seen that the common feature of the changes made in the textbooks is the approval of the genocide allegations. It has not been mentioned that there are historians

who do not recognize these allegations. In this current format, as already been mentioned above, the textbooks only reflect Armenian propaganda and aims to convince French students to embrace this propaganda. From this aspect, these chapters of the books are not in any way scholarly, but are political.

On the other hand, since these chapters, although indirectly, induce hostility and hatred against the Turks, they are also pedagogically harmful. Moreover, they create discrimination against students of Turkish origin receiving their education in French schools.

There is no doubt that official talks would have started for the removal or amendment of these sections in history textbooks. However, those who are harmed the most from these changes are the Turks in France, in particular those being French citizens. They can sue the publishers of the books on the grounds that that they are being offended as a community. It is still remembered that nearly twenty years ago, the Armenian associations in France had filed a lawsuit against well-known American historian Bernard Lewis following his statements which casted doubt on the existence of such a genocide, on the grounds that that these statements offended the Armenian community and in the end won their case.

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