

Social Studies and Humanities Textbooks in Post-Socialist Bulgaria

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Abstract

As Bulgaria went through a radical socioeconomic transition involving democratization and integration in the European Union, school textbooks and curricular contents were progressively reviewed to reduce traces of bias, value judgments, ideological content and opinions, which were thought to inflame passions and sustain mistrust and misunderstandings. The present paper discusses important changes made in Bulgarian social studies and humanities textbooks since 1989, which involved discharging educational content considered to be ideologically overloaded and overly nationalistic, and incorporating content promoting social inclusion and democratic principles. The analysis points to the strengths and weaknesses of the newly revised textbooks in upper secondary education, which seek to prepare students as future citizens in a democratic country. The conclusions drawn are based on empirical research carried out through analysis of official curricula of history, geography, Bulgarian language and literature and in-person interviews with policy makers and key stakeholders of the Bulgarian educational community.

Introduction

Textbooks are a key tool for introducing and reinforcing national core curricula and unified standards and assessment. They continue to be the dominant learning resource in the majority of European countries, despite the advent of instructional technology and substantial resources devoted to the provision of computers in schools. In Bulgaria, as in other transitional Balkan countries, textbooks constituted an important part of the educational reforms initiated following the democratization of the country in 1989.

These reforms, addressing both the institutional and administrative aspects of the education system, as well as its pedagogical components, had a dual aim: on the one hand, to modernize the Bulgarian education system towards meeting European standards and, on the other hand, to discharge the ideological content of the old regime to prepare students to become active citizens in a future democratic country (World Bank 2000 and MES 2006).

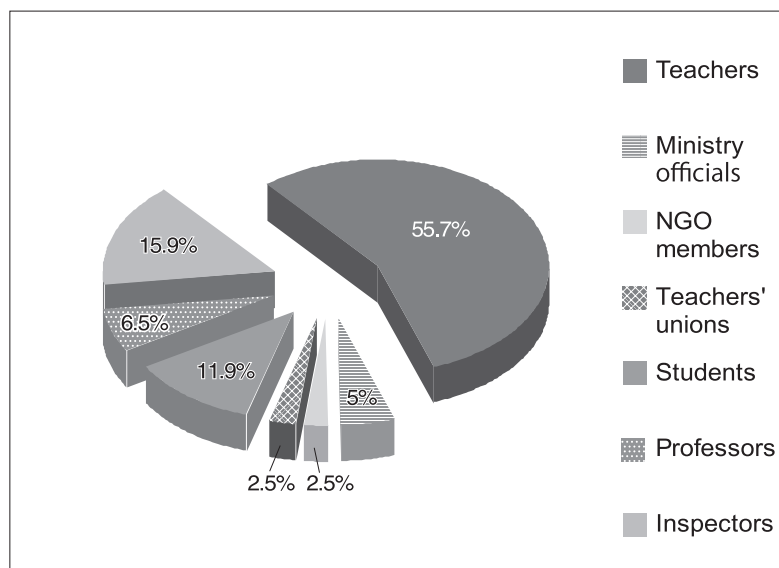
The present paper analyzes the extent to which the post-socialist Bulgarian textbooks have been sufficiently revised to incorporate an appropriate balance between knowledge updates and the inclusion of multicultural and democratic values.

While the ideological overload in education can be most recognizable in history texts, it is not limited to them. Textbooks on geography, civic education as well as in subjects of humanities, such as national language and literature, may also contain partial or biased information that may lead to further tension or conflict and devalue the newly established democratic principles (Psifidou 2007a). To this end, the paper provides a brief overview of changes introduced in textbook policy in Bulgaria upon its democratization, and analyzes two represented curricula from the humanities and the social sciences: the curriculum of *Geography* through which civic education is also taught, and the curriculum of *Bulgarian language and literature*.

Research Scope and Method

The present paper's findings are drawn from a systematic review and analysis of the official curricula concerned in addition to an empirical study of 96 in-person interviews with key national stakeholders (see Figure 1). Interviews were conducted during two weeklong study visits in Sofia—one in September 2003 and the second in November 2005. Semi-structured questionnaires were developed and adapted to the profile of each interviewee, seeking primary information about changes in textbook policies and their views on the quality of the revised social studies and humanities textbooks. All interviews were undertaken in Bulgarian with the help of a professional interpreter to allow informants to express their opinions in their native language.

Figure 1: The Professional Profile of Informants



Source: Author

Note: The percentages are calculated on the basis of 96 interviewed informants.

The decision to analyze the curricula of *Geography* and *Bulgarian language and literature* was deemed appropriate given the important role these two subjects play in transmitting values and shaping ideas, which are strongly influenced by the ideologies of a particular era (Psifidou 2007b). International textbook analysis, which typically aims at promoting international understanding, deals mainly with history, geography and civics textbooks, as these subjects are particularly relevant for education towards democracy, human rights and international, as well as intercultural awareness. Over the last few decades, researchers have pointed out that language textbooks and literature also contribute considerably to what students know and how they think about others (UNESCO 2010).

The subject of *Geography* is particularly sensitive to the evolution of values. The teaching of geography guarantees the transmission, even the creation, of the individual and community-based memory of a society. In historical terms, the teaching of geography has wavered between defending national interests and conveying great ideas, two objectives far removed from learning to live together, a value that nowadays geography curricula aim to transmit (UNESCO 1998). Furthermore, this subject in many countries, including Bulgaria, incorporates civic education, which is particularly relevant for analyzing changes in values (Kerr 1999). *Bulgarian language and literature* is a compulsory subject throughout the general education--from the first to the twelfth grade--and is assessed in all state exams. It is considered highly significant for the education of the Bulgarian youth. An analysis of this subject helps clarify the shifts in the purposes of educating young Bulgarians, first under the communist regime and then later with the democratization of the Bulgarian society.

For both subjects, official curricular materials used in the ninth grade have been selected for analysis, both because of this grade's significance in the structure of the Bulgarian education system and in the formation of students' character. This is the first grade of upper secondary education, and marks the transition from the lower secondary education. Students attending the ninth grade are around 15 years old, an important age of adolescence shaping behaviors that influence wellbeing and active citizenship in adult life.

Changing Textbook Policy Through Systemic Education Reform

Social studies and humanities textbooks often turn out to be obsolete after the fall of a totalitarian regime due to their heavy ideological content. In Bulgaria temporarily solutions were initially found: for instance, between March–May 1992, the so-called “Notes in History” were produced with no illustrations and limited methodological tools. Then in 1993, a remarkable reform took place: It was the first time that the then Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (currently Ministry of Education, Youth and Science, MES) organized anonymous tenders for history textbooks and negotiated the publishing of alternative textbooks under free market conditions (OECD 2004).

Between 1994 and 1998, a series of tenders were organized to facilitate the process of selecting new textbooks for all school subjects. In 1999/2000, the MES adopted the National Education Requirements for Textbooks and Teaching Materials, as well as the Rules and Conditions for Assessing (MES 2001a). In 2002, with an amendment to the National Education Act, the number of alternative textbooks per subject and per grade was limited to three. Since then, the three-textbook policy was gradually implemented starting from the first grade (OECD 2004).

Changes in textbook provision were followed by changes in the curriculum policy. In 1999, after ten years of ad hoc modifications introduced to the syllabi and learning programmes to eliminate their ideological weight, a systematic curriculum reform took place progressively in all levels of school education with the introduction of a National Curriculum Framework (MES 1999a) and National Education Standards (MES 1999b and MES 2000). The new curriculum framework was structured across eight thematic areas defining the core content as well as the knowledge, skills and competences that students should acquire for each subject. Its new structure allowed for establishing links between related subjects, aiming to increase content flexibility and establish interdisciplinarity between different curriculum areas (Psifidou 2009).

More flexibility and adaptability was also granted with the introduction of the School Based Curriculum (MES 1999c; MES 2001b). Regional inspectorates and school directors were given the right to adapt the national curriculum to their local needs, while students had more opportunities to choose some subjects of their interest. These and other reforms have contributed to the renewal of the education content and modernisation of the Bulgarian education system towards more democratic principles.

Analysis of Old and New Curricula

To examine the degree to which this democratization process was actually reflected and achieved in the new curricula and textbooks of humanities and social studies, I present a comparison between old and new ninth grade curricula of Geography and Bulgarian language. In practice this means a comparison between those used before and after the new curriculum framework introduced in 1999.

Geography Curricula

The main goal of the old ninth grade Geography curriculum¹ was to build upon

¹ The old study plan was adopted with Order No RD 09-395 of the Ministry of Education and Science issued on April 16, 1993. This was amended and supplemented by the Order No RD 09-352 of May 23, 1995, Order No RD 09-317 of March 27, 1996, Order RD 09-37 of January 31, 1997 and Order No RD 09-390 of June 8, 1998. *Geography* was taught for five years from the 6th to the 10th grade of secondary education for 2 weeks out of the 34 for the first three grades (grades 6th to 8th in lower secondary education) and for 2 weeks out of the 36 in grades 9 and 10 of upper secondary education. In primary education, basic information on geography was taught through the subject of *Introduction to Geography and History of Bulgaria* studied for one-half of a week out of the 31 weeks in the 1st grade and for 2 out of the 32 weeks in grades 2 to 4.

already studied content by providing students with knowledge about the natural resources, the political, social and economic organization of the Bulgarian society, the population and settlements, the national economy, in addition to outlines of the main geographic regions of the world. The curriculum was structured into six sections, which defined, among other things, the main objectives, the course structure and content, time allotments and the knowledge and skills, which students would be expected to achieve by the end of the school year (see Table 1). The old curriculum also referred to various interdisciplinary links that should be established with other curricular subjects such as *History*, *Bulgarian language*, *Foreign languages*, *Chemistry*, *Biology*, etc. However, no explanation was given as to how this should be carried out or the need to allocate space for doing so. In general, the old curriculum placed disproportionate emphasis on national aspects to the detriment of international issues under the effort to idealize the national citizens, rather than to give valuable information about international geographical, historical and cultural events enhancing mutual understanding.

In 1999-2000, under the new curriculum framework adopted with Regulation No 4 for Education Minimum and Class Hour Allocation in September 2, 1999 (MES 1999d), it was decided that *Geography* is to be studied within the curriculum area of “Public Sciences and Civic education”. In the first grades of primary education, *Introduction to geography and history of Bulgaria* was allocated 31 weeks of teaching. The subject of *Geography and economics* was to be taught for 51 weeks in lower secondary education (grades 5-8) and 54 school weeks in upper secondary education (grades 9-10)².

The new curriculum (see Table 2) is presented in 6 columns, which list the follow elements (from left to right): core content, expected results in view of the overall curriculum, expected results in each topic, new concepts introduced, context and activities, and possible interdisciplinary links with other subjects.

² In 2001, the study plan was revised without changing though the time allocation of this subject (MES 2001c).

Table 1. Extract of the Old Curriculum on Geography for Ninth Grade (1998)

Main goal:	
To build upon already studied content by providing student with knowledge and skills on natural resources, political, social and economic organization of society, population and settlements, economy, main geographic regions of the world.	
Main objectives:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ⇒ To introduce a system of well-structured scientific knowledge on the topics included in the study program ⇒ To provide students with the necessary knowledge and skills for independent study and in-depth analysis of modern processes and phenomena from the point of view of geography ⇒ ... 	
Structure and content of the course:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ⇒ Introduction ⇒ Development and modern structure of the geographic science – 2 class hours ⇒ Natural resources of the world – 5 class hours ⇒ ... 	
Key requirements for selecting and structuring the content:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ⇒ the content must be structured and presented so as to build upon already acquired knowledge in previous classes ⇒ the content must be scientific, but accessible for the students ⇒ ... 	
Class hour allocation:	
⇒ for new content	45 class hours
⇒ for practical exercises and discussions	11 class hours
⇒ ...	
Exit level knowledge and skills:	
At the end of the school year students must	
1. be familiar with:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ⇒ the main natural resources and their territorial concentration ⇒ ... 	
2. be able to:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ⇒ analyze geographic texts, documents, maps and statistical information ⇒ assess the availability of natural resources in a given region ⇒ ... 	
Topics for compulsory elective classes:	
1. Current problems in the development of modern geography –2 class hours for lectures and 1 class hour for practical exercise	
2. ...	
Main concepts:	
Follows a list of key concepts, which students would be introduced to throughout the course	

Source: Translation of official curriculum, MES, 1998.

Table 2. Extract of the New Curriculum on Geography for Ninth Grade, 2003

1 Core content	2 Expected results in view of the overall curriculum	3 Expected results in each topic	4 New concepts introduced	5 Context and activities	6 Interdisciplinary links
Core 1: Structure and natural resources of the Earth		<u>Students must master:</u> <u>Topic 1:</u> Development and modern structure of the geographic science <i>Expected results are listed in detail after each topic</i>	<i>New concepts, which students are expected to learn are listed for each topic</i>	<u>Students are given the opportunity:</u> 1. To discuss the modern structure of geography in view of its overall development 2. To observe natural phenomena, typical for some geographic regions 3. To watch documentaries on nature 4. To work in a team 5. To work with statistical information 6. To work with documents and identify trends 7. To work with geographic and thematic maps	<i>The content is linked to the content in physics, biology, chemistry, history, literature, philosophy, mathematics</i>
	<u>Standard 1:</u> - The student is able to identify and describe geographic regions and phenomena <i>Expected results in view of the overall curriculum are listed after each standard</i>	<u>Topic 2:</u> Geospheric structure of the Earth			
	<u>Standard 2</u> - The student is able to identify typical natural resource distribution patterns and the link between them	<u>Topic 3:</u> Natural components and complexes on Earth <u>Topic 4:</u> Impact of human economic activity on nature			

Source: Translation of official curriculum, MES, 2003a.

The core content of this subject is divided into six topics:

- Structure and natural resources of the Earth;
- Population and settlements;
- Political and economic organization of society;
- Geography of the world economy;
- Geographic regions and countries of the world;
- Geographic and economic information.

Students are given the opportunity to perform different activities such as:

- discuss the modern structure of geography in view of its overall development;
- observe natural phenomena, typical for some geographic regions;
- watch documentaries on nature;
- work in a team;
- work with statistical information;
- work with documents and identify trends;
- work with geographic and thematic maps.

The expected results, in light of the overall curriculum, are expressed in terms of standards and what each student should be able to do at the end of the learning process. The proposed interdisciplinary links with the contents of Physics, Biology, Chemistry, History, Literature, Philosophy and Mathematics allow for an integrated approach to the teaching of Geography especially with those subjects, which play a leading role in the development of learners' social culture.

Furthermore, the new concepts that students are expected to learn are listed for each topic accompanied by the activities students should undertake in order to learn them. Among these new concepts, the new geography curricula focused on civic education, intercultural education, tolerance, social inclusion, environmental education, sustainable development and learning to live together. It is evident that new values initially not promoted under the old curriculum are now included in the new one contextualised with proposed learning activities.

Beyond this, the development of the European dimension and the need to raise awareness on the issue of European citizenship is another novelty of the new curriculum. This generally takes the form of promoting a sense of belonging to, and involvement in, Europe, which seeks to fight against international stereotypes and conflicts, and reinforce the need for mutual understanding and living together peacefully. Students can now study physical and political aspects of Europe: the states, regions and towns of Europe, with emphasis on neighboring countries and the Member States of the European Union, the geographical position of countries and 'trans-European' concepts such as climatology, environmental protection, sustainable development, and the water cycle.

Bulgarian Language and Literature Curricula

The previous content of the ninth grade *Bulgarian language and literature*³ comprised three main topics: Bulgarian language and Western European literature (including European Renaissance and Classicism), Bulgarian language and Russian classical literature, and Bulgarian Renaissance literature, including new Bulgarian poetry and the advent of new Bulgarian theater and drama.

The elements of the curriculum were organized in two columns (see Table 3). The left column presented the compulsory content to be covered during the 3 class hours per week within the 36 school weeks of the academic year; the right column presented the indicative content for elective classes in profile oriented schools to be covered within 1 class hour per week out of the 36 school weeks. In both instances, the curriculum indicated the specific authors and literary works to be taught. The topics to be studied in elective and profile-oriented classes were chosen by the teacher. In making such choices, teachers could rely on the non-compulsory content included in the textbooks, but were also allowed to use other teaching materials deemed fit. The learning content focused on the great works of each period and geographical zone. From the Western European literature, students studied “Don Quixote” of Cervantes, “Hamlet” of Shakespeare, and “Tartuffe” of Moliere as well as works as chosen by the teacher (in the elective classes) of Denis Diderot, Johann Goethe, Victor Hugo, Heinrich Heine, P. B. Shelley, George Byron, Honore de Balzac, Guy de Maupassant and Charles Dickens. From the Russian Classical Literature, the “Eugene Onegin” of Pushkin, the Dead Souls of Gogol, a novelette as chosen by the teacher of Dostoevsky, and the short stories of Chekov were included in the statutory learning content. From the Bulgarian Renaissance, the content to be taught included literature, public activity and political journalism of Luben Karavelov, Petko Slaveykov and Hristo Botev.

³ The old study plan was adopted with Order No RD 09-395 of the Ministry of Education and Science issued on April 16, 1993. This was amended and supplemented Order No RD 09-352 of May 23, 1995, Order No RD 09-317 of March 27, 1996, Order RD 09-37 of January 31, 1997 and Order No RD 09-390 of June 8, 1998. *Bulgarian language and literature* was taught for 8 weeks in primary education (grades 1-4), 5 weeks in lower secondary school (grades 5-8), 3 weeks in the grades 9-11 of the upper secondary school and 2 weeks in grades 12-13. This subject receives more hours of instruction in primary and lower secondary schools than any other subject. It is the second most emphasized subject in upper secondary education (grades 9-13) after *Mathematics*.

Table 3. Extract of the Old curriculum for Bulgarian Language and Literature for Ninth Grade (1997)

Compulsory content	Indicative content for elective classes or classes in profile-oriented schools
36 school weeks, 3 class hours per week	36 school weeks, 1 class hour per week
Bulgarian Language and Western European Literature	
Styles in written Bulgarian language. Scientific and academic writing. Genres.	Genres: bibliographical description, annotation, comment, criticism
European Renaissance Renaissance Literature Cervantes Don Quixote	Petrarch Canzoniere Boccaccio Decameron Dante Alighieri Inferno
Text. Elements of a text. Communication and texts. (revision of already studied content with new additions and extensions) Logical unity of texts Linguistic unity in a text Scientific writing Literary texts Literary and academic writing	Communication. Speech etiquette.
Shakespeare Hamlet Written assignment on “Hamlet” Discussion on the genre and composition consistency in a text (based on the students’ written assignments)	Shakespeare Sonnets, Macbeth, Midsummer night’s Dream, Romeo and Julliet (one of the above, as chosen by the teacher)
Classicism in literature Moliere, Tartuffe or Corneille, Cid (as chosen by the teacher)	Works by the following authors, as chosen by the teacher: Denis Diderot, Johann Goethe, Victor Hugo, Heirich Heine, P. B. Shelley, George Byron, Honore de Balzac, Guy de Maupassant, Charles Dickens

Source: Translation of official curriculum, MES, 1997.

One can observe that the authors proposed for the study of *Bulgarian language and literature* in the ninth grade under the period of communism were all ideologically marked with a strong social orientation. For instance, Diderot (a prominent figure in

the Enlightenment) and Balzac (generally regarded as a founding father of realism in European Literature) were the representatives of the capitalistic society; while Maupassant and Dickens were major representatives of Naturalism. Naturalism, a movement that seeks to replicate a believable everyday reality, is opposed to such movements as Romanticism or Surrealism, in which subjects may receive highly symbolic, idealistic, or even supernatural treatment. Naturalistic writers, influenced by the evolution theory of Charles Darwin, believed that one's heredity and social environment decide one's character. Whereas realism seeks only to describe subjects as they really are, naturalism also attempts to determine "scientifically" the underlying forces (i.e. the environment or heredity) influencing these subjects' actions. Naturalistic works exposed the dark harshness of life, including poverty, racism, prejudice, disease, prostitution, filth, etc. They were often very pessimistic and frequently criticized for being too blunt.

In short, the contents of this curricular subject placed great emphasis on the social problematic. By contrast, movements in literature such as Symbolism (for example, Baudelaire and his work "Correspondence") where everything is being represented in symbols and the social problematic is not in focus, and were excluded from the list of contents. In addition, great representatives of the contemporaneous thinking in the era of Renaissance such as Michele Montaigne were not mentioned.

Regarding the study of the *Bulgarian language*, which was studied together with the *literature*, the old curriculum focused only on the stylistic aspect of the language and its different functionalities. It emphasized the learning of different styles of writing, such as the scientific, literary and academic writing. The old curriculum also guided the teacher to teach the use of language for writing different documents, such as official, administrative and business texts, professional CV, letters of recommendation, letters of authorization, declarations and meeting minutes.

The old curriculum included very brief guidelines in the form of bullet points for the oral and written examination of the pupils. For the ninth grade, the examination consisted of literary and academic writing, analysis of a given literary text and comments, and discussion of general cultural, social, or ethical issues.

Finally, the old curriculum concluded by indicating the knowledge that pupils should have acquired at the conclusion of each grade level. The curriculum was only limited in denominating the concepts which students should be able to understand; concepts such as Renaissance, Classicism, Romanticism, Character in a literary work, Novel, novelette, elegy, pamphlet, Drama, Comedy, etc.

The curriculum of the *Bulgarian language and literature* changed significantly under the new curriculum framework adopted in 1999 (MES 1999a). This subject is now split into two separate subjects: the *Bulgarian language* and the *Bulgarian literature*. The content of the new curriculum for both subjects follows the same structure as found in all revised curricula introduced after the reform: it is divided into 6 columns and described in terms of learning outcomes (see tables 4a and 4b).

Table 4a. Extract of the New Curriculum on Bulgarian Language for Ninth Grade, 2003

1	2	3	4	5	6
Core content	Expected results in view of the overall curriculum	Expected results in each topic	New concepts introduced	Context and activities	Interdisciplinary links
Core 1: Socio-cultural competencies Core 2:...	Standard 1: • The student is able to use adequately different language registers... Standard 2: ...	Students must master: Topic 1: Text and socio-cultural context • components in a communicative situation – participants, objective, topic, subject, conditions... Topic 2:...	socio-cultural context interpersonal communication civic and institutional sphere function of texts – purpose and pragmatism	Students are given the opportunity: • to monitor, analyze, and participate in different communicative acts and situations of public communication	• The knowledge and skills on text specifics and communicative functions develop students' ability to understand, interpret, and produce texts in all other subjects included in the curriculum...

Source: Translation of official curriculum, MES, 2003b.

Table 4b. Extract of Curriculum on Bulgarian Literature for Ninth Grade, 2003

1	2	3	4	5	6
Core content	Expected results in view of the overall curriculum	Expected results in each topic	New concepts introduced	Context and activities	Interdisciplinary links
Core 1: Socio-cultural competencies Core 2:...	Standard 1: • The student understands the role of ancient civilizations as a basis for a universal system of values Standard 2: ...	Students must master: 1. The link between the cosmos, the community and the individual	cosmos, community, man, common good	Students are given the opportunity: 1. To comment on the studied works, analyzing the main moral conflicts and making a reference to modern ethical norms. 2....	The content in literature, complemented with the content in history and philosophy, gives students the opportunity to acquire a comprehensive idea of the moral and ethical norms in the Antiquity and their role for the development of European culture and spirit.

Source: Translation of official curriculum, MES, 2003c.

The first column presents the core content in terms of 4 main competences. For the case of Bulgarian language these are defined as:

- socio-cultural competences
- language competences
- socio-cultural and language competences in oral communication
- socio-cultural and language competences in written communication

For the case of Bulgarian literature these are defined slightly different:

- socio-cultural competences
- literacy competences
- socio-cultural and literacy competences: communicating with a literacy work
- socio-cultural and literacy competences: producing oral statements and written texts.

Each core content comprises one or more topics to be covered and its expected results (see column 2). The expected results in view of the overall curriculum are also expressed in terms of national standards indicating the knowledge and abilities that students should acquire. More than one standard can be achieved through the core content (see column 3). The fourth column indicates the new concepts introduced; the fifth column suggests the settings and activities with which students should be involved. The last column identifies the links that can be created with the other school subjects. In the case of *Bulgarian language* links can be established with civic education while the communicative competences developed through this subject are relevant to the whole curriculum. Having regards to *Bulgarian literature*, this can be linked with *History* and *Philosophy*. In comparison to the old curriculum, the new curriculum separating *Bulgarian language* from *Literature* gives more emphasis on socio-cultural competences and inter-personal skills demonstrated in different communication settings: the academic, media, civic, institutional and artistic settings. Students are given an opportunity to monitor, analyse, and participate in different communicative acts and situations of public communication.

The quality of new textbooks

The curriculum analysis of the two examined subjects reveals important changes not only in terms of values, ideas and principles but also in relation to structure and flexible directives. The aims for teaching these subjects as well as the expected learning outcomes have changed to reflect new priorities in post-socialist Bulgaria. Nevertheless, existing research highlights the important divergence that can often exist between the official curricula and the content of school textbooks (Psifidou 2007b). Although an in-depth analysis of available social studies and humanities textbooks was impeded by language limitations and thus beyond the scope of the present paper, I gathered information about textbook quality, in part by interviewing key informants. These include, as previously mentioned, ministry officials in charge of textbook policy, inspectors, teachers, students,

parent associations, non-governmental experts, university professors and publishing houses. The main findings are presented below.

Evidence from Interviews

The free-market textbook policy, introduced in 1993, sought to increase competition among publishing houses and to improve textbook quality. However, the majority of informants stated that this objective has not met and, in some cases, the quality of new textbooks has even worsened. Although informants perceived this quality deterioration in different ways, their opinions can be categorized along three criteria:

- a. the quality and style of the language used;
- b. the accuracy of the information and data provided; and
- c. the extent to which the content complied with the nationally prescribed educational standards.

Among the interviewed informants, mainly students and teachers attributed the low quality of textbooks to the inadequate language in which they are written and the inconsistencies of the data included in different textbooks available for the same subjects. This opinion is represented in the statement of a secondary education teacher:

“ Many textbooks are often written in an academic language not adapted to secondary school purposes. There is no consistency in the information provided and sometimes controversial or false information is provided, which causes problems at the time of students’ assessment and evaluation ” (Teacher).

All interviewees acknowledged that, in comparison with the older textbooks, significant changes were made in the new textbooks. For example, they noted improvements in the quality of paper, the attractiveness of illustrations used and other stylistic elements. Significant improvements were noted in the new *History* textbooks in comparison to those used under the communist party, which consisted of black and white pages with no illustrations, bad quality of paper and long texts written in small sized fonts.

Regarding the third criteria—that is, textbook compliance with the national educational standards--opinions differed among respondents. While the majority of teachers, teacher trainers, students and former ministry officials stated that the new textbooks do not reflect the national education standards, the members of publishing houses responsible for these textbooks as well as university professors, who often are the authored the secondary education textbooks, disagreed.

These two contrasting opinions are reflected in the following statements. On the one hand, the Head of an in-service teacher training institute in Sofia stated:

“ Authors are very qualified⁴, for instance the author of History textbooks is a Nobelist but unfortunately they don’t know in-depth the national education

⁴ To be noted that there are no national standards that determine who is considered as qualified author.

standards” (Head of the in-service teacher training institute in Sofia).

On the other hand, an interviewed publisher emphasized that:

“ *The textbooks reflect the education standards mainly because most of the authors have been personally involved in their preparation*” (Publisher).

An interesting study conducted by the Paideia foundation⁵ on the alignment of *Civic education*⁶ standards and the content of textbooks provides evidence to support the first opinion. The study reveals that textbooks often contain important inconsistencies. An examination of different textbooks available for all grades on *Civic education* showed that key issues and concepts were missing. In particular, according to the findings of the study, there is a deficit of knowledge concerning:

- *the democratic process*: detailed overview of the functions and role of the executive and the legislative branches of government is included, but there is no information on local and regional governments, nor on the election process;
- *the law*: there is a false representation of the division of powers, there is no information on the functions and role of the judiciary and the active national legislation, neither on the impact of the international legislation;
- *the concept, principles and modern development of market economy, as well as other important issues in view of the country’s modern development and European integration*: there is a tendency to substitute knowledge on modern developments and phenomena with historical facts and general principles.

The same study also mentions an inadequate presentation of important values and concepts in the examined textbooks. For instance, human rights are described in very abstract terms, as some kind of privilege, which society owes to each citizen. This contradicts fundamental democratic principles in which human rights are considered in the context of the equality and are seen as a set of available options on which the democratic majority has agreed.

Furthermore, there is little balance in the presentation of international and national issues. For example, regarding international and national judicial and law-enforcement institutions, the textbooks contain almost no information on the role of the national judiciary, while the system of international judicial and law-enforcement institutions is presented in much detail, which could breed mistrust in the national judiciary and court system.

I asked informants their opinion on the degree to which the revised social studies and humanities textbooks promote social inclusion. In contrast to Ministerial experts who gave a positive reply, university professors, teachers and students interviewed believe

⁵ <http://www.paideiafoundation.org>

⁶ Under the regulation for the curriculum that came into effect in August 13, 2000, *Civic education* became an interdisciplinary element of the general compulsory education and later on became a solid element through out all education levels. Currently, is being taught in the curriculum area of “*Social sciences and Civic education*” through *History*, *Geography* and *Philosophy* and the synthetic subject “*World and personality*” introduced in 2002/03 school year.

that this is not the case. Their opinion is representative in the following statement of a university professor:

“ It has been done a lot to neutralize this nationalistic content in both subjects but they have not managed to develop a content that promotes multicultural understanding” (Professor of Philosophy, University of Sofia).

According to national educational experts of non-governmental organisations, many textbooks authors in Bulgaria still have an ethnocentric and conservative view of what the content of school subjects, like *History*, should be. The contents of many history textbooks, they claim, place too much emphasis on national aspects and too little on the international, regional and local dimensions of history. The texts typically emphasize the history of wars and violence to the detriment of giving due account of periods of peaceful coexistence, co-operation and cultural exchange, of mutual enrichment between different groups and nations.

Furthermore, in Bulgaria as in other European countries, the integration of certain ethnic groups in global history as well as ethnic minority integration in Bulgarian history remains problematic. Secondary school students have few too opportunities to learn about the history of minorities and their contribution in their society. The same is true for students of different ethnic groups, who learn little about their own customs and own traditions.

Existing research highlights that, despite a presence in Europe dating back some 600 years and having a population numbering some 12 million worldwide, Romani people do not feature in school curricula and textbooks (Andruszkiewicz 2006). Students in European schools learn little or nothing about the Romani communities. This was also the case in Bulgaria, based on information provided by the interviewees. Romani people are rarely, if at all, portrayed in textbooks issued to non-Romani students. Most students do not learn anything about Romani history, language or culture in schools. There are strong arguments for adapting and enhancing curricula and textbooks to strengthen self-esteem and self-identity in Romani children and to challenge the stereotypes and myths that persist about them.

Despite the limited opportunities for intercultural learning provided in new curricula and textbooks, it is noteworthy that the deeper purpose of social sciences and humanities textbooks has changed from one of *“intensify the conflict”* to a need *“to understand the conflict”* (Professor of History, University of Sofia). Nevertheless, this transition is incomplete, particularly since the teaching of social sciences and humanities is directly linked to the construction of new societies, where "national interests" and even "nationalist visions" are interwoven with the spreading of democratic values and the establishment of democratic institutions.

The weaknesses in textbook quality as described by my informants are similar to those identified by the Strategic paper of the new government, entitled *“Programme for the development of the education, science and youth policies in Republic of Bulgaria, 2009-2013”* (Ministry of Education, Youth and Science 2009). It points to the existing

“inconsistency between national education standards, curricula and textbooks; deficits identified include repetitions, content not corresponding to the age specifics, etc.” The Action Plan proposes concrete measures to overcome inconsistencies and deficits; at present though, policy plans lag behind in implementation (Ministry of Education, Youth and Science 2010). Furthermore, a new concept paper called “Concept for the main principles and innovative moments in the new Draft Law for pre-school and school education from 28.07.2011 (Ministry of Education, Youth and Science 2011) has been drafted. It highlights missing elements—for example, the use of key competences in the national education standards, curricula and textbooks, as well as the lack of unified conceptual frame to define the structure and extent of content in school textbooks.

Plans to Improve Textbook Quality

Since 2007, awareness about the need to modernize, improve and align curricula and textbooks with learners’ needs has increased. This issue is now present in every strategic paper of the government, especially those discussing the need for quality education.

In 2009, a new educational law introduced amendments to the national education standards, curricula and the content of textbooks. The new law proposed a new educational structure: 8-10 grades lower secondary education; grades 11-12 – upper secondary education, divided into profiles to prepare for entry to university. The new structure requires the redistribution of the education content and a careful revision of curricula and textbooks. The new law urges that textbooks and the learning content “should be in compliance with the physical and psychological needs and abilities of the pupils, to support autonomy and critical thinking”. It introduces an elaboration of formal and content-based criteria for textbook approval that should be described and regulated in one national standard on textbooks (this is one of the 18 new education standards to be developed).

This newly planned textbook policy reintroduces the unlimited number of textbooks for each subject, firstly introduced in 1993, each of which would need to be approved by the Ministry on the basis of their correspondence to the national education standards and new curricula. Every teacher should be able to choose a textbook according to the level of students’ knowledge and the specifics of the concrete educational environment. Finally, the possibility of creating interactive textbooks and teaching/learning materials should be regulated as well.

Actually, as of 2011/12 school year, Bulgaria is one of the few European countries where the teachers are using e-textbooks. E-textbooks are now introduced for grades 1-8. The name of this first generation of e-textbooks is “Prosveta Libri Magici” and includes all the traditional materials from the paper textbooks as well as additional features, such as pictures, tables, tests, movies, music, etc.

Few of the planned amendments and state educational requirements have been actually completed so far, despite these developments. Mainly this is due to delays in

introducing the new educational law (still in the form of a concept paper and open for consultation). Textbooks are supposed to be improved / amended only after adopting the law and the amendments in terms of state educational requirements and curricula (Ministry of Education, Youth and Science 2010).

Conclusions

This paper shows that, since Bulgaria initiated a process of democratization, humanities and social sciences curricula and textbooks have undergone an almost constant process of revision to reduce nationalistic content and to promote social inclusion and democratic principles. Most communist ideological components have been eliminated, while the values promoting cultural and ethnic diversity have been strengthened. The new content guidelines now allow for greater interdisciplinarity among humanities and social science subjects. Other changes have been noted: an increased alignment between school curricula and textbooks with European requirements and the consolidation of radical changes, which occurred in terms of political democratization and economic development, after the country became a full member of the European Union in 2007.

Interviews and analyses described in this paper indicate that additional changes are expected. In 2011, for example, one of the aims for introducing a new educational law is still “to remove the ideological functions of the education system” (Ministry of Education, Youth and Science 2011).

Textbooks and the learning content alone are not enough for transmitting democratic values and contributing to the development of student ethical attitude and citizenship skills. Also important are the roles played by the school as a whole to the extent it can serve as an exemplary democratic social community.

Related research (Psifidou 2008a; 2008b; 2010) shows that key players in Bulgaria’s education system acknowledge the need to promote democratic attitudes in the classroom, giving to students due attention and allowing for the expression of different opinions. This is a strong feature of the Bulgarian education community in terms of promoting and ensuring democratic values and principles. However, the same informants were found to have low awareness in three important areas:

- understanding of the school as a social community;
- accepting the important role of teachers in maintaining discipline and preventing antisocial behavior in school; and
- integrating ethnic minorities and students with special education needs and the importance of teachers being able to work in diverse and heterogeneous classrooms creating an appropriate and beneficial environment for all.

These findings suggest that teachers mentalities are still in transition, with a clear tendency to see teaching and learning as an individual activity limited to the walls of the classroom. Teachers need to understand how schools act as a representation of the society and where ethical actions and sharing knowledge contribute to its best function. Special

attention should be given to teachers' professional development to enable them to acquire competences related to teamwork as well as knowledge about principles and values of tolerance, democracy, collaboration and solidarity. Adapting teaching to students' diversity and helping the social integration of students with learning or behavioural difficulties should also become an integral element of all teacher education programmes. In short, the challenges facing Bulgaria are not only like those of other Balkan countries in transition, but also similar to more developed economies and older members of the European community.

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