



Comparative report

on history-based propaganda

in Armenia, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine

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ABOUT THE RESEARCH

Introduction

Cross-border cooperation among civil society actors, particularly educators and students, stands as a proven and effective method of networking that fosters mutual understanding, and consequently, the establishment of sustainable peace. This is a gradual and intricate process requiring systematic effort and the active involvement of educational stakeholders. Given the extensive work conducted by numerous international organizations in this realm, expectations are high. The "History Competitions" held between 2017 and 2022 in Armenia, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine significantly contributed to regional cooperation. Simultaneously, these competitions exposed various shortcomings in history education that pose substantial obstacles to the future development of these nations. Inadequate teacher training, politically influenced historical narratives, low levels of media literacy, the absence of critical reflection, and a mono-perspective teaching approach are significant weaknesses which can harm any educational system. Such deficiencies impede impartial and objective interpretations of the past, leading to a narrow worldview, diminished empathy among students, intolerance, and societal divisions into "Us" and "Them." These divisions, in turn, foster antagonism, intolerance, hatred, and conflicts in the contemporary world, including within the researched countries facing issues such as the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the Nagorno-Karabakh escalation, and frozen conflicts in Transnistria, Abkhazia, and South Ossetia.

One of the root cause of these and similar conflicts and misunderstandings lies in the (mis)use of history as a weapon of conflict rather than a tool for

cooperation. The responsibility falls on educational systems to determine whether history teaching serves as a weapon or a tool. Civil society participants can play a crucial role in this process, driven by the imperative of establishing enduring peace and cooperation in the region.

Prior experiences¹ in the mentioned countries have led to the conclusion that significant improvements are required in how history is taught. This necessitated the creation of a distinctive educational module for teachers, a toolkit designed to help them modernize their approach to teaching history. Central to this approach is working with sources, adopting a multi-perspective methodology, and fostering critical thinking. Placing the student at the core of the learning experience encourages independent thinking and conclusion-drawing, preventing the misuse of history for political and military purposes. While this transformation is a gradual and challenging process, it involves analyzing each educational system's strengths and weaknesses.

History-based propaganda

Research focused on "history-based propaganda" as a common characteristic of educational systems influenced by the "Soviet school of teaching history" in the past, revealed shared challenges. The Soviet model, laden with ideological biases, hindered the development of critical thinking and problem-solving skills among students. It served as a means of political indoctrination, which has no place in modern and democratic societies today.

¹ OHTE General Report on the State of History Teaching in Europe 2023, <https://rm.coe.int/ohte-general-report-full-web/1680ad80c2>

This model, among other things, was based on observing the past through the lens of class struggle, glorifying historical events, leaving out negative aspects, failures and controversies. The black-and-white depiction of the past based on selective presentation of historical events, victimization and demonization, heroes and villains, us and them, as well as nationalistic elements and the construction of a cults of personalities, are just some of its characteristics. Leftovers of this model remain visible even today, emphasizing the need for proactive teacher efforts and ongoing teacher education. Effective teaching methods should emphasize independent work, source interpretation, and a multi-perspective approach. However, the impact is limited if curricula and textbooks do not align with modern teaching methods, especially in centralized education systems where schools and teachers have minimal autonomy in shaping the curriculum.

A crucial aspect of addressing historical biases lies in recognizing and countering "history-based propaganda." This manipulation leverages historical events, figures, or narratives to advance a particular agenda, fostering stereotypes, prejudices, intolerance, mistrust, and hatred. Recognizing this form of history-based propaganda is vital for the integrity of any educational system, and it requires a collective effort from policymakers, textbook authors, and educators to promote balanced and unbiased historical narratives. The global nature of the modern world underscores the importance of incorporating perspectives from neighbouring countries, national and religious minorities, and a broad understanding of history. This entails having a broad awareness of significant historical milestones, cultural changes, political movements, economic changes and social dynamics that have shaped the world.

Open opposition to "History-based propaganda" is essential to prevent its influence on interpretations of the past and the shaping of the future, particularly in the education of younger generations.

History-based propaganda various forms:

Cherry-picking historical examples: This involves selecting specific historical events or figures that support a particular message while ignoring or downplaying other events that might provide a more balanced perspective.

Misrepresentation of historical facts: Manipulating historical facts or using them out of context to suit the propagandist's intentions. This can involve exaggeration, distortion, or omission of crucial details.

Revisionism: Rewriting history to fit a certain ideological framework or to downplay the significance of certain events. This can involve changing the narrative around key historical moments to align with a particular viewpoint.

Nationalistic or patriotic narratives: Crafting historical narratives that emphasize a nation's achievements, heroism, or superiority, often overlooking less favorable aspects of its history.

Demonizing the "other": Portraying certain groups, nations, or ideologies as historical villains, often by highlighting negative events from their past and using them to perpetuate a negative image in the present.

Creating historical analogies: Drawing comparisons between current events and past historical situations to justify specific actions by connecting the present with well-known historical stories.

Emotional appeal: Using emotional triggers associated with historical events, such as sacrifice, struggle, or triumph, to create a strong emotional connection and garner support for a particular cause.

Cultural appropriation: Appropriating historical symbols, figures, or narratives from different cultures to legitimize certain actions.

Absence or imitation of discussions: One-sidedness, presentation of only one position, opinion as ultimately true....

Objective

The primary objective of this report is to conduct a comprehensive analysis of the prevalence of History-based propaganda within textbooks and the training of teachers, offering an impartial overview of the state of history education in Armenia, Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine. Simultaneously, the report aims to delve into the perspectives of educators, assessing their preparedness and training to address History-based propaganda in history classrooms.

By undertaking a regional and comparative analysis, this study seeks to identify both the strengths and weaknesses inherent in the history teaching methods employed in the aforementioned countries. Such an analysis serves as a foundational step in crafting educational modules for teachers, referred to as the "ToolKit." This toolkit need to be an invaluable resource for educators in their day-to-day instructional activities, aiding them in navigating and effectively countering instances of history-based propaganda within the classroom setting.

The regional and comparative approach ensures a nuanced understanding of the unique challenges and opportunities present in each country's history education landscape. By acknowledging the diverse contexts and educational systems at play, this report aspires to provide tailored insights that can inform targeted interventions.

In essence, this research endeavours to contribute not only to the academic discourse surrounding history education but also to the practical improvement of teaching methodologies. By shedding light on the nuanced dynamics of history-based propaganda and the readiness of educators to confront it, the report seeks to empower teachers with the knowledge and tools needed to foster critical thinking, independent analysis, and a well-rounded understanding of historical events among their students. Ultimately, the overarching goal is to enhance the quality of history education, fostering a generation capable of critically engaging with the past and shaping a more informed, tolerant, and cooperative future.

Methodology

The methodology employed for this research was collaboratively designed by research teams representing all four countries involved in the study. It encompassed three key research approaches: Desk research, Focus groups, and Surveys.

Desk research

The initial phase involved a meticulous analysis of the curricula and textbooks in each country independently. The focus was specifically on recent history, with a keen emphasis on identifying instances of history-based propaganda. Each country's research team devised its own working principles. Simultaneously, common questions were formulated to aid in assessing textbook and curriculum content. These questions addressed aspects such as authorship and bias, narrative construction, historiographic context, and the portrayal of nationalism and patriotism:

- **Authorship and bias** (*Recognition of possible bias in narratives*)
- **Narrative construction** (*Does it evoke emotional reactions, feelings of superiority or victimization? Does it use emotionally charged language, demonize or glorify a particular group, nation or individual?*)
- **Historiographic context** (*Does the textbook deal with different interpretations of historical events and controversies? Are primary sources used, or is most of the information derived from secondary sources? Are historical facts and evidence presented in a balanced and comprehensive manner?*)
- **Nationalism and patriotism** (*Does the textbook promote a strong sense of national identity or patriotism that overshadows critical analysis? Does it portray national history as exclusively heroic and solid, while downplaying or ignoring neighbouring peoples and national minorities?*)

Focus groups

The second layer of research involved focus groups, strategically composed of esteemed participants in the educational process, including teachers, university professors, teaching advisers, teacher trainers, researchers, textbook authors, and educational authorities. The format of these focus groups, whether conducted online or in live meetings, was determined by each national expert team. Common to all focus groups were discussions centered around two main areas: the educational market and textbooks. Specific questions guided discussions on course content, historical periods covered, teaching methods addressing history-based propaganda, and skills acquired during training. Emphasis was also placed on exploring potential challenges and obstacles in incorporating lessons on history-based propaganda into teaching, along with suggestions for improvement.

Regarding textbooks, focus group participants provided their insights using previously prepared discussion questions from the Desk research phase. This facilitated diverse perspectives on textbook content, with particular attention given to the representations of "Others," including national and religious minorities, as well as the representation of the history of neighbours and regions.

1. **Educational market** (available formal and non-formal courses on topics that include issues of history-based propaganda);
2. **Textbooks** (representations of the "Others" and issues of history-based propaganda).

The structured discussions within the focus groups aimed at unraveling the intricacies of history education, delving into specific facets that significantly impact the teaching and learning experience. The questions posed were carefully crafted to guide participants through a comprehensive exploration of the courses' content, with a

keen eye on special historical periods, teaching methodologies designed to identify history-based propaganda, and the acquisition of specific skills by participants during their training.

One critical dimension of these discussions revolved around understanding how an awareness of history-based propaganda could reshape the landscape of history education in the classroom. Such an awareness is pivotal in cultivating critical thinking skills among students, fostering an ability to discern biased perspectives, and instilling a sense of historical inquiry.

Beyond the theoretical considerations, focus groups also engaged in conversations about the practical challenges and obstacles encountered when integrating lessons on history-based propaganda into the curriculum. This included a thoughtful exploration of potential topics that should be covered to provide a well-rounded understanding of historical events, ensuring that the curriculum is not only accurate but also capable of nurturing students' analytical skills.

Turning attention to textbooks, the focus group participants revisited their insights on content using pre-determined discussion questions, building upon the findings from the initial desk research. This iterative approach aimed at capturing diverse perspectives on the content of the textbooks, ensuring a thorough examination of the materials used in history education. A notable aspect of these discussions was the deliberate emphasis on the representation of the "Others" — a term encompassing national and religious minorities, as well as the portrayal of the history of neighbours and regions.

The insights gathered from these discussions not only provide a valuable critique of existing materials but also serve as a foundation for suggestions and improvements, ultimately contributing to the ongoing enhancement of history education in the classroom.

Survey

The culmination of our research endeavor involved a meticulous examination of history teachers' perspectives through the administration of an anonymous online questionnaire. This instrument, strategically crafted, sought to illuminate various dimensions of the teaching landscape, encompassing the teaching concept, the role of textbooks, and the efficacy of the teacher training system. The survey questions were thoughtfully categorized into three distinct groups to delve into specific aspects crucial for shaping the trajectory of history education: teachers training, textbooks and teaching about the "Others".

The first category, **Teachers Training**, delved into the quantity, format, and effectiveness of training sessions, exploring the topics covered and those perceived as necessary. Teachers were invited to share their insights and suggestions for enhancing the overall quality of their training experiences, providing a valuable foundation for refining professional development initiatives.

The second category, **Textbooks**, facilitated an exploration of teachers' personal experiences with these educational materials. The focus extended to the intricate realm of history-based propaganda, evaluating whether textbooks fostered active teaching and critical thinking. The objectivity and bias of narratives were scrutinized, along with an examination of the inclusion of different perspectives and the treatment of controversial and sensitive topics. Teachers were encouraged to provide recommendations for improvement, forming a substantial basis for enhancing the content and delivery of history education.

The third category, **Teaching about "others"**, sharpened the approaches used by educators when teaching about neighbouring peoples and minorities. He also dealt with the representation of historical conflicts with neighbouring nations and the different teaching methods used in these contexts. This nuanced research aimed to uncover the strategies used by teachers in navigating potentially sensitive topics, ensuring a comprehensive understanding of historical narratives that includes the perspectives of neighbouring peoples and minority communities.

Moreover, recognizing the distinct contexts of each country, approximately 20% of the questionnaire was tailored to specific inquiries relevant to the unique circumstances of each nation. This approach allowed us to capture the idiosyncrasies of history education in individual countries, providing a more granular understanding of regional variations. The remaining 80% of the questionnaire, shared across all four countries, ensured a common thread of inquiry, enabling cross-country comparisons and facilitating the identification of overarching patterns and challenges.

This multifaceted methodology was strategically designed to offer a holistic and nuanced portrayal of history teaching practices across the studied countries. The rich tapestry of responses obtained through the questionnaire serves as a foundation for the development of the Teacher's Toolkit, empowering educators with resources and insights essential for advancing history education in a globally interconnected world.

Challenges

The research journey unfolded within an exceptionally challenging political climate, catching everyone off guard with its unforeseen complexities. The ongoing Russian war against Ukraine cast a shadow over the survey, as a substantial part of the country was embroiled in war, creating impractical conditions for conducting a thorough investigation. This challenge extended to the formation of focus groups, leading to the assembly of only one group instead of the initially planned several, highlighting the formidable obstacles faced on the ground.

Simultaneously, the situation in Armenia took an unfortunate turn, with the events in Nagorno-Karabakh triggering a mass exodus of Armenians. This volatile environment made survey research an uphill battle, compounded by difficulties in organizing focus groups. Consequently, only one focus group materialized instead of the envisioned multiple sessions, underscoring the dynamic and unpredictable nature of the research landscape.

In contrast, the stability in Georgia provided a rare window of opportunity, allowing the seamless implementation of all three research phases. The political steadiness during this period offered a conducive environment for thorough exploration and analysis.

Moldova introduced its own distinctive challenges, with Transnistria incorporating Russian textbooks into its educational system. Moreover, the Moldovan education system operated on dual tracks: the

Moldovan national system and the Transnistrian system, influenced directly by Russian educational policy.

Despite these intricacies, the concerted efforts of national teams ensured that the research was conducted to the best possible extent under the prevailing conditions, highlighting the resilience and adaptability of the teams involved.

The unwavering commitment of the civil sector in all four countries emerged as the driving force behind the research's success. Even in the face of formidable challenges, their dedication shone through, reflecting a shared desire to actively contribute to the improvement of history teaching within their respective nations and the broader region. This collective commitment stands as a testament to the resilience of those working towards a more informed and enlightened future, regardless of the adversities faced during this unprecedented research endeavour.

FINDINGS

The investigation into the teaching of history reveals that this process relies on three fundamental pillars: Curriculum, Textbooks, and Teacher Training. While the Curriculum and Textbooks are interlinked, with textbooks being crafted based on a predefined curriculum, Teacher Training stands as a distinct pillar encompassing both Pre-Service and In-Service Teacher Training. Despite its crucial role in complementing the curriculum and textbooks, In-Service training often operates independently, leading to potential misalignments with ongoing curriculum and textbook changes. This emphasizes the teacher's responsibility for continuous professional development.

Examining these three pillars was the focal point of the research, and the following discussion provides a closer and more comprehensive look at each.

History Textbooks & Curriculums

History textbooks, as the backbone of history education, play a pivotal role in shaping the perspectives of both students and teachers. The development of curricula, mandated by the state across various nations, underscores the centralized nature of education systems. This trend persists even in Moldova, where the influence of Transnistria adds a distinctive layer to the overarching centralization.

Amidst these educational structures, efforts to break free from the shackles of a one-sided Soviet-influenced historical narrative are palpable, particularly in countries like Ukraine where frequent curriculum changes signal a commitment to fostering a more nuanced understanding of the past. Nevertheless, the journey toward complete liberation from ingrained historical interpretations is a gradual

and ongoing process, often swayed by the ever-evolving political dynamics within these nations.

Regrettably, the current state of history textbooks leaves much to be desired, failing to meet the expectations of educators and falling short of modern teaching standards. One glaring issue is the absence of age-appropriate content, with materials often failing to engage students at their developmental level. Moreover, the lack of unbiased language contributes to a skewed presentation of historical events, hindering students' ability to form independent and critical perspectives.

Another notable shortcoming is the insufficient integration of primary sources, limiting students' exposure to firsthand accounts and historical artefacts that could enrich their understanding of past events. A multi-perspective approach is similarly lacking, preventing students from appreciating the diverse array of experiences and viewpoints that characterize historical narratives. Additionally, the textbooks often neglect comprehensive contextualization, leaving students with fragmented knowledge that hinders a holistic understanding of the events being studied.

The consensus in all surveyed countries is unanimous - textbooks urgently need to be improved. Recognizing common weaknesses in these educational materials is the first step toward addressing the deficiencies. If educators and policymakers work together, there is an opportunity to reshape the teaching of history, ensuring that textbooks not only reflect a more inclusive and accurate portrayal of the past, but also adhere to pedagogical standards for fostering students' critical thinking skills, which are crucial in dealing with history-based propaganda and modern teaching of history in general.

Armenia

The evolution of Armenian textbooks from independence to the present reflects a shift in narrative, transitioning from a Marxist ideology rooted in class struggle to a nationalistic perspective. The language and tone employed in these textbooks strongly support national and patriotic sentiments, occasionally adopting an emotional and fervent tone. However, there is criticism regarding the overwhelming Armenian-centric focus, which, according to participants, gives the impression that Armenians are the sole actors in the world, occasionally interacting with Russians and Turks. As one of the Fokus group participants stated: *"Sometimes it feels that there are only Armenians in the world, and at certain point Russian appear, and then Turks come and go. We have an issue here. From the 5th grade I try to explain my students that the Armenian history is part of the world history. We speak about this elementary truth only. And if the students don't get it, if they don't get that it is not a ball game for three [Armenians, Russians and Turks], that there are other ballers around, their takeaway is that these three chatted only with each other for several hundred years now"*.

The textbooks lack a comprehensive global perspective, contributing to a limited worldview among students. Key observations include:

- The emphasis on national and patriotic narratives is dominant.
- Clear decolonization narratives are absent, and the Soviet past is not comprehensively addressed.
- Textbooks lack multiple perspectives and in-depth discussions.
- "Others" are represented by highlighting historical antagonism with Azerbaijanis and Turks, perpetuating negative images.
- The language used, especially when narrating the Soviet period, retains the old Soviet history narration style.

- Despite the introduction of new competence-based education standards in 2021, the textbooks reviewed within this study are not revised/changed yet.
- A general tendency of avoiding discussion is notable in textbooks.

Georgia

Georgian textbooks heavily rely on the author's personal viewpoints, leading to a lack of consensus on fundamental historical issues. The content tends to focus on social - economic, and political aspects, overlooking holistic and multifaceted perspectives. Key features include:

- Textbooks reflect individual perspectives, lacking a cohesive consensus on historical matters.
- History-based propaganda as a legacy from the Soviet period has been removed from the narrative in textbooks, but is still present on historical maps.
- Accumulation of excessive material impedes effective study.
- Insufficient emphasis on engaging and problem-based history lessons, hindering critical thinking development.
- Lingering old Soviet history-based propaganda elements persist in Georgian textbooks.
- History-based propaganda mechanisms are present and impact history teaching.
- Representation of diverse contextual dimensions within Georgian History textbooks is notably insufficient.

Moldova

The curriculum and textbook production in Moldova remain centralized, with the state financing only one textbook per grade on a national level. Textbooks primarily focus on the history of wars and violence, neglecting periods of peaceful coexistence and

cultural communication. Minority issues receive limited attention, and textbooks often present a one-sided version of events. Key observations include:

- Centralized curriculum development and textbook production.
- Textbooks emphasize wars and violence over periods of cooperation and cultural exchange.
- Limited attention to minority issues.
- One-sided presentation of historical events.
- Textbooks often serve as catalogs of factual material.
- Discrepancies between textbook content and thematic requirements.
- History textbooks in Transnistria are used for propaganda, promoting a Transnistrian identity based on Moscow-published history textbooks.

Ukraine

Ukrainian textbooks predominantly adopt a one-sided approach, avoiding multiperspectivity. Some textbooks perpetuate historical myths, and elements of history-based propaganda are evident. The curriculum is heavily skewed toward political and war history, with ideological clichés persisting from old Soviet textbooks. Key characteristics include:

- Avoidance of multiperspectivity in textbooks.
- Evident presence of historical myths and clichés in certain textbooks.
- Utilization of elements that can be regarded as history-based propaganda.
- Predominant focus on political and war history.
- Retention of some aspects from old/Soviet textbooks.

Despite the formidable challenges faced, recent positive developments have emerged across all countries, attributed to enhanced collaboration with international institutions and non-governmental organizations dedicated to history education:

Armenia

- The Soviet period is mostly portrayed in neutral, and sometimes (when speaking about cultural, educational, scientific and economic achievements) in positive tones. The main exception is the presentation of Great terror and political repressions, where the tone is negative/criticising.

Georgia

- Transition from predominantly ethnocentric textbooks to a more neutral tone toward neighboring nations demonstrates positive change.

Moldova

- Notable absence of negative history-based propaganda elements in textbooks signifies a positive shift.
- Inclusion of censored information from totalitarian regimes (from communist period) and the adequate coverage of sensitive topics with increased use of primary sources mark advancements.

Ukraine

- Initiatives to address and mitigate prevalent stereotypes in societal perceptions reflect positive efforts.
- A gradual departure from the dominance of political and war history in textbooks is an encouraging development.

While these positive strides are commendable, they highlight the ongoing challenges and emphasize the imperative for sustained efforts to improve history education throughout the region. The complexities extend beyond mere curricular and textbook enhancements to include the crucial aspects of nurturing critical thinking and fostering a multi-perspective approach within the teaching community. This holistic approach is essential for cultivating a more nuanced and comprehensive understanding of history among students in these countries.

Educational market (Teachers training)

Teacher training stands out as a crucial pillar in the realm of history teaching. Even when textbooks fall short of meeting prescribed standards and fail to facilitate modern teaching methods emphasizing multiperspectivity and critical thinking, teachers have the opportunity to bridge the gap during lessons. This, however, necessitates a high level of teacher awareness, readiness, and, most importantly, training to actively engage in teaching. Readiness encompasses the ability to identify and address history-based propaganda, equipping students with the skills to independently interpret contentious and sensitive historical topics. It underscores the importance of continuous training and lifelong learning, a responsibility that lies both with educational systems and individual teachers.

A universal finding across all countries in the study is the inadequacy of teacher training programs, hindering effective preparation for countering history-based propaganda. Teachers often seem isolated, left to attend sporadic training sessions through personal initiatives or with occasional support from non-governmental organizations. At the state level, there appears to be a lack of a systematic and satisfactory approach to addressing this issue.

In **Ukraine**, a notable exception, a merit system obligates teachers to attend a minimum of 150 hours of training every five years. Organized by licensed institutions and non-governmental organizations, these professional training sessions dedicate attention to developing critical thinking, particularly in working with historical sources and textbooks. Most

teachers participating in focus groups in Ukraine are aware of courses focused on recognizing historical inaccuracies and cultivating critical thinking in history lessons.

Georgia, however, faces a more challenging situation. Many teachers, having been educated in the old Soviet school during pre-service training and lacking subsequent in-service training, find themselves without the necessary skills to recognize or combat history-based propaganda. Consequently, the traditional, content-oriented teaching methods prevail in history classrooms.

Moldova lacks officially organized courses specifically dedicated to history-based propaganda. While certain structures, national or international NGOs, occasionally organise courses, these efforts are neither sufficient nor systematically coordinated. The infiltration of Russian textbooks in Moldovan schools, particularly in Russian-language schools, Gagauzia, Taraclia, Transnistria, and other actions by the Russian Embassy in Chisinau and Russian cultural centers, according to the respondents are deemed as history-based propaganda actions detrimental to Moldovan educational policy.

In **Armenia**, some training opportunities for teachers touch on history-based propaganda related issues, primarily focusing on "Media Literacy" and/or "Critical Thinking." However, these trainings are predominantly organized by local and international NGOs rather than state institutions.

Perspectives of history teachers on the issue of history-based propaganda

The teacher's point of view on the teaching process is of utmost importance because they are the direct conductors of education. Their first-hand observations, understanding of student abilities, and commitment to professional development make their opinions authoritative. The teacher's responsibility goes beyond the conscientious work and motivation of the students. This includes a constant commitment to upgrading their skills. Therefore, their insights into the teaching process, especially in history-based propaganda, are invaluable.

This research dedicated a substantial portion of its efforts to scrutinizing the opinions and attitudes of history teachers toward the teaching process and history-based propaganda. A questionnaire and focus groups involving teachers were employed for this purpose. Unfortunately, due to the prevailing circumstances, the questionnaire could not be fully conducted, particularly in Ukraine amidst wartime conditions, and in Armenia during the mass exodus from Nagorno-Karabakh. Consequently, the information gathered from Ukraine and Armenia is limited to the participation of history teachers in focus groups. In contrast, surveys were conducted in Georgia and Moldova, though the response rate was lower than anticipated. Nonetheless, the collected data samples offers valuable insights into teachers' opinions regarding history-based propaganda and the broader landscape of history teaching.

In **Armenia**, teachers identify visible instances of history-based propaganda, evident in both textbooks and classroom interactions. These instances include crafting historical narratives that emphasize national achievements, heroism, or superiority while overlooking less favourable aspects, presenting a one-sided perspective, manipulating historical facts to suit propagandist intentions, and portraying specific groups negatively. Emotional triggers associated with historical events are also used to create strong

connections and garner support for particular causes. Patriotism and nationalism are also supported with extensive use of words like "heroism" and "bravery" with respect to Armenian military and political figures, as well as the Armenian nation as a whole. At the same time it seems that even those patriotic sentences do not seem to satisfy some teachers and they expect more. One of the teachers have mentioned: *"I wish it would be more subjective, like "dear beloved students, for centuries, since Bagratunis, since Cilician Armenian Kingdom, in the Armenian Highlands it was the longed-for dream of the Armenian people [to be united], it was the aspiration, it was the desire, it was the fight, it was the struggle for centuries"*.

According to the teachers, one-sidedness, presentation of only one position, opinion as ultimately true, does not help the process of critical thinking. As one of the focus group participants noticed, *"Our textbooks are very bad. Apart from questions checking the knowledge at the end of each section, they do not provide any possibility for students to think, to express their own/independent opinion."*

The teachers also note, that the perception or attitude formed among the students depends not only on the textbook, but on the approach and personal position of the teacher. This is summarized by the following statement of a focus group participant: *"The textbook itself is merely a record of facts that one should know and that's it. I haven't noticed that it is propaganda. A lot depends on the teacher. If I have an inclination towards this or that idea/ideology/wing, or if I want to take it to a specific direction, I can play with the content of the textbook. Some other teacher can do the same in a different direction."*

In relation to the specific training for teachers on the subject of history-based propaganda, the teachers

were unanimous that it does not exist. The only trainings that are closely related to this topic are "Media Literacy" and "Critical Thinking", which are organized by local and international NGO organizations, but not by the state.

Ukrainian history teachers emphasize the presence of history-based propaganda, particularly in textbooks covering the national history of Ukraine. The ongoing Russian war against Ukraine influences the formation of historical consciousness and educational policy. Controversial moments in Ukrainian history are often presented one-sidedly, lacking a comprehensive view. The war conditions prioritize patriotic education, potentially leading to the use of ideological stamps in historical education. Discussions among teachers revealed varying opinions on the use of history-based propaganda for fostering patriotic spirit in children, highlighting the complexity of the issue.

An interesting debate arose during the discussion of the expediency of using history-based propaganda for the purpose of raising the patriotic spirit in children. In this case, teachers' opinions were divided. Some expressed their opinion that the teacher *"may not use facts that do not correspond to historical reality, but has the opportunity to present them from a different angle so that children form the correct image of history."* This opinion was also supported by the teachers, who said that *"in the conditions of war, we should first of all take not to care about what someone will think, but about our children are not saturated with hostile narratives."* However, there were also those teachers who categorically disagreed with this opinion. For example, one of the teachers noted that *"this is why there is an opinion in the public consciousness that we, historians, are propagandists. I believe that we should present information in a non-committal way, even if the historical facts are contradictory."*

In **Georgia**, the survey indicates a lack of uniform understanding among teachers regarding history-based propaganda and its societal impact. History-

based propaganda mechanisms persist in history textbooks, and some teachers exhibit stereotypical attitudes toward minority groups. While some teachers are aware of courses focusing on history-based propaganda, a minority has received training on the topic, revealing a disparity in awareness and preparedness.

According to Survey, 55% of teachers have knowledge of courses that focus on history-based propaganda, although only 35% of these (29% from NGOs, 6% from government organizations) have received training on the topic. Only 42% of those who have attended courses of governmental or non-governmental organizations evaluate the effectiveness of the course positively. Also, propaganda-based topics as part of the courses are topics that teachers cannot fully understand due to time constraints and tight schedules.

Teachers have a mixed attitude to the informativeness and relevance of the history-based propaganda examples in the textbooks, although a large number of them (46%) believe that the examples are relevant and informative, while 28% are neutral, and 24% consider the examples in the textbooks to be completely or partially inappropriate. The same trend can be seen regarding the perception of the influence of history-based propaganda on the society, which indicates that the textbooks are not uniform, and in the textbooks of different publishing houses the influence of history-based propaganda is covered more effectively, in some textbooks - less.

Moldovan teachers demonstrate varying degrees of familiarity with history-based propaganda, emphasizing the need for more knowledge and skills to combat it. Courses organized by non-governmental organizations, although sporadic, have been perceived positively, but there is a call for more training at the level of the national ministry of education. Teachers express the need for courses covering a wide range of topics related to history-based propaganda. In their feedback, they

emphasize the importance of concrete examples and practical tools for analysis.

Those who participated in history based propaganda courses evaluate the quality of the same as:

- Very effective – 47.2%;
- Moderately effective – 36.1%;
- Slightly effective – 11.1%;
- Not effective– 5.6%.

Most of them stated that they prefer in person trainings 60.5% as opposed to online courses 20.9%.

To the question “**What topics related to history-based propaganda do you think should be covered in a course for history teachers?** (*Open-ended question*)” it was variety of answers:

- *Types of history-based propaganda and their approach;*
- *Propagande techniques versus anti-propagande techniques;*
- *Digital and media history-based propaganda;*
- *The impact of history-based propaganda on mentality;*
- *Manipulating opinions;*
- *History-based propaganda through textbooks / e.g. Transnistrian textbooks;*
- *Cold War/Soviet vs. Western history-based propaganda;*
- *History-based propaganda in MSSR;*
- *The issue of minority and national identity;*
- *The problem of territorial integrity;*
- *The problem of European integration and Russian history-based propaganda;*
- *Monuments as a history-based propaganda tool;*
- *Contemporary topics as a subject to propaganda;*
- *Themes from history textbooks of the XX century.*

This answer clearly shows the wide range of interests and training needs covering different types of *history-based* propaganda, but also the urgent need for training on history-based propaganda in general.

In their answers, they go further/more specifically answering the question “**How can courses on history-based propaganda be improved to better meet the needs of history teachers?**” (*Open-ended question*):

- *Use of concrete examples of history-based propaganda;*
- *Application of concrete tools/algorithms for history-based propaganda analysis;*
- *Case Studies;*
- *Organisation of debates;*
- *Practicing source analysis;*
- *Elaboration Guides and Handbooks (paper and digital) that can be used in lessons;*
- *Organizing workshops with practical activities;*
- *Organizing information workshops on good practices / international practice / with the participation of representatives of different states;*
- *Application of the principle of multi-perceptiveness.*

Obviously, in their needs, teachers emphasize not only general training, but training based on concrete examples that they encounter every day in class.

The main recommendation arising from this research is the urgent need for courses on history-based propaganda to be organized systematically. These courses should equip teachers with a comprehensive understanding of how propaganda operates, how to detect it, its impact, and strategies for combating it. This knowledge is crucial for approaching the past objectively and teaching history topics without succumbing to propagandistic attempts to interpret historical events.

MAIN CONCLUSIONS

All participating countries encounter similar challenges in the realm of history education, particularly concerning the handling of history-based propaganda. A notable deficiency exists in the fundamental elements of history education, primarily textbooks and teacher training. Despite sporadic successes in the past decade, changes occur slowly and lack a robust foundation. Non-adjustment of textbooks to the concept of working with sources, the encouragement of critical thinking and the construction of attitudes based on evidence, was noted in all countries as part of the research. At the same time, the lack of liberalization of the textbook market is another common thread.

Textbook Shortcomings:

- History textbooks, currently fall short of meeting modern teaching standards.
- Glaring issues include the absence of age-appropriate content, biased language, insufficient integration of primary sources, and a lack of multi-perspective approaches.
- Across surveyed countries, a unanimous consensus emerges – textbooks urgently need improvement.
- Recognition of shared weaknesses in educational materials provides an opportunity for collaborative efforts among educators and policymakers to revamp history education.

Ethnocentric approach and narratives prevail in the textbooks of most countries, indicating that the influence of the "Soviet model" in interpreting history has not been entirely overcome. There is ample room for improvement, especially in incorporating a multi-perspective approach and emphasizing primary sources.

The textbooks are visibly politicized, unbalanced and assume the students' prior knowledge. They do not meet the requirements of innovative and responsible

history teaching, neglecting the inclusion of various written and visual sources.

The current teaching methodology relies heavily on a teacher and textbook-oriented approach, prioritizing rote memorization over critical thinking. Dispelling myths and recognizing history-based propaganda are not prioritized in either textbooks or teacher training, causing confusion among educators who strive to meet national standards. The educational approaches fall short of modern teaching tendencies that emphasize active student engagement and skill development.

Teacher Training Shortcomings:

- Teacher training stands out as a crucial pillar in history teaching.
- The inadequacy of teacher training programs, both pre-service and in-service, poses a significant challenge to countering history-based propaganda.
- Teachers across countries express the urgent need for systematically organized courses on history-based propaganda.
- Courses should equip teachers with comprehensive knowledge, practical tools, and strategies for detecting and combating history-based propaganda.

Currently, the opportunity to make history teaching a relevant and engaging subject for students is being overlooked. There is a clear demand for professional capacity building among history educators to address these shortcomings and elevate the quality of history education.

In conclusion, the investigation underscores the interconnectedness of curriculum, textbooks, and teacher training in shaping history education. The imperative for continuous professional development and a systemic approach to teacher training emerges as key components in building a robust foundation for history education.

RECOMMENDATIONS

While the primary focus of the research was on history-based propaganda, it became evident that the challenges in history teaching extend beyond initial expectations. Therefore, the recommendations address not only the mitigation of *history-based* propaganda in textbooks and classrooms but also fundamental prerequisites for an effective educational process.

Curriculum and Textbooks:

- Encourage the inclusion of diverse perspectives, multiple narratives, and comprehensive contextualization in both curriculum and textbooks.
- Implement strategies to make historical content more engaging, fostering a greater interest in the subject among students.
- Prioritize the use of unbiased language in textbooks, avoiding subjective tones that may influence students' perspectives.
- Promote the integration of primary sources in textbooks to provide students with firsthand accounts and historical artefacts, enhancing their understanding of past events.
- Encourage the recognition of global perspectives in textbooks, ensuring that national history is presented within the broader context of world history.
- Address the tendency towards ethnocentrism, promoting a more inclusive understanding of historical events and their global implications.
- Ensure the timely incorporation of new competence-based education standards into textbooks, aligning them with the emphasis on critical thinking and historical understanding.

Teacher Training and Professional Development:

- Establish systematic and comprehensive in-service training programs for history teachers, focusing on recognizing and addressing history-based propaganda.
- Emphasize the importance of continuous professional development, encouraging teachers to stay updated on modern teaching methods and historical interpretations.
- Encourage open-minded teaching approaches that allow for discussions, debates, and critical analysis of historical events, fostering independent and critical thinking among students.
- Stimulate innovative and responsible history teaching by promoting a multi-layered understanding of the past and adopting student-centered approaches.
- Stimulate cross-border cooperation among history teachers to facilitate knowledge exchange and collaborative learning.
- Empower teachers with resources and develop teacher manuals for effectively dealing with history-based propaganda in the classroom.
- Prioritize pre-service and in-service teacher training as a primary goal, with special attention to addressing history-based propaganda.

These recommendations aim to address the identified challenges and enhance the quality of history education, fostering a more comprehensive, inclusive, and critical understanding of the past among students across the studied countries.

History Teachers ToolKit content proposal:

Empowering history teachers with the knowledge and tools to recognize and address history-based propaganda, ensuring a more accurate and unbiased portrayal of historical events in the classroom is a very practical and necessary form of professional development.

History teachers Toolkit will significantly strengthen educators with practical resources and strategies, fostering a more comprehensive, inclusive, and critical understanding of the past among students.

Some of the topics and subtopics that could find own place in such a Toolkit could be the following:

Role of History-Based Propaganda

- How history-based propaganda affects students' perspectives.
- Responsibility of teachers in guiding students through objective historical analysis.
- Key role of history teachers in shaping historical narratives.
- Influence of educators in countering biased historical interpretations.

Identifying History-Based Propaganda

- Guidelines for evaluating and addressing biased content in textbooks.
- Recognising the biased language.
- Examples of biased language in historical narratives.
- Identification of language that may perpetuate history-based propaganda.
- Analysis of historical perspectives
- Recognizing one-sided historical perspectives.
- Strategies for identifying and addressing ideological biases.
- Significance of omissions and distortions in historical content.
- Methods for detection of factual inaccuracies.

Strategies for Addressing History-Based Propaganda

- Open and respectful classroom discussions on historical events.
- Strategies for addressing diverse perspectives and encouraging critical thinking.
- Resources for enhancing students' critical analysis skills.
- Activities that challenge students to question historical narratives.
- Multi-perspective approach in history lessons.
- Methods for integrating multiple perspectives into history lessons.
- Examples of linking national history to broader global narratives

Recommended readings

While there may not be specific manuals devoted exclusively to history-based propaganda, there are educational resources that may be useful for teachers in their daily work. When dealing with history-based propaganda, it's beneficial for teachers to integrate use of sources, critical thinking exercises, multi-perspective approach and discussions into their teaching. These readings can serve as a starting point for educators looking to incorporate these elements into their teaching practices.

- **Quality history education in the 21st century: principles and guidelines**, Council of Europe: *Principles and guidelines for increasing the expertise and abilities necessary for history education to play its role successfully.*
- **Teaching Controversial Issues - Training for History Teachers**, Council of Europe: *This publication focuses on providing training for history teachers in dealing with controversial issues, including guidance on handling potentially sensitive topics and avoiding the pitfalls of bias and propaganda.*
- **European Union's Strategies for Teaching Controversial Issues: Initiatives focused on teaching controversial issues, which may include guidance on addressing propaganda in the classroom.**
- **History teaching and the promotion of democratic values and tolerance**, Carmel Gallagher: *A handbook for teachers that include debates on function and main challenges, but also include teaching and classroom strategies.*
- **Learning to Disagree, Teachers Guide**, Euroclio: *The guide has been written with history and civics teachers and researchers from across Europe using multi-perspective materials from a wider variety of communities.*
- **Teaching 20th-century European History** by Bob Stradling: *This book concentrates on the "how" rather than the "what" of history teaching process.*
- **History Teachers ToolKit** by Russel Tarr: *This book provides history teachers with practical and creative classroom strategies.*
- **The History Teacher's Handbook** by Neil Smith and Sue Burvill-Shaw: *This handbook provides practical advice and strategies for history teachers. It covers various aspects of teaching history, including dealing with controversial topics and navigating through potential propaganda in historical narratives.*
- **Teaching Controversial Issues: The Case for Critical Thinking and Moral Commitment in the Classroom** by Nel Noddings: *This book explores the importance of critical thinking and moral commitment, when teaching controversial topics, providing insights into fostering open-mindedness and respectful dialogue*

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