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Letter from Anthony Cary, Head of Rt. Hon. Christopher Patten's Bureau to CMIP



EUROPEAN COMMISSION
CABINET OF THE RT. HON. CHRISTOPHER F. PATTEN, CH

Chef de cabinet

Brussels, 6 January, 2003
D(2002) 3880

Dear Dr Manor,

You wrote to me on 19 November observing that you had never received the further response promised in my letter of July. I apologise for that.

In his letter of 15 April 2002, Mr Legras referred to the preparation of a report on Palestinian textbooks. The European Union has since published that report, drawn up by our missions in Jerusalem and Ramallah.

The report found that allegations against the new textbooks were largely unfounded. The new textbooks have their faults, but they are a big improvement on what they replaced, and constitute an important contribution to the Palestinian education system. A number of other organisations, academics and institutions have reached similar conclusions. Most recently the Georg Eckert Institute, which conducts extensive international research into textbooks, commented that the new Palestinian books are much less prejudicial than the old Jordanian and Egyptian ones.

In your letter of 9 June 2002 to Mr Patten you recognised this important distinction between the old Jordanian and Egyptian textbooks and the new texts issued by the Palestinian Authority. From 1967 to 1994, Israeli authorities used versions of the old books in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. The Palestinian Authority has set about gradually replacing these textbooks, with some financial assistance from certain EU Member States. The European Commission does not itself provide financing, but we are fully supportive of these efforts. If you have constructive suggestions for further improvements, I suggest that you should contact the Member States that are supporting this work.

The EU, for its part, has called on the Palestinian Authority and President Arafat to speak out against incitement to hatred and violence, particularly in schools. In this context we are encouraged by the Palestinian Authority's 100-day plan of 25 June 2002 in which it declares its intention to '*renounce fanaticism in the educational curricula and spread the spirit of democracy, enlightenment and openness on a wide scale*'.

I agree with you that education plays an important part in the promotion of reconciliation and peace, both in Israeli and Palestinian society. The EU will continue to do all it can to generate a culture of tolerance and mutual understanding between peoples.

Yours sincerely

Anthony Cary

Anthony CARY

Commission européenne, B-1049 Bruxelles / Europese Commissie, B-1049 Brussel - Belgium, Telephone: (32-2) 299 11 11, Office: Char 15/139, Telephone: direct line (32-2) 2960125. Fax: (32-2) 2981299.

E-mail: Anthony.Cary@cab.eu.int.

360 Madison Avenue, 6th Floor, New York, N.Y. 10017 U.S.A. (212) 699-8823
4 Rav Ashe Street, Jerusalem 93309, Israel Tel: 972-2-6481660 Fax: 972-2-6482823

e-mail: info@edume.org

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**Reply from CMIP to Anthony Cary, Head of Rt. Hon.
Christopher's Patten Bureau**

1st April 2003

Mr. Anthony Cary
Chef de Cabinet
Cabinet of the Rt. Hon. Christopher Patten
European Commission
B-1049 Brussels

Dear Mr. Cary,

We are in receipt of your letter of the 6th January this year in which you refer to a report on Palestinian textbooks published by the European Union. It is not clear to us if this is the document dated 15th May received from the Head of Delegation of the European Union in Israel. If not, please forward a copy of it since we have not been able to locate in any of your publications including the European Union website.

If the report referred to is indeed that mentioned above, then your letter under reply does not seem to have dealt with any of the specific points raised by us in our letter of the 9th June. Our initial letter to the Commissioner for External Relations referred only to our report of November 2001, a further copy of which is enclosed for ease of reference, and to the textbooks surveyed therein. Whether these books are an improvement over those used in the past, whatever their provenance, is irrelevant.

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4 Rav Ashe Street, Jerusalem 93309, Israel Tel: 972-2-6481660 Fax: 972-2-6482823**

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The Commissioner's attention was drawn to the contents of these books as presented in the report. Since the publication of our report none of the quotations contained therein, or in the follow-up report published in October 2002, a copy of which is also enclosed, has, to our knowledge, been successfully challenged on the grounds that it is a bad translation or taken out of context nor have any of its findings been successfully impugned.

The European Union and some of its member states fund, in one form or another, an educational system which, to judge from its textbooks, is inculcating hatred, distorting history, not fostering peace and reconciliation and not upholding UNESCO criteria. We should have thought that this is a matter of more than a little concern to the Commissioner and not one that can be shrugged off with general, and unsubstantiated, allegations of bad translations and quotations taken out of context. With the greatest respect, it seems to us that our letters to him are deserving of a more serious response.

Yours sincerely,

Dr. Yohanan Manor
Vice-Chairman, CMIP