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When Textbooks Promote Violence

By Johannes Kahrs -- November 17, 2017

Anyone who wants to credibly commit to a peace process in the Middle East cannot support teaching hatred to children.

Education is the basic building block for the future of young people. In the Middle East conflict, however, education is even more: it is a piece of hope for a more peaceful future. It is therefore right for Germany and other European donors to participate in educational work in the Palestinian territories, for example by subsidizing textbooks. Here, an active contribution to more tolerance and the breaking up of old thought patterns can be provided.

Unfortunately, good ideas and good will are not always enough, as studies of the research institute IMPACT-se and the NGO Mideast Freedom Forum Berlin have shown. The two institutes evaluated the image of Israel and Jews in the new Palestinian curriculum and came to some devastating conclusions. The examined textbooks were shown to promote a spiritual climate of violence.

In a primary school math textbook, the Israeli and Jewish terminology is often pejorative and polarizing, and the fight against Israel is glorified. Addition problems are solved by summing up the "martyrs" of the first and second Intifada, and the teaching of anti-Zionist conspiracy theories in the history textbooks is deeply disturbing. Such content promotes hatred and legitimizes violence.

Those wishing to be credible in the peace process in the Middle East cannot encourage the teaching of hatred and violence to children. However, since it is worthwhile to hope for a better future through education, ending subsidies would also be a very regrettable step.

It is better and necessary to have political initiatives at national and European levels that link financial support to concrete conditions while evaluating the results in a continuous monitoring process. If we look tacitly at this point, we make ourselves not only implausible, but indirectly complicit in the continuation of this persistent hostility.

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