CRITICAL AND CREATIVE THINKING, PARTICIPATORY CULTURE AND CIVIL SOLIDARITY

A Concept Paper on the Development of Social Science Content and Democratic Competencies for the School Education System of the Republic of Armenia

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CONTENT

PART 1

SUMMARY OF STUDIES ON THE SCHOOL EDUCATION SYSTEM OF THE REPUBLIC OF ARMENIA

During the first 30 years of independence, the Armenian education system was characterized by non-participatory and vertical relationships. Since the rise of pluralism in the late 1980s and early 1990s, Armenian citizens have lived through a complicated period of winning back their rights, overcoming lack of freedom, and forming democratic institutions, which has had a direct impact on the school and university systems.

This concept paper on the transformation of educational content in the Armenian school system is based on a revised approach to the historical course of Armenian enlightenment in the modern age and the modernization of Armenians. Moreover, the document addresses the culture of civil self-organization that has emerged in Armenia since 1988 and seeks to formulate comprehensive goals for education and upbringing using educational content milestones and supplementary curricula in order to enhance **citizens' civic engagement, pluralism, and an everyday democratic participatory culture, critical and creative thinking, and civil harmony**.

Three major themes can be identified in the research and analysis of education reforms in the post-Soviet period in Armenia and, based on this, the material available to us can be divided into three groups. The first is a comparative analysis of the systemic and structural reforms carried out in the post-socialist countries over the last 25 years aimed at moving from the Soviet education system to the European Educational

space (*decentralization, plurality, new principles for assessment, new Educational standards, etc.*), as well as reevaluating the role of national culture and values in educational content. In this sense, the impression is that even if this is not explicitly mentioned, this long-term and costly work has failed to achieve its main goals for a number of reasons, including economic hardship and war, but also particularly the continuing influence of the Soviet legacy. In any case, the results are far from satisfactory, and this applies to many of the post-Soviet countries in some measure.

The second group of studies also discuss *issues related to educational content* in light of the need to make ideological changes in the post-Soviet period, to build a post-Soviet national identity and a realization of the role attributed to education for achieving this objective. The material offered by this group is scant and, as far as the subject of national identity is concerned, it is superficial. It is obvious that new approaches are required here, as well as more serious expertise and research capabilities. The question itself as to the importance of education as a means to build a new society (and cultural identity), new values and relationships, is probably valid, but only if we ignore the fact that this road is more like a dead end. However, education system reform requires people with new thinking, and such people can only be developed through a new approach to education. It is probably necessary to develop more sophisticated and flexible models.

The publications of the third group, which have some commonalities with the previous category, discuss *issues of an epistemological and methodological nature*, and it is the products of these two groups that are of most interest to us and subject to more detailed examination. It should be noted that, for obvious reasons, the research material related to educational content and a number of related issues have primarily been textbooks of history (and especially history of the Armenian people) and the methods of teaching history as a school subject. We primarily refer here to the studies by international expert groups—in one case in the three South Caucasus countries, in the other in Turkey and in Armenia—available as collections summarizing these works.

An important distinction between the second and third groups is that the third can mainly restrict itself to referring to the broadly accepted

principles of modern historiography (which textbooks authors apparently do not know, although it is well known that the authorities, led by the Ministry of Education and Science, have given direct orders to the authors to write Armenian-centric, nationalist history, and to reproduce the "official knowledge" in this area), while the second group (which consists mainly of the thesis of American-Armenian researcher **Shelley Marie Terzian**) has understood and interpreted the de-Sovietization of education, the construction of a post-Soviet national identity, and other related topics in a rather abstract and superficial way. One of the reasons for this is that the researcher has not been acquainted with local studies on the subject and has not even tried to talk to scholars and researchers of the humanities, despite conducting dozens of interviews with education specialists and experts, including also the topic of national identity.

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, the former socialist countries and Soviet republics pursued, among other things, two main approaches to the transformation of their education system – westernization and nationalization. During that time, they (supposedly) got rid of their Soviet legacy, and while the demands for westernization seemed to be understandable, it later became clear that it was largely unfeasible; nationalization, on the other hand, appeared to be both understandable and feasible. In fact, the most difficult question that was naturally left unanswered or considered self-explanatory, was hidden in terms such as "de-Sovietization", "national identity", "national value system" etc., where the "national" is considered something that can be easily recovered and distinguished from the Soviet Union, if not something that is self-evident. It was not something that is subject to critical review and reconstruction.

Let us now take a closer look at some of the studies on each of the themes and try to summarize and evaluate this material, pointing out the main objectives of the document in the given context. In her comparative analysis of the transformations of the education system in post-socialist countries (2009), **Iveta Silova** begins with the following general observation: "*The new education authorities of all post-socialist countries adopted the following catchwords – 'democratization,' 'decentralization,' 'liberalization,' 'pluralism,' and 'humanization of learning.' Educational transformation processes have generally touched all areas of education*

systems, triggering profound changes in education financing, governance, curriculum, textbooks, examination and assessment systems, teacher education, and infrastructure." As in the mainstream of political literature, the education reformers also envisioned a linear, direct transformation from authoritarianism to "democracy," but observations and research suggested something completely different, and this approach was later substantially revised.

Thus, the main strategy for education reform in post-socialist countries is to borrow and import educational models, practices and discourses from the West. As it turned out, this is a rather complicated process that involves, in particular, selective interpretation or "filtering" of the imported material. As Silova notes, this transfer can include not only practices but also discourses; what is being transferred is not a specific aspect of education reform, but rather a political discourse associated with it, which can in turn be interpreted (and thus legitimized) according to the local context. Thus, the researcher concludes, this transfer of the education system takes place in each country within a unique historical, political, social, and cultural context. These are complex processes that can go off on unpredictable trajectories and lead to many endpoints.

Terzian's thesis (2010) is the only research available to us that consistently discusses the link between school curricula and the formation of a post-Soviet Armenian identity. She notes that independence from the Soviet Union left the education system of Armenia in an ideological vacuum, and therefore "curriculum reform became a primary channel for disseminating the new knowledge, skills, and values needed for the Armenian postsocialist state." According to Terzian, the adoption of a national curriculum helped fill that vacuum by building a new civil and ethnic consciousness, thereby characterizing post-Soviet Armenia. Based on numerous interviews and the work with focus groups and her own observations, she concludes: "The post-Soviet Armenian national consciousness is being developed by national symbols, democratic participation, and new content-area foci." As already mentioned, this is a superficial interpretation of the issue of national identity and, thus, the results of curriculum review. The author has neglected extensive literature on cultural identity and related issues in post-socialist countries.

Garine Palandjian's assessments (2014) of post-Soviet perceptions of what it means to be an Armenian and efforts to disseminate this through educational content are based on a comparative analysis of Soviet and post-Soviet textbooks on the alphabet. In her opinion, the alphabet textbooks created for Armenian schools give no reason to think that the country really wants to move from the Soviet to European Educational space, adapting to Western approaches. These textbooks suggest that their authors failed to grasp the competing narratives of global civil values (openness, multiculturalism, tolerance, human rights) and the uniqueness of the Armenian national identity: *"School textbooks continue to view the Armenian nation from a separate ethnonational point of view, and the analysis reveals narratives built on the exclusive ethnocultural and linguistic character of the Armenian nation."* Palandjian concludes: *"While global discourses may indeed have been circulating in the post-Soviet education space, it is local politics that has ultimately shaped the actual educational policies and practices, including school textbooks... Soviet education policies and practices have not necessarily been replaced by Western ones. Instead, a return has taken place to historical heritage, reinforcing the ethnocultural conception of Armenian identity."* Similar conclusions can be found in the next two studies.

A study on history textbooks and teaching in the South Caucasus (2014) is guided by the idea that learning history plays a key role in the construction of national ideologies and identities, and offers a common methodological basis for the review of history education and narratives in a region rife with inter-ethnic conflict. Here, criticism of old theoretical and methodological approaches (primordialism, essentialism, etc.) is accompanied by a description of new approaches (constructivism, discourse analysis) to social science and historiography. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, the task has been to create textbooks that are objective and free of *"socialist ideology."* But over the years, nationalism has come to replace socialist ideology, and authors today no longer know how to write a textbook free of ideology.

The economic crisis and the Karabakh conflict have left a strong impact on Armenia's education system. The concept of the enemy is deeply rooted not only at the everyday level but also in the intellectual

and academic discourse, and there is even an open dissatisfaction with the "ideology-free" approach. Noting that, since the late 1990s, there has been an increasing nationalization and ethnicization of educational narratives in Armenia, with clear formal ideological instructions on the subject of history (the goal of teaching history is to develop national self-awareness, achieve national goals, preserve Armenian identity and develop a national value system), the authors of the study formulate approaches to teaching history that will foster civil solidarity and critical thinking, and allow one to combine patriotism with solidarity, while rejecting the concepts of ethnicity and nation as given by nature.

One of the central assertions of the study "History Education in Schools in Turkey and Armenia" (2017) is this: *"Today's history education is Armenia carries the legacy of the Soviet Armenian education, both discursively and in terms of pedagogy."* The schema for historical narratives is as follows: Ethnogenesis - national consciousness and the national freedom movement - Communism (in the post-Soviet era, the nation state replaces communism). Even after it is cleansed of communist internationalism and flavored with nationalism, the historical narrative still bears a striking resemblance to its Soviet predecessor. This suggests that historians cannot write history and textbooks, and teachers cannot teach history without ideology.

An analysis of the discourse in history textbooks used in Armenia allows the authors to draw a number of conclusions and make some recommendations. Here are some of them:

a. This is an essentialist historical narrative that links the ancient past with the present through the seemingly unchanging features of the Armenian nation and its imagined uniformity.

b. It is a narrative in one voice, focused on the history of wars and political elites in the continuing struggle for the liberation of the nation.

c. It is a narrative of victimhood and suppression by various groups of "others".

d. The ethno-cultural list discourse that presents a continuity between the

Armenian empire of 2,000 year ago and the present day Armenian state and identity dominates the narrative. A notion of a monolithic and unchangeable Armenian identity that excludes differences and privileges the ethnic identity compared to the civic one.

e. Complex historical narratives have been distilled into the primitive narrative of a national liberation movement, told in the voices of the political elite, which builds an essentialist view of an unchanged Armenia and Armenianness, as well as on the Others, with a strong emphasis on victimhood.

f. Women are largely ignored in this masculine and military paradigm.

g. Regardless of methodology, nationalism remains prevalent, and it is rare for critical and creative thinking to be used.

Here are some recommendations for developing history textbooks:

• A shift is necessary towards the removal of ideologies and the apoliticization of history education;

• The approach of an omniscient single voice in the narrative must be abandoned in favor of multiple voices and viewpoints.

The most difficult questions include:

• Ehe interpretation of the notion of 'national' in history education, militarism (militarism in history textbooks impairs the resolution of present conflicts);

• Overcoming essentialism by means of social constructivism, etc.

The purpose of this document is to develop guiding principles for history and social science teaching in RA public schools and key components of teaching and assessment of competencies for a pluralistic participatory culture, taking into account the historical context, critical attitudes and recommendations on the way forward in the RA education system.

PART 2

HISTORY-SOCIAL SCIENCE CONTENT, PRINCIPLES FOR MATERIAL SELECTION AND INTERPRETATION

1. Historical context

Clarification of concepts and methodological notes

It makes sense to start this text with the verification of some basic concepts.

The modern understanding of the concept of *"education"* derives from the tradition of the Enlightenment movement, when ideas such as *reasoned knowledge, reason, and rational doubt* came to replace mythical imagery. Freed from the influence of *authority and hierarchical structures*, cognition opened the path for *rational and critical thinking*.

One of the best definitions of *enlightenment* comes from Kant, according to whom enlightenment is the *ability to use one's own intellect*. Thus, mankind enters the period of adulthood, which is commonly called *"modernity."*

The main features of *modernity* are:

a. the differentiation of the social whole, as a result of which its various spheres are separated from one another and develop according to their own logic, and the contradictions between them are resolved rationally;

b. the mobilization of authorities, social groups, as well as resources including capital, technology and natural resources;

c. technical, organizational and cultural innovation;

d. secularization – the separation of religion and state.

Modernity is considered different from *modernization*, which is intended for nations that fall behind the processes described above or are completely excluded from them. The positive side of this is rapid, consistent development, the negative is the schematism imposed by outsiders (often by the colonizer). The catastrophic consequences of the latter can only be avoided when *institutional reforms are combined with the internal appropriation of the content of enlightenment, which is one of the main goals of modern education.*

The Armenian people, no matter how much they have participated in the main stages of the formation of world modernity, nevertheless belong to the ranks of "backward" peoples, to whom the idea of *modernization* applies. This is due to a *major disruption or great schism* caused by historical circumstances (loss of statehood, destruction of houses of nobility, atomization of societies), as a result of which Armenian life (since the 15th century) was subjected to the rule of three neighboring empires – the Persian, Ottoman and Russian. This state of colonization, with all its civilizing influence (each dominating force performs a function of civilizing, to some extent), has had the following negative impact:

a. the civilizing coercion of great powers that themselves have not completely gone through the modernization process

b. bringing national life to the level of religious community (*milet*) relations, which was due to the exclusion of any state or public structures of one's own;

c. The modern culture of Eastern Armenians emerged and developed under Russian, and then Soviet, domination.

Even under these conditions, as early as in the 16th century, the process of *early modernization* began in the Armenian environment, marked by *various attempts to transition from a* milet *(community) identity to a national one, from a religious identity to a secular one*. This process has not been monolinear and homogeneous. It had its unique historical foundation due to *the specific structure of the Armenian Apostolic Church,*

the existence of the Eastern and Western parts of Armenia, and the decisive factor of the networking centers of Armenian trade capital. These modernization processes shaped the basics needed for enlightenment in the Armenian environment and developed its content. Armenian enlightenment was developed both by individuals as well as by a number of secular and religious education centers.

In any case, when examining the ongoing process of Armenian modernity (modernization), one must always take into account the "spatial-temporal" fragmentation of Armenian history, as well as the *continuous effort* aimed at the reconstruction of the past and the restoration of broken tradition. This evidence of inner independence enables to state that *the key constituents of modernity and enlightenment are inherent to the national development of Armenians and that today's education must be conducted as a combination of global and local experiences of modernity.*

This approach is also meant to answer the question posed in the first part regarding the two contradictory attempts to overcome the Soviet model - through a quasi-western and a nationalist paradigm - and their eventual failure. The national tradition of enlightenment can serve as a path to bring together these seemingly incompatible directions and to develop a new national identity model based on civil principles.

In order to understand this *"reconstructive"* nature of Armenian modernization, Khachik Tololyan's thesis that the Armenians are a *"textual nation"* is of great methodological importance. Tololyan is referring to the foundation texts written in the Armenian "Golden age" **(Agatangelos, Koryun, Yeghishe, Khorenatsi)**, which have shaped behavioral patterns that still continue to define the life of Armenian society. The proposed approach can be extended to various stages of Armenian history, including the circuluation of correspondence in the networked community of Indian-Armenian traders, the phenomenon of a *"philological nation"* originating with the Mekhitarist Congregation, and even a study of the role of today's social networks in the general historical context.

2. Historical milestones

The historical milestones presented below outline the basics that could define the value-based components and strategies for the RA education system.

2.1. The Great Interruption

The narrative should probably begin with the Great Interruption mentioned above, which sharply interrupted the development of the Armenian people after the fall of the Cilician Kingdom. It is especially important to emphasize that the causes of the decline of the 15th and 16th centuries cannot only be explained through a loss of statehood. **Nikoghayos Adonts's** assessment is worth mentioning here: *"The end of political freedom in Armenia was not really caused by the fall of the royal dynasties of the Arshakunis and Bagratids, but rather by the decline of the noble houses during the Mongol invasion."* This demonstrates the difference between the attributes of statehood and the social structure of society and the latter's essential role for national self-organization. An important stage in this disadvantageous period was the transformation of the Armenian noble class into merchants and clergymen under the rule of the Ak-Koyunlu Turkmen tribe, which had a decisive influence on the structure of Armenian society in later centuries.

The long-term result of the same process was the replacement of Armenian noble families by the Kurd *beks* on Armenian territories. In this context, the ambiguous role of the Armenian Church in the Ottoman and Persian Empires must also be noted. On the one hand, the Church undeniably deserves recognition for organizing and leading the life of the Armenian population in the absence of statehood. On the other hand, it should be borne in mind that the Church was also assigned this role by the rulers, given that it was a structure capable of controlling its Christian flock without political aspirations. No matter how unpleasant this fact, it is also worth noting that Eastern Armenia was significantly Islamized before it came under Russian rule. All this has to be explicitly mentioned in order to show the depth of the decline from which the Armenian people undertook their process of modernization.

2.2. The main components of Armenian enlightenment

This drive for modernization would not have been possible without the **development of Armenian capitalism**, which took place mainly outside of Armenia (Baku, Tbilisi, Constantinople, etc.). This process impacted to the formation of Armenian intellectuals (intelligentsia) and different sociopolitical currents emerged in various Armenian educational centers – Tbilisi, Shushi, Yerevan, Madras, Constantinople, Moscow, Venice, Lvov, Isfahan etc.

It is natural that the whole text should focus on the main components of Armenian enlightenment:

- religion, secularization, and rationalization;
- sociopolitical and religious streams;
- enlightenment press and literature;
- schools and centers;
- emancipation of the Armenian woman.

2.3. The stages of modernization

During the process of presenting Armenian modernization, it is necessary to consider also the **difference in the paths traversed by Eastern Armenians and Western Armenians**, mentioning both the similarities as well as the specificities of each part.

2.3.1. The stages of Western Armenian modernization could be compiled based on F. Levon Zekiyan's chronographical classification –

a. the period of gestation, which started with the first printed book;
b. the blossoming of Armenian capitalism, from Jugha to the establishment of the Mekhitarist Congregation;
c. the humanistic period (Rebirth), related to the *"mental reconstruction of the homeland"*;

d. secularization period – from the "Awakening" to the Armenian Genocide.

The emphasis in this section should be on the following points –

- The establishment of Armenian printing house as a factor of enlightenment and modernization, its development from religious literature to practical use materials and even maps, its dissemination in Diaspora communities and in Armenia.

- The participation of Armenian trade capital in the processes of early globalization, its network nature, the creation of a new model of coexistence, its decisive participation in the formation of the **Madras Enlightenment Circle**.

- The work of this same group, one of the most prominent examples of which was **Shahamir Shahamiryan**'s (1723-1798) writing titled *Snare of Glory*, reflecting the progressive ideas of Armenian enlightenment and the principles of a constitutional state.

- The development of the model of a "*philological nation"* during the functioning of the **Mekhitarist Congregation**.

2.3.2 While speaking of the **modernization of Eastern Armenia** the emphasis must be placed on the contribution by **Khachatur Abovyan, Stepanos Nazaryants, Mikayel Nalbandyan, Grigor Artzruni** and other prominent representatives of Armenian enlightenment.

- While analyzing the work of **K. Abovyan**, both the clichés of "*emotional patriotism"* and a simplistic (whether positive or negative) presentation of his geopolitical orientations should be avoided. One should emphasize his enlightenment practices: from assimilation of European experience to the proclaimed imperative of "*overcoming muteness"* – the enlightening core of his novel *The Wounds of Armenia*.

- Another topic is the "**Northern Lights**", related to the names of **S. Nazaryants** and **M. Nalbandyan**. In the latter's work, critical elements should be emphasized, stressing the liberating power of knowledge. There should also be a focus on the contradiction between his concept of national liberation and social ideas.

- Another very important writer—although he was relegated to secondary status during Soviet times—was the editor-in-chief of *Mshak*, **G. Artzruni**, who combined bourgeois liberalism with nationalism. Advocating the idea of the economic empowerment of Armenians, Artzruni created the "*national economic vessel"* after which **Raffi** developed the "*political vessel"* (Vahan Navasardyan). Thus, Artzruni was not only the successor of Abovyan and Nazaryants, he was also the forefather of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation party.

The efforts of these authors laid the foundations of the Armenian national secular self-consciousness. Concerning this topic, see the writings of Sergey Sarinyan and Ronald Suny.

2.4. Tendencies of secularization

This process would not have been possible without **the tendency of secularization of the entire Armenian society**, which manifested itself among both Western Armenians and Eastern Armenians. The first classical manifestation of this was the program of the co-founder of **Mehian** magazine in Constantinople, Hakob Oshakan, who proposed to replace the weakening influence of the Church on the people with the influence of the new Armenian literature. The second symbol of this was the public activity and well-known gesture by Tumanyan, who contrasted the mission of the "Poet of All Armenians" to the functions of the "Catholicos of All Armenians".

2.5. Revolutionary period (threshold of the 20th century)

In this section it is necessary to give sufficient space to the history of the creation and ideological development of Armenian political parties, and later to the history of the national liberation movement, through a sober narrative that is free from bias to the extent possible. This issue needs to be given importance for at least two reasons. On the one hand,

this is about the formation of the system of Armenian political parties, and here it must be shown that these parties, with rare exceptions, did not act as structures seeking to participate in parliamentary elections, but were rather closer in concept to the Bolshevik Party, which Lenin had characterized as a *"new type of party"*. This is not surprising given their connection to the Russian Narodniks. On the other hand, their role should be discussed in organizing the national liberation struggle, their place in the context of revolutionary developments, in particular the Russian Revolution, and what its consequences were for the First Republic and the years that followed. For this purpose, **Leo**'s *"critique of ideology"*, which went parallel to the corresponding European current, is of great importance, as are the analyses by R. Suny, S. Sarinyan, and others.

2.6. The Second Great Interruption – the Armenian Genocide

The Armenian Genocide of 1915-16, as a traumatic event in history, must be examined in the broader historical context (the Armenian Question as a constituent part of the Eastern Question), as well as from the point of view of the culture of memory and the rethinking and reflection of the past. How should one talk about the Armenian Genocide in Armenian society? Questions examining the Armenian Genocide are not only permissible but also necessary in order to orientate oneself, analyze and understand the social history of one's own country. On the causes of the Genocide, as well as on other realities of that revolutionary period, it is important to use the works of people critical of the issue, such as **Hovhannes Kajaznuni, Garegin Nzhdeh, Yeghishe Charents, Hakob Oshakan** and others.

It should be noted that this Catastrophe actually destroyed the institutions of Western Armenian enlightenment, which were only partially rebuilt later, either through transformed Diaspora structures or by moving to Soviet Armenia.

2.7. The Soviet modernization project

With the establishment of Soviet Armenia, the process of Armenian modernization, to which enlightenment was inextricably linked, has entered a fundamentally new phase. In order to understand its specific characteristics, it is necessary to bear in mind that the main task of Soviet modernization was *to overcome backwardness*. The changes of the first years were made in this context: the elimination of illiteracy, the rationalization of the administrative apparatus, gender policies and so on.

A key feature of the Soviet modernization project was its mobilizing nature, which **James Scott** characterized as "high modernism" – the belief that scientific and technical progress achieved through academic and rational knowledge of the laws of nature and society, can meet human needs and lead to the control of both natural environment as well as human nature. *This tendency becomes dangerous if an authoritarian state uses its power to impose high modernist projects on a weak civil society and implement them at all costs.*

Scott's concept is needed to radically change the way we talk about Soviet Armenia. The habit of describing Soviet rule as "good on one hand, bad on the other" must be abandoned to show that the negative and positive aspects of the Soviet model are inseparably linked and mutually interconnected. The following points are important for the justification of this thesis:

- The mobilization modernization radically cuts links with history and tradition. The practice of Soviet modernization is quite different from its theoretical provisions. Examples include the solution of the national question, modernization processes in agriculture and industry.
- The repressions of the Stalinist period, their multiple impact on the Armenian intelligentsia and socio-cultural phenomena, and a reflection on this should take a special place by re-thinking the past and analyzing the totalitarian system.
- Given the contradiction between the USSR's economic achievements and its authoritarian system, as well as the repressions of Stalin's totalitarianism, it is necessary to show that Stalin's example of an "effective manager" is fundamentally flawed.
- It is also important to emphasize that the rationalist component of Soviet modernization has transformed over time into neo-

conservatism. The problem was no longer progress, but preservation of what existed. Khrushchev's mobilization was replaced by Brezhnev's stagnation.

The overall assessment is that—*Soviet modernization, implemented by such unacceptable and inhuman means, despite its economic and cultural achievements, is not sustainable. However, the rejection of its results without the adoption of new models may mean a return to the archaic.*

2.7.1. When considering cultural issues, it is important to distinguish between the different—sometimes opposing—ideological and political positions of various representatives of the Eastern Armenian intelligentsia, as well as of different generations. It is possible to emphasize, for example, the essential difference between how the concept of nation was perceived by the generations of the twenties and the sixties, and to show that *the national project of the 1920s* **(Martiros Saryan, Alexander Tamanyan, Yeghishe Charents)** was open to the world, future-oriented, and national, but not nationalist, though it is critical of Bolshevik rule.

In the educational content, it is important to include non-literary culture more effectively, in this case, artwork (Armenian paintings of the 1920s), and urban development, such as the master plan of Yerevan and the debates of the times. One can also refer to the *futuristic movement* of **Yeghishe Charents, Gevorg Abov,** and **Azat Vshtuni**. All of this is special in that there were no such debates after this, such differing views did not clash, and a careful examination of this period added much to the perceptions of national culture and identity that have been shaped at that time and preserved to this day.

We should try to take a more comprehensive approach to the sixties as a period of *"national awakening"*, to look more critically at the new national ideology that was taking shape in conditions of Soviet-Russian domination in that period, and which it embodied, whether consciously or unconsciously. That big brother-little brother relationship significantly influenced the orientation of no criticism of Russia in the entire Eastern Armenian culture.

Of course, it is not possible to separate the national and the Soviet in the culture of that period, but it is possible and necessary to give a more sober assessment of the *"national"* in the sixties and later, to show (particularly in the textbooks) its light and shadow, with a comprehensive analysis of the literature, artwork and cultural situation of that period.

2.7.2. A separate and important topic is that of **Armenian dissidentism** in the Soviet period, as an example of the resistance movement. It is also necessary to present and critically analyze its peculiarities and the limitations of cultural perceptions of independence in Soviet Armenia.

2.7.3. Another important topic is **repatriation** after World War II, which highlighted the cultural, social and other differences between the two parts of the Armenian people. Many of the repatriates later left Armenia.

2.8. Types of domination

The **discourse on the types of domination** should be one of the focuses of the course. The learner should know:

a. the origins of totalitarian power;

b. other forms of supremacy and domination;

c. the historical processes of colonization and decolonization.

A striking example of *decolonization* is the **nationwide Movement that began in 1988**, which transformed from a demand around Karabakh into a democratic process aimed at the restoration of all aspects of public life and reached the point of independence. It is necessary to emphasize *the legal, constitutional nature of the Movement* demonstrating how the pressure applied on the authorities via peaceful mass protests led to the revival of existing but never functioning Soviet laws and ensured their use in the democratic process. At the same time, it should be considered that the 1988 movement was characterized by the limitations and shortcomings that, according to Manuel Castels, were typical of most of the national

movements in the late Soviet period.

3. Current situation

It is necessary to show that, over the last decades of the existence of independent Armenia, due to the militarization of society in wartime, the weakening of civil society, as well as many other objective and subjective reasons, an authoritarian government took shape whose character has not been sufficiently analyzed to this day. Both the public consciousness and the two dominant discourses of the "nationalist-patriotic" and "pseudo-western" in the scientific community have not been able to give an adequate picture of Armenian society, tending to cover up rather than rationally reveal existing realities. A situation has emerged that can be described as "public mutedness".

The Velvet Revolution of 2018 has created an opportunity to overcome this muteness of society and to critically rethink the foundations of social life. The issues of reestablishment of the social contract in Armenian society and civil solidarity should be at the focus of these activities. The decade preceding the Velvet Revolution is seen, in particular, as a period of *civil awakening*, marked by a efforts towards the reclaiming of rights and freedoms, rethinking of the public sphere, better management of natural resources, as well as a critique of the distribution and redistribution of material resources in society. This period is characterized by the *decentralized, horizontal, compromising and participatory approach to* civil self-organization. During that time, the discourse of a "self-determined citizen" also emerged.

In the current phase of education system transformation, it is important to rediscover the role of education as a facilitator of individual emancipation and a contributor to informed decision making in the society. In this context, the following values and practices of democratic culture are particularly important:

- the principle of rational reasoning;
- the will to express one's own opinion and to listen to the opinions of others;
- the conviction to resolve conflicts and disagreements peacefully;
- the acceptance of compromises offered by the majority or all sides as well as protection of the minority.

Diaspora

Any text on the enlightenment and modernization of Armenian society, no matter how focused on the Republic of Armenia, cannot avoid the topic of the Diaspora. Tololyan's concept of the *"Armenian trans-nation"*, covering the Republic of Armenia, Artsakh and the Diaspora, can be useful for describing and understanding the current state of the Armenians in the world. When approaching this delicate issue, it is important to avoid pointless emotional calls for *"national unity"* as well as the artificial slogan of *"one nation – one culture"*. It is necessary to show that modern Armenians are involved in a network of complex, heterogeneous and diverse entities. Their effective cooperation must take place on a basis of dignified and rational dialogue.

PART 3

PRINCIPLES AND TOOLS FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF COMPETENCIES FOR DEMOCRATIC CULTURE IN SCHOOL EDUCATION

The school education system is meant to create conditions for adequately and critically reflecting on the value and content components listed in the previous sections, analyzing them and making one's own judgments on them, and then developing creative thinking. The main purpose of the content and values of the education system is to critically analyze social developments, develop the skills necessary for an individual that is innovative and a responsible decision maker, open to the world, as well as developing a pluralistic participatory culture, historical memory and shared values. The following principles are essential to this end:

- a value-based approach to teaching in general education, using a **competency model based on values, attitudes, skills, knowledge and critical thinking**;

- the formation of a pluralistic and participatory education system;

- education aimed at developing competencies;

- distinguishing between, reflecting on, and establishing interrelations between key historical developments and present realities;

- Preservation of the humanistic principle of education, which assumes a balance of natural and social science directions in the general education system.

1. Prerequisites for participatory culture

Given the historical context and social realities described in the preceding sections, the following skills are particularly important for living in a democratic and pluralistic participatory society:

- The human capacity for speech and ability to speak freely;
- The skill of making judgments about the facts;
- The ability to make commitments and agreements with goals for joint actions, as well as make decisions.

The following components are important for the conceptual model of competencies to be developed for students, which are also included in the Council of Europe's overall framework of competencies for democratic culture (see sources):

Value perceptions

- Valuing human dignity and rights;
- Valuing cultural diversity;
- Valuing democracy, justice, fairness, equality and the rule of law.

Attitudes

- Openness to other cultures, beliefs, worldviews, and practices;
- Respect, civic-mindedness, responsibility and the confidence to act independently;
- Tolerance of ambiguity and different interpretations.

Skills

- Autonomous learning skills;
- Analytical and critical thinking skills;
- Skills of listening and observing;
- Empathy;

- Flexibility and adaptability;
- Linguistic, communicative and plurilingual skills;
- Cooperation skills;
- Conflict-resolution skills.

Knowledge and critical understanding

- Knowledge and critical understanding of the self;
- Knowledge and critical understanding of language and communication;
- Knowledge and critical understanding of the world (including politics, law, human rights, culture, cultures, religions, history, media, economies, the environment and sustainability).

Participatory culture at the classroom, school, and community levels is only possible if the curriculum in secondary schools is also designed to develop the skills needed to participate. Therefore, the classroom process should also be organized based on the principles of participatory, group and collaborative work and it should be interconnected with other levels of participation.

The teaching of the components of educational content requires, at all levels of teaching, a participatory culture as well as values, attitudes and competencies (skills and abilities) along with the knowledge being delivered favoring education, as outlined below.

2. Teaching priorities for competency building

The competencies formed in the school education system should derive from the goals mentioned above of education and upbringing in the RA education policy and from the RA state standard on school education.

2.1. Preschool education

The development of social and other competencies in particular should start as early as preschool, when the youngest members of our

society form large groups and develop their social skills. Here, for the first time, they also face the realities of diversity, inequality, and poverty. For this reason, the preschool curriculum should focus on planting the seeds for developing a culture of participation in decision making, for which it is important to develop the following skills:

- Recognizing and appreciating social and cultural differences;
- Developing a critical attitude towards inequality, prejudice, discrimination and violence;
- Making independent decisions, reaching consensus and respecting agreements.

2.2. School education

Key competencies are multifaceted competencies that are required for the development of the individual, active participation in social life and having an impact on it, as well as the sustainable and rational use of a variety of resources. There are interrelations between core competencies that depend on the subjects of study and learning channels.

The general objective of all subjects is to develop language competency, learning competency, media competency, social competency, democratic competency, as well as cultural competency. Interdisciplinary knowledge is also required for the development of mathematical, natural and economic competencies. Each class can usually have one core competency related to the subject, while secondary competencies can be selected from these core competencies.

The school education system is expected to develop the following core competencies:

2.2.1. Language competency (making adequate and normative use of language)

Students communicate independently not only in their native language but also in foreign languages, both verbally and in writing, in a manner relevant to the normative, semantic, and situational conditions as well as the given addressee. They consciously use language to actively participate in and be a part of public life. Students discover and create various texts, including professional texts. They adequately use the given professional language and spoken language, consciously placing limits between them. Students maintain and take into account the esthetics of their own mother tongue and foreign languages.

2.2.2. Learning to learn competency (learning consciously and reflecting)

Students, individually and in collaboration with others, continuously and successfully learn and operate in situations consciously created throughout life. They form their own approach to effective time management. This includes self-organization, teaching and learning reflection, as well as conclusions from the individual and group of learners regarding education goals, strategies, outcomes, and attitudes. It also implies that students should be able to evaluate their own physical and psychological capabilities as well as those of others, realizing their physical and spiritual strengths and weaknesses. They learn to handle workload and be prepared for such situations. Students acquire, process, evaluate, and present information, exchange it, and use it for self-study as well as to meet personal and community needs. They use a variety of digital media, digital tools and devices.

2.2.3. Media competency (media literacy, critical understanding of the media, overcoming the challenges of a media society)

Through a rigorous and critical approach to the complex media environment in society, students reflect on and shape their own media consumption and pay close attention to the both the opportunities and risks associated with digital media use. Students evaluate the impact of the media on their own and others' value perceptions, attitudes, and actions. They also use media opportunities responsibly and adequately to enable them to articulate and respect the rights of others in communication and collaboration processes. They are able to create media products on their own.

2.2.4. Social competency (respecting others and acting constructively)

Students are constructive, harmonious, and tolerant in social relationships, and they are perceived and understood by others. On this basis, they work effectively with others. They also show balanced and responsible behavior in virtual environments. As a result of dealing with different cultures, religions, worldviews, and personal perceptions of life, students are consciously aware of their differences. They perceive this diversity as wealth, respect one another, and help the needy.

2.2.5. Democratic competency (acting in a democratic way and strengthening democracy)

Students contribute to the further development of a society based on freedom, justice, and solidarity. They find a place for themselves in social relations and a democratic constitutional state, recognize their rights of political participation, and are able to avail of them. Students are able to formulate sound attitudes, apply accepted decisions in a democratic manner, and admit it when they disagree with something. They recognize that democracy can exist and thrive if it is understood and supported by as many people as possible.

2.2.6. Cultural competency (perception, formation and reflection of culture)

Students recognize the culture of particular human civilizations when they recognize its art, technical, scientific, and intellectual testimonies, and they understand that these have been the guides of human emotions and actions, both in the past as well as today. Students are able to determine their own aspirations when studying past and present cultures, as well as cultures of other countries and regions. They are able to develop their own cultural views and esthetic perceptions, as well as to express themselves in accordance with foreign or native cultural systems or distinctively from them. They use the opportunities to participate in and be part of cultural processes.

2.2.7. Mathematical competency (perceiving and understanding facts through mathematical approaches)

Students use mathematical thinking and forms of presentation to identify and understand the phenomena of nature, society, culture, and the workplace. They are able to identify mathematical structures in problems and use corresponding mathematical thinking (logical and spatial thinking) or representation (e.g. formulas, models, structures, curves, tables). At the same time, they take into account the possibilities and limits of mathematical concepts and models. Students use inventive strategies, principles, and aids to process everyday questions of varying complexity. They purposely use mathematical aids and tools.

2.2.8. Natural-technical competency (describing and explaining natural and technical phenomena and situations)

Students observe, describe, recognize, and explain natural phenomena, draw sound conclusions from knowledge, and check evidence of natural data. At the same time, they take into account the interrelationship between natural thinking and work, as well as technical progress. Students independently perform such natural and technical activities as planning, observation, measurement, construction, testing, working with models, simulation, production, evaluation, usage and waste, and can also interpret their results. Students recognize the structures and functions of technical systems and processes, explain the conditions and consequences of technical development, particularly its impact on society, the environment, and themselves. They develop a recognition of ethical issues as well as aspects of security and sustainable development. They take a stand on current natural and technical progress, recognize their own responsibility and accept it.

2.2.9. Economic competency (acting independently in economic situations)

Students adequately analyze and evaluate economic processes at the private, national, and global economic levels. They understand the interactions between society, the economy, and politics, make meaningful decisions, and are able to act responsibly in this sense. Understanding economic and social order enables them to recognize and judge their own role and those of other actors in economic processes of circulation,

taking into account the need for sustainable development and ethical responsibility in this area.

3. Tools used for training in competency formation

The introduction and purposeful use of measurable and relevant tools— *participatory culture indicators (descriptors) and task verbs (operators)—* are essential for the formation of the above competencies. These elements are reflected in the State Standard for General Education of the Republic of Armenia and other sublegislative acts, besides also being included in international documents on democratic culture competencies.

The use of collaborative teaching methods and design lessons, models of subject competency development, use of competency class elements, as well as joint work by methodological unions and individual teachers all play an essential role in the development of competencies.

4. Interconnection between the school education and higher education systems

The principles of content and teaching at the school education level should be linked to the higher education system. Competencies and knowledge acquired at school can be enhanced through collaboration with higher education institutions (HEIs), encouraging research work at HEIs, HEI autonomy, promotion of internationalization and mobility, as well as the creation of professional literature in the Armenian language.

5. Education policy milestones and measures

The historical context and modern realities described necessitate the pursuit of the following milestones:

5.1. Recording the links between the modern education system of the Republic of Armenia and its historical origins, and the continuity of the

tradition of critical thinking, as well as transferring this to learners.

5.2. Transfer of key competencies to learners that foster critical and creative thinking, participatory culture, culture of public coexistence, individual freedom, social justice and solidarity, pluralism and equality.

5.3. Creation of non-financial and financial incentives for encouraging competency-based training.

5.4. Creating opportunities for in-school planning.

The state sets out the basic principles for curricula (for general and individual subjects), which provide for the development of certain competencies. On the basis of these principles, the school then formulates its own curricula according to the measures it can take to develop these competencies. Skills by subject should also be listed in the teacher's manuals and serve as a basis for assessing progress.

5.5. Modification of curricula in the general education system based on skills and capacity building.

For each subject, certain skills and abilities need to be identified that need to be assessed through an effective examination system.

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This concept paper is also in line with the principles outlined in the following documents adopted by the United Nations and the Council of Europe.

Convention against Discrimination in Education, adopted by General Conference of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) on December 14, 1960.

Council of Europe: Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture, April 2018.

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