EU commissioner calls to reconsider aid after antisemitism in PA textbooks

June 22, 2021

By Lahav Harkov

The Jerusalem Post

<https://www.jpost.com/israel-news/eu-commissioner-calls-to-reconsider-aid-after-antisemitism-in-pa-textbooks-671683>

The EU must review the conditions by which it gives funding to education in the Palestinian Authority, European Commissioner for Neighborhood and Enlargement Oliver Varhelyi said Monday, after the release of an EU-sponsored report that found antisemitism and incitement in Palestinian textbooks.

“Firm commitment to fight antisemitism and engage with Palestinian Authority and UNRWA” – the UN agency for Palestinian refugees and their descendants – “to promote quality education for Palestinian children and ensure full adherence to UNESCO standards of peace, tolerance, coexistence, non-violence in Palestinian textbooks,” Varhelyi tweeted.

The commissioner, the equivalent of a cabinet minister but for the entire EU, added: “The conditionality of our financial assistance in the educational sector needs to be duly considered.”

Varhelyi’s remarks came the day after the European Commission released the report it sponsored on Palestinian Authority textbooks, four months after its completion, showing instances of antisemitism and incitement to violence.

Varhelyi seeks to immediately slash funding to the Palestinian Authority, but EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs Josep Borrell objects, a source in Brussel said.

Responding to a question about the matter earlier Monday, European Commission spokesperson Ana Pisonero said the report presents a “complex picture” and repeated the claim in its introduction, that the “textbooks largely adhere to UNESCO standards and adopt criteria prominent in international education discourse, with a strong focus on human rights."

Yet, like the report, Pisonero soon contradicted that argument, saying that the textbooks “express a narrative of resistance,” which, as examples in the report show, is often violent, and “display an antagonism towards Israel.”

Though Pisonero did not mention antisemitism or incitement to violence in the textbooks, she said that “the EU has no tolerance for incitement to hatred or violence as a means to achieve political goals and antisemitism in all its forms. These principles are nonnegotiable for this commission.”

“The EU will step up engagement with the PA on the basis of this study with the aim to ensure further curriculum reform addresses problematic issues in the shortest possible time frame and the PA takes responsibility to screen textbooks not analyzed in the study,” she stated. “We have agreed to work with the PA on a specific roadmap…[that] must include a process of screening and monitoring of educational material for which the PA will be fully responsible and will ensure coherence with UNESCO standards.”

Brussels directly funds the salaries of teachers and the writers of textbooks, which, the report indicates, encourage and glorify violence against Israelis and Jews.

The EU commissioned the report in 2019 from the Georg Eckert Institute for International Textbook Research and received it in February.

Almost 200 pages long, the report examines 156 textbooks and 16 teachers’ guides. The texts are mostly from 2017-2019, but 18 are from 2020.

The report includes dozens of examples of encouragement of violence and demonization of Israel and of Jews.

The textbooks present “ambivalent – sometimes hostile – attitudes toward Jews and the characteristics they attribute to the Jewish people... Frequent use of negative attributions in relation to the Jewish people... suggest a conscious perpetuation of anti-Jewish prejudice, especially when embedded in the current political context.”

An exercise in one religious studies textbook asks students to discuss the “repeated attempts by the Jews to kill the prophet” Muhammad, and asks who are “other enemies of Islam.”

“It is not so much the sufferings of the Prophet or the actions of the companions that appear to be the focus of this teaching unit but, rather, the alleged perniciousness of the Jews,” the report states.

The report identifies “the creation of a connection between the stated deception of the ‘Jews’ in the early days of Islam and the insinuated behavior of Jews today,” calling it “extremely escalatory.” One textbook ties Muhammad’s aunt who clubbed a Jew to death to a question about Palestinian women’s steadfastness in the face of “Jewish Zionistic occupation.”

One textbook promotes a conspiracy theory that Israel removed the original stones of ancient sites in Jerusalem and replaced them with ones bearing “Zionist drawings and shapes.”

The concept of “resistance” is a recurring theme in the textbooks studied, along with calls for the Palestinians to be liberated via a revolution. To clarify the concept, one textbook has a photo with the caption “Palestinian revolutionaries” featuring five masked men toting machine guns.

Glorification and praise of terrorists who attacked Israelis can be found not only in history or social studies books, but also in science and math books, such as one that mentions a school named after the “shahid” (martyr) Abu Jihad, a leader of the First Intifada. A demonstration of Newton’s Second Law – force is equal to mass times acceleration – is illustrated by Palestinians using slingshots against Israeli soldiers.

Dalal al-Mughrabi, a much-admired figure in Palestinian society, was a Palestinian woman involved in the 1978 bus hijacking in which she and her accomplices murdered 38 Israelis, including 13 children. Textbooks repeatedly refer to her in the context of female empowerment. The report says there are “no further portraits of significant female figures in Palestinian history,” implying that “the path of violence [is] the only option for women to demonstrate an outstanding commitment to their people and country.”

In addition, most maps erase the State of Israel entirely, portraying the land between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea as Palestine, and the term “Zionist occupation” is used to refer to Israel.