The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Historian Presents Plan for State Textbook

By Jennifer Monaghan

June 19, 2013



Prominent historian Alexander Chubaryan, who heads a working group to develop a standardized history textbook for secondary schools, said Wednesday that he hoped the eventual content of the book would not be overly politicized.

At the same time, Chubaryan, who is director of the World History Institute at the Academy of Sciences, acknowledged that the book would have an important role to play in fostering pride among students in their homeland.

Speaking at a press conference, Chubaryan outlined a four-stage plan for the development of the textbook, which is currently in its conceptual stages.

Over the coming months, members of the working group will meet to discuss the chronology of the textbook, determining which events and personalities to include in a draft version and which to omit.

A public discussion about the draft will take place until the end of August, then in November a competition will be held to determine which version of the textbook will be written. Chubaryan did not elaborate on what form the competition would take.

If approved, the textbook would come out some time next year.

The idea of creating a standardized history textbook was proposed in February by President Vladimir Putin, who said there should be more consistency in what students were taught in schools. The federal list of approved history textbooks currently numbers more than 130.

Putin's proposal was one of a raft of measures sought by the president to instill patriotism in Russians, part of an apparent attempt to unite the country and to rally support for his leadership.

Critics of the textbook have raised concerns, however, over how sensitive areas of Russian history — such as the Stalinist purges — will be dealt with, warning that a single, state-sanctioned view of history could lead to a glossing-over of more unsavory events.

"The most important thing is that the student realizes that history is not black and white," Chubaryan said, noting that history has to take into account the experiences of the individual as well as the state.

Chubaryan also addressed concerns about the politicization of the textbooks, saying the book would not be the only influence on a child's education but that family, religion, society and teachers would all have a role to play in shaping a student's outlook.

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