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Putin Says State History Textbooks Will Not Impose Ideology

By Oleg Sukhov

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The participants of Thursday's meeting to discuss the new state history textbook.

President Vladimir Putin on Thursday defended planned standardized history textbooks, lashing out at some current teaching materials that he said criticize the Soviet Union's role in World War II.

The state textbooks, proposed by Putin last year, are expected to replace many alternative editions that exist now and will be used in public schools nationwide. Some analysts have accused the Kremlin of using the new textbooks to promote its ideological agenda and crack down on academic freedom.

But Putin dismissed concerns that the new historical methodology would mean imposing a single state ideology and said many alternative theories would be tolerated.

"Unified approaches on the teaching of history do not imply state-imposed, bureaucratic

and ideological unification," Putin said at a meeting in the Kremlin devoted to the issue.

The meeting was attended by several high-ranking officials, including State Duma Speaker Sergei Naryshkin, Culture Minister Vladimir Medinsky and Education and Science Minister Dmitry Livanov.

Naryshkin echoed Putin's thoughts on the textbooks' ideological makeup, saying that historians had managed to "find compromise" on all controversial issues when drafting the books, with only "dogmatic" views being rejected.

"Only those who are interested in promoting a dubious ideology and old dogmas rather than historical truth have been pushed out," Naryshkin said.

Livanov said that the textbooks would be finalized in 1 1/2 to two years but that the new framework for teaching history would be implemented before their creation.

Explaining his rationale for creating a new methodology for teaching history, Putin said at the meeting that the current certification system allowed for the approval of history textbooks that are "unacceptable," or what he called "ideological garbage."

"In that certification system of textbooks sent to schools there were things that are absolutely unacceptable not only for our country and people but for any country and any people — it is like spitting in someone's face," he said.

As an example, he cited "the denigration of the Soviet people's role in the struggle with fascism."

Putin criticized the viewpoint that Eastern Europe suffered as a result of the introduction of Stalinist regimes during Soviet occupation in the 1940s, comparing it with Nazi occupation.

"If fascism had won, what would have been the consequences?" he said. "Many nations ... would have been eliminated."

Putin urged historians to cooperate with their foreign colleagues and suggested synchronizing the teaching of Russian history with that of foreign countries, although in some cases that will apparently be difficult.

Alexander Chubaryan, head of the Russian Academy of Sciences' Universal History Institute, said at the meeting that Russian historians have sparred with their colleagues from Caucasus and Central Asian nations over whether to call the pre-1991 period a "colonial era," a term Russian historians disagree with.

As proof for their claim that a state-approved ideology will be imposed by the textbooks, critics have pointed to reports that anti-Kremlin tycoons Boris Berezovsky and Mikhail Khodorkovsky will not be mentioned in the textbooks. They have also lambasted the unified textbooks because they might not include any information on protests against purported fraud in parliamentary elections that drew tens of thousands of people into the streets from 2011 to 2012.

Political analyst Dmitry Oreshkin said the new textbooks were intended to justify

the Kremlin's authority by "projecting contemporary politics into the past."

"History is written by the victors," he said. "A historian for the authorities is like a prophet who predicts in such a way as to please them."

Oreshkin said the authorities intended to revive a Soviet-style ideology by introducing a new concept of history. In the 2000s, the Kremlin held on to power by using positive incentives like rising wages and wealth, he said. But now, when economic growth is slower, they are resorting to negative incentives by fueling anti-Western sentiment and have to falsify history to promote this agenda.

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