

TURKEY

- The Republic of Turkey is a secular nation state.
- Secularism in Turkey does not mean the separation between state and religion. The state holds a monopoly on religion and retains control over religious affairs.
- Turkey is an heir to multi-ethnic and multi-religious Ottoman Empire. Of the population is 70-75% Turkish, 18% Kurdish, and 7-12% other minorities, and 25% Alevi (estimated numbers).
- Turkey is a member to the United Nations, the Council of Europe and in the process of European Union Accession.

COMPULSORY RELIGIOUS EDUCATION:

- Basic Law of the National Education:
"In Turkish national education secularism is a fundamental principle. Instruction in religious culture and ethics is among the compulsory subjects taught in primary and middle school and lycées [high schools] and equivalent schools"
- Starting from 4th grade, religious courses are taught each year until the end of high school. 2 hours per week in primary and middle schools, 1 hour per week in high schools.
- Citizenship Education is just 1hour per week for just 8th graders.
- The Government Party Program places a strong emphasis that compulsory religion courses will continue to be taught without any change .

COURT JUDGMENTS

- Courts at local and national levels decreed that religious courses include religious facts, and they are teaching of world religious cultures.
 - In 2008, the Judgment of European Court of Human Rights: religious courses are a VIOLATION of Article 2 of Protocol No. 1.
=> courts in Turkey began decreeing in favor of victims.
- Vs. The Education Ministry did not take any step to resolve this issue.**

PRESENT CURRICULUM (8th Grade)

- Sunni-creed of Islam (Majority's faith) dominates the whole curricula of religious education.
- Titles of units: 1-Kada and Kadar (Divine Will and Decree), 2- Zakat, Hajj and Sacrifice Prayers, 3- Exemplary Behaviors from the Life of Prophet Muhammad, 4- Wisdom and Knowledge in Koran, 5- Bad Habits in Islam, 6- Religions and Universal Advice.



- Teachers of the course are graduates of divinity college where Sunni-Islam clergy is trained.
- No teacher education program includes a module or a single course addressing religious diversity.

ALEVIS

- The Largest Religious 'Minority' and Major Opponents to Compulsory Religious Education (CRE).
- As part of 'Democratic Opening' project (2007), CRE is in detail covered in the final report (2010) after a series of consultation workshops.
- Three suggestions to resolve the issue made in the report: RE should not be offered in state schools (foundations, NGOs should provide it), RE should be elective, RE content should equally include teachings of Alevi's faith.

Notes:

- Only Christian and Jewish students were given the right to opt out from CRE in 1990 (Privacy issue).
- Three Sunni-based religious courses were introduced in 2012 by preserving the already-offered CRE.

The Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education and Religious Education as a compulsory subject in primary education A mismatch? The case for Greece and Turkey



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The Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education:

"... it is essential to develop knowledge, personal and social skills and understanding that reduce conflict, increase appreciation and **understanding of the differences between faith and ethnic groups**, build mutual respect for human dignity and shared values, encourage dialogue and promote non-violence in the resolution of problems and disputes."

"In all areas of education, member states should promote educational approaches and teaching methods which aim at learning to live together in a democratic and multicultural society and at enabling learners to acquire the knowledge and skills to promote social cohesion, value diversity and equality, appreciate differences – **particularly between different faith and ethnic groups** – and settle disagreements and conflicts in a non-violent manner with respect for each others' rights, as well as to combat all forms of discrimination and violence..."

European Convention on Human Rights

"No person shall be denied the right to education. In the exercise of any functions which it assumes in relation to education and to teaching, the State shall respect the right of parents to ensure such education and teaching **in conformity with their own religious and philosophical convictions**" (Article 2 of Protocol 1).

RATIONALE

The Charter has been implemented in these two countries since they are both members of the Council of Europe.

According to Grigoriadis & Gurcel (2012) "**Religious education is one of the key indicators determining state attitudes towards religion** and is thus inextricably linked to the **secularization experience of each state**". Therefore, it can constitute a **major asset in evaluating the Charter's implementation**. In addition, the ways in which religious education is offered reflect the extent to which due respect for diversity, religious freedom and human rights is given in these two contexts.

Disregarding the policy framework, which has been designed to enable equality and inclusion, constitutes a **source of institutional racism** and therefore a **risk for the marginalisation of minorities** and sets democratisation processes in education in jeopardy.

OBJECTIVE:

To demonstrate the gap between the recommendations of the Charter on diversity & the policies implemented in two national educational systems on Religious Education.

FINDINGS

In both contexts, the Charter on EDC/HRE as a policy framework and national educational policies and practices for religious education stand in conflict.

- Religiosity is clearly manifested in school ethos in the case of Greece, rather than the one of Turkey where religious symbols and practices are forbidden in public realms including schools.
- The Charter is disregarded or overlooked regarding the issue of religious education in both countries. The non-binding aspect of the Charter might be causing this.
- Teachers in both countries are not trained to deal with culturally, ethnically and religiously diverse student population.
- National policies seem to be designed to mainstream, assimilate, silence, and suppress students of minority backgrounds through compulsory and confessional religious courses in both contexts.
- The case of Greece indicates that legal legislation would not be sufficient to protect minorities in an educational setting dominated by majority's values.
- The case of Turkey demonstrates compulsory and confessional religious education can undermine objectives of education for democratic citizenship.

CONCLUSIONS/IMPLICATIONS

- Amendments in educational legislation on the basis of the Charter seem to be one necessary step in achieving the charter's goals in both contexts.
- Both contexts suggest that there many measures need to be taken in order to establish a democratic school atmosphere (i.e. close monitoring, sharing experience between contexts)

References

Bader, V. (2003). Religious diversity and democratic institutional pluralism. *Political Theory*, 31 (2), pp. 265-294.
Council of Europe. (2010). *Council of Europe Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education: Recommendation Cm/Rec(2010)7*. Strasbourg: Council of Europe Pub.
Grigoriadis, I. and Gurcel, T. (2012). Religious courses in Turkish public education: Explaining domestic change with Europeanization theory. *Journal of Church and State*.

GREECE

"**strong establishment of the monopolistic Orthodox Church in the constitutional, legal, administrative and cultural life**" (Bader 2003: 269) (i.e. **Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs**)

In the Greek educational system, although **students of non-Christian Orthodox faith have the right to opt-out**, the compulsory **character** of the subject of Religious Ed. is supported by such establishment which stands "at odds with principles of relational neutrality, fairness in all versions, and priority for democracy" (Bader, 2003: 269). Therefore, **minority students do not opt-out under the threat of marginalisation**.



Opting-out on the grounds of faith is **Illegal and Unconstitutional** (Violation of the Greek Privacy Law, 1997 and against the Greek Constitution which pertains to the protection of citizens by the state and to the inviolability of personal liberty, the freedom of religious conscience and the enjoyment of civil rights and liberties regardless of religious beliefs).

the continuous issuing of circulars demonstrates the inefficiency of the state to take action against discrimination of students who do not endorse the Orthodox faith or religiosity for that matter:

04/08/2008:

"For parents of minor students or for adult students who do not wish to attend religious education for reasons of conscience **it is not mandatory to justify in their statement why they opt-out**"

19/09/2013

Religious education is compulsory [...] Exemption is granted to students of different religion or creed or those who invoke reasons of religious conscience and therefore do not wish to attend"

26/08/2008:

"This is to inform you that **students of non-Orthodox faith namely of different faith or dogma, who, according to the circular No: 104071/Γ2/4.8.2008 of the Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs, are exempted from attending the religious education subject**, will have to attend classes of a different teaching subject in a different classroom during the teaching hours of this subject".

Statement of the Minister of National Education and Relig. Affairs, Stylianidis, conference on the Rights of the Child (press release 22/11/2008):

"Religious Education class **remains compulsory for everyone. Those of different religion or creed shall have the right of conscience to be excluded, without declaring their faith** and so protect personal data. Therefore, the exemption applies to **non-Orthodox**".