

## **Educational Reform in Turkey**

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### **Abstract**

As a country seeking admission to the European Union, this paper explores educational reforms in Turkey that enhance its possible entry into the European Union and changes still needed for it to be an equal partner. An overview of the school system in Turkey is provided including information on teacher training and preparation, special education policy, and post high school participation. Its educational system still faces significant hurdles and must address human rights issues in order to provide equal access and nondiscriminatory education for all. While strides have been made to improve educational opportunities, inequality is still a reality for many females and those of lower socio-economic status. Higher education opportunities continue to improve with infrastructure problems competing to keep pace with the number of facilities available. Turkey continues to address these educational concerns while progressing toward the goal of improving its status as a European Union candidate.

**Keywords:** Turkey, European Union, educational reform, teacher preparation, special education, post high school participation

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## Introduction

*“Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world.”*

Nelson Mandela

Turkey is a country rich in history and has undergone radical changes in its educational system. As a country seeking admission to the European Union, this paper explores educational reforms in Turkey that enhance its possible entry into the European Union and changes still needed for it to be an equal partner. An overview of the structure of the school system in Turkey is provided including information on teacher training and preparation, special education policy, and post high school participation. Declared a secular state in 1923, Turkey has witnessed changes in the role of religion in education since its inception as a republic. It has also undergone significant curriculum reform in an effort to enhance its entry to the EU. Turkey’s educational system still faces significant hurdles and must address human rights issues in providing equal access and nondiscriminatory education for all.

### A Brief History

Education has held a rich history and significant place in Turkish society. During the Ottoman Empire, educational needs were met by guilds and medreses (institutions of higher learning). Sultan Mehmet founded the best known among the Ottoman medreses in Istanbul in 1363. During the Ottoman period, the equivalent of universities were established for the purpose of training personnel for the Palace. In 1838, Sultan Mahmut II proposed the introduction of primary and secondary education (Republic of Turkey Ministry of National Education [MoNE], 2012b).

Following the establishment of the Turkish Republic in 1923, a significant event in the history of Turkey’s educational system was the Law on Unification of Education in 1924, when a national secular education system was patterned after the Western European model (Gök, 2007). Education was viewed as a critical function in the modernization efforts and nation-building process and was seen as the means to create a new nation based on a single culture, a single ethnic identity and a single religion and language (Çayir, 2009b).

### Structure of the School System

Turkey has a centralized governance structure. Under the Basic Law of National Education of 1973, the Ministry of National Education (MoNE) is responsible for the education system at the preschool through secondary levels. The Board of Education develops curriculum and approves textbooks. The Council of Higher Education (YÖK) and its committees are responsible for higher education policies, while the Higher Education Board supervises the institutions (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2013). Turkey has three significant documents which steer education: the Strategic Plan for the Ministry of National Education (2010-14) which sets medium- and long-term education goals; the Tenth Development Plan (2014-18) an overall government strategy which includes education; and the Lifelong Learning Strategy Paper which is linked to the European Union's strategy (OECD, 2015).

Free five-year primary education has been compulsory for all citizens in public schools in Turkey since the foundation of the republic in 1923. With the passage of reform legislation in 2012, compulsory education was extended to 12 years and split into three levels of four years each (4+4+4) (OECD, 2013). The new law has been heavily criticized as being politically motivated and counterintuitive to the stated goals (Clark, 2012). Rather than encouraging students to stay in school longer, critics of the new 4+4+4 structure believe this could result in students choosing a vocational education track just four years into their formal schooling at the age of 11.

The enrollment discrepancy gap between boys and girls appears to be growing smaller. A reportedly effective contribution to these advances has been the campaign “OK Girls, Off to School” promoting the schooling of girls, and the use of school transport for children in remote locations (United Nations Development Programme in Turkey [UNDPT], 2013). However, in an analysis of the

“OK Girls, Off to School” program, Yazan (2013) reported that the education campaign aimed at girls addressed to varying extents the criteria of accessibility, probability of enrollment, probability of participation, and length of participation. Yazan felt it failed to meet the standard of educational results, since the project did not track whether the girls were successful in national examinations which are administered at the end of grades six through eight to determine the high school in which they would be placed. Consequently Yazan questioned whether the standard of educational results had been met in the girls’ education project in Turkey. Although the UNDPT indicated a closing of the gender gap, the 2012 reform law allowed parents to home school their children after the first four years of primary education, and Clark (2012) raised the concern that parents in rural and conservative parts of the country might prevent their daughters from attending school after those first four years. Gender is an issue that also requires attention in secondary education. There has been a significant increase in overall literacy in Turkey since 1990, yet the gender gap is large with 7.8 percent of women illiterate compared to 1.7 percent of men in 2011 (UNDPT, 2013).

Equal educational opportunities for students living in remote areas continue to represent an area of concern in Turkish education. As a participant of a Fulbright Group Projects Abroad, the author attended a lecture on urban and rural education presented by a secondary student in Ankara, Turkey that contrasted an eight-year old attending school in a rural setting compared to an eight-year old attending school in Istanbul. The secondary student depicted the story of Ayse and Maya as an example of the disparity of school experiences for many children in Turkey. Ayse attends second grade and is from a rural setting. She walks at least a mile to school, has four hours of lessons, attends classes with 30 students in a mixed class that includes grades one to five and has inadequate supplies. At lunchtime Ayse goes home to work for the family and her school day is finished. Ayse has a 40 percent chance of dropping out of school. Maya is also a second grade student and lives in an urban setting. She rides a school bus, has eight hours of learning, eats balanced meals, and attends interesting field trips. Maya plans to go to college and will choose between medicine, law or engineering. The story was shared to illustrate that the disparity is real for many students in rural settings who struggle to receive the same educational opportunities as those provided in urban settings. Elik (2013) concurs that while developed regions have experienced rather high enrollment, disadvantaged regions have remained below the national average and enrollment levels among female children remained considerably lower than among male children in the disadvantaged areas.

In the post-2012 era, students enter compulsory secondary school after four years of primary and four years of middle school training. Secondary education includes all the teaching institutions with at least four years of education such as general, vocational and technical schools. There are different types of general high schools and include fine arts, religious, science and foreign language schools. Technical and vocational education is offered specifically at technical and vocational training centers (Clark, 2012). Demirbilek (2010) suggests vocational education has been stigmatized in Turkish society due to the low status assigned to the idea of manual work, and a perception exists that vocational education is a last resort for weaker achieving students.

The transition into upper secondary education and tertiary education is highly selective. Graduation rates in upper secondary education for academic and vocationally oriented programs are below the OECD average of 83 percent, but they have increased significantly and both academic and vocational graduation rates were 56 percent in 2011 (OECD, 2015). Although significant improvements have been made in regard to secondary education enrollment, certain gender and geographic differences persist.

Turkey’s investment in education is below the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) average. Turkey spends four percent of its gross domestic product on educational institutions at all educational levels compared with an average of six percent in OECD countries and education makes up 11 percent of Turkey’s total expenditure compared with 13 percent in OECD countries (OECD, 2014b). Ninety-five percent of children between the ages of five and 14 are enrolled in education in Turkey compared with an OECD average of 98 percent. The enrollment

rate of 15 to 19 year-olds has increased significantly from 41 percent in 2005 to 59 percent in 2012 although this represents a slight decrease from 64 percent recorded in 2011 (OECD, 2014b).

Turkey is a participant in the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA). PISA assesses the extent to which 15-year-old students have acquired key knowledge skills that are essential for full participation in modern societies. The mean scores in PISA 2012 for performance in mathematics, reading and science were 494, 496 and 501 respectively. Turkey fell below the mean in each area with scores of 448 in mathematics, 475 in reading and 463 in science. Turkey has shown some improvement, however. When PISA 2003 scores were compared to 2012 results, Turkey improved both in mathematics performance and in the level of equity in education during the period (OECD, 2014a). Although Turkey has shown progress in enrollment and gender equity, both PISA scores and OECD data indicate Turkey still lags behind most European and Western countries. In its continued endeavor for entry to the EU, Turkey must persist in addressing these issues.

### **Teacher Training**

*“Education can be a great equalizer; the one force that can consistently overcome differences in background. But this only holds true when students have access to great teachers.”*

*The 2014 International Summit, pg. 11*

A major concern in teacher training in Turkey has been the overwhelming demand for university faculty. Higher education has become recognized as a catalyst for scientific and economic growth, socio-political progress and intercultural communication. Beginning with a single university in 1923, in 2014 Turkey had 190 institutions of higher education (Council of Higher Education [CHE], 2014). With this growth there has been a significant need for trained and qualified faculty members. Even with the addition of numerous graduate programs at the country's largest universities, a deficit has persisted in the ability to train teachers. To answer the demand for university faculty, Turkey's MoNE developed a scholarship program to sponsor graduate study abroad. The MoNE sent some of the nation's most talented graduate students abroad to obtain advanced degrees with the expectation they return home and serve as faculty members in order to enrich the country's universities with their acquired knowledge and skills. As a recipient of such an opportunity, Çelik (2012) stressed the need for Turkey to carefully review institutional barriers to change, as many of the newly trained faculties have not returned to Turkey. Çelik (2012) articulated the current Turkish system is not ready to operate on the basis of Western standards and while returning graduates are expected to take on the role of helping academic institutions define themselves in the larger academic world they are often penalized in their efforts to bring about reform.

With its shortage of university faculty, Turkey is striving to meet the challenge of ensuring that school leaders and teachers receive quality initial training and continued support to improve schools and student outcomes. Teachers are able to begin their teacher training in specific secondary high schools. They must have a bachelor's degree from an accredited program, be less than 40 years old, and pass the Public Staff Selection Exam. These teacher candidates are then placed in schools based on their exam scores and, to some extent, on their interests. In 2013, the teacher candidate test was revised to include assessments on subject-specific knowledge. The New Teacher Programme was introduced in 2011 to provide in-depth subject matter content and increase the number of general knowledge and elective courses (OECD, 2013). Special education teachers were trained in short-term, in-service programs and certificate programs until 1983 but universities in undergraduate programs now have the responsibility to train special education teachers. Training to become a special education teacher can take place at the undergraduate, graduate or doctorate levels. Training programs prepare teachers for different kinds of disabilities including those who are cognitively disabled, hearing impaired and visually impaired with gifted education included in some training programs (Çavkaytar, 2006). An additional concern in raising the number of highly skilled and qualified teachers is that teachers' salaries in Turkey are low by international standards. After 15 years of experience, a primary school teacher would earn the United States dollar (USD) equivalent of 26,678 while their OECD counterparts would earn 39,024 USD (OECD, 2014b).

### **Serving Students with Disabilities**

Delivery of special education services has consisted of blended education, special education schools, and centers for special education and rehabilitation. Blended education is based on the principle that individuals in need of special education should continue their studies with their peers in state or private formal and informal educational institutions with the provision of supporting educational services. Special education schools are more typically private institutions, which provide services for individuals requiring special education, and where the personnel are exclusively trained. Centers for special education and rehabilitation are private institutions with the goal of eliminating problems resulting from difficulties in speech and language development, voice defects, mental, physical, auditory, and social emotional deficiencies or behavioral disorders with the goal of self-care and independent living skills (MoNE, 2012a). According to Decree Law 573 on special education, the basic principles of special education indicate services should start at an early age, should be planned and provided without separating the individuals who are in need of special education from their social and physical environments as much as possible, and considerations should be made in adapting content and teaching processes (Çavkaytar, 2006). Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) is compulsory for three to six year olds in special education and available through public and vocational teaching institutions. It is also available through private institutions at a cost (OECD, 2015).

Using data obtained from the Ministry of National Education of Turkey, Çakiroglu and Melekoglu (2014) conducted a study on the education of students with special needs in inclusive settings. Their study concluded the percentage of students with special needs in inclusive education, is higher in Turkey than many European countries. The results indicated the number of students with special needs, as well as students in inclusive education, has rapidly increased in Turkey. They recommend, however, that focus should be placed on improving the quality and variety of special education services within inclusive education. While Turkey has adopted helpful policies in addressing the needs of students with disabilities, they must be effectively implemented.

Meral and Turnbull (2014) compared the special education law of Turkey with comparable law of the United States. Using the six principles of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) they compared Turkey's special education statute, Special Education Services Regulation of Turkey (SESRT), to IDEA's major principles with special attention given to the education of individuals with intellectual disabilities. Although the authors found similarities in the provisions of IDEA and SESRT, they found misalignment as well. They concluded if Turkey wants to bolster its application for membership in the European Union they would want to address in greater depth the zero reject principle concerning discipline, nondiscriminatory evaluation with bias free testing and assessment, appropriate services and supplementary aids, least restrictive environment and improved due process procedures.

### **Post High School Preparation and Participation**

Admission to all undergraduate programs in Turkey requires a valid high school diploma and a sufficient score on the Student Selection and Placement Examinations: the Transfer Examination for Higher Education (YGS) and the Placement Examination for Bachelor's (LYS). Admission is based on students' composite scores, which take into account the YGS and LYS scores as well as high school grade point averages (Council of Higher Education [CHE], 2014). Entry to post secondary education is highly competitive and depends on test results at the end of lower secondary school and consequently, many parents prefer their children attend one of the highly selective elite schools where students have a higher possibility of being admitted to a university.

With the increase in the number of higher education institutions, post-secondary education has become more accessible with almost 5.5 million students in higher education in 2013-2014. Having a higher education degree in Turkey has proven beneficial and the government of Turkey has tried to better align tertiary education to the standards of countries in the European Union. The OECD (2015) reports that tertiary-educated 25-34 year-olds can expect to earn 56 percent more than those with upper secondary and post-secondary non-tertiary education. Males have a higher graduation rate in tertiary education than females, which is in contrast to many OECD countries (OECD, 2013).

The value of vocational education is based on its ability to match the skills, knowledge and competencies with the requirements of the labor market and the world of work. Vocational education in Turkey needs to conform to the practice in the field and vocational higher education should reflect the requirements of the labor market both in Turkey and in Europe (Demirbilek, 2010).

### **Curriculum Reform in Turkey**

Historically, Turkey's secular status played a large role in curriculum development. The Turkish Revolution in 1923 established a secular government limiting public expressions of religious faith. Kemalism, also known as Atatürkism, was the founding ideology of the Republic of Turkey. The new Republic tried to build a secular Turkish identity that did not include Islam. Under the rule of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, high school history textbooks were written to assist in the Kemalist project to develop a secular Turkish identity without Islam. In the first series of textbooks used between 1931 and 1941 emergence of life on Earth is justified with the evolutionary theory and the emergence of religion is examined from a psychological perspective, pre-Islamic Turks were extolled as the real founders of most civilizations, and Islamic doctrine was rejected. Soon after the death of Atatürk, the first volume of textbooks was rewritten. The Kemalist project of creating a secular Turkish identity without Islam ended in 1942 (Ari, 2013).

Currently the MoNE prepares textbooks and allows the use of other textbooks submitted by private publishing companies once they have been approved by the Board of Education. The Ministry has sought curriculum reform based on policies aimed at achieving membership to the EU and preparing the Turkish nation for the new information age. The MoNE introduced new reforms including redesigning the whole curriculum on the basis of a constructivist paradigm and developed new textbooks employing a student-centered approach with the new curriculum to draw on the country's cultural, historical and moral tenets. Although new textbooks have provided for a constructivist approach, there is still evidence that Turkey seeks to create a distinct Turkish identity.

In 2003, Turkey began by reforming curriculum in elementary education (grades 1-8) in mathematics, science, social science, life science, and Turkish. One of the major motivations for the curriculum reform was to reach ideal international standards of education implemented in Europe, North American and East Asia. The reforms also supported children's active construction of their knowledge through problem solving, exploration, reflection and communication (Koc, Isiksal & Bulut, 2007). Early Childhood Education also saw changes in its curriculum. Demircan and Olgan (2011) examined four curriculum models used with early childhood education and their associated assessment systems. The new curriculum was based on a constructive perspective, however in early childhood, it was still missing some of the requirements of constructivist education in terms of assessment techniques.

Çayir (2009a) conducted a review of the new social studies curriculum and concluded the new textbooks did little to address ethnic, gender or language-related differences. The history of Kurds and non-Muslim minorities still was excluded from the curriculum while the importance of Turkish as the only legitimate language was still emphasized. Çayir (2009a) concluded the new Social Studies textbooks showed a narrow definition of nationalism and citizenship and that Turkey needed genuine educational reform and new textbooks in order to expand Turkey's range from the nation to humankind. Öztürk (2011) reviewed history curriculum for secondary schools in terms of teacher autonomy and analyzed whether the change in curriculum brought any significant innovation regarding teacher autonomy. He concluded that although the new curriculum program attempted to introduce a number of innovative approaches and methods, the new history curriculum failed to provide teachers a broad sphere of power and autonomy that would allow them to assume a greater role in the curriculum planning and implementation. It provided little room for teachers in the selection and planning of the teaching content, methods and materials. Öztürk (2011) viewed this as a contradiction to the reform goals that included the development of student-centered teaching methods focusing on the needs, interest and demands of students and their diversities. These studies would

indicate curriculum reform has not aided the quest for EU endorsement and teacher autonomy is a core issue that needs to be addressed in order to adequately deal with the current educational problems in Turkey.

### **Religion, Secularism, and Human Rights**

Education has been a battleground between the secularists and religious conservatives of the current ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP). Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, who won Turkey's first popular presidential election in August 2014 with 52 percent of the vote, has been seen as a champion of the rights of the pious, equalizing the balance after decades of Kemalism. In 2014 almost a million students were enrolled in imam hatip schools (which teach boys and girls separately and devote approximately 13 hours a week to Islamic instruction in addition to the regular curriculum), up from only 65,000 in 2002 when Erdoğan's AK Party first came to power (Afanasieva & Sezer, 2014).

Conflicts arising from religious education have been brought before the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) and thus attracted more attention. The annual progress reports prepared by the EU on Turkey have also put emphasis on religious education in Turkey. The main issues that were subjected to criticism from the EU were compulsory religious courses in public education and vocational education of religious minorities (Grigoriadis & Gurcel, 2012).

Some of the most fundamental human rights protected under the European Human Rights Convention are established in article 9, which ensures freedom of religion, and article 2, which establishes parental rights in terms of childhood education. Article 2 concerns a particular aspect of freedom of religion, namely the right of parents to ensure the education of their children in conformity with their own religious convictions: "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" (Council of Europe, 2013).

Alevi Muslims, who make up around 15-20% of the Turkish population, have appealed to the European Court of Human Rights to avoid having their children taught the sectarian, Sunni version of Islam. Secularists are concerned about religion being taught to students at younger ages. Islam is now taught in primary schools, and the government is appealing to the European Court of Human Rights to allow more mandatory religion classes for students of all ages (Smart, 2015).

The movement away from secularism was illustrated by the experience of Bill Cobern, director of the Mallinson Institute for Science Education at Western Michigan University. Dr. Cobern visited Sakarya University while in Turkey on a Fulbright fellowship. He felt he was warmly welcomed, but his views on religion and science were not. After a lecture he gave in 2011 on the competing influences of secularism and religion in science education, a high-ranking administrator at Sakarya spoke and made a case that science needed to be understood in the context of Islam. The administrator warned that scientific ideas were acceptable, but that such ideas were not taught by their religion. Coburn's experience highlights what many scholars see as a growing Islamic influence at universities as a result of the policies of Prime Minister Erdoğan and his Justice and Development Party. They express that Mr. Erdoğan and AKP officials have restricted academic freedom and undermined the teaching of topics, like evolution, that go against the party's religious values (Yeginsu, 2013).

In 2013 a wave of demonstrations and civil unrest in Turkey began initially to contest the urban develop plan for Taksim Gezi Park in Istanbul. The protests took on a broader role including issues of freedom of the press, expression and assembly and the government's encroachment on Turkey's secularism. One professor of the state run Bosphorus University, who requested anonymity to avoid reprimand by administrators, described the Gezi Park protests as a tipping point for many branches of society and a much needed release for academics that had been subdued by their institutions (Yeginsu, 2013). The author was present in Istanbul and Ankara at the time of the 2013 protests and witnessed multiple examples of teachers and students in K-20 educational settings

express support for the protests. Some showed solidarity for the cause by clanging silverware on glasses in the school cafeteria, others joined the protests during after school hours, and many verbally expressed their concern for the preservation of academic freedom.

Government officials have traditionally been responsible for selecting the leaders of public universities from among candidates proposed by faculty, however, many professors say rectors now are chosen on the basis of their religious backgrounds. Yeginsu (2013) quotes doctoral student Gul Ara saying, "People say religion is a part of the government's hidden agenda, but it's no secret. Erdoğan has said he wants to raise a religious youth, and the most effective way of doing that is by infiltrating academic institutions" (p. 18). Çakmak (2009) believes it is reasonable to claim that today, under the rule of the Justice and Development Party, pro-Islamic public education constitutes a more serious threat than in the past for a Turkish democracy.

In an article on Turkey's fitness to join the EU, David McAllister, then a Christian Democratic Union candidate for the European Parliament stated in an interview, "The Erdoğan Turkey of 2014 has moved further away from the standards of the European Union. The current assault on freedom of expression in no way conforms with European standards" (Mangasarian & Delfs, 2014, para. 2).

Despite continued areas of concern, the European Commission 2013 Turkey Progress Report indicated there had been good progress in the area of education. The report indicated Turkey continued to improve in its performance in all the targets of Europe 2020 (a 10-year strategy proposed by the EU on March 3, 2010) to reduce the gap with the EU average, except in tertiary education. Tertiary education attainment improved but less the EU average. The report cited significant quality differences among Turkey's universities (European Commission [EC], 2013). The report holds promise that educational reform in Turkey still has areas of concern, but is making progress in bolstering its endeavor to join the EU.

### **Other Factors in Turkey's Consideration for the EU Status**

It must be acknowledged that Turkey's negotiations to become a part of the EU are affected by various factors other than education, but the scope of this paper addresses the issues most closely related to education. Dr. Muzaffer Senel, professor of international relations at Istanbul's Sehir University in an interview with Aljazeera, cited the EU's financial crisis, the rise of right-wing parties in Europe in the late 2000s and Islamophobia as reasons for the stalemate between the EU and Turkey. Issues such as the unresolved Cyprus dispute and the Gezi Park protests have also been cited as reasons for the "frozen relations" (Uras, 2013).

It is important to understand the multiple layers of support and opposition to Turkey's accession to the EU. Eligibility for membership in the EU is a matter of not only meeting economic conditions but also the Copenhagen criteria, established in 1993. These criteria are outlined in terms of politics (including democracy, rule of law, human rights, protection of minorities), economics (a market economy able to withstand the economic forces within the EU), and the country's capacity to take on all membership obligations (Findley, 2010).

### **Conclusion**

The European Commission 2013 Turkey Progress Report indicated there had been good progress in the area of education indicating Turkey continued to improve in its performance in all the targets of Europe 2020 except tertiary education. Tertiary education attainment improved but less the EU average (EC, 2013). This is encouraging information in regard to Turkey's prospects for entry to the EU. However, several areas will need to be strengthened in order for Turkey to be considered an equal partner with its EU counterparts. Continued efforts are necessary to reach the goal of providing equal access and nondiscriminatory education for all. There is still disparity between urban and rural areas and girls lag behind in completion of higher levels of education. National spending on education continues to lag behind OECD averages. Turkey has enjoyed success with enrollment of students aged

five to 14, but continues to witness a less desired rate for those in middle and high school, with enrollment also falling below OECD averages. New teacher preparation was instituted in 2011 and promises to provide more content specific training for teachers, while the need for additional training programs continues. Inclusion of students with special needs in general classroom settings improved in number, but quality of programs still raises concerns. Special education should address the IDEA principles of zero reject, nondiscriminatory evaluation, bias free testing and provision of appropriate services if it wishes to bolster its application for membership in the EU. Post high school education is restricted for many students who are not able to receive sufficient training at the high school level and students experience a great deal of pressure in deciding the future of their educational studies at an early age. With the AKP in power, secular education has been tested. Many see religion playing a greater role in public education in this declared secular state. The ongoing tension of the new role of Islam in public education potentially threatens the right of parents to ensure the education of their children in conformity with their own religious convictions. Curriculum reform has offered a constructivist paradigm and developed new textbooks with a student-centered approach; however, concerns continue that it falls short of real reform in terms of teacher autonomy over content, methods and materials. Turkey continues to address its educational concerns while progressing toward the goal of improving its status as a European Union candidate.

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