

Political Education in Turkey, Germany and Austria. A Comparative Study*

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Abstract

Education and, indeed, political education are forms of intentional action. This means that they are led by objectives and values. The aim of education is to give everyone the possibility of playing an active role in shaping the future of a democratic society. Political education aims at motivating people of different ages to an engagement in democratic societies and communities. In this context, the structure of knowledge, the political ability to judge, legal capacity and methodical abilities are extremely important. Thus, in Europe, there is a developing interest in political education. At the beginning of the 21st century, political education is faced with new challenges in world politics and globalization debates. In connection with the political discourse about the reduction of the voting age to 16 in Germany, Austria and Switzerland, the discussion on political education has become more intense than ever. In respect of the development of a democratic consciousness, involving political culture and institutions, political education in Turkey cannot be avoided. The aim of this paper is to develop and strengthen awareness of democratic values in Turkish political education, and to make comparisons with political education in Germany and Austria.

Keywords: Education, Political Education, Learning Democracy, Turkey, Germany, Austria

1. Introduction

Education imparts general knowledge to people to prepare them to undertake various tasks that they may be called upon to perform in the future. Political education imparts knowledge and skills that one needs for political participation in the community, government and politics. Political education is based on both legal and ethical principles of human rights. Democracy and education are – particularly from a normative point of view – not independent. Every democracy supports the principle that people with different educational backgrounds and at different developmental stages are mature in terms of democracy. Every effort to make political rights dependent on education goes against fundamental democratic ideas. Nevertheless, democracy and education should be perceived – from an empirical perspective – as mutually connected terms. Education as a reinforcement of capabilities, for conceiving societal coherences, has been always an intrinsic goal of democracy. (Pelinka, 1997: 103)

Therefore, education has a crucial influence on the real development of democracy. But this context has to be clarified in several aspects: Firstly, education should not be misunderstood as an assessment giving a higher importance to the ‘well-educated’ than to the ‘less-educated’. Secondly, it is unrealistic to be optimistic of education policy progress to the extent of accepting a linear connection between the quality of democracy and education advance. It does not go without notice that a qualitative and quantitative education policy has a positive influence on democracy. Education indirectly increases equal opportunities (e.g. to reduce discrimination between the genders). Education strengthens both the possibility of using gathered knowledge for one’s own interests and the ensuring of political participation. It also conveys the tendency and skill to be able to face existing political relations sceptically and to change them. (Pelinka, 1997: 109)

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John Dewey stressed that democracy is an 'ideal', which does not only refer to the decision-making process but also to a specific way of life. Understanding the democratic way of life signifies recognizing it as an ideal of a personal lifestyle. (Henkenborg, 2009: 280) In other words, democracy is a source or means of politics in a modern society. Nico Stehr describes knowledge as potential for action. He argues that modern societies are societies based on knowledge. Also, learning is understood as the production of knowledge. In research, knowledge about politics is defined as the link between the processing of information and political participation. The processing of information into knowledge comprises the fundamental source for social action and political participation. Principally, knowledge allows individuals to be oriented by political events to combine issues with responsibilities, and, last but not least, to be able to formulate political preferences. (Rhomberg, 2009: 161) In particular, the media are jointly responsible for the greater lack of knowledge of politics and for the decline of political and civil engagement.

Robert Putnam (1995) stated that television reinforces distrust and passivity, because of the disappearance of 'face-to-face interaction'. Learning, in this sense, becomes a central concept for the inclusion of citizens into the political system. The scope and the method of informational participation in political events vary according to political predisposition and the background of social structure. Therefore, political education is needed because it seems doubtful that, due to the media explosion, the increased demand for orientation can be provided through the mass media. (Ibid., 162) The main objectives of political education in a democracy are political knowledge, political consciousness and political participation. In this study we have tried to focus attention on an illustration of democratic and political learning based on a comparative country analysis between Turkey, Germany and Austria.

2. Political Education

Political education(1) provides an understanding of political connections, such as the mechanisms of supremacy and power. It asks what the relationship between an individual and society looks like, and how and with what legitimation binding decisions can be taken in society. It follows an ideal of the democratic 'polis', a self-ruling civil society, functioning on the basis of values such as peace, solidarity, equality and justice. Political education seeks to provide political understanding on such matters as the powers of judgement and the political capacity to act. Therefore, it can not only adjust to an individual but also to the public at large. Knowledge and options for action have to be imparted discursively but also obligatorily. (1a) As already mentioned, the question about the philosophy behind political education is one of the basic questions of political didactics, whether learning democracy or political learning in general could be accepted as a 'philosophy of a school subject'.

In Europe, today, the question about the philosophy of political education is answered in terms of the idea of learning democracy. (Henkenborg, 2009: 277) According to a report of the European Council, the concept of democracy is defined as follows: 'It is obvious that democracy is becoming an improved system with its own internal contradictions. It does not pretend to be a perfect form of ruling.' John Dewey, being a pioneer for learning democracy, had already defined it with reference to pedagogic processes, in terms of democracy being a system for living, that starts in individual and personal actions and negotiating with conflicts and is thereby not limited to structures or social order – it should be experienced in the educational processes of political education. (Wenzel, 2009: 309-310) In the report 'Education for Democratic Citizenship' produced by the Council for Cultural Co-Operation, the concept of learning democracy was described as follows:

'Learning democracy represents the common denominator for a series of ... European initiatives for education and training, supporting in recent years an equal and a fair society ... But nowadays learning democracy is supposed to present a general set-up for new education, which has to be developed as part of the progress of European integration.' In the English-speaking context, Bernard Crick defined the aim of learning democracy as follows, paradigmatically and exemplarily: (Henkenborg, 2009: 278) 'The idea of a good citizen could be founded in this, certainly, but rarely the idea of the active citizen – that all subjects ... should think of themselves as citizens with rights to be exercised as well as agreed responsibilities ... We need both 'good citizens' and 'active citizens'. And citizenship is not just the assertion of individual rights, important though these are, it is acting together to achieve a common public purpose.' Learning democracy comprises, on the content level, not only political education in a narrower sense, but also education in human rights. In practice, learning democracy differs from a narrow understanding of transfer of knowledge and pleads for a structure of competences through varied educational media and resources. (Ibid., 278)

3. Political Socialization

Discussion about the political socialization of young people is not excluded in a democratic society. Nevertheless, it should be recorded that:

'We know relatively little about the civic development of adolescents. Specifically, we have a limited understanding on how schools do, or do not, foster political engagement among their adolescent students.' (Schwarzer/Zeglovits, 2009: 326) The term political socialization is part of the socio-cultural communication of public figures (Claußen, 1989: 776), with which all learning processes are acquired through personal traits, values, opinions, motivations, attitudes, knowledge and skills, which form the political consciousness and steer political behaviour. (Perlot/ Zandonella, 2009: 424) In the course of political socialization a person develops a political outlook over the years. (Ibid., 425) This process begins in early childhood and continues to adulthood.

Within the framework of political socialization, four important sources influence the political awareness education process of young people, namely family, friends, the media and schools, where knowledge, skills and values are imparted by 'independent teachers'. (Schwarzer/ Zeglovits, 2009: 327) Adelson could also show, using results from empirical research, that, at the end of this stage, teenagers have both abstract and sophisticated thoughts that pose political questions. At this point, it should be emphasized that, during the political development of young people, schools contribute to political socialization. Besides transferring knowledge, they also offer a place where teenagers are confronted with the norms and values of society. (Perlot/ Zandonella, 2009: 426)

4. Goals and Tasks of Political Education

The goal of political education is to get people interested in politics and to become responsible citizens by teaching them how to analyze and assess a given political situation independently. The fundamental objectives of political education are as follows: (1b)

1. Teaching basic knowledge on how politics works
2. Developing an understanding about politics
3. Fostering an independent opinion
4. Encouraging involvement in politics

In addition to the objectives, the following tasks of political education, which most observers can agree on, are classified as part of political education in: (1c)

1. Developing and strengthening liberal democratic value awareness
2. Understanding the basic tasks of politics
3. Gaining a basic knowledge of all the most important political issues
4. Learning certain skills such as how to approach information, media etc.

5. Orientation of competences in political education

In 1997, the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) was founded by the OECD member countries with the objective of monitoring the extent to which students nearing the end of compulsory schooling had acquired the knowledge and skills essential for active participation in society. The PISA assessments started by comparing students' knowledge and skills in the areas of reading, mathematics, science and, last but not least, problem solving. (1d) According to the PISA studies in 2000, where clear deficits arose in the German education system and education results of German students, this led to crucial debates among the German public on competences and education standards. These discussions concentrated on – analogous to the OECD concept and appropriate to the international situation – general quality criteria regarding the spirit of competences and education standards (2) and also on developing assessment programmes to assess and measure education processes in German schools. (1e)

Why should pupils acquire competences through political education? The answer is that political education should give pupils the opportunity to acquire political competences for dealing with politics and taking part in political processes. The Society for the Didactics of Political Science and for the Political Education of Youths and Adults (Die Gesellschaft für Politikdidaktik und politische Jugend- und Erwachsenenbildung) designed a competence model for education standards in Germany and in Austria; this differs from the German competence model because the Austrian model deals with the question of work knowledge (Arbeitswissen). According to the results of the PISA study, the developed competence model has not been yet applied by Turkey. Published in 2004, the GPJE draft is based on the groundwork of the politics educator, Wolfgang Sander. This draft lists four areas of competence, and it serves as a contribution to the development of education standards for German schools. (Detjen, 2005: 92)

5.1 The judgement competence (Die Urteilskompetenz)

The political judgement competence comprises the ability, skills and readiness to make independent, valid and most objective and/or value-oriented judgements of political decisions, problems and disputes. Each political decision depends on a number of partial decisions.

5.2 The action competence (Die Handlungskompetenz)

The action competence defines the skill, ability and readiness to formulate and articulate one's own positions on political questions as well as to recognize other political positions in political, economical and social fields. In other words, the action competence includes compromise, the ability to communicate, tolerance and acceptance. (1e)

5.3 The methodological competence (Die Methodenkompetenz)

The political methodological competence comprises, on the one hand, a disposition about procedures and methods, which permits being articulate in politics, verbally, in writing, and visually. On the other hand, it includes other skills, abilities and readiness to decode completed political manifestos (e.g. in diverse media, in different sorts of texts, for different addressees ...). (Ibid., 10)

5.4 The expertise competence (Die Sachkompetenz)

This political expertise comprises those skills, abilities and readiness to act which are necessary to perceive the definitions, categories and concepts of politics, as well as being able to develop them critically. (Ibid., 11)

6. Political Education in Turkey, Germany and Austria

Political education is, on an international level, institutionalized differently in schools. For example, in all the federal regions (Bundesländer) of Germany, a special subject of political education has been introduced (under different technical terms), that involves the field of Economics in most of the regions, but is separated from History and Geography. In Austria, political education is integrated with the subject of History, while Geography and Economics comprise a joint subject. (Sander, 2009: 303) The 'Political Education' subject in Turkey is institutionalized as part of the Social Knowledge subject.

6.1 Turkey

In Turkey, issues referring to political education are taught within the framework of 'Social Knowledge' to pupils at the elementary and secondary school levels. (Sözer, 1998: 7; 1f) Since the Republic Era in Turkey, when 'Social Knowledge' lessons were first introduced to elementary curricula, new curriculum regulations have been passed in different years (1926, 1930, 1932, 1936, 1948, 1962, 1968, 1989, 1993 and 1998). The 1926 curriculum stresses that the main objective of elementary schools is 'to educate young people as good citizens to be oriented effectively in the environment'. Under this principle, lessons entitled History, Geography and National Knowledge, which are appropriate to Social Knowledge, were introduced in the fourth and fifth grades. Changes affecting these lessons, in terms of principles, lesson content and timetabling, were carried forward to later curricula. In 1962, lessons such as History, Geography and National Knowledge were replaced in the elementary school curriculum by the subject 'Community and Country Studies'. However, in 1968 this was changed again to 'Social Knowledge'. (Sönmez, 1998: 8-9)

Between the years 1924 and 1967, at secondary schools, lessons in History and Geography were taught. Alongside these lessons, subjects such as National Knowledge and Citizenship Education were also taught. (Ibid., 9) In 1967, subjects such as History, Geography and Citizenship were combined into 'Social Knowledge', taught to first and second-graders at secondary schools. In 1985, the subject 'Social Knowledge' was terminated. In 1992, a new curriculum that included Citizenship Education was implemented. Amendments concerning National History and Citizenship were carried out in 1993.

In 1997, when compulsory elementary schooling of 8 years was implemented, the subject 'Social Knowledge' was adopted instead of National History and National Geography. The subject 'Citizenship and Human Rights' was taught to 7th and 8th graders. (Ibid., 10)

Since 1999 and 2000, the compulsory course 'Human Rights and Democracy' has applied at all grammar schools, but an elective course with the name 'Democracy and Human Rights' is also provided for students. In the elementary schools, the course 'Citizenship and Human Rights' takes place in the curriculum of 7th- and 8th- graders. In 2005/2006 the subject 'Social Knowledge' included other subjects such as 'Life Sciences', 'History of the Turkish Republic' and 'Kemalizm'. (1g) In fact, Political Education is offered at all secondary schools in Turkey where courses about Democracy and Human Rights are not taught separately.

On November 11, 2009, the Turkish Minister of National Education, Nimet Çubukçu, attended a workshop about Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education, where she announced that, with the technical support of the European Council, the 'Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education' project will be developed at schools within the framework of complete curricula. She also emphasized that, from preschools up to high schools, an adopted democratic school culture will contribute to a democratic consciousness in society. (1h)

6.2 Germany

Political Education started as an independent subject for discussion in Germany, as in other countries, in the second half of the nineteenth century. The background consisted of the formation of modern (national) states, so that the question concerned the appropriate preparation of young people for their new role as citizens, instead of subjects of princes. Civic education or the study of citizenship dominated school subjects in the German Wilhelminian Empire, in the Weimar Republic and, bizarrely, in the German Democratic Republic. A democratic restart of political education was initiated after the Second World War, firstly in Western Germany by the Allied powers between 1945 and about 1950 with a policy of re-education, being a democratic new education.(1i)

In the 1950s, political education as a subject in schools was introduced in the federal regions (Bundesländern) with the resolution of the Basic Law (Grundgesetz). Between 1947 and 1951 there were intensive discussions about the adequate definition of this subject. (Detjen, 2007: 111) In January 1955, a committee of experts, the 'Deutsche Ausschuss für das Erziehungs-und Bildungswesen' presented a new survey of the state of political education. (Ibid., 115) The Standing Conference of Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs, the 'Kultusministerkonferenz' dealt twice in the 1960s with content-related questions of political education. In February 1960, the Kultusministerkonferenz adopted a resolution to deal with the recent past through lessons in History and Social Sciences in schools. (Ibid., 118)

In the 1960s and the early 1970s, political education became embroiled in conflicts in the environment of student movements. Political education became, temporarily, a political struggle within political parties. For example, in Hesse and North Rhine-Westphalia, schoolbooks and the curriculum for the subject stood at the centre of the Landtag election campaigns. A political polarization emerged in the political debates. The political climate intensified in the 1970s. Between the political parties, the CDU and the SPD at that time, intense discussions about the content and objectives of political education were unavoidable. It was a question of whether political education referred to system stability or system change. (Ibid., 169-170) Within the political polarization in 1976, the debates about political education terminated with the 'Beutelsbacher Consensus' (Beutelsbacher Konsens), which clarified some principles, namely that political education had to be strictly differentiated from indoctrination by either side, and was not allowed to promote specific political positions. (1i)

In the 1970s and 1980s, other topics were on the agenda, but for some years the citizen was in great need of political education. In the Munich Agreement (Münchener Manifest) of May 1997, which was decided by the heads of the Federal Centre for Political Education (Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung), this was represented in the title 'Democracy needs political education'. The Munich Agreement opted for an active civic society.(1j) According to a Shell Survey in 2000, the political interest of teenagers decreased over time. They turn away more and more from political activity and from political parties. But who is responsible for this regrettable situation at the beginning of the 21st century? Claus Leggewie, at a conference, set up the following thesis, namely that political education is outdated conceptually and petrified institutionally. Also, Wolfgang Sander has maintained in his writings that the political lesson drowns in the flood of knowledge. For that reason, political education in Germany should adapt and modernize its structures due to global challenges.

6.3 Austria

In 1949, an enactment on civic education (Erlass zur staatsbürgerlichen Erziehung) came into effect. The enactment was linked to traditional civic education and emphasized education for a conscious, loyal and competent Republican and towards an Austrian Awareness. On the 11th of April 1978 a principle decree, 'Political Education in schools' was signed by the Minister of Education at that time, Dr Fred Sinowatz. (1k) This had its roots in the social and political developments of the 1960s, which meant that efforts to shape political education in Austrian schools needed to be encouraged. It was enshrined in the enactment that every teacher should be obliged to teach political education in every lesson and in all grades, whereas at the same time a wide political understanding was expected. (Kühberger, 2009: 8) In 2007, within the framework of a franchise reform in Austria, a reduction of the voting age to 16 was decided upon. With this decision, teenagers had the possibility of voting on the political level, which led to broad discussions in public. The Austrian Ministry for Education and Ministry for Sciences began together, after the reduction of the voting age, a democracy initiative in which a project group developed a competency model for political education. In the following stage, the subject of History and Social Studies was enacted in a new school curriculum. (Kühberger, 2009: 9) Political Education in Austria is part of the curriculum in schools of general education at the 11th and 12th grades. At the beginning of 2008/2009, political education was also introduced in the 8th grade of grammar schools and in secondary schools.

In vocational schools, political education is offered explicitly as a subject on its own. The reason for the implementation of political learning lies in the reduction of the voting age to 16, a political decision, which was taken with the protection by a pedagogical-didactical corollary programme. The standardization of politics and history in a school lesson appears to be a logical and meaningful measure. This is because the subjects of History and Politics deal with the same matters. The conscious dealing with History is an essential factor in creating or strengthening individual and collective identity. This is because politics deals with the current state of affairs, whereas history is concerned with the historical status. (Krammer, 2009: 13-14)

Conclusion

Today, it goes without saying that political education is a significant subject of education. Schools are social places which provide young people with information and analysis of the political world. In democracies, political education will reflect the norms and values of the political order. Nonetheless, research results show that political education in schools, as well as learning experiences from service (e.g. work in a not-for profit organization) in the community can foster future political participation. Many observers see the family as playing a significant role in the socialization process. Parents can pass on their political attitudes to their children through discussions. The views of parents have an important impact on their children's outlook.

In summary, it can be stated that political education in Turkey, Germany and Austria has been developed out of the social conditions in those countries. While political education and learning democracy are common in Germany and Austria, in Turkey the concept of learning democracy is not widely used. In Germany and Austria, political education is developed and organized according to competences but, in Turkey, studies about learning democracy are rather new. With reference to political education, this study has tried to show that, in the 21st century, the concepts of political education and learning democracy should be scrutinized and strongly improved. The reason lies in social developments, technology progress and globalization, which are emerging from evolutionary accomplishments. Interest in politics and political knowledge correlate with social and educational backgrounds. For that reason, studies at the national and international level have to be considered in the three countries in order to develop new models and to make political education more effective.

Notes

1) The term 'political education' is common in Germany for the subjects of civic education and social studies.

1a) Interview mit Dr. Helle Becker "Kulturelle und politische Bildung sollen sich nicht gegenseitig kolonialisieren" http://www.bpb.de/popup/popup_druckversion.html?guid=RI9U5W 19.04.2010.

1b) http://www.dadalop.org/politik_int/grundkurs_1/ziele.htm#text 25.04.2010; http://www.online-dissertation.de/politische_bildung/aufgaben_ziele.htm#fn4 25.04.2010.

1c) http://www.dadalop.org/politik_int/grundkurs_1/ziele.htm, 25.04.2010; http://www.online-dissertation.de/politische_bildung/aufgaben_ziele.htm#abs3, 25.04.2010.

1d) <http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/47/61/35070367.pdf> 26.04.2010.

1e) <http://rzv039.rz.tu-bp.de/isw/daten/Expertise.pdf> 26.04.2010.

1f) <http://www.aof.anadolu.edu.tr/kitap/IOLTP/2295/unite01.pdf> 30.4.2010.

1g) <http://www.e-akademi.org/makaleler/itorun-1.htm> 30.04.2010.

1h) <http://projeler.meb.gov.tr/pkm1/index.php?view=article&catid=25> 30.04.2010.

1i) http://www.bpb.de/themen/U5F770,0,0,Was_ist_politische_Bildung.html 01.05.2010.

1i) http://www.bpb.de/themen/U5F770,0,0,Was_ist_politische_Bildung.html 01.05.2010.

1j) http://www.bpb.de/publikationen/7FDXBG,0,Die_Demokratiekompetenz_der_B%FCrger.html 01.05.2010.

1k) http://www.politik-lernen.at/politiklernen/resources/oldbin/_data/pdf/20JahrePB.pdf 01.05.2010

2) Competences are skills and abilities, which are accomplished and acquired in a subject by students. Education standards should describe the situation of the following years by accomplishing the general competences. These two concepts are often used synonymously with similar descriptions such as knowledge, skill, understanding, ability.

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