

GREECE

Overview

Greece, with Italy, forms an exception to the European norm of extensive educational freedom both to organize nonpublic school in a manner that is distinctively different from the public schools, and also to receive public subsidies that allow equal access to nonpublic schools independent of family income.

In comparison with other European Member States, there are educational particularities due to geographical and historical factors. For example, the level of educational attainment is considerably lower than the EU average (OECD, Educational Policy Review, 1995).

The Structure of Schooling

The Greek educational system remains highly centralized, despite some recent gestures toward decision-making (Jach, 327-332). Based on the laws passed by the Parliament for all levels of education, the state seeks to democratize education by decentralization, by ensuring the participation of those directly involved in the educational process, upgrading the quality of education and applying meritocracy in the selection of administrative staff for education.

The general policy in the education field is determined and directed by the government. There are Directorates of Primary and Secondary Education in every prefecture that undertake the administration and oversee the operation of pre-school, primary and secondary education. The schools in each prefecture, both public and private, and at all levels, are administered by the Head of the Directorate of Education. At the prefectural level, there are Regional Service Councils for Primary and Secondary Education, which are created by the Prefect and are responsible for matters related to the service status of teachers. A School Council operates in every school. The task of the School Council is to support the operation of the school. School Committees are responsible for managing the budgets which are made available for running costs.

Article 16, 3 of the Constitution states that the number of years of compulsory education shall be no less than nine. Compulsory education comprises six years of primary education for pupils aged between 6 and 12 and three years of lower secondary education for 12- to 15-year-old pupils. After completing six years of primary education, pupils can register in lower secondary school (*gymnasio*), where they are obliged to attend school for another three years.

In 1995, 96% of pupils attended public-sector schools and 4% private non-grant-aided schools. Private primary and secondary schools are recognized as equivalent to state schools, and remain under the supervision and inspection of the Ministry of National Education and Religious Affairs. They are fully self-financed (www.eurydice.org) and supported by the tuition payments of parents.

The proportion of pupils attending nonpublic schools has been declining as the overall participation in schooling has risen..

Nonpublic schools in Greece, must conform to public education requirements.

It has been suggested that

the Greek educational system and the role of independent schools within it reflect the inherent antinomies of Greek society. From classical times Greeks have been remarkable for two fascinatingly paradoxical characteristics--an intense, excitable and ruthless individualism and a deep sense of loyalty to party, region and the country which is the birthplace of western culture. Decentralization of power is rare and education, like other aspects of life, is bureaucratically controlled from the centre and examination-ridden and in comparison with other [EU] countries, has adapted slowly to modern trends. So individual and commercially competitive are the schools that they are virtually unable to come together for mutual protection and the furtherance of their educational ideals. They are hard set to lighten the constraints of a bureaucratic and highly centralised system of financial and educational controls and are in fact virtually ham-strung by ministerially imposed curricula, text books and examinations, so that even the small number of non-profit-making institutions like Athens College, despite better resources and better-qualified staffs, are unable to offer the variety of choice and method which in different degrees is normal elsewhere. Political pressures share much of the blame for this, alongside the national tradition of unquestioned central control (Mason, 49, 52).

Legal Framework

Section 1 of article 16 of the Constitution adopted in 1975, after the fall of the last authoritarian government, begins with the words "Art and science, research and teaching shall be free and their development and promotion shall be an obligation of the State." This is immediately followed by the words, "and their development and promotion shall be an obligation of the State."

Section 2 of Article 16 of the Constitution provides that education constitutes a basic mission for the State and shall aim at the moral, intellectual and physical training of Greeks, as well as the development of their national and religious consciousness and their formation as free and responsible citizens.

Section 4 of the same article, first sentence, provides that "All Greeks are entitled to free education at all levels of State educational institutions."

Section 8 of article 16 has the only references to nonpublic educational institutions, and these are limiting rather than supportive of educational freedom. This section states that the conditions and terms for granting a license for the establishment and operation of schools not owned by the State, the supervision of such and the professional status of teaching personnel therein shall be specified by law. The establishment of university institutions by private persons is forbidden.

Law No. 1566 of 30 September 1985 regulates primary and secondary education. This law establishes a flexible education system and regulates new curricula and improvements in teaching methods and educational resources. It gives a decisive impetus to decentralization and brings about the democratization of education.

Freedom to establish non-state schools

In theory, schools may be founded only by Greek citizens or associations, provided that there is compliance with prerequisites stipulated under the law and the relevant Presidential Decree. In fact there are about 15 international schools, authorized by a law (#4862) adopted in 1931.

Private schools which belong to legal entities of a non-profit nature are recognized as equivalent to state schools. Private schools must meet the minimal conditions defined by law #682 of 1977. Private pre-schools and primary schools follow the organization and curriculum in effect in the state schools. By

decision of the Minister, and after consulting the Pedagogical Institute, other courses may be taught at these schools. School-leaving certificates granted by these pre-schools, primary and junior high schools are equivalent to certificates from state schools without any verification procedure being required.

Licences to establish private schools are accorded to Greek citizens as well as to legal entities, provided that they are in compliance with prerequisites stipulated under the law and the relevant Presidential Decree. Private schools which belong to legal entities of a non-profit nature are recognized as equivalent to state schools.

School-leaving certificates granted by private *lykeia*, technical-vocational lykeia and technical-vocational schools are equivalent to those of state schools after the school-leaving examinations written by the pupils in the last grade. These examinations are conducted by mixed committees consisting of an equal number of teachers from state and private schools. Regarding organization and curricula, the same applies as in public schools. Methods of assessing students lead to disagreements.

All schools must have a Parents' Association, a School Council (consisting of the Teachers' Association, the Board of the Parents' Association and a representative of local Government and in secondary school a pupil representative) and a School Committee which is responsible for management. The School Committee consists of a single representative of the municipality or commune, of the Parents' Committee and of the pupils and the Head Teacher.

Home schooling

Any person who has guardianship of a minor and fails to register him or her in school is subject to a penalty.

School choice not limited by family income

Education is funded mainly by state revenues through the regular budget and public investments budget, and secondly by private expenditure.

Private expenditure on education covers the provision of educational services by private schools operating in parallel with state schools. It also covers the cost of the services of the private tutorial institutes (*frontistiria*) and private teachers employed by the family and students, to supplement the education provided by state and private schools.

Private schools receive no state funding. However, private general secondary schools that belong to non-profit organizations may be supported by special appropriations from the Ministry of Education. Private technical and vocational schools cannot receive grants and are entirely funded by student fees. The lack of public subsidy for nonpublic schools in general has the effect that school choice is a luxury for those who can afford it. There are a few exceptional cases in which public funds are provided to nonpublic schools by decision of the Minister of Education and Religion.

Pupils in state-run pre-schools and primary schools are given free books and teaching aids; transportation from their home to school and back and free accommodation for primary school pupils during the summer months in children's camps. The family budget share of expenditure on primary school education is limited to supplying writing and drawing materials and an optional share in expenditure to improve education undertaken by the parents' associations in each school.

School distinctiveness protected by law and policy

Curriculum and instructional objectives are determined by the national Ministry.

Nonpublic schools are required to follow the programs and methods of instruction of public schools, including methods of evaluation of academic achievement. Exceptions to allow programmatic variations in particular cases can be granted by the Minister of Education and Religion.

The education commissions of the regional prefectures (which include a broadly-representative membership) have oversight over organizational – though not curricular – aspects of nonpublic schools, on the same basis as public schools.

The national Ministry oversees compliance with curriculum guidelines and even the teaching materials used, in nonpublic as in public schools.

In the independent sector the most important lack is that of provision for non-profit-making, charitable institutions with freedom to offer variety of choice and of educational programmes - a lack which “reflects the conservatism of the government and of the owners and users of the independent schools” (Mason, 52).

Distinctive character

There is little scope to offer alternative pedagogies in Greek schools, and as a result there are, for example, no Waldorf (Steiner) schools, unlike elsewhere in Europe and America.

On the other hand, the secondary schools operated by the Orthodox Church for future priests are allowed to award diplomas which are considered equivalent to the secondary school diplomas of public schools.

Decisions about staff

The Ministry has authority to select school staff .

Pre-school and primary school teachers complete a four-year university-level course. Junior and senior high school teachers have a university degree in their specialist subject (Moustakas, 204).

All pre-school, primary and secondary-level teachers are civil servants. The salaries of private school teachers are paid by the school proprietor but are at least the same as in State schools (Moustakas, 204).

Teachers of private schools can be dismissed for the same disciplinary reasons as teachers in State schools (Moustakas, 205).

State school teachers are prohibited from supplementing their income by teaching in private schools (Article 14 par. 17 of the Law 1566/85).

Teachers at private schools which belong to legal entities of a non-profit nature that are recognized as equivalent to state schools, receive pensions from the State, while persons employed in private schools receive pensions from the Social Security Fund.

Accountability for school quality

Private and State schools are subject to the same inspectorate. Inspection includes the adequacy of staffing, pupil numbers per class and, on occasion, textbooks. The School Buildings Organization is responsible for the buildings to be used for primary and secondary education; the School Book Publishing Organization is responsible for publishing and distributing books for education at all levels; the Organization for Vocational Education and Training mainly organizes the Vocational Training Institutes; the National Education Council makes recommendations to the government on matters of educational policy at all levels of education; the Pedagogical Institute is an advisory body on curriculum development, makes curriculum adjustments on the basis of the school counsellors' annual reports, works out proposals for evaluating the educational task and assessing the pupils and co-ordinates activities related to the in-service training of teaching staff; the Centre for Educational Research promote research on issues related to education.

According to a Presidential Decree in effect since 1995, assessment is an integral part of the teaching-learning process. Pupils are assessed by their teacher or teachers on the basis of: a) the daily oral examination and total participation of the pupil in the learning process and in other school activities; b) the results of his/her performance on the basis of assessment criteria which constitute an integral part of the school programme and are contained in the material taught; c) the assignments done by pupils either at school or at home.

The teaching work of each school unit is assessed at the end of the academic year by the teachers' association, taking account of the relevant opinion of the parents' and guardians' associations, with a view to highlighting weaknesses and improving the curriculum for the coming year. A relevant report must be submitted by the Headteacher of the school to the School Advisers' Office and the appropriate Head of Department or Education Office (Eurydice, *A decade of reforms at compulsory education level in the European Union (1984-94)*, Brussels, 1997, 122).

The diplomas awarded by nonpublic intermediate schools are recognized automatically, but the upper secondary examinations given by nonpublic schools must be validated by a commission made up of both public and nonpublic teachers.

The Greek independent schools proper, all profit-making and mostly expensive, vary greatly in standard and with the expansion and re-equipment of the state system face a steady diminution in numbers. Nevertheless, the often overcrowded premises of state schools and the rigidity of their methods continue to make the independent sector attractive, especially to the middle and professional classes, despite their high fees. This is especially true of the expensive, élite group which, as far as government's strict control of fees allows, is relatively well-equipped in terms of laboratories and information technology.

Greece's membership of the European Union, though it has increased contact with Europe generally in education as in other fields, has not so far greatly influenced authoritarian national attitudes to education and to the need for variety and freedom of choice, though there have been some changes--for example, the ending in 1995 of compulsory religious instruction in schools, much to the dislike of the Orthodox Church, and in 1996 a proposal that university entrance should be based on a new national certificate of education together with records of the final two years in school (Mason, 52).

Teaching of values

Article 3 of the Constitution states that:

1. The prevailing religion in Greece is that of the Eastern Orthodox Church of Christ. The Orthodox Church of Greece, acknowledging our Lord Jesus Christ as its head, is inseparably united in doctrine with the Great Church of Christ in Constantinople and with every other Church of Christ of the same doctrine, observing unwaveringly, as they do, the holy apostolic and synodal canons and sacred traditions. It is autocephalous and is administered by the Holy Synod of serving Bishops and the Permanent Holy Synod originating thereof and assembled as specified by the Statutory Charter of the Church in compliance with the provisions of the Patriarchal Tome of June 29, 1850 and the Synodal Act of September 4, 1928.
2. The ecclesiastical regime existing in certain districts of the State shall not be deemed contrary to the provisions of the preceding paragraph.

Religion is taught for several hours a week at each grade level of elementary and secondary education (*National report presented to the 45th session of the International Conference on Education, Geneva, 30 September - 5 October 1996*).

Secondary education comprises two cycles. The first three-year compulsory cycle is the junior high school (*gymnasio*) which aims to broaden the childrens' value system (moral, religious, national, humanitarian and other values) so that they can regulate their behavior to conform to these precepts, and control and direct their emotional world towards creative goals and humanitarian actions.

In the case of *Valsamis v. Greece*, the European Court of Human Rights ruled on the punishment with one day's suspension from school of a Jehovah's Witnesses pupil for her failure to attend a school parade during the national commemoration on 28 October (case numbered 74/1995/580/666). That punishment was imposed in accordance with a circular of 2 January 1990 issued by the Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs.

The Court stated that Article 2 of Protocol No. 1 (P1-2) enjoins the State to respect parents' convictions, be they religious or philosophical, throughout the entire State education programme (see the *Kjeldsen, Busk Madsen and Pedersen v. Denmark* judgment of 7 December 1976, Series A no. 23). That duty is broad in its extent as it applies not only to the content of education and the manner of its provision but also to the performance of all the "functions" assumed by the State. The verb "respect" means more than "acknowledge" or "take into account." In addition to a primarily negative undertaking, it implies some positive obligation on the part of the State (*Campbell and Cosans v. the United Kingdom* judgment of 25 February 1982 Series A no. 48).

The Court also held that "although individual interests must on occasion be subordinated to those of a group, democracy does not simply mean that the views of a majority must always prevail: a balance must be achieved which ensures the fair and proper treatment of minorities and avoids any abuse of a dominant position" (see *Young, James and Webster v. the United Kingdom* judgment of 13 August 1981, Series A no. 44, p. 25, para. 63).

"The setting and planning of the curriculum fall in principle within the competence of the Contracting States. This mainly involves questions of expediency on which it is not for the Court to rule and whose solution may legitimately vary according to the country and the era." Given that discretion, the Court held that the second sentence of Article 2 of Protocol No. 1 (P1-2) forbids the State "to pursue an aim of indoctrination that might be regarded as not respecting parents' religious and philosophical convictions. That is the limit that must not be exceeded."

In the first place, the Court notes that Miss Valsamis was exempted from religious-education lessons and the Orthodox Mass, as had been requested by her parents. The latter also wished to have her exempted from having to parade during the national commemoration on 28 October.

While it is not for the Court to rule on the Greek State's decisions as regards the setting and planning of the school curriculum, it is surprised that pupils can be required on pain of suspension from school, even if only for a day, to parade outside the school precincts on a holiday. Nevertheless, it can discern nothing, either in the purpose of the parade or in the arrangements for it, which could offend the applicants' pacifist convictions to an extent prohibited by the second sentence of Article 2 of Protocol No. 1 (P1-2).

Parents have a right "to enlighten and advise their children, to exercise with regard to their children natural parental functions as educators, or to guide their children on a path in line with the parents' own religious or philosophical convictions."

It is not for the Court to rule on the expediency of other educational methods which, in the applicants' view, would be better suited to the aim of perpetuating historical memory among the younger generation. It notes, however, that the penalty of suspension, which cannot be regarded as an exclusively educational measure and may have some psychological impact on the pupil on whom it is imposed, is nevertheless of limited duration and does not require the exclusion of the pupil from the school premises (Article 28 para. 3 of Decree no. 104/1979).

References

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