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**Aziza Khatoon on Human Rights in Turkey edited by Zehra F. Kabasakal Arat. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007. 349 pp.**

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**Abstract**

A review of:

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**Keywords**

Human rights, Turkey, Policy, Law

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**Human Rights in Turkey edited by Zehra F. Kabasakal Arat. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007. 349 pp.**

Human Rights in Turkey is a compendium of interdisciplinary essays that offers the reader an introduction to various human rights and civil rights issues concerning Turkey. The book is divided into six mutually exclusive yet overlapping sections that provide a comprehensive analysis of pressing concerns including: freedom of expression, minority rights, religious freedom, labor rights, child labor, right to education, environmental rights, internal displacement, refugees and asylum policies, women's rights, human rights in academic curricula, and Turkey's participation in human rights instruments. In addition, each chapter provides a detailed yet concise historical and political background of the subject matter at hand.

In her introductory chapter, editor Zehra F. Kabasakal Arat summarizes the Turkish state's relationship with human rights in terms of domestic law's acquiescence towards international human rights norms. In addition, Arat provides a historical overview of issues that have shaped Turkey's human rights debate and dialogue. Similarly, in Chapter 2, scholar Dilruba Çatalbas highlights the various historical and political dynamics that have influenced successive Turkish governments' relationship with the press. Çatalbas concludes that economic liberalization and the co-opting of the media by private corporations are playing an ever-increasing role in press censorship.

In Chapter 3, Baskin Oran specifically focuses on the antiquated Lausanne Treaty when delineating the rights afforded to non-Muslim minorities in Turkey. He further elaborates on this subject with a summary of nationalist rhetoric and supra- and sub-identities in Turkey in relation to the recognition and acceptance of minorities. In Chapter 5, author Mary Lou O'Neil extends the minority question by focusing on Turkey's repression of Kurdish linguistic rights through an outline of various historical and political scenarios that have culminated in state-sanctioned restrictions on the employment of the Kurdish language. The discussion of Kurdish rights is continued in Chapter 10, which highlights the unresolved dilemma of internally displaced Kurds within Turkey.

Human rights scholars have noted a new trend in Turkey: a decline in socio-economic benefits for Turks as neo-liberal economic policies aligning Turkey with E.U. economic standards have come into effect. Chapter 7 overviews various labor rights violated by Turkey, as defined by the International Labor Organization; while Chapter 8 extends the discussion of socio-economic human rights to an analysis of Turkey's education system, arguing that the subscription to neo-liberal economic policies such as the privatization of education, as well as the increasing population and the widening income gap, has led to a decline in public access to adequate education and furthers class, ethnic and gender based discrimination.

Chapters 12 and 13 concentrate exclusively on women's rights in Turkey. In Chapter 12, Yildiz Ecevit deconstructs the myth that Turkish women have maintained an inert stance in fighting for equal rights. She argues that although women were afforded many rights from the government during the formative years of the Turkish republic, they have continued to participate in various movements to further their rights and shape government policy towards women. Ecevit's essay offers a fine backdrop to Yasemin Levin's succeeding chapter on the impact and influence of the

U.N. Convention on the Elimination on All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in establishing women's rights machinery and legislative reforms in Turkey.

The last four chapters delve into the role of domestic and international actors in shaping human rights policy and reform in Turkey. In Chapter 14, author Başak Çalı's discussion summarizes how the impact of Turkish human rights organizations is pressuring legislative reform and shaping state policy and public opinion with regard to human rights. In Chapter 15, Kenan Çayir provides the reader with a summary of human rights education in primary and secondary schooling. Çayir maintains that at the expense of promoting impartial human rights education, the Turkish government continues to flex its control over human rights education courses—giving precedence to ethno-centricism, Turkish nationalism, and the infallibility of uniquely Turkish secular reforms, collectively referred to as Kemalism.

Chapters 16 and 17 illustrate Turkey's complicated relationship with international human rights organizations. In Chapter 16, through the comparison of Turkey's response to U.N. and European conventions, author Füsün Türkmen argues that Turkey's participation in the global human rights machinery is based on *realpolitik*. Chapter 17 provides an extension of Türkmen's argument by discussing the impact and influence of the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) in ushering in human rights reform to Turkish legislation.

In conclusion, Human Rights in Turkey contends that Turkey has undeniably made significant, albeit hitherto incomplete, improvements in legislation and judicial practices to improve its human rights record in light of E.U. accession talks. Although Turkey has been unjustly demonized with regard to human rights by Eurocentric xenophobes, contributors to Human Rights in Turkey would concur that the issue of human rights should not be deemed merely an anti-Turkish propaganda tool by the Turkish government and nationals—which it too often is—thus seriously undermining human rights reform endeavors.

Human Rights in Turkey is an extremely valuable contribution to the study of human rights in the contemporary Middle East and Eastern Europe. It is the first anthology of its kind that provides a comprehensive, well-balanced and finely researched review of human and civil rights in Turkey that academics, students and novices alike will find indispensable in their study of modern Turkey.

*Aziza Khatoon*  
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