

**Teaching  
about  
Religions in  
European  
School  
Systems**

**Policy issues  
and trends**

**Luce Pépin**

**NEF Initiative on Religion  
and Democracy in Europe**



# Teaching about Religions in European School Systems Policy issues and trends

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and Democracy in Europe**



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## Preface

# **The 'Religion and Democracy in Europe' initiative**

The Network of European Foundations (NEF) is an operational platform primarily committed to strengthening the potential for cooperation in the form of joint ventures between foundations at the European level. The NEF offers its members the opportunity to identify common goals and, as an open structure, to join forces with other foundations in Europe which may share similar concerns and objectives. It is also open to collaboration with the public and private sectors in developing its initiatives. Its areas of intervention to promote systemic social change include migration, European citizenship, support for the European integration process, youth empowerment and global European projects. The NEF is based in Brussels.

In January 2007 the NEF launched a special initiative on 'Religion and Democracy in Europe'. This was conducted with the participation of Hywel Ceri Jones, NEF European policy adviser, and was based on a partnership between several foundations, including: Van Leer Group Foundation (chair); Arcadia Trust; Barrow Cadbury Trust; Bernheim Foundation; Compagnia di San Paolo; Ford Foundation; Freudenberg Stiftung; King Baudouin Foundation; Riksbankens Jubileumsfond; Stefan Batory Foundation; and Volkswagen Stiftung.

The 'Religion and Democracy in Europe' initiative focuses on the relation between religion and democracy in European societies, covering both religion and the public domain and religion and the state. The aim is to contribute to a better-informed debate on the topic through seminars and research on related issues.

The first year of activities, which included a roundtable with specialized journalists and a series of youth debates, culminated in the publication through

Alliance Publishing Trust of a compendium in which all the material presented in an international symposium held in Jerusalem was collected. This publication is available on NEF's website at [www.nefic.org](http://www.nefic.org).

The second phase of the 'Religion and Democracy in Europe' initiative (2008–9) aims to develop a series of reports addressing specific aspects of the interaction both between the state and religion and between religion and society. The reports are a mapping exercise of existing practices and different approaches to specific issues, set in the broader context of the religion and democracy debate. They target practitioners, policy-makers and civil society actors. The reports have been developed by acknowledged experts and address the following questions:

- *Religion and Healthcare in the European Union* Dimitrina Petrova and Jarlath Clifford
- *Teaching about Religions in European School Systems* Luce Pépin
- *Conflicts over Mosques in Europe* Stefano Allievi
- *Religion and Group-focused Enmity* Andreas Zick and Beate Küpper

Through this and other activities, the 'Religion and Democracy in Europe' initiative aims to open up and contribute to the public debate on issues of strategic importance for the future of European societies.

#### *For more information*

For more on NEF and its activities, please contact [info@nefic.org](mailto:info@nefic.org).

For more on the 'Religion and Democracy in Europe' initiative, please contact [rienvangendt@vanleergroupfoundation.nl](mailto:rienvangendt@vanleergroupfoundation.nl) (chairman) or [cristina.pineda@nefic.org](mailto:cristina.pineda@nefic.org) (coordinator).

## About the author and advisory group

**Luce Pépin**, consultant, former (1992–2001) head of the European unit of Eurydice, the EU information network on education in Europe; author of the *History of European Cooperation in the Fields of Education and Training* (European Commission, 2006).

#### *Advisory group*

- **Hywel Ceri Jones**, former Director General for Education, Training and Youth, and then for Employment and Social Affairs, at the European Commission; European policy adviser to the Network of European Foundations.

- **Lynne Chisholm**, Director of the Institute for Educational Sciences, University of Innsbruck.
- **Cristina Pineda Polo**, coordinator of the 'Religion and Democracy in Europe' initiative at the Network of European Foundations.
- **Rien van Gendt**, Van Leer Group Foundation, chairman of the Network of European Foundations 'Religion and Democracy in Europe' initiative; former Executive Director of the Van Leer Group Foundation.
- **Jean-Paul Willaime**, Director of the Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes (Section des sciences religieuses), Sorbonne, Paris; Director of the European Institute of Religious Sciences (IESR); in charge in France of the REDCo project on religion and education (2006–9), financed by the European Commission, under the EU seventh Research Framework Programme.





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# Introduction

*'Cultural diversity is something to be enjoyed. It is not a problem. The problem is ignorance. It is ignorance that provides the fuel for fear, prejudice and hate.'*

Terry Davis, Secretary General of the Council of Europe  
First Forum of the Alliance of Civilizations, Madrid, 15–16 January 2008

*'... learning to live together by learning about others, their history, their traditions and their spiritual life. And from there to create a new spirit which ... spurs us on to develop projects together or to manage peacefully and intelligently the inevitable conflicts.'*

*Learning: The Treasure Within* (Unesco Commission, Jacques Delors, 1996)

## Context

Over recent years, the question of the place of religion in public life has re-emerged in Europe, in societies which, though ever more secular, are increasingly multicultural and in search of meaning. The debates over the new European constitution, concerning the cultural and religious identity of Europe, clearly demonstrated the currency of the issue and the extreme sensitivity surrounding it in an enlarged Europe. The rise of religious fundamentalism, finding expression in the extreme violence of the terrorist acts since 11 September 2001, has attacked the very foundations of western democracies and thus helped to put the question of religion at the heart of public debate.

As a mirror of society, school is directly concerned with the question of the place of religion in public life. There is by no means unanimity on the subject, as is evident from the growing controversy, not only over the presence and wearing of religious symbols in school, but also over the status to be given to teaching about religions, particularly the so-called minority religions such as Islam. Some would say that such issues are marginal when considered alongside the major challenges of equity and efficiency confronting state education systems that are faced with significant budgetary restrictions. The issues take on a whole new meaning when seen in the larger perspective of educating citizens who will be living and working in ever more multicultural societies and when religion is seen as a cultural fact and a field of knowledge that cannot be ignored. For some

years now, France has highlighted the problems posed by the growing ignorance of young people where religion is concerned. The report by Régis Debray in 2002 to the French minister of education on the teaching of 'religious facts' (*fait religieux*) clearly establishes the fact that the disappearance among many young people of any reference to religious culture prevents them from understanding an essential part of their own heritage as well as the contemporary world.<sup>1</sup> Ignorance and a lack of cultural reference cut young people off from their own roots and create problems for them in acquiring certain fields of knowledge. More importantly, it lays the foundation for intolerance and prejudice.

Teaching about religions and other convictions, together with the broader objective of intercultural and citizenship education for young people, should play a very important role in reversing this trend. However, approaches to religious education adopted in state schools in Europe still have some way to go to take up this challenge. Such approaches are very varied and remain deeply rooted in the history and circumstances of each state. Teaching can be confessional or non-confessional, obligatory or optional, with or without an alternative subject. It can also take the form of teaching about religious facts and be integrated into existing subjects. It can be provided by the different confessions, by the state or through cooperation between church and state. Circumstances are not set in stone, however, and over the last 20 years there have been interesting developments that may augur more important changes in the future. While confessional teaching may remain the most widespread approach in Europe (with occasional gestures towards religious diversity), non-confessional, neutral and pluri-religious teaching, as well as teaching about religious facts (*fait religieux*), appear to be gaining ground.

'a good general knowledge of religions and the resulting sense of tolerance are essential to the exercise of democratic citizenship. . . Knowledge of religions is an integral part of knowledge of the history of mankind and civilizations. It is altogether distinct from belief in a specific religion and its observance. Even countries where one religion predominates should teach about the origins of all religions rather than favour a single one or encourage proselytizing.'

Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, Recommendation 1720 (2005) on education and religion

These trends reflect the positions adopted at European level over the last ten years. In 1999 the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe invited

.....  
<sup>1</sup> Régis Debray, 'L'enseignement du fait religieux dans l'école laïque', report to the minister of education, February 2002.

member states to reinforce teaching about religions 'as sets of values towards which young people must develop a discerning approach, within the framework of education on ethics and democratic citizenship' and to promote 'the teaching of the comparative history of different religions, stressing their origins, the similarities in some of their values and the diversity of their customs'. In order to clarify the status of such teaching in state schools, the European Parliamentary Assembly invited member states 'to avoid any conflict between state-promoted education about religion and the religious faith of families, in order to respect the free decision of families in this very sensitive matter'.<sup>2</sup> In 2007 the European ministers of education declared that 'regardless of the religious education system that exists in a particular country, children must receive tuition that takes account of religious and philosophical diversity as part of their intercultural education'.<sup>3</sup> In the same year the world teachers' organizations, meeting at their congress in Berlin, voiced the same opinion, expressing support for teaching about religions and their history, without discrimination, as an indispensable element of general culture, intercultural dialogue and citizenship education.<sup>4</sup>

It is from these various perspectives that our analysis will take its lead. It will attempt to clarify the present position of teaching about religions in the European Union (EU) and to identify the challenges to be faced if such teaching is to stand any chance of fully contributing to the intercultural and citizenship education of young people.

## Objectives of the study

The main focus of the present study is teaching and learning *about* and *from* religion(s) and not religious instruction as such, ie teaching and learning *in* religion, even if the dividing line between the various approaches is often blurred. The first part of the analysis covers those contextual elements which help to explain this field of teaching and its main characteristics in the countries studied. The second part deals with changes that have taken place in the EU, as well as common challenges to be faced in the future.

Because the majority of students in the EU attend state schools – around 80 per cent following the 2004 enlargement (EU 25) – we shall concentrate on this area. Nevertheless, where state-aided private education (mainly confessional)

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<sup>2</sup> Recommendation 1396 (1999) of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, on religion and democracy.

<sup>3</sup> Final declaration (paragraph 23) of the 22nd session of the Permanent Conference of European ministers of education, Istanbul, 4–5 May 2007.

<sup>4</sup> Resolution on the place of religion in schools, adopted by the Fifth World Congress of the Education International, Berlin, 22–6 July 2007.

is highly developed, as it is in the Netherlands, for example, we shall take account of this. We shall mainly discuss the situation in compulsory education, because this level is of prime importance in the education of young people. The countries covered are as follows: the Czech Republic, England, France, Romania, Spain, Sweden and the Netherlands. They have been chosen because they represent the diversity of situations that prevail in the EU: confessional or non-confessional education; teaching religious facts (*fait religieux*); interdisciplinary or separate subject; centralized or decentralized systems. A general map showing the overall situation in the European Union (see section 1.2.1 below) places the seven countries in the study in their wider European context. The study will also refer to countries in the EU other than the seven chosen when they display characteristics or developments of interest to this analysis.

This analysis does not pretend to offer in-depth research into the content of teaching about religions in Europe. Work by experts on this subject already exists and is referred to in the text.<sup>5</sup> It constitutes, rather, an overview of the current situation, and the main objectives are to achieve a better understanding of the organization, rationale and major trends characterizing teaching about religions in Europe; and, in the light of recent debates and developments, to identify the challenges and key questions confronting European education systems. The analysis has been prepared principally on the basis of the existing literature. Contacts with some national units of the Eurydice network have allowed the most recent information on education systems to be exploited, in particular in drafting the brief national profiles on the seven countries analysed (appendix C).<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> In particular we shall refer to the work of REDCo ('**R**eligion in **E**ducation. A contribution to **D**ialogue or a factor of **C**onflict in transforming societies of European countries'), an EU project bringing together researchers working on religious education in Europe, financed under the seventh Research Framework Programme. [www.redco.uni-hamburg.de](http://www.redco.uni-hamburg.de).

<sup>6</sup> Eurydice is the information network on education in Europe. Set up by the European Commission and the EU member states in 1980, it is one of the most trustworthy information sources on European education systems.

# 1 Europe and diversity

## 1.1 The context of teaching about religions

To understand how teaching about religions has been established in each of the countries studied, such teaching must first be seen in the wider context of the separation of church and state, the secularization of society, the importance given to religious and educational freedom, and the extent of cultural diversity in the country concerned.

### 1.1.1 Separation of church and state and secularization

School is at the heart of the nation-state, not only as the means by which citizens are educated but also as a mirror of social and cultural tensions that afflict society. In some countries, the settlement of the school issue has influenced those very principles on which the identity of the state has been founded, such as secularism (*laïcité*) in France<sup>7</sup> and the ‘pillarization’ of society in the Netherlands.<sup>8</sup> Changes in the relations between school and religion are intrinsically linked to changes in the relations between state and religion. Separation of church and state is a dimension that constitutes part of the identity of European nations. Applied more or less strictly, according to the country, this dimension is never absolute. Even

<sup>7</sup> Even before the 1905 law that separated church and state, the process of secularization (*laïcisation*) of French society was launched in education with the 1882 Jules Ferry law: ‘The victory and solid establishment of the Republic stemmed naturally from the school.’ Dominique Borne, Dossier no. 36 (July 2004), *Revue Internationale de l’Éducation*, CIEP, Sèvres.

<sup>8</sup> The school dispute (*Schoolstrijd*), which resulted in the 1917 Pacification Act and equal funding of state and private (Catholic and Protestant) education, gave an extra impetus to the process of societal pillarization, that is the confessional segregation of public life in the Netherlands (REDCo 2007, p 204).

in countries where this separation is widely supported, such as in France, important nuances exist. In the same way, where there is a recognized church of the state, such as in England, it does not necessarily mean that the church controls religious education in school.

Situations are very diverse. In France, for instance, following the 1905 law, the separation of church and state is almost complete. The very principles that underpin the French Republic, particularly *laïcité*, have been established by excluding the church and religion from public places and thus from schools. For a long time, religion had no currency in state schools, which had to be secular and neutral. Only since the 1990s, and in particular since 2002, has the school curriculum been opened up, not to religion as such, but to knowledge of 'religious facts'. France tolerates, nevertheless, exceptions where secularism and the neutrality of the state are concerned. The three *départements* of Alsace-Moselle, which were part of the German Empire when the 1905 law was adopted, continue to apply the former religious laws more than a century later. Three religions are recognized there (Catholic, Protestant and Jewish), with the state paying the ministers of religion and funding denominational teaching of the three religions that are taught in state schools. Besides this, alongside the state school, a mainly confessional private education system exists, which is subsidized by the state and which takes a little more than 20 per cent of students. In contrast, the Church of England, or Anglican Church, is the established church in England.<sup>9</sup> The queen is the 'head of the church and defender of the faith'. In this country, the education system is built on this close collaboration between church and state, and the teaching of religion took on an obligatory character very early on in all state-maintained schools. Teaching today, however, is non-confessional and multi-faith.

Besides these two cases, there are countries where, in spite of the separation of church and state, the state maintains cooperation of more or less importance with the church, and this is not considered paradoxical. In spite of there being no established church in Spain according to the constitution, the public authorities have a duty to maintain working relations with the Catholic Church and other confessions according to article 16 of the 1978 constitution. The Catholic Church is responsible for Catholic teaching in state schools, following the 1979 agreement with the Vatican, and the other recognized religions (Protestant, Jewish and Muslim) can also be taught following agreements reached in 1992. In Sweden, the separation of the Lutheran Church and the state is very recent (2000). In this country religious education is allowed in the school curriculum, but it must be strictly non-confessional and objective.

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<sup>9</sup> The three other EU countries where there are state churches are Finland (the Lutheran Evangelical Church and the Orthodox Church), Denmark (the Lutheran Evangelical Church), and Greece (the Greek Orthodox Church).

The Netherlands has the most distinctive situation of all the countries in this study. As in France, the separation of church and state goes back a long way, to the 1848 constitution. The country is one of the most secularized in Europe, but religion continues to play an important role. The Dutch multicultural model, which for a long time was known as 'pillarization', has its origins in the way in which Dutch society (just as in Belgium) was divided into 'pillars', representing the different groups in society according to their religious or philosophical affiliations. The Catholic and Protestant pillars remain very much part of an education system where there is total freedom of education (including freedom to set up schools), and where private schools, mainly confessional, and public schools are funded on an equal footing.<sup>10</sup> The Netherlands is one of the few EU countries (along with Belgium) where private education, assisted by state grants, is bigger than state education. Although this organization, compartmentalized into 'pillars', has lost its relevance and vitality in a society which has today become strongly secular, it nevertheless remains a real part of the education system.

With its recent expansion into central and eastern Europe, the European Union has grown to include countries where religion has suffered falling numbers and severe restrictions during the long period of Soviet domination. The return to democracy has revealed very different situations. Although church and state are officially separated in the Czech Republic and Romania, links with the majority religion remain strong in Romania, where the Orthodox religion enjoys a high profile in society and dominates religious education in school; the situation is very different in the Czech Republic, where religion has much less importance in society and education. The last census of 2001 revealed that more than half the Czech population described themselves as having no religion.

A common feature of many European countries is indeed the growing secularization of society. Before EU expansion into central and eastern Europe, 'the three European countries with the most people who said they had no religion were the Netherlands (54 per cent), France (43 per cent) and Belgium (37 per cent). The three countries with the least number of people describing themselves in this way were Greece (3 per cent), Ireland (10 per cent) and Denmark (11 per cent) . . . A growing percentage of the younger generation described themselves as not having a religion, particularly in the Netherlands (70 per cent) and in France (53 per cent).'<sup>11</sup> Religious practice continues to slow down, signalling disaffection with traditional religious institutions. The Religion Monitor (2008) reveals that

<sup>10</sup> See note 8 above.

<sup>11</sup> Jean-Paul Willaime, directeur d'études, groupe de sociologie des religions et de la laïcité, Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes, 'Teaching about religious facts: European perspectives'; report of the Versailles seminar, June 2003.



one in every four or five Europeans is not religious at all.<sup>12</sup>The Council of Europe confirms this trend: 'Fewer than one European in five attends a religious service at least once a week, whereas twenty years ago the figure was more than twice that.'<sup>13</sup>This trend cannot, however, be correlated with a loss of religiosity or lack of interest in questions concerning spiritual values. On the contrary, these aspects are on the increase, particularly among young people, in a world that is seen to be excessively materialistic and where traditional ideologies no longer have such an impact.

### 1.1.2 Religious freedom and freedom of education

Religious freedom and freedom of education are two principles which influence the place of teaching about religions in the education systems of EU member states. They represent two fundamental principles of the constitutions and legal frameworks of most EU member states.<sup>14</sup>These principles are an integral part of the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights,<sup>15</sup> which states that 'every one has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion' (article 9) and that '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.'<sup>16</sup> In Romania, the constitution expressly guarantees religious education in state schools (article 32 (7)). This is also the case in Germany.<sup>17</sup>

The right of parents to give their children an education which conforms to their convictions also forms an integral part of some national constitutions and raises the question of the priority given to the convictions and interests of parents over those of their children. The application of this right can lead to particular difficulties. This is the case in Spain (article 27.3 of the constitution), where parents have used it, as well as the right to conscientious objection, to refuse permission for their child to attend the new, obligatory course on citizenship put in place by

<sup>12</sup> 'Europe: overview of religious attitudes and practices', Religion Monitor, Bertelsmann Foundation, 2008 ([www.religionsmonitor.com](http://www.religionsmonitor.com)).

<sup>13</sup> Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe. Recommendation 1804 (2007) 'State, Religion, Secularity and Human Rights'.

<sup>14</sup> In the absence of a written constitution in the United Kingdom, reference is made to the Human Rights Act of 1998, which includes the fundamental rights and freedoms expressed in the European Convention on Human Rights.

<sup>15</sup> Convention of the Council of Europe, which came into effect on 3 September 1953. By 16 June 2009 there had been 47 ratifications.

<sup>16</sup> Article 2 of the additional protocol to the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, amended by protocol 11; Paris, 20 March 1952.

<sup>17</sup> Article 7.3 of the Basic Law of 23 May 1949: 'Religious instruction forms part of the ordinary curriculum in state and municipal schools.' It is the only subject specifically cited in the constitution.

the socialist government under the 2006 Law on Education (LOE), alleging that it contravened their convictions and values.<sup>18</sup> From the outset, the new subject had met with the opposition of the Conservative party and a greater part of the Catholic Church, which considered it a means to weaken the teaching of religion. It should be noted that the 2006 LOE had also revoked the obligatory character of the teaching of the Catholic religion determined by the former Conservative government. On 28 January 2009 the Spanish Supreme Court finally decided the issue by giving its judgement that the subject did not contravene parents' basic constitutional rights to give their children religious and moral education in accordance with their own convictions. The question, however, is not closed. Lobbies opposed to this judgement announced that they would appeal to the Constitutional Court and the Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg.

The application of these two principles concerning religious and educational freedom has led in several countries to the setting up of a sector of private education, principally of a confessional character, alongside the public system.<sup>19</sup> This sector is mainly grant-aided by public authorities under specific contractual arrangements, reflecting the flexible nature of the principle of separation of church and state where education is concerned. This situation sometimes blurs the dividing line between state and private education.<sup>20</sup> The proportion of this grant-aided private sector in education is very variable (see section 1.2.1.4 below). State schools are, however, in the majority in almost all EU member states.

### 1.1.3 Cultural and ethnic diversity

Whether it is due to the reuniting of families following the waves of immigration of workers in the 1960s and 1970s, to the effects of EU enlargement or to globalization, the EU has for several decades experienced growing immigration. This is not likely to slow down, both for demographic reasons and because of continuing labour needs in Europe. Such cultural and ethnic diversity is to be found in state schools whose mission is to take in all children, regardless of race, culture and religion.

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<sup>18</sup> In March 2008 the High Court of Justice of Andalusia recognized a parents' right to exempt their children from this course. On the other hand, following three appeals, the court in Asturias took the opposite position.

<sup>19</sup> There are also state-aided private schools promoting particular philosophical and pedagogical principles, as in the Netherlands and Sweden (eg Steiner, Freinet, Montessori, Dalton and Jena schools). In the Netherlands, there are also grant-aided private schools which support neutral education, and combinations of private and public schools working together.

<sup>20</sup> In the United Kingdom, as in Ireland, most grant-aided schools are considered to be part of the state sector (so-called maintained schools in England and Wales).

Using data from the PISA (OECD) survey,<sup>21</sup> the Green Paper published by the European Commission in 2008 on the challenges of immigration facing European education systems states that 'at least 10 per cent of the school population at age 15 within the EU 15 countries was either born abroad or has both parents born in another country; the figure approaches 15 per cent at the fourth grade of primary school'.<sup>22</sup> In certain countries, such as Ireland, Italy and Spain, the proportion of students born in another country had increased three- or fourfold since 2000. In the UK, the number of students joining schools shortly after arriving from abroad has increased by 50 per cent in two years, augmenting an already high number of students from a migrant background. The report also underlines the fact that the migration flows tend to result in a concentration of migrant students in urban areas and in particular cities, such as Rotterdam, Birmingham and London, where roughly half the school population has an immigrant background. In Madrid, the share of migrant students has increased tenfold since 1991. The multicultural school is thus well and truly a reality increasingly visible in the majority of EU countries. Added to the challenge of cultural diversity facing schools is the language issue. 'In all countries, without exception, a fairly significant proportion of pupils at home use a non-indigenous language' (Eurydice 2008).

The school is a multicultural melting pot which constitutes a unique laboratory for 'learning to live together', one of the four pillars of lifelong learning defined by the Delors Commission in 1996.<sup>23</sup> This melting pot also presents a major challenge to education systems, already under pressure from the increased demand for efficiency and quality. For several years now, most education policy-makers in Europe have sought to address this challenge by developing civic and intercultural education policies, but teaching about religions too often remains disconnected from such developments.

## 1.2 The place of teaching about religions in education systems and the different approaches adopted

Deeply rooted in the history and the circumstances of each state, teaching about religions has multiple facets. It can be confessional or non-confessional, obligatory or optional, with or without alternative subjects. It can be teaching of religious

<sup>21</sup> PISA Survey 2006, 'Science competencies for tomorrow's world', OECD 2007. Coordinated by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment) is an international survey based on tests carried out every three years to measure the school performance of students aged 15 years.

<sup>22</sup> Green paper on 'Migration and Mobility: challenges and opportunities for European education systems', COM (2008) 423 final, Brussels, 3 July 2008.

<sup>23</sup> *Learning: The Treasure Within*, report to UNESCO of the International Commission on Education for the 21st Century, chaired by Jacques Delors. Editions O. Jacob, 1996.

facts integrated into existing subjects. It can be the responsibility of different confessions or of the state, or managed through cooperation between church and state. It has, to a varying degree, become more open to the religious diversity of the country concerned. These are the variants that we shall be examining in order to understand more clearly the different approaches that have been adopted and the contexts in which the debates, which have sprung up almost everywhere in recent years, are taking place.

### 1.2.1 Character and status

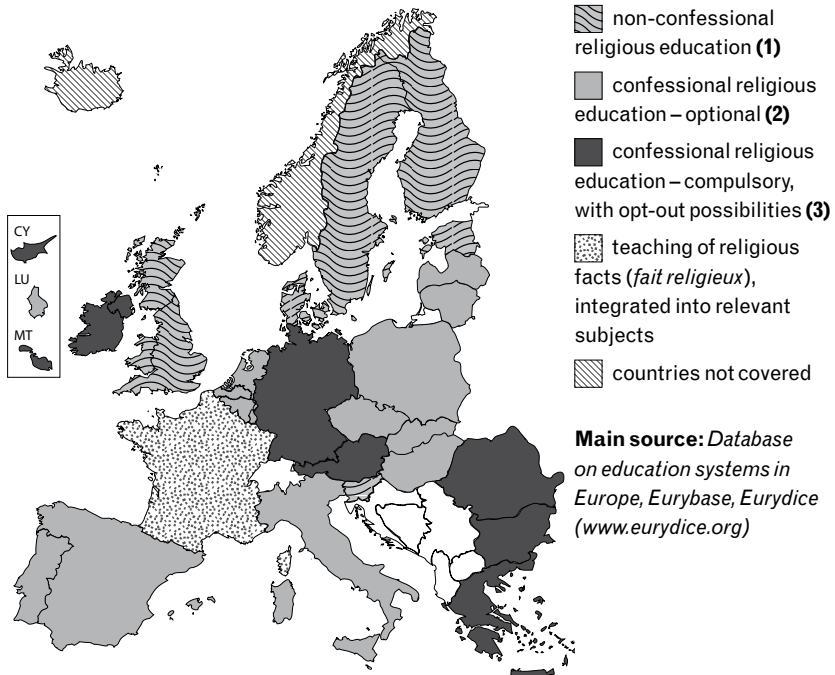
Four types of teaching about religions have been identified in the seven countries covered in this study:

- non-confessional religious education (England, Sweden);
- confessional religious education – optional (Spain, Czech Republic, Netherlands);
- confessional religious education – compulsory, with opt-out possibilities (Romania);
- teaching of religious facts (*fait religieux*), integrated into relevant subjects (France).

If the study were extended to other EU countries, the above typology would remain valid. The map on page 20 provides an overview of the 27 member states. Some general conclusions can be drawn: in the majority of European countries (with the exception of France), there are specific subjects which deal with religion; where religious education is confessional, which is the case with the majority, it is in most cases optional (where it is compulsory, an opt-out is possible). It is interesting to note that non-confessional religious education tends to be found in northern Protestant countries.

This categorization should be treated with caution because of the wide variety of situations, contexts and approaches found in different countries and, sometimes, within a single state. The Netherlands is an example of this complexity. In this country, the most important sector (covering more than 75 per cent of students), funded by the state, is private and for the most part confessional (Catholic or Protestant), even if entry to many of the schools in this sector is today open to a wide public. There is no confessional teaching in public schools, but teaching about religious and philosophical movements is now part of the curriculum. Public schools can, however, set up courses on the Christian (or another) religion, if requested by families; in which case the teachers are trained and paid by the churches. The classification of a country in a particular category depends also on the chosen criteria. Religious education can be considered non-confessional

## Teaching about religions in the European Union (compulsory education), 2009



### *Brief notes on EU member states, other than those covered by this study*

- Denmark:** 'study of Christianity' a compulsory non-confessional subject.

**Estonia:** optional non-confessional teaching; schools to provide appropriate teaching if a minimum of 15 students are registered. **Finland:** new programmes adopted in 2004; organization by confession but non-confessional content; recognized denominations can set up a religious course if a minimum of three students registered. **Slovenia:** optional subject on 'religions and ethics'.

**United Kingdom (Scotland):** compulsory non-confessional teaching – 'moral and religious education'; possibility to opt out. **United Kingdom (Wales):** multi-faith teaching; in 2008 new skill-based framework for religious education for 3–19-year-olds.
- Belgium:** compulsory choice in state schools between non-confessional moral education and religious education (Catholic, Islamic, Jewish, Orthodox or Protestant). **Hungary:** extra-curricular and optional teaching; responsibility lies with the religious denominations concerned; the school makes space available and the state gives a subsidy to pay teachers. **Italy:** 1984 Concordat; Catholic religious education must be offered by schools but it is optional for students;

church recruits teachers (paid by the state), chooses the textbooks and defines the curricula; no alternative subject, decisions left to individual school. **Latvia:** since 2004, choice between introduction to Christianity and ethics; schools must provide teaching if minimum of ten students register. **Lithuania:** moral education, with a choice between religious education (in one of the recognized traditional denominations) and ethics. **Luxembourg:** compulsory teaching with choice between religious and moral instruction, and moral and social education. **Poland:** Concordat (1998); choice between religious education and ethics; minimum of seven students required to set up a course. **Portugal:** 1940 Concordat revised in 2004; optional moral and religious education (Catholic); teachers appointed by bishops and paid by state. **Slovakia:** 2004 Concordat; choice between religious lessons and ethics.

- 3 Austria:** religious education financed by the state, under the responsibility of the different churches and recognized confessions; inter-confessional cooperation. **Bulgaria:** part of the elective compulsory subjects and the group of subjects 'social sciences, civic education and religion'; mainly Orthodox teaching. **Cyprus:** one of the compulsory subjects (mainly Orthodox teaching); pupils of other faiths can be exempted. **Germany:** according to the Basic Law, religious education is part of the ordinary subjects of a state school; cooperation between the state and religious denominations; teaching mainly Catholic or Protestant; there is inter-confessional cooperation; often ethics or another subject is an alternative; situation varies according to the region (*Land*); there are also non-confessional approaches, such as in Berlin, Bremen and Hamburg. **Greece:** teaching of the majority Orthodox religion, part of the compulsory curriculum; optional since 2008 for all students; until then parents wishing to have their children exempted had to declare their religion in their written request to the school. **Malta:** teaching of the Catholic religion is a compulsory subject in the curriculum; optional for students. **Northern Ireland:** majority of Protestant children go to state schools and Catholics go to grant-aided Catholic schools; only 5 per cent of children go to integrated schools which accept both Protestant and Catholic children; religious education is compulsory in all grant-aided schools; syllabus is common to all (mostly Christian in nature) and has been agreed by the three largest Protestant churches and the Catholic church; revised in 2006, now includes other world religions. **Republic of Ireland:** 94 per cent of primary schools are Catholic; growing number of schools (currently 15) are now multi-confessional, set up by parents.

from the point of view of its content, even though it is confessional from the point of view of its organization by confession (Finland is a case in point). It is also not always easy to draw a clear line between the 'optional confessional education' category and the one stipulating 'compulsory confessional education, with opt-out possibility'.

Similar schematic presentations can be found in other recent works on the subject, eg Willaime and Mathieu (2005) or Lähnemann and Schreiner (2008). The reader will note differences between the various presentations which testify to the difficulty in representing in a simplified way a complex reality and one which is open to different interpretations and subject to change. It is for this reason that it is very important for the reader consulting such maps to pay particular attention to the contextual explanations relating to each country.

#### *1.2.1.1 Confessional religious education*

The position of confessional religious education in the school programme varies greatly from one country to another. Although well established in Spain and Romania, it has a marginal position in the Czech Republic, where it is non-compulsory and situated outside the compulsory or the optional subjects.<sup>24</sup> Confessional religious education is generally established by the denominations concerned, which are responsible for curricular content and teaching materials.<sup>25</sup> The same applies to the recruitment and training of teachers, who are, moreover, in most cases paid by the state.<sup>26</sup> Teachers are required to obtain from the relevant religious communities a reference in support of their competence to teach, a condition that is found in most other EU countries with confessional religious education.<sup>27</sup> The state supports confessional teaching of the religions it recognizes,<sup>28</sup> by making premises and school time available.

Confessional religious education takes many different forms. In most countries, it is optional. In Spain, it is compulsory for schools but optional for students, whose parents are required to make their choice known when they register their children (the situation in Italy is similar). In Romania, it is considered

<sup>24</sup> Silvio Ferrari (in Willaime and Mathieu 2005) underlines that this position on religious education (shared also with Hungary) would bring the Czech Republic close to the situation in France.

<sup>25</sup> In other EU countries (eg Germany, Hungary, Italy, Latvia and Lithuania), there is cooperation between the state and the religious communities. Source: Silvio Ferrari in Willaime and Mathieu 2005.

<sup>26</sup> There are no regulations in the Netherlands governing salaries paid to teachers of religion. This question is dealt with by each individual school. There are currently debates on the subject, some being of the opinion that if the state makes certain demands on these teachers, it should also pay their salaries.

<sup>27</sup> Germany, Austria, Belgium, Italy, Greece, Hungary, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia, Luxembourg, Malta, Latvia, Lithuania. Source: Silvio Ferrari in Willaime and Mathieu 2005.

<sup>28</sup> For instance Spain: Catholicism, Protestantism, Judaism and Islam; 30 churches and religious societies are registered in the Czech Republic, 18 in Romania.

compulsory as it is part of the core curriculum, but students can opt out on the written request of parents; there is, however, no alternative subject. Compulsory confessional religious education can focus on a dominant religion (eg in Romania and Greece) or it can be more open to religious diversity (eg in certain German *Länder* and in Austria). In some cases, there is an alternative subject or alternative activities (eg alternative study activities in Spain and lessons on ethics in some German *Länder*, Poland and Slovakia). In Belgium, there is a choice between non-confessional/secular 'moral education' and religious education (Catholic, Islamic, Jewish, Orthodox or Protestant).

#### *1.2.1.2 Non-confessional religious education*

As far as non-confessional religious education is concerned, it is incumbent on the state which finances it to decide its organization and content, usually in cooperation with the religions concerned. This form of teaching tends to be found in northern Protestant countries and is generally compulsory. Given the diversity of situations, however, the notion of a non-confessional approach would need to be qualified. In the case of Sweden, for example, it stems from the ideals of neutrality and objectivity to which state education aspires, and these go hand in hand with the neutrality required by the state in matters of religion. In England, on the other hand, somewhat exceptionally, where the general objectives of education include students' spiritual development (as expressed in the 1988 Education Reform Act), the locally agreed official religious education syllabus is the instrument specifically used to achieve this objective. There is, therefore, a close link between education and religion, even if religious education is non-confessional in maintained schools.<sup>29</sup> In England, the participation of different religious communities in the drafting of the official, locally agreed religious education syllabuses bears witness to this close link and is a means by which these syllabuses are opened up to religious pluralism. It is known as multi-faith education.

It must be stressed, however, that non-confessional teaching, even if it is open to religious diversity, continues to focus on the dominant religious culture of the country concerned. Such is the case, for example, in England, where religious education syllabuses (and daily acts of collective worship) must reflect the fact that the religious traditions of the country are predominantly Christian.

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<sup>29</sup> In England the notion of a state school embraces all state-funded schools (maintained schools), both those that are managed by the state (community schools) or those (mainly confessional) ones that are managed by the private sector (voluntary-aided or voluntary-controlled schools and foundation schools).



### 1.2.1.3 *The teaching of religious facts (fait religieux), integrated into relevant subjects*

France is an interesting case, although it is often excluded from analyses of religious education because of its neutral position. In the name of the principle of secularism (*laïcité*) and the neutrality of the state, enshrined in the 1905 law on the separation of church and state, references to religion have long been banned from the French public education system (with the exception of the *départements* of Alsace-Moselle – see 1.1.1 above). Since the end of the 1980s and in particular since 2002, however, following Régis Debray's report to the French minister of education (Debray 2002), *laïcité* in France has opened up to include knowledge of religions. The report defends the transition from an approach to secularism that ignores religion (*laïcité d'incompétence*) to one that promotes knowledge about it (*laïcité d'intelligence*), with the principal objective of improving students' knowledge of and access to an essential part of their own heritage. The growing lack of a religious culture (*inculture religieuse*) among young people, underlined in the Debray Report, has been attributed to two crises which are certainly not unique to France: 'the crisis in the humanities and the transmission of culture in general, and the crisis in the structures responsible for passing on religion (decline in religious practice and the crisis in family commitment to passing on religion).'<sup>30</sup>

The approach adopted is to teach religious facts (*fait religieux*), introduced not in isolation but in the framework of the most relevant subjects in the school curriculum (history, geography, literature, languages, the arts, etc). This approach places religion in the field of objective knowledge and hence is compatible with the demand for neutrality in state education. It could be of interest to countries where confessional religious education is very weak, reflecting the position of religion in society, and which are seeking to strengthen religious knowledge in school curricula. It is the case, for example, in the Czech Republic (see note 24 above). The new Czech framework programme for basic education, adopted in 2007, includes knowledge of religions – mainly Christianity but also Islam – particularly in the history and geography syllabuses, as well as in cross-curricular subjects such as intercultural education.

### 1.2.1.4 *The grant-aided private education sector*

The existence of a state-aided but private (mainly confessional) education system is the consequence of an implementation, more or less pronounced, of the principle of freedom of education. It is quite small in the Czech Republic, Romania and

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<sup>30</sup> Mireille Estivalezes, historian and sociologist in religious studies at the Ecole Pratique de Hautes Etudes (Paris), in 'L'enseignement du fait religieux à l'école: les paradoxes de la situation française', 6 August 2008 ([www.formiris.org](http://www.formiris.org)).

Sweden (around 5 per cent), but it represents the majority in the Netherlands,<sup>31</sup> embracing three-quarters (76.3 per cent) of all students.<sup>32</sup> This expansion of the private sector has its origins in the Dutch constitution, which, almost uniquely in Europe, has established not only freedom of education but also equal funding for both private and state education sectors. The private sector accounts for more than a third of all students in the United Kingdom (37.2 per cent) and more than a quarter in Spain (26.4 per cent), a country whose constitution demands that public authorities should guarantee parents' rights to give their children religious and moral education in accordance with their own convictions (article 27.3). In France roughly one child in five is involved.

The grant-aided private sector is predominantly confessional in most of the countries concerned. Funded by the state, it often has to conform to particular requirements, for example concerning implementation of the official curriculum and teacher qualifications. However, in some cases the religious character of the schools in this sector has become weaker over time and finds expression not so much in the implementation of the official school curriculum as in the specific character of the school. In both France and the Netherlands, under the pressure of multiculturalism and the secularization of society, many confessional schools have opened their doors to an increasingly diversified public. Parental choice of a confessional private school seems to be less and less determined by its religious character and more and more by its reputation.

Most grant-aided private schools in England belong to the maintained sector. The majority are funded by local authorities and must follow the official, locally agreed syllabus for religious education. Most of these schools, whether they are voluntary-aided, voluntary-controlled or foundations, have a religious character, but only the voluntary-aided can provide confessional religious teaching.

### 1.2.2 Place in the curriculum

Whether religious education is confessional or non-confessional, religion is always taught as a separate subject; it may or may not be included in the core curriculum, while its status may vary and its objectives be more or less well defined. The hours spent on the subject vary from one country to another, making comparisons difficult.

In Romania, the subject, predominantly Orthodox, is an integral part of the compulsory curriculum. Students are able to opt out, but there is no alternative subject. It is integrated into the field of *om și societate* (man and society)

<sup>31</sup> It should be noted that the only other EU country, besides the Netherlands, where the state-aided, confessional private education sector is more important than the public sector, is Belgium (56.8 per cent of students).

<sup>32</sup> *Key data on education in Europe 2005*, European Commission (Eurydice/Eurostat).

alongside history, geography and civic education. It is taught for one hour a week in primary and secondary schools (6 to 18 years). The curriculum is devised by each religious denomination and given final approval by the ministry of education. Students can opt out with the written agreement of their parents or legal guardians. Such cases are rare, however, with 90 per cent of all students participating in Orthodox religious teaching.<sup>33</sup> In the Czech Republic, on the other hand, participation in confessional religious education is very low. There are no official statistics, but one source indicates that 5.9 per cent of primary-school students attend religious education lessons, while only 0.79 per cent do so at secondary level (ICCS 2007).

In Sweden non-confessional religious education is one of a group of subjects in the core curriculum comprising history, geography, religion and civic education. Over the nine years of compulsory education 885 hours are allocated to this group of subjects. The municipalities and the schools decide on the allocation of time to each subject or group of subjects throughout the nine years. The aims of teaching about religions are to broaden the experience of students, to encourage them to think more deeply about existential matters from a religious or ethical point of view, and to strengthen their aptitude for critical analysis as responsible citizens. At primary level it focuses on questions concerning life, ethics, beliefs and tradition. At upper-secondary level, these aspects are developed and taken further. Teaching about religions focuses on interaction between knowledge and existential questions (ICCS 2007, p 196).

In Spain, the teaching of religion (Catholic) is optional for students, although schools are obliged to make provision for it; it is included in those fields of knowledge that are integrated into the core curriculum. An allocation of 210 hours is given to each of the three cycles of primary education (in the field of 'religion/study activities'), while 175 hours are allocated to the four years of compulsory secondary education. At this education level, students opting for religious education have a choice between Catholic religious education (or other confessions that have signed agreements with the state) and a course on the history and culture of religions. Students who do not choose religious education must be offered alternative activities. Specific syllabuses for teaching the Catholic religion, as well as syllabuses for the Protestant, Jewish and Muslim religions, covered under a cooperation agreement signed in 1992, are officially approved. The most recent agreement on the Catholic religion was authorized in June 2007. According to ministry of education statistics for 2005/6,<sup>34</sup> out of all primary schools, both state

<sup>33</sup> 'Society today – religion in school', Radio Romania International, 4 June 2008.

<sup>34</sup> Estadística de la Enseñanza en España niveles no universitarios, 'Distribución del alumnado según religión/actividad que cursa, por enseñanza y titularidad del centro', Oficina de Estadística del MEC.

and private, 78.83 per cent of students chose Catholic religious education (59.48 per cent in compulsory secondary education); 20.52 per cent took 'study activities' in place of religious education (40.39 per cent in compulsory secondary education). As in many other countries, the rate of participation and the importance given to the subject diminish the further up the school one goes.

In the Netherlands, the 1985 law on primary education introduced into the curriculum of both public and private schools a new field of knowledge covering religious and philosophical movements.<sup>35</sup> The subject could be taught separately or included in other subjects. It constituted an important step in opening up the Dutch school system to religious diversity in the world. 'In practice, this means that in Christian schools, where religion used only to be taught from a normative (Christian) point of view, it is now expected to be taught also from an objective point of view. In public schools, however, where religious education was never previously taught, religion is a new subject . . . Its position, however, still remains very vague. In 1998, 13 years after its introduction, it was found that not all schools were teaching world religions; and that where they were taught, there was no similarity in contents, didactics and the time spent on it.'<sup>36</sup> Public primary schools may also facilitate the setting up of optional courses on specific religions at the request of parents. They provide the necessary teaching space and make available the time needed. Private (mainly confessional) schools, attended by the great majority of children (more than 75 per cent), are completely free to recruit their own teachers and to make decisions about subjects, such as religion, which are outside the core curriculum.

In England there have been important developments over the last 20 years in the position of non-confessional and multi-faith religious education in the school system. This compulsory subject is not included in the National Curriculum, as defined in the 1988 Education Reform Act, but enjoys a specific and well-defined status. The law requires that every school defines, within the framework of a representative local committee (SACRE),<sup>37</sup> a locally agreed religious education syllabus, which must be revised every five years. The syllabus should reflect the country's Christian traditions but also take account of the country's other religions, as well as philosophies such as humanism. Religious education aims to strengthen students' knowledge (learning *about* religions), to develop their critical thinking, and to link what they learn with their own experience

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<sup>35</sup> This field ('Social structures, including political studies, and religious and ideological movements') is one of the objectives to be met within the framework of the six fields of knowledge defined under the 1985 law (Eurybase 2007–8).

<sup>36</sup> REDCo 2007, pp 213–14.

<sup>37</sup> Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education. Teachers, churches (Anglican and other denominations), local authorities and other groups are represented on these local committees.

(learning *from* religions). National guidelines and model syllabuses are available to help the local committees elaborate their syllabuses. In 2004 an important milestone was passed with the adoption of a non-statutory National Framework for religious education, which aims to clarify the requirements in this area of education and to regulate the diversity of practice. The Framework also includes non-religious points of view, such as humanism. As with other subjects, the time allocated to religious education is not fixed by law, which sets a legal minimum of lesson time for all subjects. Each school makes its own decision on the allocation of teaching hours.

In France, for some 20 years, and particularly in recent years following the Debray Report of 2002, practice has moved from a secular approach in schools, which excluded religion from the curriculum, to an approach which now includes teaching religious facts (*fait religieux*)<sup>38</sup> in their empirical and objective aspects (see section 1.2.1.3 above). Teaching religious facts does not constitute a separate subject but is included in the most appropriate existing school disciplines, such as history, geography, literature, civic education, art and music. The common foundation (*Socle commun*) of knowledge and skills, agreed in 2006 on the basis of the new 2005 law relating to schools, is at the heart of these changes. Among the seven skills to be acquired by students before the end of their compulsory schooling, humanist culture and social and citizenship skills are most closely involved with the teaching of religious facts. The new programmes for primary and lower-secondary education were adopted in 2008 and define in detail the aspects that the teaching of religious facts should deal with at each stage of schooling. It naturally includes teaching about different religions.

### 1.2.3 Teachers

The status of religious education teachers is very varied. They are normally paid by the state, whether the teaching is non-confessional, as in the case of England and Sweden; or confessional, as in the case of Spain, where it is based on concordats with the Holy See, and Romania, where it is based on constitutional rights.<sup>39</sup> Their status can differ from that of other teachers. Such is the case in Spain, where they are not civil servants. However, since 2007, in order to remove a measure of insecurity about their position, they now benefit from permanent contracts and need to fulfil the same training requirements as other teachers.<sup>40</sup> This last point also applies in Sweden, England and Romania.

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<sup>38</sup> This formulation, 'religious facts', is based on a consensual approach and aspires to a rational treatment of religions as facts of civilization.

<sup>39</sup> Article 32.7 of the constitution stipulates that religious education in state schools is organized and guaranteed under the law.

<sup>40</sup> Royal Decree 696/2007 (1 June), regulating the status of teachers of religion.

In all the countries in this study – and probably in other EU countries as well – the level and quality of teacher-training for those responsible for religious education (or religious facts in France) are a cause for concern. When religious education is confessional and provided by the different religious denominations, it would appear to be easier to find ‘specialists’, even though there are also, in some cases, difficulties in recruiting teachers at the required level (as in Romania<sup>41</sup> and the Czech Republic<sup>42</sup>) or for certain denominations (such as Islam in Spain and the Netherlands).

However, the more the teaching approach is non-confessional and open to religious diversity and exchanges of ideas among students, the more demands it imposes at the level of teachers’ professional ethics (‘deontology’), knowledge and teaching skills required. In England, for example, the 2007 report on religious education by Ofsted (the body responsible for overseeing the education system), ‘Making sense of religion’, underlines the fact that the initial training of primary teachers remains inadequate and that later professional development does not compensate for this. At secondary-education level, the lack of specialist teachers persists. In France, the European Institute of Religious Sciences (IESR), set up in 2002, is making an essential contribution to the considerable training needs of secular teachers who are now being asked to introduce religion into their courses. But it cannot on its own cover all existing needs. A module of ten hours of training per year on the philosophy of secularism (*laïcité*) and on the teaching of religious facts was introduced in the University Institutes for the Training of Primary Teachers (IUFM) of some *académies* (regional education authorities), but such initiatives remain insufficient. In the Netherlands, the new scheme, ‘Religious and philosophical movements’, introduced into the curriculum in 1985, represents a big step forward, but its implementation has turned out to be very patchy. In the Dutch case, other key issues are the training of teachers, to ensure that they are equipped to teach the subject in an objective manner and on a cognitive basis; and the lack of suitable teaching materials (REDCo 2007, p 213).

#### 1.2.4 Taking account of religious diversity

The account taken of existing religious diversity in a given country is very variable and depends to a great extent on the capacity of religious education to become more open. This remains a considerable challenge in all countries, whatever teaching approach is adopted (confessional, non-confessional or teaching about

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<sup>41</sup> Teachers are trained in university religious education departments. Very few existing teachers are tenured, and the majority are replacement teachers.

<sup>42</sup> The situation seems to be similar to that in Romania; a minority of religious education teachers in schools appear to have a university diploma in theology, the officially required qualification (ICCS 2007, p 41).

religious facts). The predominant, traditional religions naturally tend to occupy the most important position and continue to enjoy greater privileges, particularly financial ones, than recognized minority religions. Moreover, certain statutory conditions that must be met before denominational teaching can start in a state school – for instance, a stipulated minimum number of students<sup>43</sup> or competence in the national language – may create problems for minority religions trying to assert their right to have their religion taught in schools. Nevertheless, there are some positive developments. For instance, in Italy some experiments have taken place to open up confessional (ie Catholic) teaching to an understanding of religious diversity. One example is the ‘interreligious table’, an experimental project set up in 1998 in some 68 schools in Rome, which encourages encounters between members of various religious traditions.<sup>44</sup> There are similar experiments in several other Italian towns; and the ‘Association of 31 October’ is working out the details of an inter-confessional curriculum for religious issues.

Taking account of the Muslim religion, which continues to grow in Europe, remains a difficult issue. There are signs, however, of a growing awareness that solutions have to be found. The difficulties often raised by the authorities include the absence of an agreed national organization for this religion, which covers a variety of groups; and the lack of qualified teachers. An important step forward was the 1992 cooperation agreement between the Spanish state and the Islamic Commission of Spain, which recognized, among other things, the right to have Islam taught in state schools (similar agreements were reached in the same year regarding the Protestant and Jewish religions). However, although some progress has been made – for example, since 2005 the teaching of Islam has been provided in some state primary schools in Andalusia, Catalonia and Madrid (REDCo 2007, p 126) – for more than a decade, implementation of the agreement has been very weak and fraught with difficulties.

In the Netherlands, the freedom to set up schools, combined with financial equality between private and public schools and an approach focusing on the needs of different communities (‘pillarization’), has allowed the Muslim community to benefit from about 40 Islamic schools that are funded by the state. But these schools are currently the target of criticism, as much for their quality and financial management as for their ideological approach. It should be noted that only around 5 per cent of Muslim children are in fact schooled in this way (ICCS 2007). By providing space and allocating time, some municipal authorities assist,

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<sup>43</sup> For example, a minimum of ten students is required in Romania and seven in the Czech Republic, but just three in Finland.

<sup>44</sup> Adalberto Bernardini and Armando Bernardini, ‘Italy: which direction shall religious education take?’, in Lähnemann and Schreiner, *Interreligious and Values Education in Europe: map and handbook*, Comenius Institute, July 2008.

at the request of parents, in setting up courses (often run by a local imam) in local state schools. Some 7 per cent of all state primary schools offer this possibility.<sup>45</sup> In 1997 the Islamic University of Rotterdam was created. Funded by the state, it aims to help improve the integration of Islam into society by training imams, teachers of Islam, etc. The University of Applied Sciences, *INHolland*, also offers a four-year training course for imams on the teaching of religion, developed in close association with five representative Islamic organizations (Husson 2007).

England is an interesting case, where non-confessional teaching has developed that is open to religious diversity, including Islam, and has resulted from cooperation between various religions (mediated by SACRE councils; see section 1.2.2 above). Over the last decade, however, this development has coincided with an unparalleled growth in the number of private faith schools, which have provoked repeated criticism (see section 2.1.2.1 below). In this context, four Muslim schools and two Sikh schools joined the state school system in 2003.<sup>46</sup> *The Economist* wrote in September 2008 that nearly 100 private Islamic schools were on track for state funding.

Progress in taking account of the Muslim religion can also be seen in several regions (*Länder*) in Germany. Since 2003 the region of Bremen has been developing a course on Islam for its state schools. In Berlin the Islamic Federation was the first of its kind to be authorized to develop Islamic teaching programmes alongside those provided for the Christian denominations. The universities of Münster and Osnabrück have set up teacher-training programmes for the Islamic religion.<sup>47</sup> Alongside the existing initiatives to teach Islam, particularly for the Turkish community, the subject 'Teaching Islam' has been running since 2000 in North Rhine Westphalia, the region with the highest population of Muslims (REDCo 2007, p 79). Austria is perhaps the EU country where the teaching of Islam at school has been most successfully introduced alongside the other officially recognized religions.<sup>48</sup> The main problem, however, as elsewhere, is the lack of qualified teachers.

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<sup>45</sup> Wasif A Shadid and Pieter Sjoerd van Koningsveld, 'Islamic religious education in the Netherlands', in *European Education* 38.2 (2006). Summary, ERIC Database 2006.

<sup>46</sup> James A Beckford in Willaime and Mathieu 2005; until that date only Christian and Jewish schools could be funded by the state.

<sup>47</sup> Source: [www.euro-islam.info](http://www.euro-islam.info). This network of researchers, supported by GSRL/CNRS, France, and Harvard University, carries out comparative studies on Islam and Muslims in Europe and the United States.

<sup>48</sup> Although in many other countries the Muslim communities find it difficult to group themselves into one common organization which can negotiate with the authorities, in Austria the Islamic religious community (*Islamische Glaubengemeinschaft in Österreich*) has been officially recognized since 1979 (REDCo 2007, p 71).



### 1.2.5 Religious symbols in school

The issue of whether wearing religious symbols in school is allowed is dealt with in different ways.<sup>49</sup> The position has been most clearly defined in France. Following incidents that took place in secondary schools in 1989 associated with the wearing of the Islamic headscarf, there has been lively debate in the country, putting the subject of secularism (*laïcité*) back on the agenda. A law passed in March 2004 decided the issue by banning in lower- and upper-secondary schools (*collèges* and *lycées*) 'the wearing of symbols or garments by which students conspicuously display their religious affiliation'. This position should be understood in the context of neutral and secular education in France, where the claims of specific groups or communities are not recognized. Elsewhere, because such principles are not so strictly observed, there has been a tendency to treat the issue in a more open and less confrontational fashion. The rule has tended to be to follow a more tolerant approach, with local attempts to find solutions. This is the case in England where, as in the Netherlands, multiculturalism and a recognition of community identities go hand in hand. In most European countries, wearing religious symbols at school, such as the Sikh turban or the Islamic headscarf, has not generally been problematic, and because of their decentralized systems, problems are often dealt with at school level, on a case-by-case basis. The situation is changing, however, particularly in countries where the integration of the Muslim community is encountering difficulties and where perceptions of this community have hardened, especially in the wake of events such as the bombings in Madrid in 2004 and London in 2005 and the murder of Theo van Gogh in the Netherlands in 2005. In the Netherlands, for example, a law is currently going through to forbid the wearing of the burqa and niqab, clothes which cover the whole body (except for the eyes in the case of the niqab). The ban would apply to students, teachers and other staff in all schools, whether public, private or Islamic, as well as in universities. The Netherlands will thus become the second European country after France to legislate on the subject, although wearing the headscarf will still be permitted.

The presence of religious symbols in state-funded schools is another sensitive issue, one that is being discussed in a number of countries under pressure from the forces of secularization and from secular movements defending the neutrality of state-school premises. Such is the case in Spain where, in November 2005, a judge in the administrative court of Valladolid asked the state school Macias Picavea to remove religious symbols from classrooms and public spaces, at the request of a parent and a local association in support of secular schooling. The judge referred to the Spanish constitution, which guarantees 'the freedom

<sup>49</sup> On this issue, see in particular the EUREL website dealing with sociological and legal data on religion in Europe: Comparative table on the wearing of religious symbols in Europe (March 2007) and 'Le port des signes religieux: essai de comparaison européenne', Bérengère Massignon.

of religion and cults' and establishes the 'secular and neutral' character of the Spanish state. This was the first judgement of its kind in Spain.

In Romania (as also in Greece), the law generally forbids any form of religious proselytizing in public places, and especially in education, the only acceptable religious symbols being those that represent the country's majority religion. However, in Romania, at the request (supported by several NGOs) of a philosophy teacher who considered that icons hanging on classroom walls discriminated against other religions and represented a violation of the freedom of conscience and religious choice, the National Council Against Discrimination (CNCD) requested, in 2006, that the ministry of education remove religious symbols from schools (except from classrooms where religion was taught), on the grounds that they violated the state's principle of religious neutrality. The request gave rise to a passionate reaction and much public debate. The Orthodox Church and the ministry of education refused to comply, and in 2008 the appeals court ruled against the CNCD position.

The issue of parents' rights to withdraw their children from certain lessons, such as physical education and sex education, on grounds of religion is another question confronting schools. Again, opinions are deeply divided. The issue has given rise to debates in some countries, such as the proposal of the Swedish liberal party, in March 2008, to remove the option of opting out.

### 1.2.6 Research and pedagogy

It is noteworthy that, in some countries, the revived interest in teaching about religions is to be found also in the increasing amount of research work that is aimed at consolidating this field as a discipline in its own right. This is the case in England, where Warwick University, for example, through its Religions and Education Research Unit, has developed an 'interpretative approach' to religious education, aiming 'to help students and young people to find their own positions within the key debates about religious plurality . . . Pedagogically, the approach develops skills of interpretation and provides opportunities for critical reflection in which students make a constructive critique of the material studied at a distance, re-assess their understanding of their own way of life in the light of their studies and review their own methods of learning.'<sup>50</sup> The situation is similar in France, where the European Institute of Religious Sciences (IESR) was created in 2002, following the Debray Report on religious facts (*fait religieux*), in the Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes, with the support of its Department for Religious Sciences. Its aim is to bring together pedagogy and research where the teaching of religious facts is concerned. The IESR supports the initial and in-service

<sup>50</sup> REDCo 2007, p 182.

training of teachers and facilitates the dissemination in schools of research findings and scientific publications that are most suitable for teaching religious facts. Thanks to its European dimension, it also brings from other European countries a perspective on research work and practices in this field.

At the European level, political interest in the issue of teaching about religions has led to the production of teaching materials, aimed particularly at teachers. The Council of Europe has worked for several years on the question of intercultural dialogue and education. In 2007 it published a reference book for schools called *Religious Diversity and Intercultural Education*. This book aims to help teachers, as well as others involved in education, to deal with the issue of religious diversity in school on a conceptual and pedagogical level. In May 2008 the Council issued an important White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue,<sup>51</sup> and in December 2008 its Committee of Ministers adopted a specific recommendation on the place of religions and non-religious convictions within intercultural education. This recommendation sets out a number of principles and objectives, as well as teaching and learning methods, in order to facilitate an appropriate treatment of the diversity of religions and non-religious convictions in school settings.

The Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) of the Organization for Security and Cooperation (OSCE) collaborated with experts to achieve similar ends. In 2007 it published *Guiding Principles on Teaching about Religions and Beliefs in Public Schools*, better known as the *Toledo Guiding Principles*. These principles focus on teaching about different religions and beliefs and not on any specific religion. They put forward ten key principles and criteria to be observed in order to ensure high-quality teaching and adequately trained teachers. They provide guidelines on preparing curricula for teaching about religions and beliefs and are aimed at political decision-makers as much as at teachers and schools. The effectiveness of this tool will depend on its dissemination and its accessibility through translation in all 56 member states of the OSCE.

It is also worth noting the Norwegian government's creation, in May 2009, of the European Wergeland Centre (EWC), within the framework of a cooperation agreement with the Council of Europe. A resource centre on education for intercultural understanding, human rights and democratic citizenship, it aims to promote and support the work of the Council of Europe in these fields. It will represent a precious source of information for researchers, schools, trainers and teachers.

For some years, the European Union has also supported research in the field of religions in Europe, under the seventh Research Framework Programme

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<sup>51</sup> White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue, 'Living together as equals in dignity', launched by the ministers of foreign affairs of the Council of Europe at its 118th session, Strasbourg, 7 May 2008.

(priority 7 'Citizens and governance in a knowledge society'; special field 'Values and religions in Europe'). Within this framework, for the period 2006–9, the EU funded an important project, REDCo (see note 5 above), which worked specifically on religion in education (eg comparative analyses of approaches, empirical analyses of students' perceptions) and to which reference is often made in the present analysis.

## 2 Common trends and challenges for the 21st century

*'The diversity of religious (and non-religious) student backgrounds poses important questions concerning educational demand. Should schools respond to demands for instruction in specific religious beliefs? Should they respond to religiously motivated demands concerning the content of school curricula? Or should schools, in principle, act as counterweights to religion, offering a secular 'citizenship education' for all? Given the number of immigrants from different religious backgrounds, few countries are spared these tough questions, which are made more acute by the growing presence of religious fundamentalism, which is not restricted to any single tradition or faith . . . It is a very prominent issue with no obvious sign of disappearing in the 21st century.'*

*Schooling for Tomorrow: demand-sensitive schooling? Evidence and issues, OECD/CERI 2006*

There is considerable diversity in Europe between national situations and approaches to teaching about religions, and these are deeply rooted in the history and context of individual countries. Harmonization at European level is out of the question, as the field of education remains the responsibility of member states (article 149 of the European Union Treaty). The aim is to try to understand to what extent current trends show Europe moving towards a form of teaching about religions that is open to different religions and convictions and able to contribute to achieving the goals of public education, particularly in the field of intercultural education. This analysis will then allow us to identify the common challenges that confront EU member states and which could constitute a common platform for exchanges and reflection within the framework of European cooperation promoted under the treaty.

### 2.1 Developments and trends

#### 2.1.1 Adapting to new realities

Current developments reveal that teaching about religions is seeking, in various ways and with varying degrees of success, to adapt and to be open to new expectations and the realities of multicultural society. Some countries have moved from a confessional approach to a non-confessional approach in state schools that

are now open to the understanding of other religions (England,<sup>52</sup> Sweden<sup>53</sup>). Others have moved from an almost total absence of any reference to religion in state schools to a position where their curricula take account of 'religious facts' or of knowledge about religions (France,<sup>54</sup> Czech Republic,<sup>55</sup> Netherlands<sup>56</sup>). In Spain, agreements on religious education were signed in 1992 with the Protestant, Jewish and Muslim religions so as to give them rights which, until then, had mainly benefited the Catholic religion. Moreover, a certain 'de-confessionalization' of private, state-aided confessional education can be observed in some countries, such as the Netherlands, France and England. Parental choice of a school seems less and less determined by its religious character and more and more by its reputation. The private confessional education sector has thus had to adapt to changes in society and to open its doors to a more varied public, sidelining the strictly religious character of the establishment. Some countries, of course, still have well-established confessional education in state schools, such as the Orthodox religion in Romania and the Catholic religion in Spain. In others, some schools maintain a specific religious character (eg voluntary-aided schools in England and some schools in the Netherlands), but they are not in the majority, even if, as in the case of England, faith schools have grown in number over the last ten years and are now the subject of heavy criticism (see section 2.1.2.1 below). Most grant-aided confessional schools, as a condition of state support, are obliged to implement the official school curriculum, including what it has to say on knowledge of the diversity of religions. Examples of this are the official locally agreed religious education syllabuses in England; the new subject 'Religious and philosophical movements' in the Netherlands; and teaching religious facts in France. This opening of public schools to knowledge about religions has therefore had an impact on grant-aided private confessional schools, obliging them to follow suit and to develop an inclusive approach to religions.

<sup>52</sup> The Reform Act of 1988 marked the change. 'Religious instruction' is no longer referred to and is replaced by 'religious education'. Since that date this subject has been an integral part of the objectives of schools and must be open to other religions besides Christianity. For the first time, faiths other than Christianity take part in defining local religious education syllabuses.

<sup>53</sup> The change brought about in England in 1988 was introduced earlier in Sweden, a country offering an example of 'an originally confessional curriculum secularizing from within' (REDCo 2007, p 61). In 1969 the 'study of Christianity' became 'knowledge about Christianity', and soon after 'knowledge about religion' (Von Brömssen 2007). Since then legislation has insisted on the neutral, objective and pluralistic nature of the subject. The compulsory education curriculum established in 1980 links the teaching of religion with questions on life and existence.

<sup>54</sup> In particular, since the passing of the 2005 law on schools, the teaching of religious facts has fully taken its place in the new school programmes (adopted in 2008).

<sup>55</sup> In the new framework programme for basic education of 2007, which has to be followed by all registered schools, both state and confessional (the latter are rare in the country at 0.6 per cent), knowledge about religions is one of the interdisciplinary themes (geography, history, etc).

<sup>56</sup> The 1985 law on primary education introduced into the curriculum for the first time knowledge about religious and philosophical movements.

Changes can also be detected in countries where confessional education is obligatory. In Germany, for example, where the situation varies greatly from one regional state (*Land*) to another, non-confessional approaches are being developed.<sup>57</sup> 'The Muslim issue and the changing relations in religion reveal the limits of the bi-confessional organization of religious education. Various alternatives to confessional education have been proposed in the form of lessons in ethics or in religious sciences, while traditional religious education has been seeking a non-confessional profile and, with the help of teaching methods based on dialogue, a closer alignment with the personal development of students.'<sup>58</sup> Thus, in the Brandenburg region, teaching about religions is gradually introduced as a non-confessional compulsory subject on 'the fundamental questions of life, ethics and religious education'. In Hamburg, a model of religious education for all was developed, in cooperation with different religions.<sup>59</sup> But situations can also change. Thus, in Berlin, religious education has been replaced, since 2006–7, by a course on ethics with a neutral approach, but debates are taking place at the moment concerning the reintroduction of religious education in schools, with support from the Lutheran and Catholic churches. The proposal is that students should have the choice between a course in the religion of their choice (Catholic, Protestant, Jewish or Muslim) and a course on ethics. Another interesting development is the case of Greece, where the previously compulsory subject, Orthodox religious education, became optional for all students in 2008 and showed signs of opening up to other religions.<sup>60</sup> In Northern Ireland, the compulsory religious education syllabus, which earlier focused on the Christian tradition, will henceforth, and for the first time, introduce a new emphasis on world religions in its latest version, which came into force in 2007.<sup>61</sup> The syllabus, however, is limited to 11–14-year-olds and its design did not involve minority religions.

It is also noteworthy that from the moment teaching about religions is integrated into state school curricula, this field of knowledge tends to be recognized as such and is consolidated through support from the science of religions (see section 1.2.6 above). 'Academic research has taken on board "religious sciences"'

<sup>57</sup> For more information on developments in Germany, see the article by Thorsten Knauth, 'Religious education in Germany', in *Religion and Education in Europe: Developments, contexts and debates*, REDCo 2007.

<sup>58</sup> Peter Schreiner in Willaime and Mathieu 2005.

<sup>59</sup> It should be noted that attempts were made over several years to set up an 'Academy of World Religions' in Hamburg; an interdisciplinary centre 'World Religions in Dialogue' was created to this end in 2006 (REDCo 2007, p 78).

<sup>60</sup> Until that date, parents wishing their children to be exempt had to declare their preference in writing.

<sup>61</sup> Core Syllabus for Religious Education. The thrust of this new syllabus follows the government guidelines of 2005, *A Shared Future*, which requires that the policies, structure and curricula of schools should prepare young people to live in a diversified society and multicultural world.

and religious facts have thereby become knowledge to be learned, and it is for this reason that they are taught in schools.<sup>162</sup>

## 2.1.2 Some disquieting trends

The interesting changes that are taking place to make way for a pluralist form of teaching about religions and for a more inclusive form of confessional education must not be allowed to hide the less positive trends. Reference will be made in particular to the selection which takes place in some state-aided confessional or independent schools and the consequent segregation brought about by such practices, as well as to the spread of approaches that are unacceptable in the framework of public education, such as the theory of creationism. Even if these trends remain relatively marginal, they should be monitored carefully by politicians, as well as by society in general, because they undermine the very foundations of school as a democratic space, accessible to all and a place for the transfer of objective knowledge, based on science and not on religious convictions.

### 2.1.2.1 Selection and segregation

In some countries, opposition is growing to the use of selection by certain confessional schools or by some independent schools and to the segregation that this produces, highlighting the otherness of different communities and hampering social integration. This is the case in England, for example, where the number of faith schools has grown during the last decade. In addition to the existing 7,000 Christian schools, there are now the first Islamic, Sikh and Hindu schools and an increase in the number of Jewish schools. Nearly 100 private Islamic schools are on track for state funding.<sup>63</sup> Criticism is also directed at certain schools belonging to the new category of publicly funded independent schools, the so-called 'academies'. Academies, created in 2000 and taking the form of public-private partnerships, involve sponsors from business, faith or voluntary groups working with partners from the local community. They are normally located in disadvantaged areas and are supposed to cater for students of different abilities. There are at present 133 of these academies in 64 local authorities. Some 80 more are due to open by September 2009, and 100 in 2010. The government considers that the figure will reach at least 400.<sup>64</sup> Faith schools and independent schools are the target of repeated criticism. Accord, a coalition of lay and religious activists set up in 2008,

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<sup>62</sup> Borne and Willaime 2007, p 122.

<sup>63</sup> *The Economist*, 'Faith and schools – religious rights and wrongs', 4 September 2008.

<sup>64</sup> Source: Directory of Academies, Department for Children, Schools and Families, Standards Site; [www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/academies/academies\\_directory/?version=1](http://www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/academies/academies_directory/?version=1).



has asked the government to stop funding schools that practise segregation on a religious basis and so undermine community cohesion.

In Spain, grant-aided private schools are accused of practising hidden forms of selection, creating school segregation and unequal access in relation to the private and public school sectors. 'In subsidized Catholic schools, ie in approximately one-third of all Spanish schools, religious education is offered only to Catholics, while non-Catholics tend to be rejected or discouraged from applying for admission . . . As a side effect of this rejection of immigrant and other minority students, subsidized Catholic schools thus succeed in preserving their students' homogeneity not only in terms of social background, but also in terms of culture and religion.'<sup>65</sup> The new education law of 2006 seeks to solve this problem by strengthening the administration's supervision of the conditions governing equal access to grant-aided state and private schools.

In Sweden, official studies and statistics reveal that the policy of free choice of school has tended to create segregation of students in terms of their socio-cultural background, performance and ethnic origin.<sup>66</sup> The Netherlands is also faced with growing segregation along ethnic lines. 'Desegregation' has become an important aim of official Dutch education policy, to be pursued through various measures (ie no more funding of new private schools with more than 80 per cent of students from a low socio-economic background; active citizenship education and social participation).<sup>67</sup>

### 2.1.2.2 *The dangers of creationism*

The dangers of creationism<sup>68</sup> were denounced in 2007 by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (and also by teacher organizations at international level<sup>69</sup>) in the framework of a resolution 'The dangers of creationism in education'.<sup>70</sup> This resolution was adopted after a long debate, in spite of considerable pressure from some countries and organizations to block its adoption,

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<sup>65</sup> Dietz 2007, p 120.

<sup>66</sup> *Schools Like Any Other? Independent school as part of the system 1991–2004*, p 51, Skolverket (Swedish National Agency for Education), 2006.

<sup>67</sup> Yvonne Leeman, 'Education and diversity in the Netherlands', in *European Educational Research Journal*, 7.1 (2008).

<sup>68</sup> 'Making its appearance in the second half of the 19th century, the creationist movement rejects the Darwinian theory of the evolution of species through natural selection and promotes the idea that the world was created by God, either in six days according to the Old Testament, or thanks to the intervention of "intelligent design" for the neo-creationists.' *Le Monde*, article on creationism in education, 26 June 2007.

<sup>69</sup> Resolution on the place of religion in school; adopted by the Fifth World Congress of Education International, Berlin, 22–6 July 2007.

<sup>70</sup> Resolution 1580 (2007) on 'The dangers of creationism in education', adopted by the Parliamentary Assembly on 4 October 2007.

thereby illustrating the reality of the danger and the necessity for extreme vigilance in the matter. The resolution states that: 'Creationism, born of the denial of the evolution of the species through natural selection, was for a long time an almost exclusively American phenomenon. Today creationist ideas are tending to find their way into Europe and their dissemination is affecting a number of Council of Europe member states. The position is clear: 'the primary target of present-day creationists, most of whom are Christian or Muslim, is education. There is a real risk of a serious confusion being introduced into our children's minds between what has to do with convictions, beliefs, ideals of all sorts and what has to do with science.'

'When some people contend that the theory of evolution is on the same footing as the religious belief in creationism, they are attacking head-on two essential instruments of the Council of Europe: the separation of church and state, as the guarantor of equality for all before the law and of religious and cultural freedom; and the school, as the place for rational learning and for an unfettered intellectual and spiritual development and as a space for tolerance and for multi-ethnic and multi-religious interaction.'

Maria Manula de Melo, Parliamentary Assembly, Council of Europe,  
4 October 2007

Among the concrete examples quoted in the preparatory report and which directly concern education,<sup>71</sup> the following are worthy of note. The Turkish creationist Harun Hahya sent copies of his 700-page *The Atlas of Creation* to schools in France, Belgium and Spain. Lectures by creationists in state schools and universities are not unknown in England,<sup>72</sup> the country which hosted the biggest international conference of creationists for three days in 2006. In the Netherlands, in 2005, the minister of education, Mrs Van der Hoeven, proposed a debate on the theory of evolution in schools, as she considered that Darwin's theories were incomplete and that, since his time, new elements had been brought to light, notably by the supporters of so-called 'Intelligent Design'. In Germany, in a university town in the region of Hesse, teachers of life and earth sciences at a state-approved private upper-secondary school teach their students that a creator is the origin of the various 'main types' of animals. The Hesse ministry of education said it was

<sup>71</sup> Guy Lengagne (France, socialist group), 'The dangers of creationism in education', report to the Committee on Culture, Science and Education, Council of Europe; doc. 11297, 8 June 2007.

<sup>72</sup> Several schools promoting the teaching of creationism have been severely criticized in the press: Emmanuel City Technology in Gateshead (*Guardian*, March 2002); the Seventh Day Adventist School in Tottenham; and several Muslim schools. See Derek Gillard, 'Never mind the evidence: Blair's obsession with faith schools'; [www.dg.dial.pipex.com/articles/educ29.shtml](http://www.dg.dial.pipex.com/articles/educ29.shtml).

not competent to deal with such issues and some parents withdrew their children from this school.

Sweden is also confronting the same problem. A book by biology teacher and doctor Per Kornhall, *The Creationist Conspiracy*,<sup>73</sup> analyses the phenomenon and its dangers and explains how creationism is taught in some state-aided private schools in Sweden.

New forms of creationism, including Intelligent Design, are more dangerous because, without denying the theory of evolution, they insist that creationism deserves the status of a scientific theory and should therefore be taught for the same reasons that evolution is taught. The weaker the teaching of evolution, the more these new forms will find an audience, hence the need to strengthen the former so as to fix in the minds of young people the difference between the subject matter of science and matters of faith.

## 2.2 Common challenges

State schools should be capable of providing all students with an education that allows them to gain sufficient knowledge and to develop an open and critical mind where religions and other philosophies of life are concerned. The approach should be neutral, with high-quality teaching, and it should be integrated into a general and intercultural education that is itself of a high standard. Such an approach would clearly provide one of the best defences against the problems noted above.

Young people have made similar demands. A European survey (REDCo 2009), carried out in eight European countries among students of 14–16 years, revealed that they wanted schools to put an emphasis on knowing about different world religions rather than on any particular religious belief. Students expressed their desire that learning about religions should take place in a safe classroom environment, governed by agreed procedures in which views could be expressed and discussed. A real challenge for all European education systems is to teach children ‘the history and philosophy of the main religions with restraint and objectivity’, as promoted by the Council of Europe,<sup>74</sup> and in a way which is completely compatible with the mission of state schools. The answer is not easy because the weight of tradition and prejudice is considerable and the dividing line between knowledge (ie science) and belief (ie religion) is not always easy to define. The challenges to be tackled by education systems are threefold:

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<sup>73</sup> *Skapelsekonspirationen (The Creationist Conspiracy)*, published March 2008; <http://perkornhall.se>.

<sup>74</sup> Recommendation 1720 (2005) of the Parliamentary Assembly on education and religion, para 7.

- To improve the quality of teaching about religions (status, contents and teacher-training).
- To reinforce its basis in intercultural education and human rights.
- To enhance its capacity to embrace the diversity of religions, beliefs and convictions that exist in society.

### **The challenges**

To define quality teaching about religions for all, with its basis in intercultural education and human rights and open to the diversity of beliefs and convictions that exist in society.

## **2.2.1 High-quality teaching for all students**

### *2.2.1.1 Clarifying and strengthening the status and quality of teaching about religions*

An education about religions – one which is neutral and open to the diversity of religions and other convictions, whether it is treated as a separate subject or integrated into existing subjects – should be accepted as a field of learning and a discipline in its own right, with well-defined contents and suitably adapted teaching methods. Given the non-confessional, neutral and pluralist approach which should underpin it, teaching about religions should be provided for all students, whatever their religious or philosophical convictions. Such an approach should be able (as it is in some countries; see section 1.2.6 above) to take account of the results of research already carried out into the science of religions and to benefit from new research, particularly with respect to teaching methods, teaching aids and appropriate documentary resources. In spite of the abundance of such resources on specific religions, resources presenting pluri-religious or interreligious approaches are much rarer.<sup>75</sup> The effectiveness of teaching about religions will also depend upon sufficient time being set aside for it in the curriculum.

A fundamental question remains, however – one which should be analysed more deeply by comparing the experiences of different countries, experts and practitioners. The question concerns the boundaries that should be set with regard to teaching about religions in state schools. Should it be restricted to teaching about religions and other convictions, targeting principally the acquisition of knowledge (the 'phenomenological approach') – the approach adopted, for example, in France in the context of teaching 'religious facts' (*fait religieux*); or should it be widened to include the life experience of students (the 'experiential' approach) – the approach adopted in England (learning *about* and learning *from*

<sup>75</sup> This was the conclusion reached at the London conference 'Faith, Identity and Belonging: Educating for Shared Citizenship', organized in 2006 by the InterFaith Network and the Citizenship Foundation.

religions)? The question is justified if teaching about religions is to contribute to the development of students' intercultural skills, defined as a body not only of knowledge but also of aptitudes and attitudes.<sup>76</sup> The answer, however, is not simple when the subject to be taught involves an issue as sensitive as religion.

### 2.2.1.2 *Strengthening teacher-training*

As has already been emphasized (see section 1.2.3 above), the training of teachers is essential to their ability to deliver courses about religions, with respect both to the content of such courses and to the teaching methods used. The *Guiding Principles on Teaching about Religions and Beliefs in Public Schools* (the *Toledo Guiding Principles*), developed in the framework of the OSCE (see section 1.2.6 above), confirm, on the basis of existing research, that teachers are generally 'ill-prepared to address the cultural and religious diversity they encounter in their classrooms. They often lack the training to discuss different religions and philosophies in a fair and balanced way and do not always have an adequate understanding of how issues relating to religions and beliefs relate to human rights.' Furthermore, the *Guiding Principles* underline the fact that, particularly in the urban centres of Europe and North America, considerable disparity exists between the cultural and religious (or non-religious) milieu of teachers and the milieu of students (the school population always being more multicultural); and that it is important that the teaching body should be more representative, in particular, of minority communities.<sup>77</sup> This question was also raised at a meeting on peer learning, organized in 2007 in Oslo by the European Commission, which focused on the way in which teacher-training policies can prepare teachers to teach in culturally diverse settings.<sup>78</sup> In their final recommendations of 19 March 2009, the experts of the REDCo project, funded by the European Union (see note 5 above), also ask that universities be 'encouraged to give fuller consideration to religious diversity in research and teaching'. According to the REDCo experts, 'the curriculum for teacher-training should include the development of skills to organize and moderate in-class debates on controversial religious issues and conflicting world-views'.

High-quality teacher-training is the essential condition for the successful integration of teaching about religions and other convictions into the objec-

<sup>76</sup> On this issue, see in particular the EU Reference Framework on key competences (see note 81 below); the White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue issued by the Council of Europe (2008); and the publication *Intercultural Competence – the key competence in the 21st century?*, published by the Bertelsmann Foundation ([www.bertelsmann-stiftung.de](http://www.bertelsmann-stiftung.de)).

<sup>77</sup> *Toledo Guiding Principles on Teaching about Religions and Beliefs in Public Schools*, chapter 4 on teacher-training, OSCE 2007; [www.osce.org/item/28314.html](http://www.osce.org/item/28314.html).

<sup>78</sup> 'How can teacher education and training policies prepare teachers to teach effectively in culturally diverse settings?', report of the Peer Learning Activity, Oslo, May 2007.

tives of state schools, whether the country concerned has adopted (as in France) a cross-curricular approach to teaching *about* religions, or has adopted (as in England) a non-confessional approach involving a separate subject that focuses on teaching *about* and *from* religions. The training, in general, is inadequate, although the official syllabuses or guidelines make increasingly clear demands (ie the National Framework on teaching about religions in England; the 2008 new school programmes in France).

'Teacher-training should ensure that educators' personal, religious or non-religious commitments do not create bias in their teaching about different religions and philosophies.'

Toledo Guiding Principles

Training is indispensable to enable teachers, at an ethical and pedagogical level, to deliver neutral and objective teaching, with due regard to all beliefs. 'As soon as different religions are presented to students belonging to one or other of those religions or to none, there is a strong mental obligation, forbidding not only any form of proselytism but also any confessional perspective . . . Regardless of personal convictions, beliefs or non-beliefs, the teacher must conform to the scientific rules which, in the subject concerned, regulate the construction of knowledge and its transmission. Transmitting knowledge is first of all a matter of standing back and rationally examining it from a distance. It is this standing back, ie critically examining sources, confronting documents, considering numerous different interpretations of the same event, which allows for the distinction to be drawn between beliefs and knowledge.'<sup>79</sup>

## 2.2.2 A basis in intercultural and citizenship education

'Within the formal curriculum, the intercultural dimension straddles all subjects. History, language education and the teaching of religious and convictional facts are perhaps among the most relevant. Education in religious and convictional facts in an intercultural context makes available knowledge about all the world religions and beliefs and their history, and enables the individual to understand religions and beliefs and avoid prejudice.'

White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue, Council of Europe, May 2008

The distinction which is being drawn almost everywhere between teaching about religions in all their diversity, studied as a field of knowledge and a social reality,

<sup>79</sup> Borne and Willaime 2007, pp 86 and 123.

and a strictly confessional approach, which falls within the responsibility of religious communities, is a welcome development. It fits well with the objectives set at a European level by the Council of Europe,<sup>80</sup> and by the European Union, in particular in its European Framework on the key competences for lifelong learning.<sup>81</sup> This development should give teaching about religions a clear position and greater effectiveness within the wider framework of intercultural and civic education of young people and the objectives of a pluralist and democratic school. The *Toledo Guiding Principles*, moreover, clearly position teaching about religions and beliefs in the larger framework of human rights education 'as the best guarantee of the development of an adapted and balanced educational approach'. The final recommendations of the European Union REDCo project (see note 5 above) also strongly recommend that teaching about religions be integrated into general intercultural education, education for democratic citizenship and human rights education. In 2008 the Civil Society Platform for Intercultural Dialogue, launched in 2006 by the European Cultural Foundation and Culture Action Europe, adopted a series of policy recommendations and conditions (the so-called 'Rainbow Paper') for the concrete implementation of intercultural dialogue, among which education is a central aspect (developing pre-school education, countering segregation by schools, eradicating discrimination in schools, defining educational content for intercultural dialogue and teacher-training).

The study carried out by the European Institute of Comparative Cultural Research for the European Commission (ERICarts) underlines the interest in national initiatives which have made intercultural education a political priority: the 2007 Programme for Global Education in Finland and the 1994 Ministerial Memorandum on Intercultural Dialogue and Democratic Coexistence in Italy. The study also mentions the guidelines for intercultural dialogue laid down for schools by certain countries, namely Austria, Finland, Ireland, Italy, the Netherlands, Slovenia and the United Kingdom. 'Such guidelines encourage schools and training institutions to develop intercultural projects aimed at, for example, promoting tolerance, developing curiosity about other cultures and learning about their traditions, including their main celebrations and symbols.' Teaching

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<sup>80</sup> In particular, Recommendation 1720 (2005), 'Education and religion', Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe; and Recommendation CM/Rec (2008)12 of the Committee of Ministers on the dimension of religious and non-religious convictions within intercultural education (10 December 2008).

<sup>81</sup> The EU Reference Framework on the key competences for lifelong learning (*Official Journal of the EU*, 30 December 2006) promotes the importance of 'social and civic competences', which include personal, interpersonal and intercultural competences, indispensable to enable all individuals to live and work in diversified societies and resolve possible conflicts. 'Full respect for human rights . . . and appreciation and understanding of differences between value systems of different religious or ethnic groups lay the foundations for a positive attitude.'

the language of the host country (and other countries) is everywhere an important dimension of policies concerning intercultural dialogue.

In spite of all these initiatives and activities, the authors of this study conclude, nevertheless, that there is still much to do to ensure that there are global strategies in Europe supporting the development of intercultural competences and qualifications throughout life, especially if such competences are considered as a body of knowledge, skills and attitudes to be acquired (see the question raised under section 2.2.1.1 above). Understandably, the authors also underline the fact that intercultural learning is not exclusive to schools and that reference should also be made to the numerous informal activities organized outside school that offer programmes based on the media, cultural presentations and exhibitions, as well as measures in support of continuous training and employment.

Some states work on several fronts at the same time. As well as developing intercultural and citizenship education in the curriculum, which includes encouragement of a better knowledge of religions, they have set up programmes aimed at taking account of the specific needs of cultural and religious minorities. This is the case, for example, in Spain, a country which has recently made citizenship a compulsory subject and which has also put in place the programme *Pluralismo y Convivencia*, which funds cultural, educational and social integration programmes and projects. In the spirit of the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations (UNAOC),<sup>82</sup> the programme promotes religious freedom and supports better understanding of religious minorities which have signed cooperation agreements with the state.

'The aim is to ensure that account is taken of the dimension of religions and non-religious convictions within intercultural education as a contribution to strengthen human rights, democratic citizenship and participation, and to the development through adequate training of competences for intercultural dialogue at the levels of education policies . . . institutions . . . and the professional development of teaching staff.'

Recommendation of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe (December 2008) on the dimension of religions and non-religious convictions within intercultural education

In England there is a marked tendency to link the objectives of religious education with the policies of intercultural learning. The evaluation report, published in 2007,

<sup>82</sup> Opposing the thesis proposed by Samuel P Huntington in his book *The Clash of Civilizations* (1996), the head of the Spanish government, J L Zapatero, with his Turkish counterpart, R Erdoğan, initiated the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations under the auspices of the United Nations; [www.unaoc.org](http://www.unaoc.org).



which deals with the implementation of the programme of education in citizenship and diversity, strongly supports in its recommendations a joint Citizenship with Religion GCSE.<sup>83</sup> Teaching about religions and other convictions contributes to learning to live together and to knowing and understanding democracy. In this connection, the handbook produced by NEF (in its ILDE project) on learning about democracy in Europe<sup>84</sup> underlines examples of interesting practices developed in the framework of public–private partnerships between foundations and educational institutions.<sup>85</sup>

The challenge facing European countries in their policy decisions regarding multicultural integration is the need to build unity in diversity—a diversity that is much greater and more complex today than before, in particular because of the need to take account of Islam. Policies aimed at developing teaching about religions as well as intercultural and citizenship education are in the front line when it comes to responding to this challenge, which is a distinctively European one, as was demonstrated throughout 2008 by the activities carried out in the framework of the EU European Year of Intercultural Dialogue. The White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue ('Living together as equals in dignity'), published by the Council of Europe in 2008, makes learning and teaching intercultural skills a central issue by combining it with teaching about religions (point 5.3): 'An appreciation of our diverse cultural background should include knowledge and understanding of the major world religions and non-religious convictions and their role in society.' In the framework of its work on the religious dimension of intercultural dialogue, the Council organized a conference in April 2008 on the theme 'Teaching religious and convictional facts: a tool for acquiring knowledge about religions and beliefs in education; a contribution to education for democratic citizenship, human rights and intercultural dialogue.' The meeting was the first of its kind in Europe to bring together in open dialogue representatives from religious communities and humanist movements.

### 2.2.3 Taking religious diversity effectively into account

In 2007 the European ministers of education declared that, regardless of the religious education system in place, teaching should take account of religious

<sup>83</sup> *Curriculum Review: Diversity and Citizenship*, Department of Education and Skills 2007, p 11.

<sup>84</sup> *Schools for Society – Learning Democracy in Europe: a handbook of ideas for action*; produced in the framework of the ILDE project (Initiative for Learning Democracy in Europe) of NEF (Network of European Foundations). Alliance Publishing Trust and NEF 2009.

<sup>85</sup> The programme 'Classroom of Difference' should, in particular, be mentioned. This was conceived by the Centre européen juif d'information (CEJI; www.ceji.org) and implemented by the Lycée Louis Querbes in France, a *lycée* which has a very diverse school population, culturally, religiously and linguistically, and which had already encountered numerous incidents involving aggression and violence. On the basis of this programme, the school developed its own intercultural initiative 'Integration Days'. The school won the Evens Prize for Intercultural Education in 2007.

and convictional diversity. This objective is a long way from being achieved, even if some progress has been made (see section 1.2.4 above). For many European countries, there have been difficulties in finding ways of taking account of minority religions on an equal footing with the country's traditional religions. This includes not only religions such as Hinduism, Buddhism and Sikhism, but also Islam, whose presence in the populations of European countries has grown steadily over the last two decades. Fear of religious fundamentalism and Islamophobia, which have gained ground since the events of 11 September 2001 and the attacks and murders perpetrated on European soil, make debate and reflection on this important question more difficult. First of all, more should be done to improve knowledge of Islam,<sup>86</sup> a religion too often seen in a bad light and associated in people's minds with fundamentalism and terrorism. One of the recommendations (November 2006) of the High-level Group of the Alliance of Civilizations (see note 82 above) concerns the provision of public and private funds 'to support scholarly institutions to re-issue those parts of the Islamic heritage that deal with pluralism, rationality and the scientific method, and to make them available online in multiple languages'.

It cannot be said that any model yet exists for successfully integrating religious diversity in general, above all in the case of religious education, even if, as we saw above, positive developments have taken place (see sections 1.2.4 and 2.1.1). The challenge remains. England seems to be well in advance with its locally agreed non-denominational syllabuses of religious education, designed with the participation of different denominations and within its National Framework. Less positive, however, is the development of a growing number of independent faith schools which benefit from state aid (see section 2.1.2.1).

'Regardless of the religious education system that exists in a particular country, children must receive tuition that takes into account religious and philosophical diversity as part of their intercultural education.'

Final declaration, European ministers of education, Council of Europe, Istanbul, May 2007

The multicultural integration model in the Netherlands is being questioned in the light of the difficult integration of the Muslim community, a difficulty which has been exacerbated by the events of the last few years, such as the murders of the politician Pim Fortuyn, a militant against the 'Islamization of Dutch culture',

<sup>86</sup> This need is not limited to Europe. A Gallop poll, conducted in December 2005 in the United States ('Americans' views of the Islamic world'), revealed that, when Americans were asked what they admired about Muslim societies, the most frequent response (32 per cent) was 'nothing' and the second (25 per cent) was 'I don't know'. Information quoted in 'Alliance of Civilizations – report of the High-level Group', 13 November 2006. United Nations, New York, 2006.

in 2002 and of the film-maker Theo van Gogh in 2004, killed by a Dutch citizen of Moroccan origin. The country is divided between those who think that this model, which privileges the needs of each community, encourages the emancipation of Muslims (Muslims have access to Islamic schools, funded by the state) and those who consider it to be an obstacle to integration. The debate is not over, and a draft law forbidding the wearing of the burqa and the niqab at school and in university, due to become law in mid-2009, points to a certain hardening of positions. The Netherlands, like France, faces a very low level of social and religious mixing, particularly in the big cities. Interesting experiments, for example in the town of Gouda,<sup>87</sup> are nevertheless taking place in an attempt to resolve this problem.

These examples illustrate how difficult it is to provide a teaching approach for religions that is open to religious pluralism, particularly in countries which have traditionally provided denominational religious education. Equal treatment would require that they all benefit from the same treatment and can enjoy a form of teaching about religions that answers their individual needs. Demands in this direction, even though justified on the basis of equal rights, are probably difficult to implement at a practical level, in view of the growing number of competing religions. Furthermore, an approach by confession confines each religion to its own universe and codes of reference and impedes intercultural and interreligious communication and cooperation.

It could be argued that non-confessional and pluri-religious education, or the teaching of religious facts (*fait religieux*), when well established in the curriculum of a school and fully respectful of the school's mission, would have a positive effect on claims made by specific groups and would encourage, moreover, reflection, research and interreligious cooperation and an inclusive attitude to other convictions and philosophies of life. But teaching about religions must be of high quality, with qualified staff and a syllabus of sufficient relevance to respond to the expectations of students from different denominations and of other convictions. Otherwise, it will be doomed to remain superficial and descriptive, and religious minorities, in particular, will turn to other solutions to answer their needs, such as the creation of private faith schools.

There are no simple solutions. These can only be found by taking into account the particular circumstances of each state and by encouraging joint discussions and an exchange of experience between countries. The European Wergeland Centre, set up in Oslo in May 2009 by the Norwegian government and the Council of Europe to promote intercultural understanding, should allow sharing of knowledge and experience at a European level. In the same way, the

<sup>87</sup> Gouda took the initiative 'to organize an equal distribution of immigrant (read: Muslim) children all over the town. To have state and private schools equally involved in educating both indigenous and immigrant pupils is the explicit aim.' (REDCo 2007, p 207)

Clearinghouse on education about religions and beliefs, under development by the Alliance of Civilizations, should cover knowledge and needs at a global level. The *Toledo Guiding Principles on Teaching about Religions and Beliefs in Public Schools*, developed within the framework of the OSCE, are also a valuable tool to enhance the quality of teaching about religions at school at the level of content and teacher-training.

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## Conclusion

There is now a broad consensus in Europe that teaching about religions and about religious facts has a place in state schools and constitutes an important dimension in the intercultural education of young people. But policies and practices still need to change considerably before this field, and intercultural education in general, can act as real levers to change mentalities and approaches and contribute effectively to the necessary process of learning how to 'live together'.

'Even if non-confessional teaching of religions is introduced or if teaching about religious facts is integrated into different school subjects, it is probable that confessional religious education will continue. But it will need to be considerably reformed. In particular, it will need to be made entirely optional and widened to include several religions. Care will also need to be taken to ensure that state aid is more equally available. Only if these conditions are met will confessional religious education be able to survive and play a positive role in a social context characterized more and more by religious pluralism.'

Silvio Ferrari (in Willaime and Mathieu 2005)

Most education systems have been designed (as far as their content and teacher-training are concerned) to respond to the needs of relatively homogeneous and monocultural societies. In many countries, teaching about religions is still confessional; as yet it has forged few links and synergies with intercultural and civic education and is scarcely responsive to religious pluralism. In this type of education, situations evolve but they do so too slowly, and the tendency is for

teaching to focus on the religion that is taught. Non-confessional and pluralist religious education has, for its part, made some interesting advances. It is naturally closer to intercultural education and has a potential to contribute to raising students' knowledge of, respect for and acceptance of the diversity of religions and other convictions in society. High-quality teacher-training is, however, the essential condition for the successful integration of non-confessional teaching about religions and other convictions into the objectives of state schools.

The question of teaching about religions remains a politically sensitive issue in most countries, for historical reasons that are peculiar to each state and from fear of all forms of fundamentalism and extremism, especially religious. This is why it is important that teaching about religious (non-confessional) and other convictions should not be designed and delivered in isolation but as a part of the intercultural education of young people. Only under such circumstances will it be acceptable to all, allowing school to remain a peaceful world where learning takes place in a serene atmosphere, open to diversity and to respect for all religions and other convictions. School cannot be a place for religious and convictional confrontation; it is a place for dialogue and for building intercultural experience and knowledge. The more teaching about religions and other convictions has a clear place in the school curriculum in terms of approach and content, the less it will tend to shut itself into a strictly religious logic which has no place in a state school and which will be counter-productive in achieving the aims and objectives of the school.

Whatever approach is developed at a national level, all European countries are confronted by the problem of taking account of minority religions and, particularly, of Islam. The traditional multicultural integration 'models' seem to be inadequate in their response to the challenge. Democracy needs to be rethought: 'a pluralist democracy based not on tacit cultural similarity but on the recognition of an open and accepted notion of diversity . . . The key question is how the secular state manages religious diversity: how we can arrive at shared values rather than aim at common values.'<sup>88</sup> Education, often criticized for its inflexibility and conservatism, is at the cutting edge when it comes to making the necessary changes. The search for solutions could be conducted by following a European secular approach, based on three fundamental principles which should be acceptable to all EU member states: the principle of freedom of conscience and thought; the principle of non-discrimination; and the principle of the mutual independence of politics and religion.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> Rien van Gendt, 'Closing remarks at the conference on Religion and Democracy' (Jerusalem, 3 September 2007), in *Religion and Democracy in Contemporary Europe*, Alliance Publishing Trust 2008.

<sup>89</sup> See the conclusions presented by J-P Willaime, reporting on the 2008 meeting of the Council of Europe on the religious dimension of intercultural dialogue.

To succeed, educational players (decision-makers, practitioners, teachers' organizations, civil society, humanist, secular and religious organizations, etc) should strengthen cooperation at the European level – at the level of both the Council of Europe and the European Union – in order to exchange experience and good practice and to contribute to concrete changes in practice and policy. To make tangible progress, it will be vital to ensure that member states follow through on the calls for action expressed in the December 2008 Recommendation of the Council of Europe Committee of Ministers on the dimension of religions and non-religious convictions within intercultural education and the EU Reference Framework on the key competences for lifelong learning. We hope to support these efforts by proposing the following European Reference Framework on the conditions which should underpin high-quality intercultural teaching of religions and other convictions in state education.

### **Towards a European Reference Framework on the conditions for high-quality intercultural teaching about religions and other convictions in state education**

The proposed European Reference Framework should be seen as a flexible and evolving tool available to the different players concerned in support of their ideas, both domestic and European. It does not seek to impose any particular model: starting points and approaches differ from one country to another and are deeply rooted in the traditions and history of each country. Education remains the responsibility of each member state.

#### *Definition (at compulsory education level)*

- The aim should be **teaching about religions** and other convictions and not religious instruction.
- Teaching about religions should be **neutral and unbiased**, non-confessional, and based on an objective and well-documented presentation of the facts.
- It should be **pluralist**, inclusive of the diversity of religions and other convictions, defined in cooperation with all confessions and other relevant parties.
- It should draw on the **best research work**, in particular in the science of religions.

*Status in the curriculum*

- Teaching about religions and other convictions (either as a separate subject or integrated into others) should take place within the framework of the objectives and programmes of **intercultural, citizenship and human rights education**.
- It should be **provided to all students**.
- It should have **clear objectives**, particularly with respect to the knowledge to be acquired and the attitudes and aptitudes to be developed.
- It should enjoy **sufficient time in the curriculum**.

*Teacher-training*

- **High-quality initial and in-service training** on content and teaching methods.
- **Adequate teaching materials** (content should be pluri-confessional and embrace other convictions).
- **A clear ethical approach** that allows teachers to carry out their teaching in an objective, well-documented and non-partisan way.

*Resources*

- Possible access to **external contributors** who are both qualified and neutral.
- Access to the **best sources of information**, adapted to this kind of teaching; cooperation in particular with departments focusing on science of religions.
- Access to information from the Oslo **European Wergeland Centre** on education in intercultural understanding.
- Availability in all languages of the **Toledo Guiding Principles** (OSCE) on teaching about religions and beliefs in public schools.



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## Appendix A

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## Appendix B

# Main networks and organizations

*Coordinating Group for Religion in Education in Europe (CoGREE)*. Organization established in 1998 to strengthen cooperation between networks and organizations supporting the teaching of religion in Europe. [www.cogree.com](http://www.cogree.com).

*European Association for the Study of Religions (EASR)*. Promotes the study of religions through international collaboration between students whose research bears on these issues. [www.easr.eu](http://www.easr.eu).

*European Association for World Religions in Education (EAWRE)*. Independent association promoting appropriate teaching about world religions in schools and in education generally, with a multi-religious approach. [www.eawre.org](http://www.eawre.org).

*European Forum for Teachers of Religious Education (EFTRE)*. Non-confessional organization which supports cooperation at a European level between national and regional teacher associations, and other institutes and organizations involved in religious education. [www.eftre.net](http://www.eftre.net).

*European Network for Religious Education through Contextual Approaches (ENRECA)*. Set up in 1999; brings together students engaged in theoretical and empirical research on education and religion linked with intercultural issues. [www.enreca.isert-network.com](http://www.enreca.isert-network.com).

*Institut européen en sciences des religions|European Institute of Religious Sciences (IESR)*. Set up at the Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes (Paris, France), following the Debray Report ('L'enseignement du fait religieux dans l'école laïque', 2002). [www.iesr.ephe.sorbonne.fr](http://www.iesr.ephe.sorbonne.fr).

*InterEuropean Commission on Church and School (ICCS)*. Network of churches and institutes for religious education; deals with relations between church and state; ecumenical approach. [www.iccsweb.org](http://www.iccsweb.org).

*Network on Teaching Religion in a Multicultural European Society* (TRES). TRES is a transnational thematic network, created in autumn 2005 and funded under the EU Socrates Programme. [www.teol.uu.se/tres](http://www.teol.uu.se/tres).

*REDCo* (Religion in Education. A contribution to Dialogue or a factor of Conflict in transforming societies of European Countries). Project of the European Union (2006–9); a network of researchers working on religious education in eight European countries, funded by the European Commission under the seventh Research Framework Programme. [www.redco.uni-hamburg.de](http://www.redco.uni-hamburg.de).

*Société, Droit et Religion en Europe* (SDRE). Part of the Unité Mixte de Recherches, PRISME, of the Robert Schuman University and CNRS (Centre national de la recherche scientifique); composed of lawyers, political scientists and specialists in the social sciences of religions, its aim is to carry out comparative studies, at a European level, of the legal status and institutional and cultural situation of religions. SDRE and GSRL (Groupe Sociétés, Religions et Laïcités) have set up EUREL, a website which provides verified and up-to-date data on the sociological and legal status of religion in Europe, with an interdisciplinary perspective. [www.eurel.info](http://www.eurel.info).

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## Appendix C

# National profiles

### Czech Republic

#### General statistics

In the last census (2001), more than half of all Czechs described themselves as having no religion. In 1921, the figure was 7.2 per cent; in 1950, 5.8 per cent; and in 1991, 39.9 per cent.<sup>90</sup>

The majority of students (98.8 per cent) attend state schools.<sup>91</sup> Participation in confessional religious education is very low. There are no official statistics, but one source indicates that 5.9 per cent of primary-school students attend religious education lessons, as against only 0.79 per cent at secondary-education level (ICCS 2007).

#### General organization of the education system

The Czech education system is jointly managed by the central government, the 14 regions, which enjoy considerable autonomy, and the local communities. The latter are responsible for school education (compulsory education from 6 to 15 years – *Základní škola*); they set up the schools and administer them. The head of the school is responsible for the quality of education in the school and for financial management. He or she hires and fires the teachers. The government fixes the main objectives of the education system and its general content, along with the competences to be acquired. These are defined in the Framework Education

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<sup>90</sup> Source: Czech Statistical Office.

<sup>91</sup> Data is for primary education; the figure for secondary education is 84.7 per cent (Eurydice 2008).

Programme, which serves as a reference to the schools for the development of their own programmes; it is responsible for teacher-training and the School Register. A school, whether state or private, is only constituted after it has been added to the Register. This is the condition which allows it to receive financial support from the state. The government finances private schools (mainly non-confessional) since their inclusion in the school system in 1990 by an amendment to the 1984 law on the education system. Since 2005, this has been prescribed by the 2004 education law. Their funding is equivalent to state schools (Eurydice 2008).

### **Place in the curriculum, objectives and approaches**

Teaching about religions in state schools is at two levels: a distinction has to be made between teaching about religions and confessional religious education. Teaching about religions, or about knowledge of religions, takes the same approach as in France with the teaching of religious facts, and is integrated into the various compulsory disciplines, mainly history, geography, civic education and intercultural education, defined in the Framework Programme for Basic Education adopted in 2007. Its target is knowledge, not beliefs.

The history syllabus deals with ancient civilizations and the roots of European culture (such as the birth of Christianity and connections with Judaism); Christianity and medieval Europe (the role of Christianity and religion, conflicts between the church and secular powers, relations between Christianity and heresy, Islam and the influence on Europe of the Islamic empires, the papacy, the crusades, etc); the beginnings of the modern era (the Hussite movement, the Reformation, baroque culture and the Enlightenment, etc); the modernization of society and the modern era (such as anti-Semitism, racism and its rejection from the point of view of human rights, the Holocaust).

Civic education highlights human rights, non-discrimination, tolerance in general and in particular towards minorities, respect for cultural differences and differences of opinion. Among cross-curricular subjects, citizenship education develops respect for cultural and ethnic differences; multicultural education also highlights the ability to recognize and tolerate the differences in other national, ethnic, religious and social groups and to interact with different socio-cultural groups. The focus is to make students aware of the incompatibility between racial, religious and other forms of intolerance and the principles of life in a democratic society. The cross-curricular subject 'Thinking in a European and global context' also aims to develop a positive attitude towards difference and cultural diversity.

Confessional religious education has optional status. It is taught outside the time allotted to compulsory and optional subjects. With this status, the time allotted to the subject depends on each headteacher (Eurydice 2005). Lessons in

religion are no more than one hour a week. Participation in these classes is very limited (see above), especially in secondary education. This is due not only to 'the lack of interest in this particular optional subject among students of secondary schools, but also to the insufficient interest and ability on the part of the church to offer religious education to students who are more adult and hence also more critical and independent' (Fiala and Hanus, 2007).

The law fixes the provisions for confessional teaching in state schools. It must be delivered in accordance with the objectives and principles of education, which include tolerance and religious plurality.<sup>92</sup> Making use of the specific rights they have been granted, the churches and religious associations organize religious education in state schools.<sup>93</sup> The different confessions are responsible for the content and quality of this education and organize the registration of students. There must be at least seven students interested before a course can be set up (this can consist of students from different year groups, and several schools can group together as long as the number in the group is no greater than 30 students). It is the headteacher's responsibility to ensure that all the conditions for setting up such a course are met.<sup>94</sup> The first Catholic education syllabus for compulsory education was approved in 1996; for confessional schools in 2004. It can be used for non-compulsory religious education in other schools. These syllabuses are mainly aimed at providing religious instruction.

### Teachers

In the Czech Republic, initial teacher-training is not standardized. The various faculties define their study programmes autonomously. The ministry requires that religious education teachers have a university degree in theology. However, any university degree with a specialism in teaching religion is often considered sufficient. It is apparently not uncommon that Catholic teachers have only a secondary-education qualification and a one year's course to teach catechism. Only a minority are graduates of colleges of theology (Fiala and Hanus 2007). Just as for other teachers, religious education teachers are free to choose their teaching methods. Although religious education teachers in confessional schools are remunerated from the school budget in the same way as other teachers, the situation is less clear in state schools. As both state and private schools often lack financial resources to offer other optional subjects and because the religious education in these schools is often given by part-time staff, it can

<sup>92</sup> Law no. 561 of 24 September 2004 on pre-school, primary, secondary, vocational and other education (Education law) – Teaching religion (section 15).

<sup>93</sup> Law no. 3 of 27 November 2001 on the churches and religious societies (section 7 – Specific rights of the churches and the registered religious associations).

<sup>94</sup> As note 92 above.

happen that teachers are paid from funds provided by the local diocese (Fiala and Hanus 2007).

### **Assessment**

As confessional religious education is not part of the compulsory curriculum, it escapes any form of official inspection. The diocese is generally responsible for this.

#### *People consulted*

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## **England<sup>95</sup>**

### **General statistics**

A survey carried out in 2003/4<sup>96</sup> on the place of religion in the population gave the following results in England and Wales: 79.9 per cent Christian; 3 per cent Muslim; 1.1 per cent Hindu; 0.6 per cent Sikh; 0.5 per cent Jewish; 0.3 per cent Buddhist; and 0.8 per cent other religions. 13.8 per cent replied that they had no religion.

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<sup>95</sup> We shall deal principally with England. Indeed, situations differ considerably in the remainder of the United Kingdom, particularly in Scotland and Northern Ireland.

<sup>96</sup> Source: Labour Force Survey, data of 2003/4. Question asked: 'What is your religion even if you are not currently practising?' UK National Statistics ([www.statistics.gov.uk](http://www.statistics.gov.uk)).



The majority of students in the United Kingdom (58.9 per cent) are in state education (primary and secondary), as against 37.2 per cent in grant-aided private education and 3.9 per cent in non-grant-aided private education.<sup>97</sup> In January 2004 there were some 7,000 state-aided confessional schools in England – 36 per cent of primary schools and 17 per cent of secondary schools, out of a total of 21,000 schools; 99 per cent of these schools were Christian. There were four Muslim and two Sikh state-aided schools.<sup>98</sup> Nearly 100 private Islamic schools are today on track for state funding.<sup>99</sup> At the time of the last census (2001), the ethnic minority populations in the United Kingdom consisted of 4.6 million people, representing nearly 8 per cent of the total population. Some 38 per cent of these live in the Greater London area, where they represent 28 per cent of the population. In the school census for England of 2003, 10.5 per cent of primary students and 8.8 per cent of secondary students had English as an additional language (Eurydice 2003/4).

### **Legal framework and organization**

Since the 1944 Education Act, all maintained schools<sup>100</sup> must implement a locally agreed religious education syllabus, as well as a daily act of worship. The 1988 Education Reform Act, which established a national curriculum for the first time, confirmed, as did succeeding Acts, this obligation (with possibility of exemption). However, the term 'religious instruction' has been replaced by 'religious education', and representatives of religions other than Christianity can now officially take part in the design of local syllabuses for religious education, which has become non-denominational and pluri-religious. 'The most positive feature of the 1988 legislation, although a compromise, was that it confirmed the educational nature of religious education and ensured that all the principal religions in Britain would be studied as part of the programme of all students in fully state-funded schools' (Jackson and O'Grady 2007, p 185).

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<sup>97</sup> Source: *Key data on education in Europe 2005*, European Commission (Eurydice/Eurostat).

<sup>98</sup> National Statistics (2008), 'Education: one in three Muslims have no qualifications' ([www.statistics.gov.uk/cci/nugget.asp?id=963](http://www.statistics.gov.uk/cci/nugget.asp?id=963)).

<sup>99</sup> *The Economist*, 'Faith and schools – religious rights and wrongs', 4 September 2008.

<sup>100</sup> Maintained schools today include schools belonging to local authorities, community schools (the most numerous), voluntary schools and foundation schools. Foundation schools are also funded by local authorities but belong to the school board or a charitable foundation. Voluntary schools, in most cases originally established by the churches, are now mainly funded by local authorities. The 1988 School Standards and Framework Act redefined school categories and introduced the notion of 'religious character'. Most of the voluntary-aided or voluntary-controlled schools, as well as some foundation schools, have a religious character.

Religion is not, however, a core or foundation subject of the National Curriculum.<sup>101</sup> The implementation of religious education is defined at the level of the 172 local authorities. Each local authority must adopt, and revise every five years, a locally agreed syllabus for religious education. The local syllabuses apply to all maintained schools, except schools with a religious character. Each local authority must establish a Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education (SACRE), which supervises the implementation of the syllabus, offers advice to the authorities, and reports back every year to the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA)<sup>102</sup> on the progress of the syllabus. The SACREs have a pluri-denominational composition and consist of four representative groups: Christian and other religions; the Church of England; teacher organizations; and local authorities. A SACRE can also include humanists and members of minority religions.

The QCA, in cooperation with representatives of various religious communities, designed in 1994 two model syllabuses for religious education to help local authorities develop their syllabuses at local level. A major step to improve the efficiency, coherence and evaluation of religious education was taken in 2004, with the production after wide consultation of the first non-statutory National Framework. It is supported by the main religious communities, who signed an agreement in February 2006 in which they encouraged their schools to use it.

### **Objectives and approaches**

The 2004 National Framework for religious education specifies that the local religious education syllabuses must contribute to the general objectives of the National Curriculum, ie 'the spiritual, moral, cultural, mental and physical development of pupils at school and in society'. According to the terms of the 1988 Reform Act, which have been used in texts adopted since then, all syllabuses designed locally must reflect the mainly Christian religious traditions of the country, while at the same time taking into account the teaching and practices of other religions represented in the country. The compulsory daily act of worship must be mainly Christian. The National Framework emphasizes that teaching must give a clear understanding of the meaning of religions and beliefs in today's world, recognizing their similarities as well as their differences. The Framework underlines the knowledge, skills and attitudes to be acquired at each stage of learning. Religion has to be learned *about*, including its nature, facts and practices, vocabulary, and means of expression; and learned *from*, by making students think about their own

<sup>101</sup> The National Curriculum defines two levels of compulsory subjects: core subjects (English, maths and science) and foundation subjects (ICT, history and geography, art and design, music and physical education).

<sup>102</sup> It has recently become the Qualifications and Curriculum Development Agency (QCDA), with a refocusing of its work on curriculum development, evaluation and qualifications.

experience and the experience of others.<sup>103</sup> Students have to understand not only Christianity but also the other main religions represented in the country, such as Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, Judaism and Sikhism; and they also have to learn about philosophies such as humanism.

### **Number of hours**

The legal minimum lesson time for the whole school curriculum is 21 hours a week for students of 5–7 years and 23.5 hours for those of 8–11 years. Most schools go beyond this number of hours. The time allocated to each subject, including religious education, is not fixed by law. This applies also to teaching methods and materials, although considerable guidance is given to teachers and schools for the delivery of the curriculum. Too little time, however, seems to be allocated to implementation of the local religious education syllabuses, and religion classes, alongside music and citizenship education, seem to be the poor relations when it comes to allocating hours in the curriculum (REC 2007). Although it is recommended that 5 per cent of curriculum time be allocated to religious education, this is rarely the case because it is not compulsory.<sup>104</sup>

### **Teachers**

In primary schools it is the class teacher who teaches religion. There is usually one teacher per school, specialist or not, designated to help teachers deal with the subject. At secondary level, most schools have at least one specialist teacher on their staff. All teachers are employed by the school and paid by the local authorities. The number of teachers following PGCE courses (Post Graduate Certificate in Education) in religious education is on the increase (Lankshear 2007).

### **Examinations and inspection**

Religious education is one of the subjects that can be chosen for GCSE (General Certificate of Secondary Education) at 16 years and for GCE A level (General Certificate of Education Advanced) at 18 years. Religion is bound by the same inspection regime as all other subjects, except in schools of a religious character, where inspection is the responsibility of the religious groups who run the school.

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<sup>103</sup> In schools with a religious character (mainly voluntary-aided schools), there is a third approach: 'learning *within* religion' (Lankshear 2007).

<sup>104</sup> 'Religious education in England and Wales', [www.mmiweb.org.uk/eftrereurope/england\\_2009.html](http://www.mmiweb.org.uk/eftrereurope/england_2009.html) (website of EFTRE, *European Forum for Teachers of Religious Education*).

### **Evaluation of the quality of teaching**

Ofsted (Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills),<sup>105</sup> which is responsible for the inspection of the education system, produced in June 2007 a report, 'Making sense of religion' (Ofsted 2007), which takes stock of religious education in schools and the impact of locally agreed syllabuses. The report recognizes that progress has been made since local authorities and schools have had access to the National Framework for religious education: students' achievement at primary level has improved; more students choose the subject for examination at secondary level; a more positive image and a greater consensus about the nature and purpose of the subject exist. But Ofsted states that the general quality of religious education remains inadequate, with significant variations within the different education levels and between schools. One problem is the inadequacy of teacher-training, with only 36 per cent of new teachers judging that they have been well prepared to teach in multicultural schools. Moreover, too many local advisory councils (SACREs) are without sufficient resources to make a success of their work. Ofsted recommends that the government should consider making the National Framework, currently non-binding, the statutory basis for locally agreed religious education syllabuses, with some allowance for local determination of specific content to reflect local circumstances.

A government report published in 2007 takes stock of citizenship and diversity education in the curriculum. It recognizes the essential contribution of the National Framework for religious education and expresses the hope that it be generalized (DfES 2007, p 55). In its recommendations, the report proposes, moreover, a joint Citizenship with Religion GCSE. In its proposals for a national strategy for religious education (REC 2007), the Religious Education Council follows a similar line and asks that teaching about religion should be more closely linked to related developments in education, particularly citizenship. The Council proposes the setting up of a liaison group for citizenship, diversity and religious education in the DfES and its agencies.

#### *People consulted*

- Dr Joanna Le Metais, independent consultant, expert in UK education; former head (1984–97) of the UK (England, Wales and Northern Ireland) unit of Eurydice, the information network on education in Europe ([www.eurydice.org](http://www.eurydice.org)).

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<sup>105</sup> A unified inspection service since 2007.

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**France****General statistics**

According to a survey in 2007,<sup>106</sup> 69 per cent of French people of 15 years and over replied that they had a religion: 59 per cent of these described themselves as Catholic, 3 per cent as Muslim, 2 per cent as Protestant, 1 per cent as Jewish and 1 per cent as Buddhist; 2 per cent said they had their own religion and 1 per cent another religion. Only 2 per cent of those who declared that they had a religion went to mass or other religious services several times a week; 8 per cent went once a week and 7 per cent once or twice a month, making a total of 17 per cent practising a religion regularly.

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<sup>106</sup> 'Les Français et la religion', TNS Sofres, study carried out April 2007. [www.tns-sofres.com/etuse/pol/050407\\_religion.htm](http://www.tns-sofres.com/etuse/pol/050407_religion.htm).

The majority of primary and secondary students (79 per cent) attend state schools. Of the 21 per cent who attend private schools, 20.6 per cent are in private grant-aided mainly confessional schools, predominantly Catholic, and 0.4 per cent are in schools financed by private individuals.<sup>107</sup> Ministry of Education statistics registered, for 2002, 6 per cent foreign students in primary schools and 4.6 per cent in secondary. Out of the 617,000 foreign students in primary and secondary, the most heavily represented nationalities are: Moroccan (150,000), Algerian (80,000), Tunisian (45,000) and Turkish (70,500). Some 80,000 students are of African origin (Eurydice 2004).

### **Secularism (*laïcité*) at the heart of the public education system**

France is the only EU country where there is no specific teaching of religion in state schools.<sup>108</sup> Alongside compulsory and free schooling, secularism (*laïcité*) is one of the three founding principles of the state school system, created in 1882 by the minister of education at the time, Jules Ferry,<sup>109</sup> well before the 1905 law which established the separation of church and state. State education then became neutral and non-confessional. Religion no longer had a right of place in state schools and was expelled to the private sphere. The Ferry law, however, allowed for one day a week, other than Sunday, to be free to allow parents to give their children religious education of their choice, but outside the school framework. The setting up of chaplaincies in secondary schools was also permitted. To mark this radical change of approach, 'moral and religious' instruction became 'moral and civic' instruction.<sup>110</sup> The status of teaching staff was revised accordingly as follows: 'In state schools, teaching is exclusively the responsibility of secular staff.'<sup>111</sup>

Although secularism (*laïcité*) brought an easing of tension in relations between church and state, its implementation in education has always been a sensitive issue and remains so. History has been marked by episodes of considerable conflict, in particular on the status and public funding accorded to the private education sector, which covers one in five children – funding which is perceived to be a distortion of the principle of *laïcité*. In the 'school war' of 1984 the first socialist government of François Mitterrand attempted to create a great

<sup>107</sup> Source: *Key data on education in Europe 2005*, European Commission (Eurydice/Eurostat).

<sup>108</sup> The exceptions are the *départements* of Alsace-Moselle (under the jurisdiction of the German Empire from 1870 to 1919, when the 1905 law was passed), where three religions are recognized (Catholic, Protestant and Jewish). The state finances the ministers of these religions and optional religious instruction is offered in state schools (Eurybase 2007/8).

<sup>109</sup> The Ferry law rescinded the Falloux law of 1850, which gave a dominant place to religious education and to the Catholic Church, in particular, in primary education.

<sup>110</sup> Nevertheless, it was only in 1923, when primary-education programmes were revised, that the 'duties towards God', retained in moral education, were abolished (Willaime 2007).

<sup>111</sup> Article 17 of the law of 30 October 1886 on the organization of primary education.

'unified and secular National Education service', but was forced to shelve the project following extensive demonstrations by defenders of private schools. Following various incidents which took place in secondary schools in 1989, the issue of the wearing of the Islamic headscarf, and more generally the wearing of religious symbols in school, put the question of secularism back on the agenda. The law of 15 March 2004, the only one of its kind in the EU, decided the issue by stipulating that 'the wearing of symbols or garments with which students conspicuously demonstrate their adherence to a religion is forbidden in state primary and lower- and upper-secondary schools'.

### **Place in the curriculum**

Over the last 20 or so years, France has become aware of the need to take account of the issue of religions in the secular state school. Particularly since the early 2000s, in the context of the dramatic events of 11 September 2001 and the growing incidence of violence in schools, there has been no doubt that the 1996 school programmes failed to go far enough.<sup>112</sup> In his report of February 2002 on 'Teaching about religious facts in the secular school' to the then minister of education Jacques Lang, the writer and philosopher Régis Debray emphasized that 'The time has come to go from an approach to secularism which ignores religion [*laïcité d'incompétence*, in which religion does not concern us] to one which promotes knowledge about it [*laïcité d'intelligence*, in which it is our duty to understand it]' (Debray 2002). On the basis of this report, an important colloquium, in November 2002, brought together specialists, practitioners and politicians and resulted in a clarification of the meaning, objectives and conditions for implementing such teaching. The consensus that it was necessary to teach 'religious facts' and not religion as such was reaffirmed. The core of this concept is that religious fact is 'an observable fact, a field of knowledge, an element of culture and a dimension which helps understand societies' (Eurydice 2005). The chosen approach is multi-disciplinary. Religious facts need to be taught through all relevant subjects, such as history, literature, geography and civic education. The April 2005 education law on the future of schooling gives priority to the inclusion of this kind of teaching in the initial and in-service training of teachers, as well as to the development of teaching tools, and finally to 'the appropriate insertion of this knowledge area into the syllabuses of the main subjects involved'.

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<sup>112</sup> Since 1986 the history of religions has in fact been part of the history syllabus, and the French syllabus includes reading the founding texts of religions. The reform of lower-secondary syllabuses (11–15 years) and of the first year of upper-secondary (16 years), carried out from 1996, was the first step in a more specific consideration of 'religious facts' in the history, geography and French syllabuses.

On the basis of the 2005 law, two initiatives were adopted in 2006: a common foundation of knowledge and skills (*Socle commun de connaissances et de compétences*) to be progressively acquired by students over the duration of their schooling from nursery school to the end of compulsory schooling; and the terms of reference of teacher-training (*Cahier des charges de la formation des maîtres*). 'Social and civic competences' and the 'humanist culture' are among the seven competences to be acquired by students. The latter is based on knowing about the 'different periods of the history of humanity', through linking 'political, economic, social, cultural, religious, scientific, technical, literary and artistic facts'; and knowing about 'the diversity of civilizations, societies and religions; the religious facts in France, in Europe and in the world, with reference to the founding texts in the Bible or the Koran . . . in a spirit of secularism (*laïcité*), respectful of different beliefs and convictions'. The social and civic competences, considered until then to have been somewhat neglected at school, aim to prepare the student for life in society (rules for living in a community, respect for others through politeness and tolerance, rejection of prejudices and stereotypes, peaceful resolution of conflicts, etc) and for life as an informed citizen (knowledge of the symbols of the Republic, the Universal Declaration of Human and Citizens' Rights, the fundamental rules of democratic life, etc). This common foundation of competences is considered to be 'the cement of the nation: a set of values, knowledge, languages and practices'. 'Mastering the common foundation means that the student is in a position to understand the great challenges of humanity, the diversity of cultures and the universality of human rights.'<sup>113</sup> The principal subjects involved in teaching religious facts are history, geography, literature, philosophy, the visual arts and music.

In June 2008 the minister of education presented the new programmes for primary education, which included some new fields, such as history of art (taking account, for example, of religious architecture and music) and teaching about the Holocaust. At the end of August 2008, the new programmes for lower-secondary education were published. The new programmes for history, geography and civic education have been designed in the light of their common contribution to the development of humanist culture and social and civic competences. In the history programme, 'room is made for teaching about religious facts, connecting them to the study of the contexts in which they developed in order to better

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<sup>113</sup> Decree no. 2006/830 of 11 July 2006, relating to the common foundation of knowledge and competences (*Socle commun de connaissances et de compétences*) and modifying the education code; JORF no. 160 of 12 July 2006.



understand their origins'.<sup>114</sup> In the second year of lower-secondary education, the programme starts with the birth of Islam as a religious fact. An interdisciplinary approach between disciplines dealing with the history of art is encouraged. Religious facts are included in the study of architecture and music and in the subject 'Art, myths and religions'. In French lessons, readings conducted in class must be 'thought-provoking on the place of the individual in society and on the facts of civilization, in particular, on religious facts'.<sup>115</sup>

### Teacher-training

As a result of the Debray Report of 2002, the European Institute of Religious Sciences (IESR) was set up in 2006 at the Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes in Paris (Sorbonne), with a mission to help teachers get to grips with the teaching of religious facts and to encourage joint discussions on curriculum content. The institute has a European dimension so that the French education system can benefit from experiments undertaken elsewhere in Europe. One of the added values of the IESR is the bridges that have been built between two completely different worlds – between higher education and research (where scientific, multi-disciplinary and secular approaches to religious facts are very well developed) and primary and secondary education (Willaime 2007). The IESR makes available to teachers a great variety of different online resources.<sup>116</sup>

Following the Debray Report, a module of ten hours per year on the 'philosophy of secularism (*philosophie de la laïcité*) and teaching religious facts' was introduced into the University Institutes for the Training of Schoolteachers (IUFM) of a few *académies* (regional education authorities). For the first time, teacher-training was providing a course on religions and secularism (*laïcité*). 'But one cannot fail to notice the very limited character of this initiative, judging from the low number of hours allocated to this course' (Willaime 2007). Moreover, the cross-curricular nature of the subject means that too many of the University Institutes still fail to give it any real priority in their training programmes. Because France has opted for an interdisciplinary approach to teaching religious facts, compatible with the principle of educational secularism (*laïcité scolaire*), it is confronted with the crucial question of training all the different subject teachers concerned to carry out the task of integrating religious facts into their teaching. 'Teachers are not sufficiently equipped to tackle this subject, which requires

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<sup>114</sup> Official Journal of the Ministry of National Education; special edition of Official Journal no. 6 of 28 August 2008, 'Programmes du collège – Programmes de l'enseignement d'histoire-géographie-éducation civique: introduction'.

<sup>115</sup> Official Journal of the Ministry of National Education; special edition of Official Journal no. 6 of 28 August 2008, 'Programme du collège – Programmes de l'enseignement du français'.

<sup>116</sup> www.iesr.ephe.sorbonne.fr.

specific knowledge ... Although there is agreement nowadays on the content that this subject needs to cover, its implementation has been only partially achieved ... it is limited to a historical, patrimonial and pragmatic approach to religious facts ... Tackling religious facts in a comprehensive way presupposes specific knowledge that has to be identified, as well as an examination of one's personal convictions in order to develop an honest and reasoned approach to teaching religious facts.<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>117</sup> Nathalie Barthez-Delpy, 'Les faits religieux dans les programmes d'histoire, entre modifications et finalités: conséquences sur les pratiques éducatives', International Colloquium on Comparative Education (CIEP), October 2005.

## Romania

### General statistics

The majority of the population (nearly 87 per cent) is of the Orthodox religion, according to the last census (2002). Other religions and religious organizations are officially recognized, the biggest being Catholics, Protestants, Evangelists, Muslims and followers of the Mosaic religion (Eurydice 2006/7). About 31 per cent of the population say that they go to mass several times a month, according to a survey carried out in September 2007,<sup>118</sup> which represents a higher figure than in most EU countries.

State schools dominate the Romanian educational landscape, accounting for more than 98 per cent of all students.<sup>119</sup>

### General organization of the education system

The duration of compulsory education has been ten years since 2003/4 and is organized in three stages: primary school from 6 to 10 years (*școală primară*); the first general phase of lower-secondary from 10 to 14 years (*gimnaziu*); and the second phase of lower-secondary, with a general or specialist course of study (*liceu ciclul inferior*) or vocational course of study (*școală de arte și meserii*), from 14 to 16 years. In upper-secondary, some 80 establishments offer teaching of theology. The official language of tuition is Romanian, but at all levels teaching is also delivered in the languages of the linguistic minorities (Hungarian, German, Serbian, Ukrainian, Czech, Turkish and Romany).

Reforms carried out since 1990 have supported the decentralization of the education system. The ministry of education defines the minimum and maximum number of teaching hours, and on this basis schools determine the local organization of the school timetable. The framework programme for compulsory education, defined at a national level, includes the core curriculum (*trunchi comun de materii obligatorii*). Subjects fall into seven fields: language and communication; mathematics and natural sciences; man and society (including religion); the arts; physical education; technologies; counselling and guidance. Teaching methods are not imposed, but there are recommendations on textbooks, homework and the use of ICT (Eurydice 2008).

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<sup>118</sup> 'International religious freedom: Romania', 2008 report published by the US Department of State; [www.unhcr.org/refworld/category,COL,,,ROM,48d5cbe370,0.html](http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/category,COL,,,ROM,48d5cbe370,0.html).

<sup>119</sup> Romanian Statistical Yearbook 2007.

## Teaching about religions

The constitution, the 1995 education law and the 2006 law on religious freedom<sup>120</sup> determine the principles and organization of religious education in state schools. According to the constitution, 'the state shall ensure the freedom of religious education, in accordance with the specific requirements of each religious cult. In public schools, religious education is organized and guaranteed by law'<sup>121</sup> and the different recognized confessions have the right to teach religion. It is, however, the majority religion (Orthodox) which dominates.

During the 40 years of communism, religions and religious education experienced considerable restrictions, even though two religions, Orthodox and Roman Catholicism, were tolerated. The Greco-Catholic church was the most affected by these restrictions.<sup>122</sup> The reinstatement of this teaching in state schools was one of the churches' first requests after the fall of communism in 1989. Before 1948, the school system had a confessional approach, which it restored after the fall of communism by reinstating religion as a school discipline. However, since 1993 the term 'religious education' has not been used, and 'religion' is used instead. The subject is included in the pre-university core curriculum of compulsory subjects. With the written consent of their parents or legal guardians, students can be exempted (although this situation is rare, with 90 per cent of students participating).<sup>123</sup> There is no alternative subject proposed. In that case the subject does not count in a student's overall average mark, and the same applies to students who cannot take part in a course on religion because the number of students registered is insufficient.

To set up a course in religion there must be a minimum of ten students in compulsory education and 15 in upper-secondary. A group can be made up of several different levels of education, with the agreement of the school inspectorate. If too few students in a school are interested, the churches can provide teaching at their own cost and students' marks are accepted by the schools (Wünsch 2007).

## Place in the curriculum, objectives and approaches

Religion belongs to the core curriculum of compulsory subjects (*trunchi comun de materii obligatorii*) at pre-university level. Included among the seven fields of the compulsory curriculum is 'man and society' (*om și societate*). Religion is one

<sup>120</sup> Law no. 489/2006 on religious freedom and the general regime of denominations.

<sup>121</sup> Article 32, 'The right to education' (chapter 1: Common provisions; title II: 'Fundamental rights, freedoms and duties').

<sup>122</sup> The constitutions of 1948, 1952 and 1965 stipulated that confessions and religious congregations and communities could not carry out teaching, except in the case of training clerical staff.

<sup>123</sup> 'Society today – religion in school', Radio Romania International, 4 June 2008; www.rri.ro.

of the five subjects in this field, along with history, geography, civic education and philosophy. One hour a week is devoted to it in compulsory education.

The framework programme for religious education is based on common objectives for all confessions:<sup>124</sup>

- knowledge and love of God;
- use of a language based on religious values;
- knowledge of holy scriptures, religious traditions and the history of the church;
- training in Christian values and moral and religious behaviour;
- learning to understand, accept and respect other beliefs and convictions.

Even if the fifth common objective encourages exposure to other beliefs and religions, it does not seem that this approach has been developed very far. 'An inter-confessional approach to religious education is inconceivable. The syllabuses have almost no space for information about other world religions . . . Each confession/religion works independently. The Romanian Orthodox Church as the church of the majority strives to establish its place as a national church. The ministry of culture has started an initiative to work out a comprehensive publication about "religious and theological teaching" in Romania, and all recognized religions have been invited to collaborate. But the focus is not so much on presenting a common ecumenical front as on teaching the Orthodox religion' (Wünsch 2007).

'Structural changes need to be made in the orientation of training programmes at all levels, not least at university. The introduction of intercultural education should go beyond teaching the bare essentials in minority languages. It is necessary to introduce cultural content that allows mutual learning between ethnically and religiously different groups sharing a common space. Similarly, a revision of teaching materials to make them more representative of the groups currently making up the Romanian population could lead to a more positive portrayal of the *de facto* diversity of the country and thereby lessen prejudice and stereotypes, both sources of tension in society.'<sup>125</sup>

The specific religious education syllabus is designed by each faith, then submitted to the minister of state responsible for faiths and finally approved

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<sup>124</sup> Constantin Cucos (Faculté de Psychologie et Sciences de l'Education, Alexandru Ioan Cuza University, Iasi, Romania), 'L'étude de la religion – en tant que discipline d'enseignement – dans les pays à religion orthodoxe majoritaire de l'Est de l'Europe', 3 March 2008; [www.constantincucos.blogspot.com](http://www.constantincucos.blogspot.com).

<sup>125</sup> Translation of an extract from 'Les perceptions de futurs enseignants sur l'éducation interculturelle en Roumanie', Mirela Moldoveanu (University of Ottawa) and Anca Dumitru (University of Bucharest), September 2004.

by the ministry of education. Religious education textbooks are assessed by a committee appointed by the ministry to authorize textbooks for the different subjects in the programme.

### Teachers

The 128/1997 law on the status of teaching staff (article 136) specifies that religion must be taught by qualified teachers, based on protocols agreed between the ministry and the religions officially recognized by the state. Teachers are trained in higher-education institutions or, in the case of primary teachers, in seminaries or theological colleges (*seminarii/licee teologice*). They have to meet the same training standards as other teachers. Members of the clergy who teach religion need a certificate, without which they are not considered to be qualified. The different confessions send the names of their teachers of religion to the local school inspectorate which keeps a list of teachers who have been approved by the churches. Teachers of religion are paid by the state, or by the parish if there is not a sufficient number of students (Wünsch 2007).

In 2004/5 10,514 teachers taught the subject 'religion' (Romanian Orthodox); among these only 2,987 were tenured, the remainder being replacement teachers. This situation creates a problem where the qualifications and status of these teachers are concerned. There were 572 Roman Catholics, 207 Greek Catholics, 440 from the Reformed church, 60 Evangelicals, 60 Muslims, 171 Baptists and 195 Pentecostals.<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>126</sup> Radu Petre Muresan (University of Bucharest), 'Tradition et renouvellement de l'enseignement religieux dans les écoles publiques en Roumanie'; [www.ftoub.ro/download/Muresan](http://www.ftoub.ro/download/Muresan).

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## Spain

### General statistics

According to a survey carried out in October 2008, 78.1 per cent of Spanish people describe themselves as Catholic, 1.8 per cent as belonging to another religion, 12.3 per cent as non-believers, and 5.9 per cent as atheist. Over half – 55.6 per cent – say they practically never go to church and 14.5 per cent go every Sunday.<sup>127</sup>

Spain is a decentralized country with 17 autonomous Communities which have wide powers; for instance, health and education are managed at Community level. The majority of students (68.7 per cent) in primary and secondary go to state schools. However, the share of grant-aided private education is relatively large (26.4 per cent of all students); 4.9 per cent are in non-grant-aided private schools.<sup>128</sup> Grant-aided private education is composed of 70 per cent Catholic schools. There has been considerable growth in the number of foreign students in classes (non-university level) over the last few years, from seven students per 1,000 in 1995/6 to 69 students per 1,000 in 2005/6, 82 per cent of whom are in state schools.<sup>129</sup>

### Legal framework and organization

The different laws on education (*Ley Orgánica de Educación* – LOE) recognize parents' rights to educate their children according to their religious and moral beliefs (article 27.3 of the constitution); freedom of choice between state and private schools; and non-discrimination over access on ideological, religious, moral, social or racial grounds. The new LOE of 2006 aims to simplify all existing laws and now constitutes the legal framework for the Spanish education system. Its implementation over five years began in 2006/7.

Where the Catholic Church is concerned, the place of religion in the education system is based on the Agreement on education and cultural affairs of

<sup>127</sup> Source: Centre for Sociological Research (CIS), study no. 2775, October 2008.

<sup>128</sup> Source: *Key data on education in Europe 2005*, European Commission (Eurydice/Eurostat).

<sup>129</sup> National System of Education Indicators 2007, Institute of Evaluation (Ministry of Education); [www.institutodeevaluacion.mec.es](http://www.institutodeevaluacion.mec.es).

January 1979 between the Spanish state and the Holy See.<sup>130</sup> For other religions, it is based on cooperation agreements signed in 1992 with the Protestant churches (*Federación de Entidades Religiosas Evangélicas de España*); the Jewish communities (*Federación de Comunidades Israelitas de España*); and the Muslim communities (*Comisión Islámica de España*). These agreements (article 10) establish the rights of children to receive an education in their own religion in state and grant-aided private schools. The only condition is that this education should not be in contradiction to the school's philosophy. The teachers, paid by the state, are appointed by the relevant Communities, who are responsible for the syllabus and the textbooks used.

The Catholic Church organizes religious education in state schools. 'The Catholic Church has successfully resisted a complete secularization of the Spanish educational system, maintaining a *de facto* monopoly on religious instruction inside public schools and running a huge majority of state-subsidized private schools' (Dietz 2007, p 103). It was in 1994 that the first decree regulating the organization of religious education was adopted.<sup>131</sup> It established that religious education had to be offered by all schools (public or private) but that it was optional for students. The new decrees adopted to implement the 2006 LOE defined the minimum education content for primary education and for compulsory lower-secondary education.<sup>132</sup> They confirmed the status of religious education (compulsory for schools to offer it but optional for students). At primary level, parents decide at the beginning of the school year whether or not to register their child in the religious education course (the Catholic religion or other confessions that have signed agreements with the state). At compulsory secondary education level, students who choose the religious education course have the choice between the Catholic religion (or other confessions that have signed agreements with the state) and a course on the history and culture of religions. For students who do not follow the religious education course, each school (primary or secondary) must offer activities or alternative courses in their school plans, and parents must know about these in advance. Such a choice should not lead to any discrimination. Assessment in the religious education course or the course on the history and culture of religions takes place as for other subjects, but it cannot be taken into account in the average mark required to sit competitive exams, to obtain grants or to go to university.

<sup>130</sup> Agreement of 3 January 1979 between the Spanish state and the Holy See on education and cultural issues; BOE no. 300, 15 December 1979.

<sup>131</sup> Royal Decree 2438/1994 of 16 December, regulating the teaching of religion; BOE no. 22, 26 January 1995.

<sup>132</sup> Royal Decree 1631/2006 of 29 December, laying down minimum requirements for teaching compulsory secondary education (BOE no. 5); and Royal Decree 1513/2006 of 7 December, laying down minimum requirements for teaching primary education (BOE no. 5).



The new education law of 2006 does not go as far as the supporters of a neutral educational approach would have wished, but some progress has nevertheless been made.<sup>133</sup> The law strengthens the administration's ability to monitor equal access to state and private schools.<sup>134</sup> Private schools were often suspected of encouraging a hidden form of selection that led to school segregation and unequal access to private and state education.<sup>135</sup> In its additional provisions, the LOE stipulates that teaching of religions will be in accordance not only with the 1979 agreement with the Catholic religion but also with the 1992 cooperation agreements with the Protestant, Jewish and Islamic religions, as well as with any agreements that may be reached in the future with other denominations. This stance signals the state's desire to put all religions on an equal footing, conforming to the spirit of the constitution.

As things stand, in spite of existing agreements, the Jewish, Protestant and Muslim faiths are not on the same footing as the Catholic religion. The Muslim religion suffers most clearly from this discrimination. Experiments and pilot projects have been carried out, for example in Malaga and Granada, often at the initiative of parents, but they have met with many difficulties. Without doubt the most successful of such schemes is the experiment run since 1996 in the Spanish enclaves of North Africa, Ceuta and Melilla, where almost 50 per cent of the students are Muslim. Feeding on the dissatisfaction of the Muslim community, 'there is now a strong and explicit movement struggling to privatize Islamic religious education' (Dietz 2007, p 124).

The status and importance of Catholic religious education in the state education system, where it is not unusual to find religious symbols in schools, are the target of frequent criticism by trade unions and secular and political lobbies. The socialists, who came to power in 2004, blocked the implementation of the law on the quality of education (LOCE), which the conservatives had just voted in and which would have given more weight to religious education, by reinstating its compulsory character.<sup>136</sup>

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<sup>133</sup> 'Religion is voluntary and teachers benefit from the Workers' Statute', press release from Ministry of Education and Science, 5 December 2006.

<sup>134</sup> Chapter 3 of the LOE, 'Schooling in state and grant-aided private schools', article 84-3: 'In no way shall there be discrimination based on questions of birth, race, gender, religion, opinion or other personal or social conditions or circumstances.'

<sup>135</sup> 'In subsidized Catholic schools, ie in approximately one third of all Spanish schools, religious education is offered only for Catholics, while non-Catholics tend to be rejected or discouraged from applying for admission . . . As a side effect of this rejection of immigrant and other minority students, subsidized Catholic schools thus succeed in preserving their students' homogeneity not only in terms of social background, but also in terms of culture and religion.' (Dietz 2007, p 120)

<sup>136</sup> It was intended that the subject 'Society, culture and religion' should be broken down into two compulsory alternatives, one confessional and the other on the history of religions, which would replace the alternative activities and both of which would be taken into account in the evaluation of students.

## Syllabuses and timetables

Some 210 hours are allocated to the field of 'Religious education/Study activities' for each of the three cycles of primary education; 140 hours to the field of 'Religion' for the whole of the first three years of compulsory secondary education (the precise distribution is decided by each Autonomous Community); and 35 hours for the fourth year. According to Ministry of Education statistics for 2005/6,<sup>137</sup> in all primary schools, both state and private, 78.83 per cent of students chose Catholic religious education (59.48 per cent in compulsory lower-secondary schools); 20.52 per cent 'study activities' instead of religion lessons (40.39 per cent in compulsory lower-secondary schools); 0.25 per cent Evangelical religious education; 0.39 per cent the Islamic religion; and 0.01 per cent Judaism. Participation in Catholic religious education is higher in primary than in secondary.

Following the LOE of 2006, an order (*Orden*) was passed in June 2007 detailing the syllabuses for Catholic religious education in pre-school, primary and secondary compulsory education, as defined by the ecclesiastical authorities.<sup>138</sup> This text stipulates the objectives, content and evaluation criteria for each educational level. There are some limited references to knowledge of other important religions. When religious facts are talked about, it is exclusively facts about the Christian religion. In fact, 'The content and teaching methods of Catholic religious education have not been affected by the subsequent educational reforms ... Interreligious contents are not included in the official curriculum, but are often addressed by teachers on their own initiative' (Dietz 2007, p 121).

## Teachers

Teachers are appointed by the responsible bodies of the different confessions. One improvement brought about by the LOE of 2006 is a clarification of the status of religious education teachers.<sup>139</sup> They now receive permanent employment contracts, putting an end to their previously precarious status, and their dismissal by confessional authorities has to be justified and respect individual rights.<sup>140</sup> Their training requirements are now the same as for other teachers, ie *maestro* diploma for pre-school and primary, *licenciado* for secondary. There is a serious

<sup>137</sup> Estadística de la Enseñanza en España niveles no universitarios, 'Distribución del alumnado según religión/actividad que cursa, por enseñanza y titularidad del centro', Oficina de Estadística del MEC.

<sup>138</sup> Order ECI/1957/2007 of 6 June, establishing the curricula for teaching the Catholic religion at pre-school, primary and compulsory secondary levels; BOE no. 158, 3 July 2007.

<sup>139</sup> Royal Decree 696/2007 of 1 June, regulating the employment of teachers of religion; BOE no. 138, 9 June 2007.

<sup>140</sup> This put an end to the abusive practice of the Episcopal Commission for Education, which suspended religious education teachers whose private life failed to correspond with Catholic morality (Dietz 2007, pp 121, 122).

lack of qualified teachers for the Muslim religion. For the current school year there are only 41 Islamic teachers in Spanish schools for 120,000 Muslim students. The situation is seen as discriminatory when compared with the resources made available to Catholic education. The government is facing the difficulty of finding a sufficient number of qualified teachers.<sup>141</sup>

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- Mercedes Muños Repiso, education expert, former head (1996–2006) of the Spanish unit of Eurydice.

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## **Sweden**

### **General statistics**

About 75 per cent of the population belong to the Church of Sweden. Since its separation from the state in 2000, a growing number of people have left the church. Less than 36 per cent of young people of 15 years were confirmed in 2006, as

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<sup>141</sup> 'Muslims decry lack of Islam school teachers', Expatica, 5 May 2008 ([www.expatica.com/es/articles/news](http://www.expatica.com/es/articles/news)).

opposed to 80 per cent in 1970.<sup>142</sup> It has been estimated that scarcely 2 per cent of Swedes go to church on Sunday.<sup>143</sup>

Even if the percentage is growing smaller, the great majority of Swedish students (more than 90 per cent) continue to attend state schools. In 2005/6, 8 per cent of students in compulsory education (7–16 years) and 13 per cent of students in upper-secondary attended independent private schools, grant-aided by the state (*fristaende skolor*) and organized by associations, foundations, enterprises or individuals (Eurydice 2008). There are 800 grant-aided independent schools in compulsory education and upper-secondary.<sup>144</sup> In Sweden, 67 primary schools and six secondary schools have a religious denominational character.<sup>145</sup> In 2002, 13 per cent of pre-school children and 12.9 per cent of students in compulsory schooling had a language other than Swedish as their mother tongue. Between 1998 and 2002, the number of students in this category increased by about 16,600 (Eurydice 2004). Today, almost 15 per cent of students in compulsory schooling and upper-secondary fall into this category (Ministry of Education and Research 2008).

### **General organization of the education system**

When the compulsory primary school (*folkskola*) was introduced in 1842, literacy in the country was mainly achieved through the efforts of the church. The Swedish education system has profoundly changed since 1962 with the creation of the *grundskola*. This comprehensive system of nine years' compulsory education, from 7 to 16 years, highlights the democratization of state education in Sweden and the end of the split between schools for the children of well-off families and those for children of more modest means. All children attend the same schools and follow the same curriculum. Compulsory schooling, unified in this way and standardized, was designed to support educational and social equality. One of the fundamental principles of the Swedish education system is that all children must have access to the same education, regardless of gender, ethnic and social origin, and place of residence.

Swedish schools changed at the beginning of the 1990s from a centralized management model to one which is highly decentralized, focusing on objectives and results, with a considerable transfer of responsibilities to local authorities.

<sup>142</sup> 'International religious freedom: Sweden', 2008 report published by the US Department of State; [www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/48d5cbe77a.html](http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/48d5cbe77a.html).

<sup>143</sup> Arne Rasmusson, 'A new relationship', *Christian Century* (magazine), 3 May 2000.

<sup>144</sup> *Schools Like Any Other? Independent school as part of the system 1991–2004*, p 46, Skolverket (Swedish National Agency for Education), 2006.

<sup>145</sup> Hilary White, 'Sweden to suppress religion in schools', *LifeSiteNews*, 23 October 2007; [www.lifesitenews.com](http://www.lifesitenews.com).

From programmes set up by the Parliament and government at national level (the current programme dates from 1994), the municipalities design their own school plans, which form the basis on which schools define their work programme, such as syllabus content, organization and teaching methods. Teachers in the public sector are recruited by the municipalities. They enjoy considerable pedagogical freedom where both teaching methods and teaching aids are concerned.

### **Non-confessional and neutral teaching about religions**

Teaching about religions is one of the compulsory subjects. For a long time it was confessional, strongly influenced by the Lutheran Church. The character of religious education has changed radically, becoming neutral and non-confessional in order to take account of religious freedom, established in 1951, as well as changes in Swedish society, which has become increasingly secularized and multicultural. 'In 1969, there was a change of name of the subject from Christianity to "Knowledge about Christianity", but already in the curriculum of that year there was another change of name of the subject to "Knowledge about Religion", to reflect demands from a more pluralistic society' (Von Brömssen 2007, p 144). 'Sweden offers a very characteristic example of an internal secularization of an approach to religious education which was originally confessional.'<sup>146</sup>

The 1962 national curriculum for the *grundskola* and the 1965 version for the *gymnasium* (secondary school) insist on the demand for objectivity in all subjects and, especially, in the teaching of religion (Almen and Oster 2000). These new demands for neutrality, objectivity, plurality and (especially) a non-confessional approach apply to the whole school curriculum in general and to teaching about religions in particular, which remains a compulsory subject, both at *grundskola* level and at the level of upper-secondary.

### **Place in the curriculum, objectives and approaches**

Teaching about religions belongs to a group of subjects in the curriculum known as 'history, geography, religion and social sciences', for which 885 hours are allocated for the whole of compulsory schooling (*grundskola*).<sup>147</sup> The municipalities and the schools decide on the distribution of teaching time for each subject or group of subjects throughout the nine years of compulsory education. The maximum length of the school day, however, and the minimum number of hours per subject is regulated at a national level (Eurydice 2008).

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<sup>146</sup> Silvio Ferrari in Willaime and Mathieu (eds), *Des maîtres et des dieux: école et religion en Europe*, Edition Belin, 2005.

<sup>147</sup> Fifty hours are allocated to the subject 'Religion' in upper-secondary (16–19 years) (Eurydice 2007/8).

'The key words in the non-confessional approach which has been used over the past 40 years are understanding, reflection, acting with responsibility and personal development. On this basis, religious education in primary school focuses on issues concerning life (life questions), ethics, beliefs and tradition. Religious education is seen as a resource for children to broaden and deepen their experience and thinking, to train their ability for critical reflection on existential, religious and ethical questions, and to develop their competence as responsible citizens. The upper-secondary school develops and expands these dimensions. The subject focuses on an "interaction between the knowledge perspective and existential issues". Its content reflects dimensions such as history, institutions, culture, beliefs, ethics and gender' (Larsson 2007, p 196).

### **Curriculum content**

'The aim of teaching about religions is to allow students:

- to reflect on, develop and deepen their knowledge of religious, ethical and existential questions as a basis for forming their own viewpoints;
- to deepen their knowledge of Christianity and the other major world religions and of religious representations from other religions, as well as their knowledge of non-religious conceptions of life;
- to understand how Swedish society has been influenced by the Bible and the Christian faith;
- to deepen their understanding and respect for the views of other people in religious and ethical questions;
- to appreciate the value of basic ethical principles (Almen and Oster 2000, p 74).'

The custom in Sweden is to organize teaching about religions not according to parents' wishes to bring their children up in their own tradition but according to the child's right to get a rounded view of different opinions and traditions. The tradition in Sweden is to show great respect for the student's own thinking and judgement (Almen and Oster 2000).

It seems, however, that religious education in Sweden remains imbued with Christian/Lutheran concepts and approaches and that much remains to be done to ensure that teaching is really inclusive of religious diversity. According to Von Brömssen, 'Traditions within other faith communities are still not much recognized in schools, which gives the impression that no other faiths or festivals are part of Swedish society. Partly because of a fear of losing the tradition and faith and risking children becoming culturally and religiously alienated in what

some argue is a monocultural Swedish school, parents of both Christian and Muslim faiths in Sweden have established independent schools'.<sup>148</sup>

### Teachers

Training demands for teachers of the subject covering 'history, geography, religion and civic education' are the same as for other teachers.

Swedish teachers have had to adapt to radical change in the approach and content of religious education, in particular when the curriculum in the 1960s demanded that they deliver their teaching in an objective way and that they also deal with life issues. This change was not always well received by teachers, who felt destabilized both in their role and in their competences. 'Many class teachers tried to avoid the subject, and in an evaluation conducted by the National Agency for Education (Skolverket), it was obvious that teachers in the late primary school, in particular, tried to avoid the subject, which thus got less time than prescribed' (Almen and Oster 2000, p 76).

### The private school issue

The swift expansion of publicly funded independent schools has given rise to various criticisms and concerns. Official studies and statistics show, moreover, that free choice over schools has led to a tendency towards segregation in terms of the sociocultural and ethnic origins of students and their performance (Skolverket 2006).

The government is worried about such trends. It is considering new regulations: suppression of religious activities in school, except those linked to religion classes; a ban on teaching religious ideas as though they were objectively true; insistence that the origin of life be taught from a scientific perspective, according to the theory of Darwin, and not from a religious and creationist point of view; doubling the inspections of state and independent schools; transparency over the source of school funding.<sup>149</sup> These regulations were due to be approved by parliament and enter into force in 2009.

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<sup>148</sup> Von Brömssen 2007, p 146. Von Brömssen explains that the major Christian festivals are often prepared for in schools and certain practices subsist: 'Heated controversies have arisen in relation to the tradition of arranging the school's last day before the summer vacation as a ceremony in a Swedish church.'

<sup>149</sup> Hilary White, 'Sweden to suppress religion in schools', *LifeSiteNews*, 23 October 2007; [www.lifesitenews.com](http://www.lifesitenews.com).

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## The Netherlands

### General statistics

Roman Catholics are the most numerous (30 per cent), followed by members of the Dutch Reformed Church (11 per cent), the Free Reformed Church (6 per cent) and Muslims (around 5 per cent).<sup>151</sup> Eight per cent of the population belong to other religions or ideological groups. It should be noted that 41 per cent of the Dutch practise no religion (Eurybase 2007/8).

In contrast to most EU countries (the other exception being Belgium), the majority of Dutch primary and secondary students (76.3 per cent) attend the private, mainly confessional sector of education.<sup>152</sup> In all, 15 per cent of the school population come from non-western ethnic minority groups, half of whom attend public schools and half private schools. The big cities are characterized by a high concentration of minorities: 56 per cent of the schools in Amsterdam have more

<sup>150</sup> 'Promoting and Establishing a Teacher Education programme on non-denominational religious studies' (PETER). This project was funded under the EU programme TEMPUS/TACIS.

<sup>151</sup> Statistics Netherlands (CBS) assesses the Muslim population at around 5 per cent of the total population, or one inhabitant in 20, ie 850,000 people; CBS web magazine, 25 October 2007.

<sup>152</sup> Source: *Key data on education in Europe 2005*, European Commission (Eurydice/Eurostat).



than 50 per cent of students from minority ethnic groups; 59 per cent in Rotterdam; 45 per cent in The Hague; and 33 per cent in Utrecht. In Rotterdam, almost 40 per cent of schools have more than 80 per cent children of ethnic minorities (Avest et al 2007, p 209).

### **Absolute equality between state and private education**

The Dutch multicultural model developed on the basis of 'pillars' (the 'pillarization' approach), representing the different groups in society on the basis of their religious or philosophical affiliation. The Catholic and Protestant pillars remain important in an education system where there is total freedom of education, including the freedom to set up schools. After a long struggle led by Catholics and Protestants, in 1917 the constitution recognized absolute equality between confessional and state education. It was on that basis that a great variety of schools were set up. They take two main forms: schools managed by the state sector (*openbare scholen*) and those managed by the private (mainly confessional) sector (*bijzondere scholen*); the latter are in the majority, catering for more than 75 per cent of students (see above).<sup>153</sup> Public schools, covering only about 25 per cent of students, are non-confessional, open to all, and administered by municipal councils or recognized public bodies or foundations that they set up. Private schools are subject to private law and are administered by the board of the associations or foundations which set them up. They can in theory refuse to admit children of families who do not adhere to the ideology of the school.

From the 1960s the strong link that existed between private confessional schools and the church was weakened. These schools were opened up to children from a more diverse background and many no longer have institutional relations with a particular church. In the 1990s, moreover, education in the country became increasingly decentralized, deregulated and privatized. Public and private schools became more and more similar (Eurydice 2000).

### **Place in the curriculum**

There is no confessional teaching in public schools. Schools can, however, organize courses in Christian or other religions at the request of families, in which case teachers are trained and paid by the churches. The educational objectives set for primary and secondary education are to contribute to students' development, encouraging attention and respect for the various religious, philosophical and social values which exist in Dutch society. The 1985 law on primary

<sup>153</sup> Of the private schools, 30 per cent are Roman Catholic and 30 per cent are Protestant. Of the remaining 15 per cent, some have a specific pedagogical or philosophical profile, such as Montessori, Dalton or Jena schools. There are also grant-aided private schools which support neutral education, and combinations of private and public schools working together.

education introduced into the curriculum of both public and private schools a new non-confessional perspective on religious and philosophical movements, which could be taught as a separate subject or integrated into other subjects.<sup>154</sup> This represents an important stage in the opening up of the Dutch education system to world religious diversity. 'In practice, this means that in Christian schools, where religion used only to be taught from a normative (Christian) point of view, it is now expected that it will also be taught from an objective point of view. In public schools, where religious education was never previously taught, religion is a new subject . . . Its position, however, still remains very vague. In 1998, 13 years after its introduction, it was found that not all schools were teaching world religions; and that where it was taught, there was no similarity in contents, teaching methods and time spent on it. There are key questions concerning the position of this subject in relation to other subjects, including confessional religious education – about whether teachers can teach this subject in an objective way, based on a cognitive approach, and about their own beliefs and the lack of adapted teaching material' (Avest et al 2007, pp 213–14).

Private confessional education is completely free to recruit teachers and to decide on subjects which fall outside the compulsory curriculum, such as religion. Confronted with a more and more diversified school population, a great variety of different scenarios will henceforth be found when it comes to tackling religious education. There will be some schools that continue to follow a traditional path, focusing on the denominational identity of the school, but a growing number will support more open and multicultural teaching, while at the same time continuing to respond to the demand for denominational religious education. Schools are inspected by the ministry of education in all subjects except religion, as it is considered that this subject falls under the direct responsibility of the body administering the school. With the development of Islamic schools and the criticism they face, in 2003 the ministry of education requested that inspections also be carried out on religious teaching in confessional schools. The evaluation remains very general and aims to ensure that the syllabus does not encourage attitudes of hatred towards others (Avest et al 2007, p 205).

## Teachers

Teachers of religion in confessional schools belong to the normal teaching body, with the same training requirements. They usually have a specialist diploma to teach religion. In public schools, they are trained and paid by the churches. The

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<sup>154</sup> This perspective is subsumed under one of the attainment targets ('Healthy living; social structures, including political studies, and religious and ideological movements') within the framework of the six curriculum areas defined under the law (the revised law on primary education) (Eurybase 2007/8).

present government is discussing the possibility of funding teaching about religions in public schools.

### **Number of hours**

There is considerable flexibility in the number of hours allocated to teaching about religions, reflecting local needs and conditions. Primary schools can allocate up to a maximum of 120 hours per year (article 50 of the law on primary education). At secondary level, classes in religion are organized within the framework of the 20 per cent of teaching time which schools are free to use at their own discretion (Eurydice 2005).

### **Taking account of the needs of the Muslim community**

With the presence in the country of a growing Muslim community, the state has supported the setting up of Islamic schools. There are 48 at primary level (attended by only about 5 per cent of Muslim children) and two at secondary level.<sup>155</sup> In response to family demand, some municipalities have also supported the setting up of Islamic teaching in public schools, given, for example, by a local imam. Such teaching can be for up to three hours per week. It is only available, however, in 7 per cent of public primary schools (Shadid and van Koningsveld 2006).

The progressive development of the new 'pillar' representing Islam, in a general atmosphere of tension concerning this religion, has given rise to both problems and criticisms.<sup>156</sup> Following the reuniting of families in the 1970s, the Muslim community has become a sizeable community. Hostile public reactions to Islam, especially with their current intensity, are relatively recent. They occur when Muslims have already asserted certain rights and have seen a number of their claims satisfied, such as the building of mosques . . . Islamic teaching in public schools and the creation of Islamic schools grant-aided by public authorities. Muslims have thus been able to merge themselves into the model of pillarization or at least into what is left of it, and have themselves constituted a sort of pillar, even if it bears little resemblance to the pillars of the golden age of the model' (Cecilia 2004).

Such developments are seen by some as favourable to the emancipation of Muslims, while others regard them as an obstacle to integration. There is a hardening of positions in the debate. Even though up until now schools have been

<sup>155</sup> Statistics from Kuyk 2007.

<sup>156</sup> The situation has deteriorated, as in other European countries, with the events of September 2001 and the growth of Islamophobia. The murder in 2002 of the politician Pim Fortuyn, an opponent of the 'Islamization of Dutch culture', and in 2004 of the film-maker Theo van Gogh, by a Dutch citizen of Moroccan origin, revived tensions and restored the religious question (particularly the influence of Islam) to the centre of political debate. The controversial film about the Koran, broadcast in spring 2008 by the politician Geert Wilders, has helped to inflame the continuing debate.

free to decide for themselves whether to allow the wearing of the Islamic headscarf, a law is due to be adopted in 2009 which will ban the burqa and the niqab (garments covering the whole body, except the eyes in the case of the niqab); the law will apply to students at school and at university, as well as to teachers and other staff.

### **Finding unity in diversity**

As in many other European countries, the key challenge facing Dutch society and its education system is to find unity in diversity, in a context where there is growing segregation in the school population between the majority 'whites' and the 'blacks' (as the ethnic minorities are called). The weak social and religious mixing of communities, especially in the larger cities, remains a big problem, in spite of some very fruitful experiments.<sup>157</sup> The setting up in Ede 20 years ago of a Christian-Islamic primary school, named after Princess Juliana van Stolberg, demonstrated the relevance of education to dialogue and a better understanding between religions, but in the process it also revealed the inherent difficulties. As it turned out, the school had to close in 2004, following the withdrawal of a large number of 'white' families who feared the influence of Islam (Avest et al 2007, p 207).

In its recommendations of March 2007 on the problem of school segregation ('A school culture that unites'), the Education Council of the Netherlands invited the government to re-assess the implementation of the law on active citizenship (citizenship education was introduced into all schools in 2006) and social integration, in order to see whether the latter had the expected effect on school culture, particularly in culturally diversified schools. It encouraged schools to develop a 'school profile' that would foster a better understanding of religions and other convictions, and asked that teachers' multicultural competences be strengthened (Education Council 2007).

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<sup>157</sup> For instance, the initiative of the city of Gouda to organize an equal distribution of immigrant (read: Muslim) children all over the town. To have public and private schools equally involved in educating both indigenous and immigrant students is the explicit aim (REDCo 2007, p 207).

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