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## **The Contribution of Teaching about Religions and Beliefs to Education for Democratic Citizenship in Europe and Beyond: Consequences of the REDCo-project**

### **Abstract**

The events of 9/11 and their ongoing consequences have accelerated a process whereby religion is increasingly accepted as a topic for discussion within the public sphere. Various inter-governmental bodies, including the UN, have recognised the importance of public education as a means to inform young people about religions and other belief systems and to increase tolerance of religious and ‘philosophical’ difference within a human rights framework. The complementary work of the Council of Europe (on the religious dimension of intercultural education, education for democratic citizenship, intercultural autobiography, exchanges with representatives of religious leaders and philosophical organisations, and intercultural dialogue) and the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe’s Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (through the *The Toledo Guiding Principles on Teaching about Religions and Beliefs in Public Schools*) have facilitated the development of appropriate policies and practices at individual state level with regard to education about religious and philosophical diversity.

A summary of Council of Europe and OSCE documents together with REDCo research findings shows that:

- REDCo research findings support Council of Europe and OSCE broad approaches and policy recommendations
- REDCo findings support the Council of Europe’s broad view of Education for Democratic Citizenship and its view of intercultural dialogue. For example, they show strong student support for democratic principles in school and classroom procedures
- REDCo findings suggest that the implementation of European policies needs to be contextualised.

### **Résumé**

Les événements du 11 septembre 2001 et leurs conséquences, toujours actuelles, ont contribué à accélérer la prise de conscience générale que la religion devenait un sujet de débat de plus en plus légitime dans la sphère publique. Plusieurs Organisations internationales, notamment l’ONU, ont reconnu l’importance de l’éducation à l’école publique comme moyen d’informer les jeunes à propos de la religion et des autres systèmes de valeurs et comme outil permettant d’accroître la tolérance à l’égard de la diversité religieuse et « philosophique », et ce dans le cadre d’une éducation aux Droits de l’homme. Le Conseil de l’Europe a entrepris un travail complémentaire sur la dimension religieuse tant de l’éducation interculturelle, que de l’éducation à une citoyenneté démocratique, dans la perspective de la construction d’identités individuelles plurielles, en incluant ou non la possibilité d’intervention de la part de leaders religieux et philosophiques, et ce dans la perspective d’un dialogue interculturel entre les élèves dans la classe. De même le bureau de l’Organisation pour la Coopération et la Sécurité en Europe consacré aux Institutions démocratiques et aux Droits de l’homme (OSCE/ODHIR) a entrepris un travail de réflexion sur ces mêmes thèmes à travers la production d’un rapport sur *Les instructions de Tolède sur les principes de l’éducation à la religion et aux croyances dans les écoles publiques*, plus connu sous le nom de « Toledo guidelines ». Toutes ces initiatives convergentes ont facilité la mise en œuvre de politiques publiques et de pratiques propres à favoriser l’éducation à la diversité religieuse et philosophique, et ce au niveau de chaque Etat.

Les documents du Conseil de l’Europe et de l’OSCE rejoignent les conclusions des recherches menées dans le cadre du programme REDCo. Celles-ci montrent que :

- Les résultats de l’enquête REDCo rejoignent la philosophie générale et les recommandations en matière de politiques publiques formulées par le Conseil de l’Europe et l’OSCE.
- Les résultats de l’enquête REDCo rejoignent la philosophie générale dégagée par le Conseil de l’Europe qui prône une éducation à la citoyenneté et à la démocratie incluant le dialogue interculturel. Ces résultats montrent par exemple, que les élèves soutiennent fermement les principes démocratiques tels qu’ils sont mis en œuvre dans le fonctionnement de l’école et de la classe.

- Les résultats de l'enquête REDCo suggèrent que la mise en œuvre des politiques publiques européennes en matière d'éducation doit être mise en relation avec le contexte national et prendre en compte ses spécificités.

### Zusammenfassung

Die Ereignisse des 11. September 2001 und ihre Folgen haben dazu beigetragen, Religion verstärkt in den Mittelpunkt der öffentlichen Debatte zu rücken. Von Seiten verschiedener internationaler Institutionen, nicht zuletzt der UN, wurde auch die Bedeutung des öffentlichen Bildungssystems in der Vermittlung von Wissen über Religionen und Weltanschauungen und der Förderung von Toleranz gegenüber weltanschaulichen und religiösen Differenzen vor dem Hintergrund einer allgemeinen Menschenrechtserziehung betont. Die Arbeit des Europarates (zur religiösen Dimension interkultureller Bildung, zur Demokratieerziehung, interkultureller Autobiographiearbeit, im Austausch zwischen Vertretern religiöser und weltanschaulicher Institutionen, und zum interkulturellen Dialog) und der OSZE im europäischen Büro für demokratische Institutionen und Menschenrechte (ODIHR) (durch die *Toledo Guiding Principles on Teaching about Religions and Beliefs in Public Schools*) ergänzen sich in der Unterstützung des Entwicklungsprozesses von angemessenen Formen und Programmen der pluralenreligiösen und weltanschaulichen Bildung auf Einzelstaatsebene.

In der Zusammenschau der Publikationen der OSZE und des Europarates mit den Ergebnissen der REDCo-Studie ergibt sich:

- Die Forschungsergebnisse des REDCo-Projektes untermauern die Initiativen und Empfehlungen des Europarates und der OSZE allgemein.
- Die REDCo-Ergebnisse stützen ebenso die Position des Europarates zur Demokratieerziehung und zum interkulturellen Dialog. Sie zeigen besonders eine breite Zustimmung unter Schülerinnen und Schülern zur Anwendung demokratischer Grundsätze in Schul- und Unterrichtspraxis.
- Die Ergebnisse der REDCo-Studie legen allerdings nahe, dass die Anwendung europäischer Richtlinien auf der konkreten Ebene kontextualisiert werden muss.



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## **The Contribution of Teaching about Religions and Beliefs to Education for Democratic Citizenship in Europe and Beyond: Consequences of the REDCo-project**

### **Introduction**

The events of 9/11 and their ongoing consequences have accelerated a process whereby religion is increasingly accepted as a topic for discussion within the public sphere. Various inter-governmental bodies, including the UN, have recognised the importance of public education as a means to inform young people about religions and other belief systems and to increase tolerance of religious and ‘philosophical’ difference within a human rights framework. This presentation introduces the complementary work of the Council of Europe and the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe’s Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights in facilitating the development of appropriate policies and practices at individual state level with regard to education about religious and philosophical diversity. These policies are linked to the findings of recent empirical research with 14–16 year old students in eight European countries as part of the EC Framework 6 REDCo-project.

### **The Council of Europe**

The Council of Europe’s work in this field began in 2002 with the establishment of a project on the religious dimension of intercultural education. This project has included workshops and a major conference held in Oslo in 2004, the development and production of the publication *Religious Diversity and Intercultural Education: a Reference Book for Schools* – published in English (Keast 2007a) and French (Keast 2007b) and the development of a European policy document on behalf of the Committee of Ministers (currently in draft form). The reference book covers some of the theoretical perspectives that teachers and others need to be aware of as they consider issues of intercultural education, some key conceptual elements of intercultural education on various approaches to teaching and learning, some aspects of religious diversity in schools in different settings, and some examples of current practice in some member states of the Council of Europe. It includes some discussion of possible pedagogical approaches that could be applied or adapted in different national settings.

The Council of Europe initiative raised the question as to how the study of religion(s) can be brought into public education across different systems. The argument took the view that all should agree that religion(s) are at least part of human culture (this does not reduce religion to culture – that is not the intention – but points out that the practice of religion(s) is an indisputable aspect of cultural life). The next step is to affirm that intercultural education is incomplete without attention to religion(s). The conclusion is that religions could be included in all states (in addition to national arrangements for religious education) as part of intercultural education. Within the Council of Europe, intercultural education is seen as an element of a broadly conceived education for democratic citizenship (Jackson 2007), and the furtherance of intercultural dialogue is a major priority (see below).

Other educational contributions from the Council of Europe in relation to religious diversity and education include initiatives from the Commissioner for Human Rights (Jackson 2007), the involvement of representatives of religious leaders in Europe in an exchange on learning about religions and beliefs (the first meeting was on April 8, 2008), the establishment of a project on Intercultural Autobiography (including religion) and partnership in establishing the new European Wergeland Centre for Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights, including the dimension of religion, to be based in Oslo from early 2009.

### **Education for Democratic Citizenship and the White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue**

The Council of Europe has considered education for democratic citizenship (EDC) to be a priority in relation to its mission to strengthen pluralistic democracy, human rights and the rule of law in Europe. The EDC project was launched in 1997 and is now in its third phase. The first phase, covering 1997–2000, identified values and skills needed to become responsible citizens and to examine how they could be acquired and transmitted to others. EDC is seen *broadly*, as inclusive of many aspects of human rights education, civic education, peace education, global education and intercultural education as well as activities in which participation in society can be learned, exercised and encouraged. The second phase covered the period 2000–2004, concentrating on the development of EDC policies, establishing networks, producing and disseminating materials and preparing for the European Year of Citizenship in 2005. The European Year of Citizenship through Education (2005) marked the culmination of the first two phases of the EDC project and set out to encourage the implementation of agreements by politicians who undertook to adapt the 2002 Committee of Ministers' Recommendation on EDC to their own states' education systems. The third phase of the project (2006–2009) aims to promote sustainable policies, support good practice and encourage co-operation between and within the member States.

The EDC project has not dealt directly with religion as an aspect of citizenship education. This is partly because the project is primarily concerned with generic issues, and may also be because of the view that religion was the centre-piece of the project on Intercultural Education and the Challenge of Religious Diversity and Dialogue in Europe – intercultural education being considered to be a sub-set of EDC. However, the links between EDC and education about religions and beliefs will be part of the remit of the European Wergeland Centre, established in Oslo by the Norwegian Government in conjunction with the Council of Europe. Its work begins early in 2009.

A vitally important part of the Council of Europe's recent work has been the development of its White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue (Council of Europe 2008). The publication of this important document was a highlight of the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue. The religious dimension of intercultural dialogue is discussed specifically in section 3.5, pp 21–23.

### **The Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe /ODIHR**

The main contribution of the OSCE/ODIHR has been the development of a standard setting document, *The Toledo Guiding Principles on Teaching about Religions and Beliefs in Public Schools*, launched (in English) in Madrid in 2007 (OSCE 2007) and now available in Spanish translation. This document was produced by an inter-disciplinary team including international human rights lawyers, educators

and academics from a cross section of religious and philosophical backgrounds, and gives close attention to legal issues in relation to freedom of religion or belief and education.

The argument for the inclusion of the study of religions and beliefs in public education has a human rights emphasis which is different from the Council of Europe's 'cultural' argument (although *all* of the Council of Europe's work is grounded ultimately on human rights principles). The first premise is that freedom of religion or belief predicates plurality: if freedom of religion or belief is a given for society, then society inevitably will be plural. The next premise is that, if society is to be cohesive, plurality requires tolerance of difference. The conclusion is that tolerance of difference requires *at least* knowledge and understanding of the beliefs and values of others. This would be so whatever the approach specifically taken to religious education in particular countries. In other words, the document supports the inclusion of a just and fair approach to religious difference, whatever the system of religious education or education about religion in particular states.

The guidelines include a substantial chapter on the human rights framework – including legal issues in relation to the state and the rights of parents, children, teachers and minorities, as well as chapters on preparing curricula and teacher education, plus conclusions and recommendations.

The outputs from the two organisations complement one another, and together provide a very useful tool for discussion on teaching about religions and beliefs in individual states. Both texts (together with the forthcoming Council of Europe policy recommendations) are worthy of close attention within and beyond Europe (Jackson 2008).

### **The REDCo-project**

The REDCo (**R**eligion, **E**ducation, **D**ialogue, **C**onflict) project is funded by the European Commission Framework 6 initiative.<sup>11</sup> REDCo is a 3 year project (2006–9) involving universities from eight European countries (University of Warwick, England; Universities of Hamburg and Muenster, Germany; VU University, the Netherlands; University of Stavanger, Norway; Russian Christian Academy for Humanities, St. Petersburg, Russia; Tartu University, Estonia; The Sorbonne, Paris, France and University of Granada, Spain). The project aims to establish whether studies of religions in schools can help to promote dialogue and reduce conflict in school and society.

The main research is focused on young people in the 14–16 age group, but there are also some studies of teachers, of primary pupils and of the place of religion in different educational systems.

Core studies include a mapping exercise of religion and education in Europe (Jackson, Miedema, Weisse & Willaime 2007); a qualitative study of teenagers' views on religion in schools (Knauth *et al* 2008); a cross national quantitative survey of young people's views in the eight countries; studies of classroom interaction; and a study of teachers of religious education (all to appear as books from Waxmann in the first half of 2009).

Several individual studies have also been completed in the different countries. For example, the English team has produced an evaluation of a project on dialogue by email in primary schools

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<sup>11</sup> The project's website is at <http://www.redco.uni-hamburg.de>.

(McKenna, Igrave & Jackson 2008) and a 'community of practice' from Warwick (teachers and teacher training providers) have conducted action research studies in schools and teacher training institutes (Igrave, Jackson & O'Grady forthcoming).<sup>12</sup>

### **Selected Findings from Qualitative and Quantitative Studies**

Each of the national studies gives a flavour of the particular national situation where it was located and needs to be examined in some detail.<sup>13</sup> However, some broad trends emerge from the data. Qualitative questionnaires and interviews completed by 14–16 year olds and the quantitative survey, conducted with the same age group in the eight countries participating in the REDCo-project, reveal some general trends that are of high relevance to the evaluation and implementation of the policies advocated by the Council of Europe and the Office for Democratic Institution and Human Rights of the OSCE. These might be summarised very briefly as follows:

- Students wish for peaceful coexistence across differences, and believe this to be possible
- For students peaceful coexistence depends on:
  - knowledge about each other's religions and worldviews
  - sharing common interests /doing things together
- Students who learn about religious diversity in school are *more willing* to have conversations about religions/beliefs with students of other backgrounds than those who do not
- Students wish to avoid conflict: some of the religiously committed students feel vulnerable
- Students want learning to take place in a safe classroom environment where there are agreed procedures for expression and discussion
- *Most* students would like school to be a place for learning *about* different religions/worldviews, rather than for instruction *into* a particular religion/worldview

Having made these points, the various REDCo studies suggest that approaches to the study of religious diversity would need to be implemented differently in particular national contexts. For example, in some countries (eg England) religious diversity would be covered mainly in a *separate subject* devoted to the study of religion, while in others (eg France) religious diversity would be covered through *several* subjects, with none dedicated specifically to religion. In some countries, religious diversity could be linked to students' discussion of their *personal views* (eg Netherlands, Norway, England, Germany), while in others, this would be more difficult (eg France, Estonia). In some countries (eg Estonia, France, Norway) religious diversity would be covered in a non-confessional setting, while in others (eg Spain), religious diversity would be covered in a confessional context, and steps would have to be taken to ensure fairness, balance and objectivity in teaching and learning. In some countries, religious diversity would be covered in *both* confessional and non-confessional contexts (eg Netherlands, England).

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12 The REDCo project's books are published in paperback in English in the series 'Religious Diversity and Education in Europe' by the German publisher Waxmann (<http://www.waxmann.de/index-e.html>)

13 Because of issues of access and staffing in countries with some very different sizes and populations, the approaches to sampling vary across the countries. Moreover, each study shows some distinctive features related to the national situation.

This brief summary of Council of Europe and OSCE documents and REDCo research findings shows that:

- REDCo research findings support Council of Europe and OSCE broad approaches and policy recommendations
- REDCo findings support the Council of Europe's broad view of Education for Democratic Citizenship and its view of intercultural dialogue. For example, they show strong student support for democratic principles in school and classroom procedures
- REDCo findings suggest that the implementation of European policies needs to be contextualised.

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