**Intercultural
Education through
Religious Studies**

Baseline Study
European projects and recommendations involving Religious Education (RE)

Lifelong
Learning
Programme

IERS Project. *Intercultural Education through Religious Studies*

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Version No.	Author, institution	Date/Last Update
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Index

1. Introduction

Supra-national processes such as globalization, pluralization and migration are challenging individual European nation-states *and* Europe as a whole: when it comes to ideas about national and/or European citizenship, about 'cultural identity and heritage', about social cohesion and co-existence, - and when it comes to confessional as well as non-confessional RE in public schools. The sharing by all European countries and kinds of RE of the challenges mentioned is what Jean-Paul Willaime (2007; see also Willaime 2014, and Jensen 2014) referred to as an `Européanisation´ of challenges facing various models of RE in Europe. Apart from the country-by-country responses to the challenges, the challenges are also met at the European supra-national political level in the shape of various educational projects and in discourses focusing on e.g. 'citizenship education', 'intercultural education', 'inter-religious dialogue', and RE. In his extensive writings about these projects, Robert Jackson has pointed out that September 11, 2001 and the events that followed marked a turning point in European policies in regard to security[1], citizenship and education (Jackson 2007, 2009, 2008).[2] RE was as of now allotted an important role in efforts to solve political and social problems and in the promotion of human rights values, active democratic citizenship and intercultural dialogue. In what follows, the most important of these efforts and the resulting projects and recommendations involving RE will be outlined.[3]

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[1] Discussions and studies of this 'securitization of religion' in different countries can be found in Sakaranaho (2013), Jensen (2014) and Shani (2014)

[2] Jackson has since 2002 been closely involved with the Council of Europe projects relating to RE and is now special advisor for The European Wergeland Centre.

[3] See also Pépin (2009) for a discussion of these projects and the situation of RE in different European countries.

2. The Council of Europe: Intercultural education, citizenship education and RE

In 1997, the Council of Europe (CoE)[4] launched the project 'Education for Democratic Citizenship', a project running until 2009. Recalling the Council of Europe's mission to build a more tolerant and just society and "concerned by the development of violence, xenophobia, racism, aggressive nationalism and religious intolerance", the Committee of Ministers in the 1999 declaration on education for democratic citizenship recommended that all member states should make education for democratic citizenship an essential component of all educational training, and all cultural and youth policies and practices. (Council of Europe 1999). In the 2002 recommendations "religious intolerance" was replaced by "intolerance of minorities" and it was affirmed that education for democratic citizenship, informal as well as formal, is a factor for "social cohesion, mutual understanding, intercultural and inter-religious dialogue, and solidarity" and therefore should be a priority and factor for innovation in educational policy-making, curricula and teaching methods, and that "the European dimension" should be a component in this (Council of Europe 2002).[5] It was encouraged to use multidisciplinary approaches, combining civic and political education with teaching in history, philosophy, religions and other relevant

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[4] The Council of Europe founded in 1949 and based in Strausbourg, France, is a human rights organization with 47 member states, of which 28 are members of the European Union. All the member states have signed the European Convention of Human Rights. The Council's decision-making body is the Committee of Ministers, made up of the ministers of foreign affairs of each member state or their permanent diplomatic representatives. The Committee of Ministers decides the policy and actions of the Council of Europe which leads to recommendations or European conventions expected to influence policy development in the member states. Recommendations to the Committee of Ministers are given by the Parliamentary Assembly on the basis of investigation and projects. The Parliamentary Assembly is made up by members of parliament in the member states, and also elects the Secretary General, the Human Rights Commissioner and the judges to the European Court of Human rights (http://hub.coe.int/, (last accessed April 5, 2016).

[5] 'The European dimension' is not explicitly defined in this recommendation but refers to democratic citizenship as a factor that promotes relations of trust and stability in Europe beyond the boundaries of the member states, and it is recommended that European networks on democratic citizenship be established. The Project Management T-Kit issued by the Council of Europe explains 'the European dimension' as "putting forward certain values, a certain idea of society, a certain concept of human beings. It means showing respect for individuals and for human rights. It also means helping to integrate young people into a multicultural world". Criteria for the 'European dimension' of projects are: European citizenship, partnership and transferability with and to other European countries, reflection of topics and concerns of European countries, project mobility, intercultural learning, involving young Europeans and connections to other European activities and programs. (http://youth-partnership-eu.coe.int/youth-partnership/documents/Publications/T_kits/3/4_european.pdf, (last accessed April 5, 2016).

disciplines. It was also recommended that the member states set up specific curricula related to education for democratic citizenship in teacher training systems in order to develop key competences of the pupils, students and teachers. Some of these competences are defined as the ability to settle conflicts in a non-violent manner, to listen, understand and interpret other people's arguments and develop a critical approach to information through patterns and philosophical, religious, social, political and cultural concepts (Europe 2002). As a culmination of the project, the *Council of Europe Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education* (2010) was adapted by the member states. The charter recommends that education for democratic citizenship and human rights education be included in curricula at all levels of formal education from pre-primary to higher education and that teachers should be provided with training in these areas. Citizenship education is defined as:

> (...) education, training, awareness-raising, information, practices and activities which aim, by equipping learners with knowledge, skills and understanding and developing their attitudes and behavior, to empower them to exercise and defend their democratic rights and responsibilities in society, to value diversity and to play an active part in democratic life, with a view to the promotion and protection of democracy and the rule of law (Council of Europe 2010a, 5-6).

Educational approaches and teaching methods should enable learners to acquire knowledge and skills in order to "promote social cohesion, value diversity and equality, appreciate differences – particularly between different faith and ethnic groups – and settle disagreements and conflicts in a non-violent manner (...)" (Council of Europe 2010a, 14).

In the same year a standing conference of the Ministers of Education was held with the theme 'Education for Sustainable Democratic Societies: the Role of Teachers'. The Ministers expressed a determination to implement educational actions geared "to Europe´s diverse and multicultural societies", and, seeing the teachers as one of the "essential pillars of the process of building sustainable democratic societies", they wished for "the development of a teaching and learning methodology, which equips

future teachers with the knowledge, skills and attitudes needed for managing a diverse sociocultural environment" (Council of Europe 2010b paragraphs 8, 11, 14).

When this project about citizenship education was started, 'history teaching' was highlighted as a key factor in the development of democratic citizenship (Council of Europe 2000), and as pointed out by Jackson, RE was not dealt with explicitly as an aspect of citizenship education (Jackson 2009, 88). However, from 2002 and onwards there seems to be a development towards more attention to social problems related to religious and cultural diversity and on the importance of knowledge, skills and teaching methodologies that enables pupils, students and teachers to live and work in social, cultural and religious pluralistic schools, democratic societies and Europe as a whole.

Issues of religion and RE became a central part of a new project on 'Intercultural Education and the Challenge of Religious Diversity and Dialogue' which the Ministers of Education agreed upon in 2003 (Council of Europe 2003). According to the CoE 'intercultural dialogue' has since the 'Third Summit of Heads of State and Government' of the CoE in Warsaw, May 2005 been a major political priority, and is to be seen as a "cross-sectoral, 'transversal' approach that influences the agenda of virtually all other policy domains and institutions of the CoE".[6] In the declaration from the European Conference on 'The Religious dimension of intercultural dialogue', April 2007, the participants underlined the importance of teaching about religions and that "the religious dimension of our cultures should be reflected in an appropriate manner in education systems (...) (Council of Europe 2007). An important policy document on this project is the *White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue* (2008), in which CoE argues for a new intercultural strategy based on 'intercultural dialogue' as a replacement for 'multiculturalism' and 'assimilation', now found inadequate as policy approaches (Council of Europe 2008a, 9). Intercultural dialogue is defined as:

> (A)n open and respectful exchange of views between individuals, groups with different ethnic, cultural, religious and linguistic backgrounds and heritage on the basis of mutual understanding and respect (Council of Europe 2008a, 10).

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[6] http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/intercultural/policy_EN.asp (last accessed April 5, 2016)

One of the policy areas in the promotion of intercultural dialogue is 'Learning and teaching intercultural competences', which according to CoE should form part of citizenship education and human-rights education, teacher training as well as all subjects, especially history, language and RE. It is stated that "education as to religious and convictional facts in an intercultural context makes available knowledge about all the world religions and beliefs and avoid prejudice" and that regardless of the different RE systems, "religious and convictional diversity" should be taken into account and education should include "knowledge of the major religions and non-religious convictions and their role in society" (Council of Europe 2008a, 30-31, 43-44). The role of religions and non-religious convictions within intercultural education is further elaborated in the recommendation of the Committee of Ministers, December 2008. According to this document, religions and non-religious conviction are seen "at least" as 'cultural facts' and information and knowledge of these areas should therefore be taught in consistence with the aims of citizenship education, human rights and respect for equal dignity of all individuals (Council of Europe 2008b, 4).[7]

Some of the objectives of an intercultural approach to teaching about religious and non-religious conviction are stated as:

- promoting knowledge of different aspects (symbols, practices, etc.) of religious diversity;
- addressing the sensitive or controversial issues to which the diversity of religions and non-religious conviction may rise;
- developing skills of critical evaluation and reflection with regard to understanding the perspectives and ways of life of different religions and non-religious conviction;
- fostering an ability to analyze and interpret impartially the many varied items of information relating to the diversity of religions and non-religious conviction, without prejudice to the need to respect pupil's religious or non-religious conviction and without prejudice to the religious education given outside the public education sphere. (Council of Europe 2008b, paragraph 5)

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[7] Jackson points out that this formulation ('cultural facts') was a pragmatic strategy recognizing that the presence of religions in society was the lowest common denominator with which all European states could work in an educational context, - despite the different relationships between religion and state and the diversity of RE. This approach also legitimizes that knowledge and understanding of religion as a cultural fact is relevant and therefore of public concern also within the Council of Europe that has to be neutral with regard to expression of views on religion (Jackson 2008, 157-158; 2009, 87).

The recommendations go further and also set up appropriate "attitudes" to be promoted, *inter alia:*

- recognizing the place of religions and non-religious convictions in the public sphere and at school as topic for discussion and reflection;
- recognizing that different religions and humanistic traditions have deeply influenced Europe and continue to do so;
- promoting a balanced approach to "the role of religions and other convictions in history and cultural heritage" (Council of Europe 2008b, paragraph 6).

Different didactical approaches are recommended such as 'a phenomenological approach' (aiming at the cultivation of knowledge and understanding of religions and non-religious convictions), 'an interpretative approach' (encouraging a reflective understanding and preventing a "rigid pre-defined framework"), an approach enabling dialogue, and 'a contextual approach' (taking account of local and global learning conditions) (Council of Europe 2008b, paragraph 7). This document is at the same time referring to earlier recommendations, one of them from the Parliamentary Assembly in 2005, in which teaching about religions is promoted. In this 2005 recommendation, education is seen as "essential for combating ignorance, stereotypes and misunderstandings of religions" and it is stated that:

> By teaching children the history and philosophy of the main religions with restraint and objectivity and with respect for the values of the European Convention on Human Rights, it will effectively combat fanaticism. Understanding the history of political conflicts in the name of religion is essential (Council of Europe 2005, 7).

The Parliamentary Assembly explicitly criticizes "so-called secular countries" that are not devoting enough resources to teaching about religions or are focusing on or favoring a particular religion, something they find examples of especially in countries where one religion predominates or functions as the state religion. They also find that there is in Europe "a shortage of teachers qualified to give qualified instruction in the different religions" and they therefore recommend that the Committee of Ministers, on the basis of the criteria given in the recommendations, "promote initial and in-service teacher training in religious studies respecting the principles set out in the previous paragraphs" and "envisage setting up a European teacher training

institute for the comparative study of religions". (Council of Europe 2005, 13.2; 13.3).

The reply of the Committee of Ministers given in 2006 noted that the recommendations were in line with the general thinking underlying most of the activities in CoE, and therefore pointed to existing projects and earlier declarations and recommendations (Council of Europe 2006). The proposed European Center on the Study of Religions (European teacher training institution mentioned above) was, according to Jackson, considered too narrow, and instead work to set up an interdisciplinary center to deal with research, information, training of educators and policy recommendations, including recommendations about RE, was initiated (Jackson 2008, 161-162). In 2009, the European Wergeland Centre[8] was established by the Norwegian government in cooperation with the Council of Europe. The center focuses on education for intercultural understanding, human rights and democratic citizenship with a mission to build bridges between policy, research and practice. One of the activities is a joint Council of Europe/Wergeland Center expert group including Jackson and other RE scholars trying to find the best ways to support member states implementing the 2008 recommendation from the Council of Europe. A booklet, authored by Robert Jackson (Jackson 2014), and titled *Signposts - Policy and practice for teaching about religions and non-religious worldviews in intercultural education* was published at the end 2014.

3. Projects and recommendations from OSCE, UN and EU related to RE

3.1 UN: Alliance of Civilizations

The importance of education for efforts to solve cultural and political problems is also highlighted by the United Nations (UN). In 2005 the Secretary-General of UN launched the project 'Alliance of Civilizations' co-sponsored by the Prime Ministers of Spain and Turkey as a counter-response to (the theory of) the 'clash of civilizations' expressed by Samuel Huntington (1996) and by some political leaders, sectors of the media and radical groups. A High-level Group of prominent people including former ministers, religious leaders and scholars was formed in order to examine the relations

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[8] Information on the European Wergeland Centre and the activities can be found on http://www.theewc.org/ (last accessed April 5, 2016).

between societies, with particular attention to relations between Western and Muslim societies, and to give recommendations on a practical program of actions to be taken by states, international organizations and civil society. The *raison d'étre* for these are "the need to build bridges between societies, to promote dialogue and understanding and to forge the collective political will to address the world´s imbalances" and the suggested actions are hoped to assist in "diminishing hostility and in promoting harmony among the nations and cultures of the world" (United Nations 2006, I paragraph 1.4; 1.5). One of the areas of action is education, and it was stated that:

> Education systems, including religious schools, must provide students with an understanding and respect for the diverse religious beliefs, practices and cultures in the world. Not only citizens and religious leaders but the whole society needs a basic understanding of religious traditions other than their own and the core teachings of compassion that are common to all religions (United Nations 2006, VI paragraph 6.8).

Some of the recommendations are:

- Governments should ensure that their primary and secondary educational systems provide for balance and integration of national history and identity formation with knowledge of other cultures, religions, and regions.

- Religious leaders, education policymakers, and interfaith civic organizations should work together to develop consensus guidelines for teaching about religions. (...) Those involved in ongoing efforts should collaborate to develop consensus among religious leaders and educators on the need to teach about world religions in various educational settings, and to collect and disseminate best practices, consensus guidelines and instructional resources toward this end. The goal would be to provide base-materials that could be used by schools and religious training centers to teach about major faith traditions.

- Government and international organizations should work together to convene curriculum-review panels consisting of curriculum experts and representatives of the major faith traditions to review widely used educational curricula, ensuring they meet guidelines for fairness, accuracy, and balance in discussing religious beliefs and that they do not denigrate any faith or its adherents (United Nations 2006, VII paragraphs 1, 3, 4).

3.2 Toledo Guiding Principles on Teaching about Religions and Beliefs in Public
Schools

According to Jackson, these recommendations from the UN had exercised influence
on the decision taken by the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
(OSCE)[9] to develop the *Toledo Guiding Principles on Teaching about Religions and
Beliefs in Public Schools* issued in 2007 by OSCE´s Office for Democratic Institutions
and Human Rights (ODIHR), which provides support and expertise to member states
and civil society in promoting democracy, rule of law, human rights, tolerance and
non-discrimination (Jackson 2008, 154). These were developed by members of the
Advisory Council of the ODIHR Panel of Experts on Freedom of Religion or Belief and
other experts and scholars in the fields of international law, human rights, religion,
sociology, education, RE and academics and practitioners with theological expertise
from religious associations and denominations. This has, according to the Toledo
Guiding Principles, helped "to ensure that the perspective of religious and belief
communities is reflected and that the final product is as balanced and inclusive as
possible" (OSCE 2007, 27). The framework for the *Toledo Guiding Principles* is the
human rights, especially freedom of religion or beliefs, and the 2006 Decision on
Combating Intolerance and Non-Discrimination and Promoting Mutual Respect and
Understanding. In this decision, the OSCE Ministerial Council called upon the member
states to "address the root causes of intolerance and discrimination" by developing
domestic education policies and strategies and awareness-raising measures that
"promote a greater understanding of and respect for different cultures, ethnicities,
religions or belief" (OSCE 2007, 9).

The *Toledo Guiding Principles* is based on two core principles: "first, that there is
positive value in teaching that emphasizes respect for everyone's right to freedom of
religion and belief, and second, that teaching about religions and beliefs can reduce

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[9] OSCE has its origin in the early 1970s, when the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe
(CSCE) was created to serve as a forum for dialogue and negotiation between East and West during
the cold war. After 1990 CSCE acquired permanent institutions and operational capabilities and the
name was in 1994 changed to OSCE. OSCE comprises 57 participating States from North America,
Europe and Asia and is engaged in many different areas including military security, economic and
environmental co-operation and human rights. See http://www.osce.org/ (last accessed April 5,
2016).

harmful misunderstandings and stereotypes" (OSCE 2007, 12). It is explicitly stated that the OSCE and the *Toledo Guiding Principles* do not take side with respect to the different approaches and models for teaching religions in the participating states, but is aimed to offer practical guidance in preparing and implementing curricula to educators, legislators, teachers and officials in public and private schools in member states that "choose to promote the study and knowledge about religions and beliefs in schools, particularly as a tool to enhance religious freedom" (OSCE 2007, 12, 20).

The 'Key Guiding Principles' addresses the curricula, textbooks and educational material, the teachers and their education as well as the general ethos of the teaching. The teaching "should be provided in ways that are fair, accurate and based on sound scholarship (...) in an environment respectful of human rights, fundamental freedoms and civic values" (OSCE 2007, 16). In summary curricula should be:

- Developed in accordance with recognized professional standards in order to ensure a balanced approach to study about religions and beliefs and also include open and fair procedures that give all interested parties appropriate opportunities to offer comments and advice.
- Give attention to key historical and contemporary developments pertaining to religion and belief, and reflect global and local issues.
- Should be sensitive to different local manifestations of religious and secular plurality found in schools and the communities they serve in order to address the concerns of students, parents and other stakeholders in education.

Curricula, textbooks and educational material should also:

- Take into account religious and non-religious views in a way that is inclusive, fair and respectful. Care should be taken to avoid inaccurate or prejudicial material, particularly when this reinforces negative stereotypes.

It is also a key principle that the development of curricula makes sure that the process "is sensitive to the needs of various religious and belief communities and that all relevant stakeholders have an opportunity to have their voice heard", and thus a key guiding principle is that the teaching "should not undermine or ignore the role of families and religious or belief organizations in transmitting values to successive generations" (OSCE 2007, 15-16).

In the detailed chapter about the curricula, it is also stated that they should be sensitive, balanced, inclusive, non-doctrinal, impartial, based on reason and up to date and that sources from various religious and belief traditions that reinforce the significance of tolerance, respect and caring for others could be included in order to enforce inter-religious dialogue and respect of the rights of others (OSCE 2007, 40-41). Convictions, interests, and sensitivities of the pupils, the parents, the teachers, school administrators, representatives of religion and belief communities, NGOs, inter-religious councils etc. are to be taken into account when developing curricula. At the same time, the *Toledo Guiding Principles* also highlight that the teaching should be based on sound scholarship and not merely on wishes from religious communities, and that if they gain too much decision-making power at the cost of abdicating state responsibility, this could be a violation of the right to freedom of religion or belief (OSCE 2007, 64-65).

The Key Guiding Principles for the teachers, states that they should:

- Have a commitment to religious freedom that contributes to a school environment and practices that foster protection of the rights of others in a spirit of mutual respect and understanding among members of the school community.
- Need to have knowledge, attitude and skills to teach about religions and beliefs in a fair and balanced way. Teachers need not only subject-matter competence but pedagogical skills so that they can interact with students and help students interact with each other in sensitive and respectful ways.

It is also stated that any basic teacher preparation should be:

- Framed and developed according to democratic and human rights principles and include insight into cultural and religious diversity in society (OSCE 2007, 16-17).

Different pedagogic approaches are mentioned as appropriate, with special references made to 'the Phenomenological Approach', 'the Interpretative Approach' and 'the Dialogical Approaches' also mentioned in the Council of Europe's recommendations from 2008. A so-called 'empathetic attitude' are highlighted as something to be encouraged among learners and teachers, which is defined as "attempts to genuinely understand what another person is feeling and the ability to respectfully communicate the essence of another person´s experience" (OSCE 2007,

46). The learning objectives and reasons for teaching about religions and belief can be classified as social formation competences, cultural-historical knowledge and personal existential-ethical formation. The social formation competences are:

- attitudes of tolerance and respect for the right of individuals to adhere to a particular religion or belief system. This includes the right not to believe in any religious or belief system;
- an ability to connect issues relating to religions and beliefs to wider human rights issues (..) and the promotion of peace (..);
- an historical and psychological understanding of how a lack of respect for religious differences has led to extreme violence in the past and, related to this, the importance of people taking an active role in protecting the rights of others (civic responsibility); and
- the ability to counteract, in a respectful and sensitive way, a climate of intolerance and discrimination, when it occurs (OSCE 2007, 48-49).

It is argued that knowledge about religions and beliefs is an essential part of a well-rounded education, and required in order to understand much of history, literature and art. This cultural-historical knowledge and competences include:

- a core knowledge about different religions and beliefs systems and knowledge of the variation that exists within all religions and beliefs, with reference both to the local/national context as well as to larger geographical areas;
- an understanding that there are various legitimate ways to view history and historical developments (multi-perspectivity);
- knowledge of the contexts associated with major historical events relating to different religions and belief system; here, again, the specific attention to local/national circumstances should be combined with a broader geographical and cultural perspective;
- an understanding of the importance of religious or philosophical beliefs in a person´s life;
- awareness of similarities and differences between different religions and beliefs;
- the ability, based on sound knowledge, to recognize and to question existing negative stereotypes about religious communities and their members (OSCE 2007, 48-49).

The contribution to the learner's personal existential-ethical formation is the:

- forming and developing self-understanding, including a deeper appreciation of one's own religion or belief. Studying about religions and beliefs opens student's minds to questions of meaning and purpose and exposes students to critical ethical issues addressed by humankind throughout history (OSCE 2007, 19).

The *Toledo Guiding Principles* clearly reflects the human rights framework, and the idea that teaching about religion and belief can play an important role in solving political and social problems and in the promotion of human rights values, active democratic citizenship and intercultural/religious dialogue.

3.3 The REDCo-project sponsored by the European Commission

EU has also shown interest in RE as a potential factor in promoting intercultural and interreligious dialogue and solving political and social problems. A major project called 'Religion in Education. A Contribution to Dialogue or a Factor of Conflict in Transforming Societies of European Countries?' (REDCo) was financed by the European Commission (EC)[10], designed to contribute to the section 'Values and Religions in Europe' in the Framework 6 Program 'Citizens and Governance in a Knowledge based society'. The REDCo project lasted from 2006-2009 and included nine universities from Estonia, Russia, Norway, Germany, the Netherlands, England, France and Spain with project leaders from various academic disciplines (theology, Islamic studies, education, RE, sociology, political science and ethnography) and coordinated by Wolfram Weisse from the University of Hamburg. The main aim of the project was "to establish and compare the potentials and limitations of religion in the educational systems of selected European countries" (Weisse 2011, 113) with a focus on religion in the lives and schooling of pupils in the age group 14-16. The project included qualitative and quantitative research such as document analyses, class-room observation, questionnaires and interviews with pupils and was theoretically based on Robert Jackson's interpretative approach to RE and combined with approaches of 'neighbor religions', 'citizenship education', 'non-foundational education' and 'identity formation' (Weisse 2012). The results of REDCo are published in several books and reports, three films, more than 100 articles and the research group also produced policy recommendations aimed at European

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[10] EC represents the interests of the EU: It proposes new legislation to the European Parliament and the Council of the European Union, and it ensures that EU law is correctly applied by member countries. For more information, see http://ec.europa.eu/index_en.htm. (Last accessed March 14, 2016)

institutions, national educational bodies, research associations, religious organizations, universities and schools.[11]

These policy recommendations support the recommendations given by the Council of Europe and Toledo Guiding Principles but also stresses the need for a differentiation at the national level and "underline the importance of dialogue at classroom level which emphasizes the exchange of different perspectives of students concerning religions and worldviews." (REDCo 2009, 3). The recommendations cover four main objectives:

1) Encouragement for peaceful coexistence, 2) Promotion of diversity management, 3) Including religious as well as non-religious worldviews and 4) Professional competences. 'Encouragement for peaceful coexistence' should according to REDCo focus on the transmission from abstract, passive tolerance into practical, active tolerance through the following actions:

- Counter stereotypical images of religions, present more complex images that show the impact of religion on society and the individual.
- Develop and strengthen skills for dialogue between pupils concerning different religions and worldviews.
- Provide opportunities for engagement with different worldviews and religions, (including cooperation with local communities in order to increase exchange between different religious and non-religious groups) and to offer opportunities for encounters between students of diverse positions vis-à-vis religion.

The 'promotion of diversity management' stresses the necessary to value religious diversity at school and university level, and recommend actions that:

- Offer opportunities for students to learn about and give space for discussions on religions.
- Develop innovative approaches to learning about religions and worldviews in different subjects including RE, history, literature and science.
- RE and learning about religion must incorporate education for understanding and tolerance and take account of children's differing needs as they develop.
- Encourage universities to give fuller consideration to religious diversity in research and teaching.

It is recommended that actions should be taken in schools towards the:

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[11] The most recent book *Religion, Education, Dialogue and Conflict* ed. Robert Jackson (2012) gives an overview and some of the results of the REDCO project.

- Inclusion of learning about different religious and secular worldviews in their complexity and inner diversity
- Inclusion of the religious dimension into general intercultural education, education for democratic citizenship and human rights education.

Similar to the projects from other European organizations, the education of teachers is seen as vital for implementing these recommendations, and it is therefore recommended to:

- Prepare educators in different subjects to treat religious topics relevant to their subject, ensuring the inclusion of students regardless of their religious or non-religious background.
- Train educators in methods that supports and encourage students to be comfortable with difference and to engage with the diversity of their personal experiences.
- The curriculum for teacher training should include the development of skills to organize and moderate in-class debates on controversial religious and conflicting worldviews (REDCo 2009, 3-4).

4. Concluding remarks

As can be seen from the different projects and recommendations mentioned above, teaching about religions and beliefs is nowadays seen as an important instrument for meeting and maybe even solving major social, political and cultural challenges and conflicts. The projects and recommendations are in agreement that no matter what kind of RE that currently may be in place in the European states, there is a need to ensure that this RE or another kind of RE provides teaching about different religions and non-religious convictions in a balanced, impartial and pluralistic way that may counteract negative religious or cultural stereotypes, intolerance and misunderstandings of religions. This teaching and the recommendation thereof is placed in a framework of human rights, intercultural and inter-religious dialogue and citizenship education with the main aim of contributing to the learners 'social formation'. Common to the ideas of what this 'social formation' includes or implies is a competence to contribute to social cohesion and to a culture of 'living together', thus also implying active citizenship and intercultural dialogue, active tolerance, respect and the ability to interact with 'the other' in multicultural and multi-religious societies. The prerequisite for developing such social skills and attitudes is a

balanced, impartial historical-cultural knowledge about religion, religions and non-religious convictions.

Despite this overall agreement, differences and nuances can be detected when it comes to the framework and academic basis, to the teachers' education and to whether the pupils are to learn not just from the teaching about religions in regard to social formation but also from the religions themselves with regard to their personal moral- and spiritual development.

The Council of Europe, particularly in the 2005 Parliamentary Assembly recommendations, in the *White Paper* (2007), and in the 2008 recommendations shows a move from recommending more general principles towards giving more explicit and detailed principles for RE in a framework of intercultural education and the study of religions. These recommendations stress the need of impartial, critical-analytical knowledge and skills, and they differ from others by also recommending that the teaching includes controversial issues related to religions. The idea of learning *from* religions is, however, also expressed, and much in line with Robert Jackson´s idea (1997,2008) of 'edification' as the ability to reflect on one's own and others' existence and views not least as a way to develop intercultural (and interreligious) dialogue.

The UN *Alliance of Civilization* recommendations put more weight on interreligious dialogue as the framework for teaching about religions with a mainly positive perspective on religions and the harmonization of religions. They also assign a central responsibility to religious leaders of the major religions and intercivic organizations in evaluating and developing curricula and teaching material.

Not all RE scholars from the study of religions agree with the interreligious dialogue framework for RE and also point to difficulties to be considered if religious leaders

are included in curricula production.[12] Some such concerns are also discussed in the *Toledo Guiding Principles*, that also stress the need of showing sensitivity to and including representatives from religious and inter-religious communities and councils. Just like the Council of Europe, the *Toledo Guiding Principles* stresses that teaching about religions and beliefs should be based on professional expertise, training, and sound scholarship and that it should be accurate, objective, non-doctrinal, impartial and up to date. At the same time, however, teachers and learners are asked to have and show 'empathy' and 'sensitivity' in regard to religion and religious sensitivities, and (religious) existential-ethical formation is said to be one of the aims of RE.[13]

Consequently: As pointed out also by Luce Pépin in his report on RE in various European countries and trans-national European recommendations, despite agreement on the need to teach about different religions in schools, a fundamental question remains whether this also include learning from religions and how this should be justified (Pépin 2009, 43-44). Another unanswered question is to what an extend the trans-national European organizations and the member states are ready to acknowledge that it is the research, methods and theories developed within the academic study of religions that ought to serve as the academic foundation and overall framework for an impartial, balanced, and objective RE that can be made compulsory because in line with the criteria stated by e.g. the European Court of Human Rights.

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[12] See for example Alberts (2007, 377-380) for a discussion of these matters. Alberts stresses, that this inclusion should not give privileges only to the major established religions and requires a clear distribution of roles under the general responsibility of secular educational institutions. She also points out, that the inclusion of insider voices in the representation of religions can be helpful, but that they cannot have the final world in the representation and that educators must be aware of the diversity of insider-voices

[13] See Jensen 2008, 2011 for a critic of the Toledo Guiding Principles, which in his opinion puts to much weight on respect, empathic attitudes and sensitivity towards the needs and interests of pupils, parents, religious communities etc. and thus making the teaching of religions and beliefs something special compared to other subjects or subjects-areas in the school.

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