

## Religious Education and Education Policy in a European context

### Outline

#### EFTRE 2016 Vienna

**Believing – Belonging – Behaving; Challenges for Religious Education in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

#### 1. The start of EFTRE and beyond

From the very beginning of EFTRE education policy was a driving force for the collaboration. The first EFTRE conference in Helsinki in 1980 was organized in support of Religious Education (RE) in Finland. 36 years later RE teacher associations and their respective networks should also be alert about education policy developments and their influence on the status and form of RE. Gaining a participative status in education policy at regional, national and European level seems to be urgent.

#### 2. What are we speaking about?

Discussing education policy means to look at principles and government policy-making in the educational sphere as well as to the laws and rules that govern the operation of education systems. Education policy includes processes, themes and impacts. Governments are not the only stake holders, organisations in civil society can also shape and influence policy.

General trends in education policy affect RE. An important aspect is the increasing economic orientation in education, the measurement of outcome in form of standards and competencies and an increasing competition within and between education systems. A Europeanisation of education happens. This includes the potential of horizontal developments eg. in the network of EFTRE ([www.eftre.net](http://www.eftre.net)) and CoGREE ([www.cogree.com](http://www.cogree.com)).

General trends in education create basic threats for RE. A limited concept of education leads to a marginalisation of RE in the school curriculum, independent of its underlying approach.

This occurs together with changes in the inner structure of RE and change of the image of RE. The perception of the students is that RE is often not a serious subject but more or less a welcoming break between e.g. maths and foreign language courses.

For analyzing the impact and the influence of education policy for RE a differentiation between various dimensions may be helpful:

*Policy* refers to content, context, standards and narratives and related processes

*Politics* refers to procedures and processes

*Polity* refers to institutional, formal and value-orientated dimensions.

Religious Education is a multi-layered subject that exists in nearly all European states with different history and approaches shaped by the specific context.

## References

Franken, Leni; Loobuyck, Patrick (Eds.) (2011): Religious education in a plural, secularised society. A paradigm shift. Münster, New York, NY, München, Berlin: Waxmann.

Börzel, Tanja; Risse, Thomas (2003): Conceptualizing the Domestic Impact of Europe. In: K. Featherstone & C.M. Radaelli (Eds): The Politics of Europeanization. Oxford, pp. 57-80.

### 3. National education policy issues

Three national examples show a variety of how education policy influences RE. They document activities of different stakeholders and levels as well as problems and opportunities for developing RE further.

*England:* There are a number of current documents that highlight the following issues: Place of RE in the National Curriculum; the name of the subject, the quality of teaching and teacher training; Different interest groups are active in the field: APPC, Ofsted, RE Council, foundations

*Germany:* Two documents: Beutelsbach Consensus (1976) provides guiding principles for all kind of school education and beyond: (1) No indoctrination; (2) Controversy, (3) Focus on students' personal interests. (<https://www.ipb-bw.de/beutelsbacher-konsens.html>)

Memorandum of the Protestant Church in Germany (EKD, 2015): "Developing Religious Orientation. Protestant RE as a contribution to a school ready for plurality."

([http://www.ekd.de/download/religioese\\_orientierung\\_gewinnen.pdf](http://www.ekd.de/download/religioese_orientierung_gewinnen.pdf)) (English translation coming soon)

Issues: Further development of the existing confessional approach through more dialogue and cooperation of the different models and through developing approaches of interreligious learning. RE teacher trainers argue for more cooperation in teacher training; religion as an issue for the whole school and not just for RE.

*France:* The development towards a more intelligent laïcité and the confirmation of the existing separation between state and religion. Crucial document: the Charta of Laïcité (2013), obligatory for all public schools.

## References:

Debate in England on RE:

All party Parliamentary Group on Religious Education (2013): The Truth Unmasked; at:  
<http://religiouseducationcouncil.org.uk/media/file/APPG RE - The Truth Unmasked.pdf>

Commission on Religion and Belief in British Public Life (2015): Living with Difference. Community, diversity and the common good; at: <http://www.woolf.cam.ac.uk/uploads/Living%20with%20Difference.pdf>

Ofsted (2009): Religious education: realising the potential; at:  
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/religious-education-realising-the-potential>

RE Council (2013): A Review of Religious Education in England; at:  
<http://www.natre.org.uk/uploads/Free%20Resources/2013%20Review%20of%20Religious%20Education%20in%20England.pdf>

RE Council (2013): A Curriculum Framework for Religious Education in England; at:  
[http://www.natre.org.uk/uploads/Free%20Resources/RE\\_Review\\_Summary%20&%20Curriculum%20Framework.pdf](http://www.natre.org.uk/uploads/Free%20Resources/RE_Review_Summary%20&%20Curriculum%20Framework.pdf)

Westminster Faith Debates (2015): A New Settlement: Religion and Belief in Schools. Available at:  
<http://faithdebates.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/A-New-Settlement-for-Religion-and-Belief-in-schools.pdf>

House of Commons, Library (2016): Religious Education at Schools. Available at:  
<http://researchbriefings.parliament.uk/ResearchBriefing/Summary/CBP-7167>

RE for Real <http://faithdebates.org.uk/debates/re-for-real-religious-education/>

Debate on Charta of Laïcité:

<http://derstandard.at/1378248629340/Frankreichs-Schulen-bekommen-Charta-der-Laizitaet>

<http://www.spiegel.de/schulspiegel/ausland/frankreich-laizismus-charta-soll-schulen-von-schleieren-befreien-a-925380.html>

<http://www.zeit.de/news/2013-09/09/frankreich-frankreichs-schulen-bekommen-charta-der-laizitaet-09160404>

#### 4. European education policy issues

European institutions have become sensitive for the issue of religion and education:

For the *Council of Europe* ([www.coe.int](http://www.coe.int)) the religious dimension in intercultural dialogue and education has become an important issue and dialogue with religious communities was developed. The Signposts document (2015) ([www.coe/bookshop.int](http://www.coe/bookshop.int)) offers a starting point for discussing policy and practice for teaching about religions and world views in intercultural education.

For the *European Union* education has become an embedded issue in European integration. The Erasmus+ programme (2014-2020) offers opportunities for supporting projects regarding strategic partnership in school education including different aspects of religious education. READY is a running project on RE teacher training in that programme ([www.readyproject.eu](http://www.readyproject.eu)).

For the *OSCE* the broad concept of security includes also dealing with teaching about religions and beliefs as an area for securing democracy and human rights. The Toledo Guiding Principles document this policy. (<http://www.osce.org/odihr/29154>)

## **References:**

Jackson, Robert (2015): Signposts – Policy and practice for teaching about religions and non-religious world views in intercultural education, Strasbourg: Council of Europe. (so far in 7 languages available at <http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/education>)

Jackson, Robert (2016): Inclusive Study of Religions and World Views in Schools: Signposts from the Council of Europe; in Social Inclusion 2015, Vol. 4, Issue 2, pp. 14-25; at: [www.theewc.org/download/file/1422](http://www.theewc.org/download/file/1422)

OSCE/ODIHR (2007): Toledo Guiding Principles on Teaching about Religions and Beliefs in Public Schools; available at: <http://www.osce.org/odihr/29154?download=true>

Schreiner, Peter (2015) Europäisierung von Bildung und die Zukunft des Religionsunterrichts; at: [https://comenius.de/themen/Evangelische-Bildungsverantwortung-in-Europa/Texte/Europaeisierung\\_Bildung\\_Zukunft\\_Religionsunterricht\\_Schreiner\\_2015.pdf?m=1472458788](https://comenius.de/themen/Evangelische-Bildungsverantwortung-in-Europa/Texte/Europaeisierung_Bildung_Zukunft_Religionsunterricht_Schreiner_2015.pdf?m=1472458788)

Schreiner, Peter (2016): Zur Zukunft des Religionsunterrichtes und der Schule im Kontext europäischer Entwicklungen; available at: [https://www.comenius.de/themen/Evangelische-Bildungsverantwortung-in-Europa/Texte/Zur\\_Zukunft\\_des\\_RU\\_Schule\\_Europa\\_2016.pdf?m=1462190840](https://www.comenius.de/themen/Evangelische-Bildungsverantwortung-in-Europa/Texte/Zur_Zukunft_des_RU_Schule_Europa_2016.pdf?m=1462190840)

## **5. Conclusions and Perspectives**

- RE in Europe needs collaboration of research, policy and practice in order to create empirical evidence, policy support and good quality of teaching.
- A Europeanisation of education influences the place and value of RE and needs further consideration in research and policy.
- Inclusive RE should contribute to personal development and to social development practice.