

<b>Revised draft of a project plan for the Cooperation of European RE Organisations</b>
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**Discussion paper for the participating organisations  
Date: November 1997**

Preliminary remark:

*The first draft of a project plan (January 1997) received mainly positive reactions from the different organisations. At the same time the need was expressed, to continue the discussion and to work on issues of co-operation. This includes e.g. the following interests: a) to inform each other about the self-understanding of each organisation b) to work out possible common aims of cooperation c) to make concrete, how areas of common aims can be handled. The purpose is to learn more from each other and to work out common aims, which do not influence the different profiles in a negative but in a positive way and finally to find out common activities, which can deal with the overall existing common problems and challenges on the European level.*

*The second draft of a project plan will clear the ground for further steps and will give the necessary information. It is linked with the discussions and statements we have had and will serve the aim of ongoing understanding.*

*Again comments and further ideas are necessary and most welcome (dates see page 5)*

• **STRUCTURAL BACKGROUND**

On the European level there are a number of associations, organisations and networks which deal with a range of issues concerning the teaching of religions in schools and of Christian and religious responsibility in the area of European education policy.

\* The *InterEuropean Commission on Church and School - ICCS* is a network of churches, institutes for education and religious education, and state organisations (from 17 European countries) which deal with education and RE. ICCS creates a forum especially to discuss the relations between church and school.

Aim: Ecumenical orientation with contacts to other religions.

\* The *International Association for Christian Education - IV*, is an umbrella organization of Protestant national associations and organisations of teachers and schools (members from 6? countries). The self-understanding of IV is to act as a council, which represents the interests of its members on the European level. It encourages co-operation amongst its member organisations and works on issues of the realization of christian responsibility in education in Europe.

Aim: To strengthen the protestant position in the discussion of education policy in Europe.

\* The *European Forum for Teachers of Religious Education - EFTRE* supports the European cooperation of national and regional RE teachers' associations as well as of institutes and organisations which support RE/RS (about 50 members from 10 countries). Its self-understanding is that of a non-confessional forum which represents the interests of RE teachers in Europe, independent of a specific structure and a confessional or non-confessional approach.

Aim: To serve and strengthen the work of all RE teachers associations, adopting a professional approach on RE.

All these associations, organisations and forums have their own agendas, but at the same time they share a common interest in and a concern to contribute to activities, programmes and statements about religious education and general education at the European level.

Besides these more formal organisations which are legitimated to act in a representative way through boards, general assemblies and other committees, there are looser associations working on the European level in related areas.

\* The *European Conference on Christian Education - ECCE* is a forum for the exchange of ideas, models and discussions about issues of sunday school work in particular.

Aim: Christian orientation, open for all those who are involved with sunday school work and christian education.

\* The *RE-Network for Christian Religious Education in Europe* gives practical support for the establishment of a christian oriented RE in Middle and Eastern Europe, especially through seminars and providing information material.

Aim: Ecumenical orientation (protestant - orthodox), support of religious education.

\* The *European Association for World Religions in Education - EAWRE* is an independent association of scholars and educators which fosters an accurate handling of world religions in school and education.

Aim: Multi-religious orientation with emphasis on issues about world religions in education.

#### • CONTENT ORIENTED BACKGROUND

In 1995, ECCE, EFTRE, ICCS and IV formulated a common statement which included aims as a basis for further cooperation and at the same time as a common agreement in the area of 'Education and Europe'.<sup>1</sup>

1) *We want to dedicate ourselves to the view that European education policy is based on a comprehensive concept of education.*

Education should not be exclusively based on the interests and demands of the economy and a pure purpose-oriented behaviour. People should also learn to reflect on the impact and limits of their own knowledge and abilities. Education (Bildung) enhances the humanity of every human being. It leads to the development of an autonomous and self-aware individual. Criteria, which are used to assess 'Bildung' go beyond economical justification: 'Abhorrence and resistance of inhumanity; a willingness to grasp opportunities; the capacity and the will for understanding; a consciousness of the historical dimension of the self; sensitivity to ultimate questions; and - a double criteria - the readiness to be responsible for yourself and to be responsible for the *res publica*.' (H.v.Hentig). Questions of moral responsibility do have a place in all school educational and vocational training courses.

2) *We want to commit ourselves to the view that religion will find its position in the school curriculum*

There are a number of arguments on the level of educational philosophy which provide an educational justification for the relation of education and religion. They are also a basis for RE in schools:

- Religion is for many an indispensable dimension of human nature
- Religion is an important dimension of self formation
- Religion influences culture and history in Europe
- Religion is a central issue of life in society
- Religion can be a basis for moral education.

<sup>1</sup> The whole text is published in: P.Schreiner, H.Spinder, F.Vos (eds.): Education and Europe, Bildung und Europa, Common statement and information, Gemeinsame Erklärung und Informationen, Münster, Driebergen 1995, S. 7-12, it is also available through the mailbox of the Ev. Schulbund (+49 -4731-969318).

Religious education in the schools of Europe contributes to the development of the spiritual, moral, cultural, social, political and personal competence of pupils.

- **COMMON AIMS ON THE EUROPEAN LEVEL**

Although our organisations have different perspectives and understandings we are facing a number of common challenges and issues. We believe that the following aims can be held in common. We want to work out strategies and possibilities, to bring these aims into the discussion of education in Europe, to continue our work on the educational consequences of them and to put them into practice.

1. **Clarification of religion(s) as a part of the cultural basis of Europe**

The process of European integration is not taking place in a part of the world where culture and religion do not exist, although we find a separation of politics and religion in most of the states which is based on the neutrality of the state. Religion is enmeshed in the history and culture of all European societies. The necessity of a RE which refers to culture and history is not at issue. The historical development of Europe cannot be understood without knowledge of Christianity, but also of Judaism and Islam. On the other hand the contribution of the living religions to education is a point of controversial discussion. In many countries churches and religious communities can take responsibility for RE, in other countries RE has no involvement from the religious communities. The specific capability of religions to provide education needs further clarification.

2. **Participation in the debate about values in Europe**

What values characterize Europe? The Council of Europe emphasizes in its analysis of the situation in Europe a crisis of values (or rather a lack of them).<sup>2</sup> 'The pure market society is revealed as inadequate as was communism for individual well-being and social responsibility.' Also on the European level and in many countries religious communities are asked by politicians to contribute to a constructive living together in Europe on the basis of democracy and human rights. In our highly differentiated society the religious communities have to be actively involved, they have to be related to the cultural context and they should contribute to the education system. A broad ethical basic education cannot ignore Christian ethics, although it is not the only contribution of Christianity to education in Europe.

3. **Promotion of understanding and dealing with differences in a plural Europe**

The presence of different religions in the societies and schools in Europe - in various forms - makes religious pluralism an inescapable reality. It is a central challenge for society and for religious education. Since religious diversity exists the need for dialogue and the ability to understand and explain one's own faith is obvious. In the classroom the aims are to create understanding of other religions and world views as well as a constructive dealing with existing differences. In a European oriented RE the contact with the unfamiliar should be seen as a central task. The European Council declared in its statement in October 1995<sup>3</sup>: 'The education system can make a valuable contribution in promoting respect, tolerance and solidarity in the relationship between people or groups with different ethnic or cultural backgrounds or different religions.' Many representatives of different religions in Europe share these aims and like

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<sup>2</sup> Recommendation 1202 (1993) on 'religious tolerance in a democratic society', printed eg. in Education and Europe (see note 1).

<sup>3</sup> Declaration of the Council and the representatives of the government of the member states united in the Council from October 23, 1995 about the answer of the education system to problems of racism and xenophobia (95/C 313/01), published in the official newsletter of the European Communities No. C 312/1 of 23-10-95.

to make a contribution through their education activities. These issues also play a role in the dialogue of religions.

#### 4. **Development of a human orientated vision of Europe**

Religious education in the European context needs a vision of Europe. We are demanding a just, participatory and sustainable Europe which is not exclusively oriented on economic and political forces but which serves the discerned relations between people and their communities.

#### 5. **Support for education of the whole person**

The different statements of the European institutions properly emphasise a concept of education (Bildung) which predominantly meets economic needs and stresses 'human capital' and 'human resources' available for the existing market with an emphasis on Europe's competitive capability against other markets. Other central aspects of education like the development of one's own judgemental skills or the preparation of people 'to take a stand against structures of power and carelessness', are neglected. Religious education can be a critical corrective to a reductionist understanding of education.

#### 6. **Work towards a sustainable global education**

The extension of European co-operation takes place at a time in which global perspectives are becoming more and more important. Religious education should not lead to a narrow euro-centric world view. On the contrary it should make aware of global problems and take account of linked aspects. The current crisis, where globalisation and fragmentation are paradoxically developing apace in equal measure, makes it necessary for educational thinkers to apply a critical analysis to such issues as whether religion is a strength or hindrance to understanding and also to include the global perspective in educational philosophical thinking.

#### • **STEPS OF FURTHER CO-OPERATION**

If these six aims can be agreed by the various organisations they could be a platform for a common initiative, to promote and clarify these aims to the public. A twin-track approach would respect the commonalities and differences of the six organisations:

- ◆ *Track A: A narrowly focussed political initiative at the European level on an issue where there is substantial agreement between the organisations. This should include the pooling of political contacts on the national as well as on the European level*
- ◆ *Track B: A broadly based discussion of issues where there are different perspectives held by the organisations. This could be facilitated by a common conference (as proposed below) and by the gathering of papers and other relevant material from the organisations on the issues raised in this paper.*

#### ◆ **Proposed common conference**

**Draft theme: „Religious Education and its contribution to the shaping of Europe“.**

**Possible date: 2001.**

As part of the moves towards this conference the organisations involved are organising a number of conferences. The results of these conferences can influence the planning and running of the common conference. Up to now the following conferences can contribute to this process:

- 1) **ICCS- Conference: „SPIRITUALITY AND EUROPE. RELIGIOUS CONTRIBUTIONS TO EDUCATION“**, July 21 to 25, 1997 in Strasbourg/F

- 2) **IV-Conference:** DER PROTESTANTISCHE BEITRAG ZUR EINIGUNG EUROPAS (THE PROTESTANT CONTRIBUTION TO THE UNIFICATION OF EUROPE), 26.-30. September 1997 in Cieszyn, Poland,
- 3) **EFTRE-Conference:** „INTO THE 3RD MILLENIUM. RELIGION, CULTURE AND RELIGIOUS EDUCATION/RELIGIOUS STUDIES IN EUROPE.“, August 27. to 30, 1998 in Copenhagen, Denmark
- 4) **ECCE-Conference:** „FREED TO MEET OTHERS - THE TASK OF THE CHURCH WITH CHILDREN IN EUROPE, September 5 to 11, 1998 in Czeske Budejovice, Czech Republic.

◆ Further discussion

For the discussion of reactions to this draft and an ongoing discussion the following meetings are planned:

**February 07, 1998 Coordinationgroup of the organisations, in Utrecht** (Coordination by ICCS / Hans Spinder)

**June 05/06, 1998 Koblenz III in Koblenz-Güls** (Coordination IV/ Dr. Horst Bahn)

• **POSSIBILITIES FOR FINANCIAL SUPPORT BY THE EUROPEAN UNION?**

European projects should be supported on the European level. If we look carefully at this demand two difficulties come up:

- a) Education and other activities, in which church organisations are involved, are seen as lobby activities, which cannot be supported from the administration in Brussels.
- b) The action programmes for education of the EU do not have a great amount of money available.

For the past two years the action programmes have been newly combined into two strings:

SOCRATES: for universities, schools and adult education

LEONARDO for general education, inservice training and cooperation amongst universities and companies.

Chapter II of the SOCRATES Programme, known as COMENIUS, is the first initiative of the EU dealing with school education. It is divided into three Actions: (multilateral partnerships between schools, European Projects for intercultural education, European Projects to update and improve the skills of teachers/teaching staff). Possibilities for subsidies must be identified and justified.

Chapter III includes also 'Horizontal measures' with Action 3: 'Exchange of information and experience'. In 1995 only four applications received financial subsidies.

In this field more research is needed to identify contacts within the administration in Brussels.

Münster, November 10, 1997

signed Peter Schreiner, Comenius-Institut