

# EDUCATION AND EUROPE

## Common statement from

ICCS:	Intereuropean Commission on Church and School
IV:	International Association for Christian Education
EFTRE:	European Forum of Teachers of Religious Education
ECCE:	European Conference on Christian Education

in co-operation with: **Comenius Institut, Münster**

As non-governmental organizations (NGO's) we are all, at a European level, involved in questions concerning christian and church education, religious education and general education. Our activities concern the whole of Europe. More and more individuals and institutes from Middle- and EasternEurope participate in our conferences and working groups.

Our organizations have multiple relations with the Protestant and Anglican churches. These churches are, firstly, national churches and are not always able to meet the international European challenges.

True, there is the Ecumenical European Commission for Church and Society (EECCS), with offices in Brussels and Strasbourg, but questions concerning education have hardly played a role in this commission. ICCS and IV, who are consultative members of EECCS, want to support the Protestant and Anglican voice in the area of education.

## 1. Common starting points

The profound, incisive and contradictory changes in Europe also affect the conditions of our work. We want to contribute to understanding, to overcome prejudices and to peaceful living in Europe. At the institutional level the Council of Europe and the European Union are important for us. The documents of the Council of Europe concerning culture, education and human rights influence discussions in Eastern-, Middle- and Western-Europe. In several of these documents the role of religion in education and culture is acknowledged.

Guidelines and programme recommendations of the European Union concerning education do certainly respect the responsibility of member states for the educational content matter in schools and for the composition of their education systems, but, through their concepts of education, they affect the conditions of our work. For that reason it is important to discuss the dominating concept of education in the Europe.

Schooling and education are essential for the democratic and social construction of Europe and for the peaceful co-existence of its citizens. Therefore, we intend to reinforce the role of schooling and education in Europe.

## 2. Common goals

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

The different statements of European institutions properly emphasize the interests of schooling and education in the shaping of Europe. They are nevertheless based on a concept of education that predominantly meets economic needs and defines 'human resources' in such a way. These human resources are largely nothing more than flexible trained labour, available for employment in the European labourmarket.

We are of the opinion that there is more at stake in schools and training institutes. People should also learn to reflect upon the extent and limitations of their own ability. Within this context we

believe it to be necessary that in all schools and training institutes in Europe questions of moral responsibility are incorporated more explicitly into curricula and educational regulations.

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

For us this means, on the one hand, that we take the religious dimension which exists in the different subjects seriously and on the other hand, recognize religion as an independent subject, in which questions are raised regarding lifestyles as well as questions about ethical and religious orientation. We acknowledge that in some countries, for political or historical reasons, it is not yet possible to have such an independent subject.

It is our common conviction that, within the framework of schooling and education, religion plays an important role in several aspects:

### \* *Religion as part of culture*

In all (European) societies religion is part and parcel of their history and their culture (in their poetry, music, plastic arts, etc.).

The furtherance of cultural competence of students requires, accordingly, an encounter with the own religious heritage and with other religions.

### \* *Religions as currently operative factor in society*

Religious ideas and beliefs are operative in ethical questions and disputes. In social conflicts religious groups and institutions commit themselves in their orientation depending upon their convictions of faith.

The furtherance of social and political competence of the student needs, accordingly, to be engaged with norms and values of the religions.

### \* *Religion as an element in the interpretation of self and world*

In the pictures and symbols of the religions people find a language for their experiences, their questions and their understanding of the beginning and ending of life; for happiness and sadness, for meaning and meaninglessness, for joy and grief, for good and evil.

The furtherance of the personal competence of students needs, accordingly, an encounter with the fundamental existential statements of the religions.

## 3. What do we want to do together?

\* In order to participate in the discussions concerning European education policy it is necessary that we make important information and documents more available between us and that we evaluate them; for example the guidelines and programme suggestions of the European Union as well as conference announcements about topical issues and recommendations of the Council of Europe.

\* We want to use the existing membership of different European organizations to represent our common interests (i.e. the consultative membership of IV and ICCS with EECS and the consultative status of ICCS with the Council of Europe).

\* With common conferences, publications and working groups we want to inform teachers and other educationalists and motivate them to engage in greater European co-operation.

\* We want to participate in the existing possibilities for NGO's within the framework of European institutions and programmes, to disseminate relevant information and to be involved in the development of educational initiatives at European level.

\* We want to create opportunities to improve our lobby activities in relation to European politicians, MEP's and civil servants.

Driebergen, June 1995