

Education and Religion in Europe



A dossier by EARS on the role of religion in education in 17 European countries



The European Academy on Religion and Society (EARS) is a European network of Departments and Faculties of Theology and Religious Studies. The need to understand the complexity of religious developments is increasingly important. This is why EARS, the participating universities, and their theologians cooperate at different levels, aiming to make knowledge available and applicable to society at large. Within the debate on religion, EARS strives to seek the nuance rather than further polarize the debate. EARS contributes, from its own narrative, to the debate on values, societal cohesion, and the challenges and impact of religion. It acts both as a think tank and as a hub for society. Our insights on topics such as leadership, social dilemmas, politics, technology, and education aim to inspire and to motivate.

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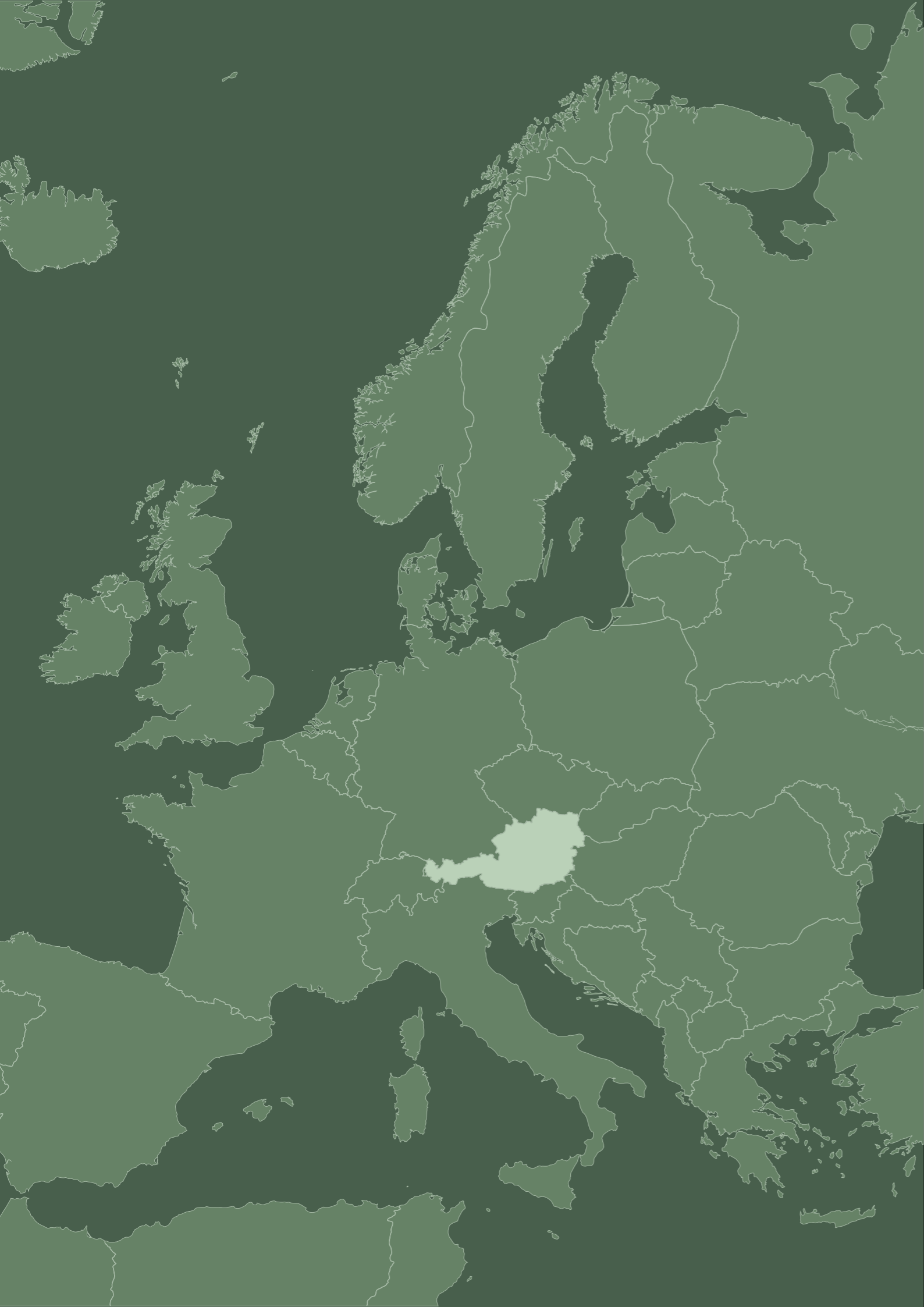
Throughout the history of many European nations, at some point, education and religion have been connected. For some countries, the relationship between education and religion has been pervasive, with religious authorities possessing significant control over the education system. While for other countries with long histories of secularism, religion has left less of a mark.

Despite the differing degrees to which the relationship between education and religion has impacted European countries, it is clear that this relationship has been positioned against a backdrop of a continuously shifting social and political landscape on the continent. For example, several of the chapters in this dossier reflect on the transformations that occurred in 20th-century Europe and the influence these changes had on the connection between education and religion. Events and processes such as revolutions, world wars, communism, fascism, secularisation, and multiculturalism, have, in different ways, shaped the connection between education and religion in Europe.

As will be seen in this dossier, the impact of such processes is still felt in many European countries in the present day and has often influenced the nature of religious education (RE). Topics such as whether RE is run by religious institutions or the state, if RE is a compulsory subject or not, the impact of secularisation on RE, and the rise in the subject of 'Ethics', are reflective of such societal changes and will be considered in this dossier.

The 17 countries covered in this dossier were analysed by a total of 17 analysts from across Europe. Importantly, each chapter in this dossier is written by authors either native to or very familiar with that country, ensuring that the reader is provided with a more intimate knowledge of the relationship between religion and education in each specific country.

We will start by outlining the organisation of RE across these 17 countries. Then, we will move on to identify common trends across European countries and we will divide the countries into three broad categories based on their approaches to education and religion. Finally, we will conclude by analysing what the future will hold for the relationship between religion and education across Europe.



Austria: Education on religion in a transformation process

In Austria, parents are legally responsible for the religious education (RE) of children. By the age of 14, children reach the status of religious majority and attain full control over their religious life and affiliation.¹

In state schools and private schools with a public status, RE in confessional form is an obligatory subject from the first up to the last (13th) grade. This concerns all pupils affiliated with an officially acknowledged church or religious society. Sixteen different religious communities have reached this state of acknowledgement in Austria, which entitles them to various rights and duties. These communities adhere to either the Buddhist, Christian, Islamic, or Jewish traditions.²

Rights and duties of religious communities

One of the rights of the acknowledged communities is the RE of affiliated children in schools, therefore the classes are separated on the basis of denomination. The church or religious society has to provide, conduct, and supervise the confessional education and is responsible for the granting of permissions for teachers (in the Catholic Church called *missio canonica*).³ The topics and aims of the classes depend on various curricula given by the denominations. For instance, in primary schools, Catholic children shall acquire knowledge in their own religion and skills in orientation in life, religion in the context of society and culture, and the diversity of religious worldviews.⁴

The mentioned religious communities are also granting the right to hold religious activities at school. In official documents referring to religious activities in general, types of activities are mostly exemplified by Church services. This can be seen as an example of the favoured position of Christian (Catholic) churches in practice. An obvious privilege aligned with the Christian churches is the requirement to place crosses in classrooms if more than half of the pupils have a Christian confession.⁵

RE and the freedom of religion

The right to educate children in schools about their religion is seen as a 'realisation of religious freedom in a corporate and individual form'. However, the freedom of religion also grants for the opposite and consequently there is an option to sign out from religious classes at school. Pupils older than 14, or their parents when they are younger, can deregister them from RE. In this case, there is no obligation for the students to attend an alternative subject.^{6,7}

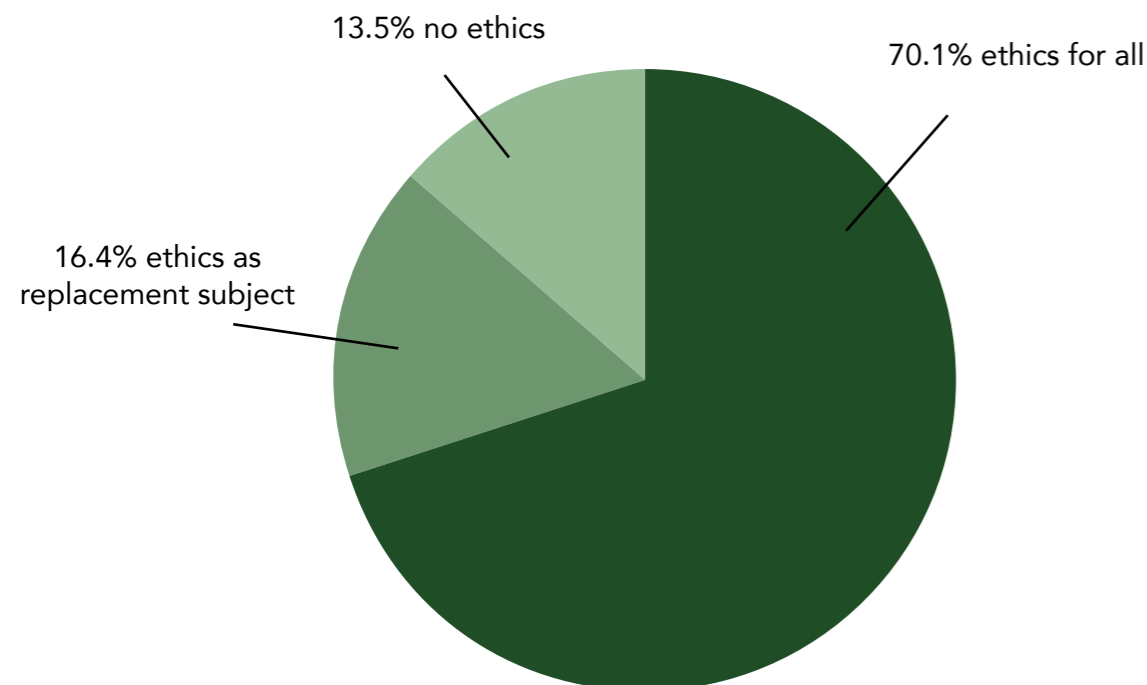
Ethics as (alternative) teaching subject

However, in autumn 2021, a new regulation concerning ethics education will become effective. All pupils in 9th grade or higher will be obliged to attend either

classes on religion or classes on ethics.^{8,9} In 1997, the school subject 'Ethics' started as a school pilot project in grammar schools and vocational schools, and it will soon be turned into an obligatory subject for all students who do not attend RE classes.¹⁰ Education in ethics should provide an engagement and confrontation with different philosophical, cultural, and religious aspects of life and encourage self-reflectiveness.¹¹

Still, the wider public seems to be unsatisfied with the new change. A popular petition was held on the vote for Ethics classes for all pupils regardless of religious affiliation, religious classes, and grade.¹² The petition demands "common teaching of values and integration at school — regardless of origin, worldview, or religion." In a survey in 2020, 70% of the respondents voted for Ethics as a general subject.¹³ Nearly 160,000 Austrians had signed the petition by January 2021. As a result of this high number of signatures, a discussion on the concerning topic will be held in the National Assembly.¹⁴

Outcome of 2020 survey on Ethics as a subject



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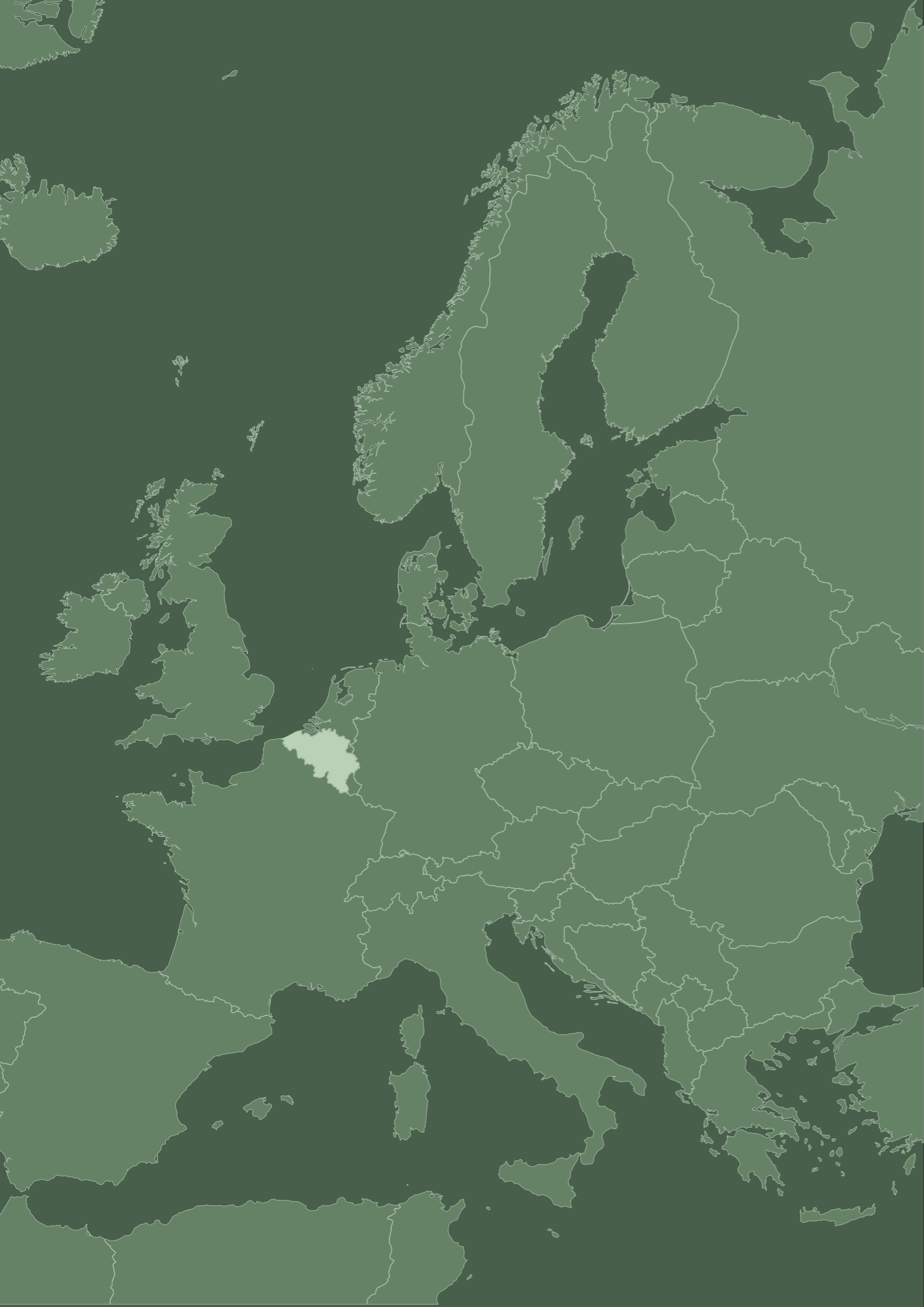
An interreligious project in Graz, Austria's second-largest city, is proposing a different modification of the RE system. This project implies shared teaching units by Islamic and Roman-Catholic teachers within the confessional RE. It is a research project of the University of Graz called 'Christian-Islamic religious education in team teaching. Evidence-based development of local theories for a didactics of cooperative religious teaching/learning processes' and is funded by the Austrian Science Fund until 2024.¹⁵

The head of the project, Wolfgang Weirer, emphasised the importance of schools as "places where people with different ethnic, cultural and mostly also religious backgrounds encounter each other."¹⁶ The main goal is to encourage integration through the personal contact of pupils which adhere to the two largest religious communities in Austria: Islam and Christianity. Teachers will play an important role in this setting as role models for the interreligious encounter. The research focuses on the shared teachings and its capabilities and limitations. It will also examine the legal possibilities, the perspectives of the teachers, and the requirements for this kind of education.¹⁷

The future of RE in Austria — a lookout

The status of RE in Austria is currently in a transformation process. It remains to be seen how the new regulation on education on ethics will be established. There might also be an impact on the confessional RE itself. The voice of the malcontents is loud, but could be overseen by government parties and politicians in favour of RE and the partly powerful religious communities and churches behind it. Nonetheless, changes are bound to occur, which are not least due to the changes within Austria's society.

Elisabeth Waldl



Belgium: Ancient structures under fire

The Belgian education system is divided into two types of schools: municipal or official state schools on the one hand, and private schools (mainly Catholic, but also Jewish, Steiner, or Freinet schools) on the other. The first are fully financed by the state and are not based on a certain religion, whereas the latter are only partially subsidised and reflect a specific world view.¹⁸ For instance, such schools may reflect the Catholic religion, or the non-confessional Steiner philosophy.¹⁹ The existence of this 'double' system is quite unique and a product of a long history.

The origins of this tangled web

Until the 18th century, the Catholic Church had a monopoly on education. However, the arrival of secularisation forced the Church to reorganise itself and, therefore, the bishops created the Catholic 'column' of religious schools and associations.²⁰ This system of different 'columns' is quite unique in Europe and has remained important until today in Belgium. Starting in the second half of the 19th century, the Christian column, for instance, consisted of schools, hospitals, libraries, newspapers, sports clubs, and even marching bands. Later on, socialists and liberals followed this example. People thereby stuck to one column in their choice of free time activities and segregated pillars were created.²¹ The gradual disappearance of the three major ideologies and the modern secularisation, however, caused this system to fade away. Nevertheless, the traces of this structure are still visible in the competition between the municipal and the Catholic schools.²²

After the Second World War, the tensions between Catholic and municipal schools increased and gave rise to discussions around topics such as subsidies for free schools and the teaching of religion at official state schools. Around 1850, these tensions came to a climax and erupted in the so-called 'Schoolstrijd' or 'battle of the schools'. For over a century, Christian parties in the parliament debated against liberals and socialists about the power of the Church in schools. Finally, in 1956, the School Pact was signed. This pact mainly determined that free schools receive around 60% of their expenses in subsidies, and that both types of education have to be equally accessible all over the country.²³

State of affairs and challenges

Some may be surprised by the fact that Catholic schools still form the biggest column in Belgium: in the Flanders region, over 700,000²⁴ pupils attend a Catholic free school. It should be noted that only 10% of the Belgian population declares themselves practicing Catholic.²⁵ In many cases, the two hours of RE a week drifted into

more pluralistic, moral, and philosophic classes. Knowledge of the Christian faith thereby declined even more. In 2019, as a consequence, the conference of bishops presented an updated version of the attainment targets in which they stressed the importance of theoretical knowledge.²⁶ The Bishop of Antwerp, Johan Bonny, explains that religion classes should not become an hour of cosy chat, but that a basic ‘toolbox’ of terms is necessary to start discussing religion. There will also be room to discuss other religions, but the bishop states that the Belgian society has to be vigilant about the knowledge of its own Jewish-Christian heritage.²⁷

At municipal schools, every pupil receives classes about the recognised belief (Roman Catholicism, Orthodoxism, Protestantism, Anglicanism, Judaism, Islam, or non-religious moral class) he or she prefers. The organised structures of the chosen beliefs themselves (such as the Bishop council for the Catholics) thereby choose the teacher and organise the classes. For example, the Muslim executive is responsible for all Islamic teachers at municipal schools.²⁸

Jewish and Muslim schools in Belgium represent the smallest groups of schools that offer religious classes. The 25,000 Jews in Antwerp, for example, have established special schools in their Jewish neighbourhood. Nevertheless, these schools are controversial. For instance, a Jewish school was warned for providing barely any sexual education.²⁹ Equivalently, a new Muslim school in Genk did not receive recognition as the state judged that they fell short in terms of honoring children’s rights,³⁰ meaning that the school does not have the authority to grant degrees and cannot receive state subsidies. However, the overwhelming majority of Muslims follow classes in Catholic or municipal schools as there are only four Islamic schools in the country.³¹

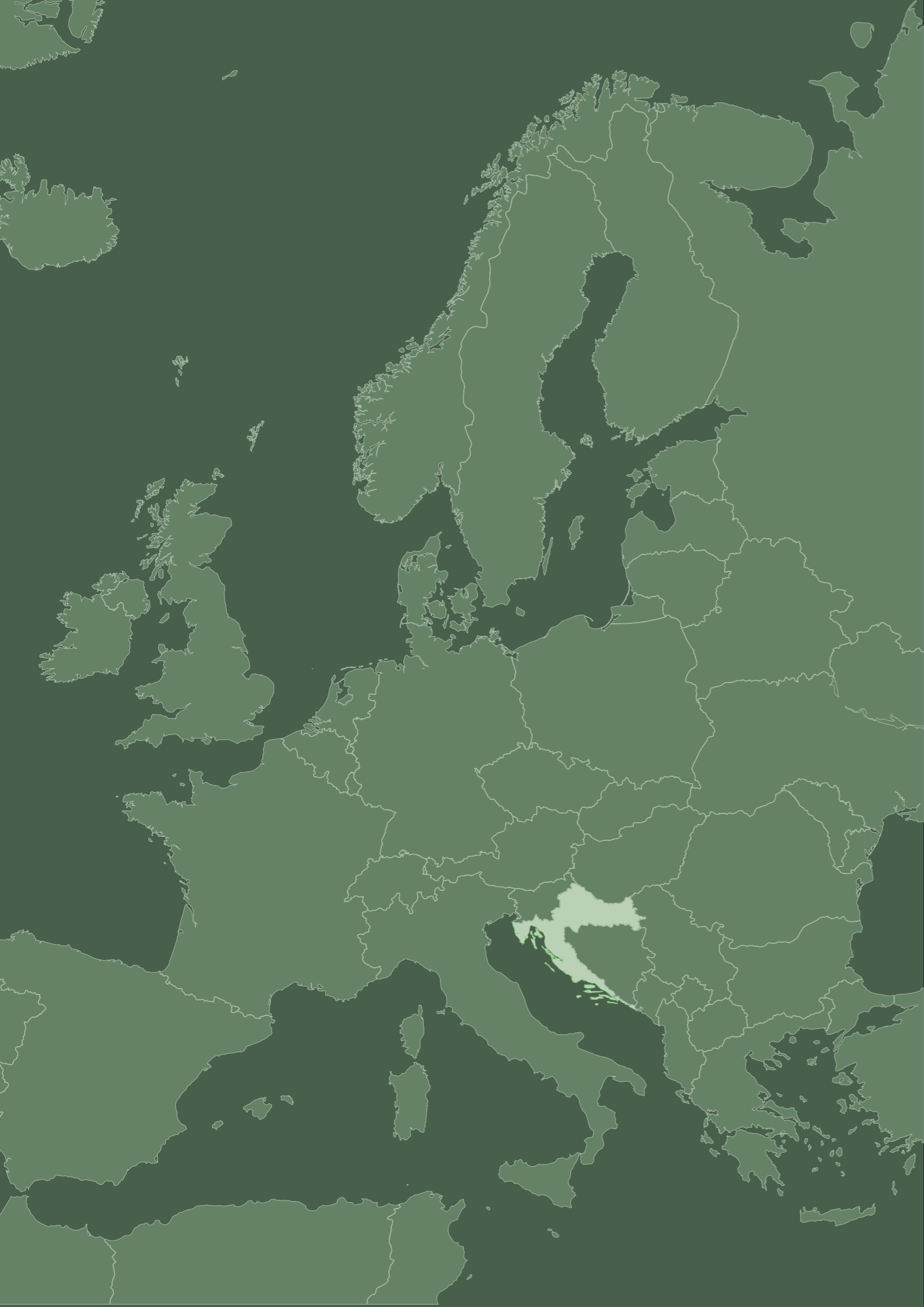
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Visions for the future

Religious education in Belgium is a complex phenomenon and the question arises whether this model will continue to exist. Indeed, the power of the Catholic Church in education and the right to attend religious classes in a rapidly secularising society, are regularly questioned.^{32 33} It is argued that the model of competition between the Catholic school network and the municipal one is inefficient and that this idea of ‘columns’ is not relevant anymore in the 21st century.³⁴ On the other hand, the wish of Belgium’s Muslim community to organise their own schools and the firm reaction of the bishops on the declining level of religious knowledge at Catholic schools, shows that religion still plays a key role in Belgian education.

Luca Van Cleempoel



Croatia: Communism is gone, religious freedom has come

Religion is the opium of the people

After the end of the Second World War, the Republic of Croatia was an integral part of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. Communism was the ruling regime in Yugoslavia until its disintegration, and Croatia — as an integral part of Yugoslavia — was also under that same communist regime. This regime propagated its own interpretation of the philosophical teachings of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. Marx believed that people are exclusively the product of upbringing and living conditions, so that it is possible to change people only by changing the social institutions that form them.³⁵ One of those institutions was the Church, which was to be replaced by the Communist Party.³⁶

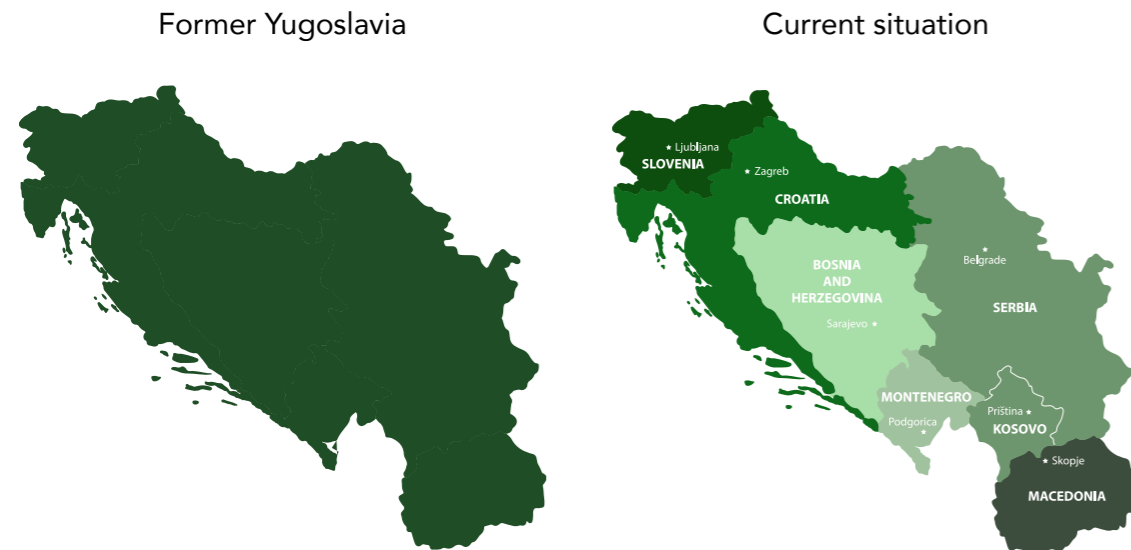
Russian philosopher Nikolai Berdyaev believed that communism dictated a view of the world because it forced everyone to think the same way through violence. Communism sought to be the religion that would overtake Christianity and aspired to offer its alternative meaning of life.³⁷ The Yugoslav communist regime largely banned all forms of religiosity in both the public and private spheres.³⁸ The main motto it was guided by was: *Religion is the opium of the people*.³⁹

Religion was not present in the Croatian educational system after 1952, and religious education (RE) was allowed only in churches.⁴⁰ The state government excluded clerical schools from the state system and stopped financing them. Clerical schools were funded by religious communities, and the state did not recognise or accredit them. Faculties of theology were expelled from all universities by the decision of the ruling communist regime. For instance, in 1952, the Orthodox Theological Faculty was expelled from the University of Belgrade by the communist authorities.⁴¹ Religion was viewed with superstition by communist propaganda and was presented as something outdated, backward, and in complete opposition to science. Moreover, it was believed that Yugoslavia should be liberated of religion in order for its society to progress.⁴²

Rejection of Yugoslav identity and acceptance of national identity

During the 1990s, Yugoslavia disintegrated and the civil war broke out. The communist regime lost its power. Yugoslav identity was no longer acceptable and the Yugoslavian people began to glorify their nationalism.⁴³ With the growth of nationalism, the need for nation-states arose. The civil war resulted in the fragmentation of communist Yugoslavia and the emergence of six independent nation-states, one of which was Croatia, which received international recognition of independence in early 1992.⁴⁴

Fragmentation of Yugoslavia



With the disappearance of the Communist Party on the political scene and the emergence of nationalism, religion was viewed as part of the national corps. Suddenly, there was a religious resurrection in the former territory of Yugoslavia. The church became very powerful in all former Yugoslav republics and was glorified as a part of the national being. The restitution returned a large part of its property to the Church that it had before the Second World War, which made the Church financially influential.⁴⁵ Roman Catholicism is still the major religion in Croatia, and the Holy See was one of the first countries to recognise Croatia's independence.⁴⁶ After the formation of the independent Croatian state, the question arose of how to return religion to the educational system. As a result, RE returned to primary and secondary schools in 1991. In 1995, RE was given an alternative in secondary schools in the form of a subject called Ethics.⁴⁷

Communism is gone, religious freedom has come

Today, registered religious communities in the Republic of Croatia can establish religious schools at all levels.⁴⁸ The largest religious community is the Roman Catholic Church. In addition, the Serbian, Bulgarian, and Macedonian Orthodox Churches, the Islamic Community, the Jewish Community of Municipalities, the Evangelical, Baptist, Adventist, Reformed Churches, and the Alliance of Churches 'Word of Life' are registered.⁴⁹ RE classes start in kindergarten. In primary and secondary school,

students can attend RE if they choose to do so.⁵⁰ For students under the age of 15, parents decide whether or not their child will attend RE classes.⁵¹

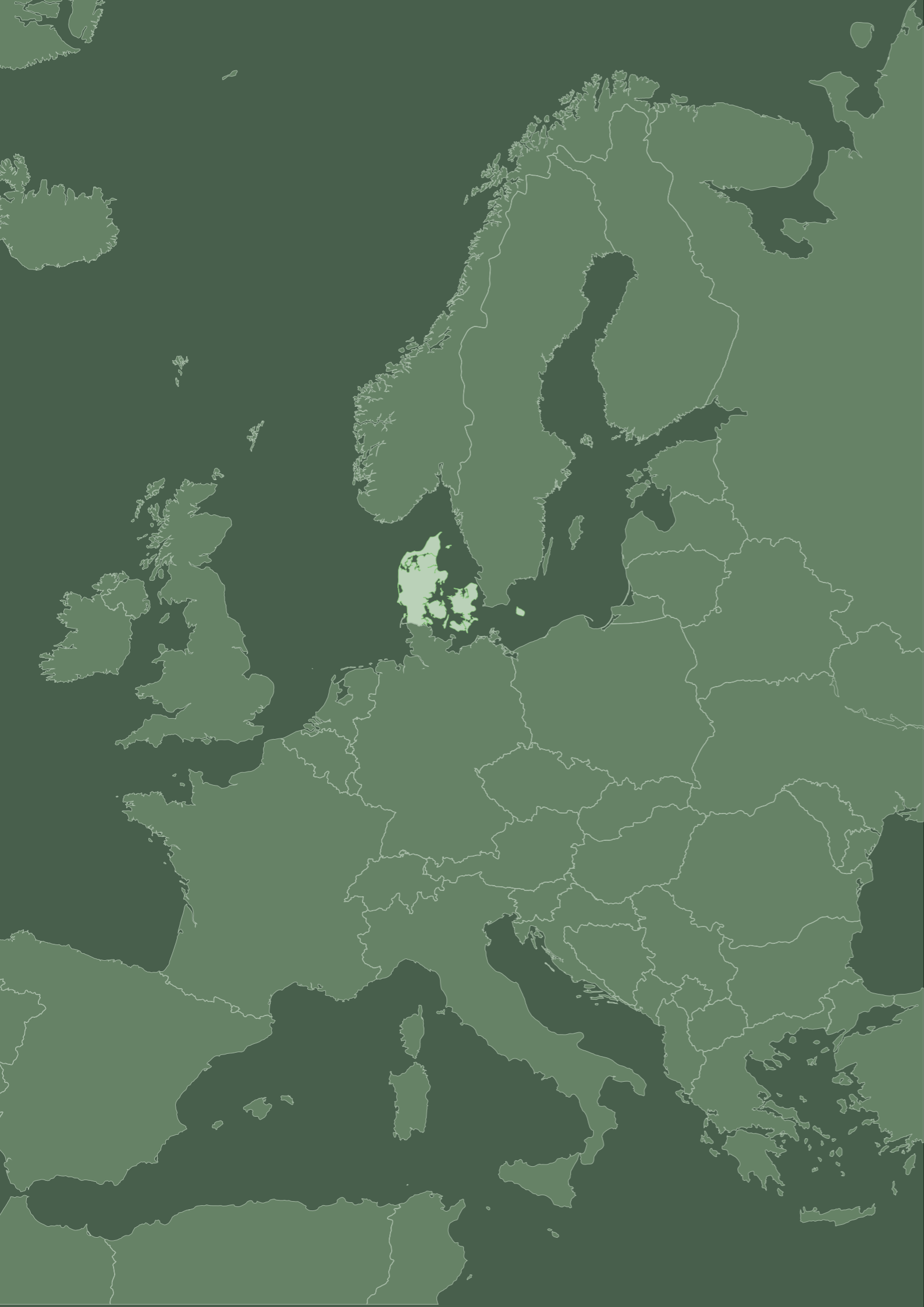
RE teachers are theologians with a degree in theology of the denomination which RE they teach. In addition to a certain diploma, teachers of religious instruction must also have a certificate from their religious community, which states that they can and may teach. If the religious community withdraws this certificate, for instance due to a disciplinary offense by a teacher or some other important violation for the Church, a teacher cannot continue to teach, regardless of their academic qualifications. At least seven students are needed to form a class for RE in the school.⁵² Religious communities can also establish their own Theological Faculties within one of the universities in the Republic of Croatia, which must work within the law on higher education.⁵³

RE or free time

Pupils have two hours of RE at school per week.⁵⁴ If they do not want to attend RE classes in high school, they receive the alternative subject of Ethics.⁵⁵ However, there is no alternative in elementary school, so students that do not join RE classes — about 10% of all students⁵⁶ — spend time in the hallway or the library during RE classes. This is regularly considered as a problem for both the school and the parents, because those children are unattended for two hours.⁵⁷ Every year, students who do not follow RE classes spend 70 hours without proper supervision,⁵⁸ even though they have the opportunity to choose another elective subject such as German.⁵⁹

The issues described above, including the lack of adequate alternatives for RE in elementary school, are leading to a re-examination of the need for RE in the Croatian educational system. However, traditional prejudices remain. For instance, some assume that one can only be a Croat when they are Roman Catholic, and Roman Catholics should attend RE classes. The Ministry of Education now faces the challenge of finding an RE model that will overcome existing challenges in this field, and potentially offer new alternatives.

Marko Pavlović



Denmark: The freedom to choose

Christianity as central but secular

The Danish school system was established as a result of the country becoming a Christian state. In this way, there has always been a link between religion and education in Denmark. Back in the early 1500s, Denmark's school system consisted of Latin schools where children would learn about the Bible. This changed radically after the Reformation, when the school system started focusing more on the individual and teaching in Danish rather than in Latin.⁶¹

Since then, religion has played less and less of an important role in the Danish educational system. In 1975, it was approved that parents could opt their children out of Christianity lessons if they wished to.⁶² In the Danish public school system, 'Christianity' is an obligatory subject unless you opt your children out of the class. Some schools choose to call the subject 'Religion'. Though the subject is still officially known as 'Christianity' and follows the Lutheran tradition,⁶³ it focuses on teaching about a diverse set of religions. Yet, considering Denmark is still officially a Christian country, the central focus of the subject is on Christianity. Religion is also an obligatory subject in 'gymnasium', however, in such schools, the same focus on Christianity does not exist.⁶⁴

Confirmation as a central ritual

The focus on religion and Christianity in the public Danish education system is an overall secular, informative, and pluralistic one. It is also very normal to be confirmed in Denmark (in 2019, 68.3% of Danish young people were confirmed), and this happens through a collaboration between Danish schools and churches.⁶⁵ Confirmation is a Christian ritual where people confirm their christening from when they were a child and thus choose to remain in the Danish folk church.⁶⁶ Even though confirmation is a Christian ritual, it bears mostly cultural significance in Denmark as a 'rite of passage' from childhood to adulthood, rather than bearing strong religious symbolism.⁶⁷

Political divides

Currently, the main debate in Denmark is between more nationalist right-wing parties and more left-wing parties. Right-wing parties seek to strengthen Christianity lessons in Danish public schools and prohibit parents from the right to remove their children from the subject. In contrast, left-wing parties aim to change faith lessons to lessons that are more about 'life philosophies' and have less of a focus on religion in the educational system.⁶⁸

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Most parties additionally want to change the name from ‘Christianity lessons’ to ‘Religion’ in Danish public schools, so that children will learn about a variety of religions rather than just Christianity. The right-wing Danish folk party, however, is against this.⁶⁹ They also argue that Christianity lessons should be placed at the same level of importance as subjects such as geography and history. They believe that replacing Christianity lessons with ‘Religion’ will make Denmark more multicultural and harm Danish culture and tradition.⁷⁰

Freedom of religion as part of the education system

In Denmark, there are many faith schools that belong to different religious communities, including Christianity, Islam, Judaism, and Scientology.⁷¹ The protection of faith schools is a fundamental part of the Danish education system,⁷² as long as they adhere to democratic and Danish values. Some of the faith schools are currently being investigated by the Danish government, as it is suspected that they might be operating in undemocratic ways, for instance by using religion as an excuse to separate children by gender in class. Faith schools across a variety of religions are being investigated, and there is therefore no suggestion that this investigation is discriminatory against a specific religious community.⁷³

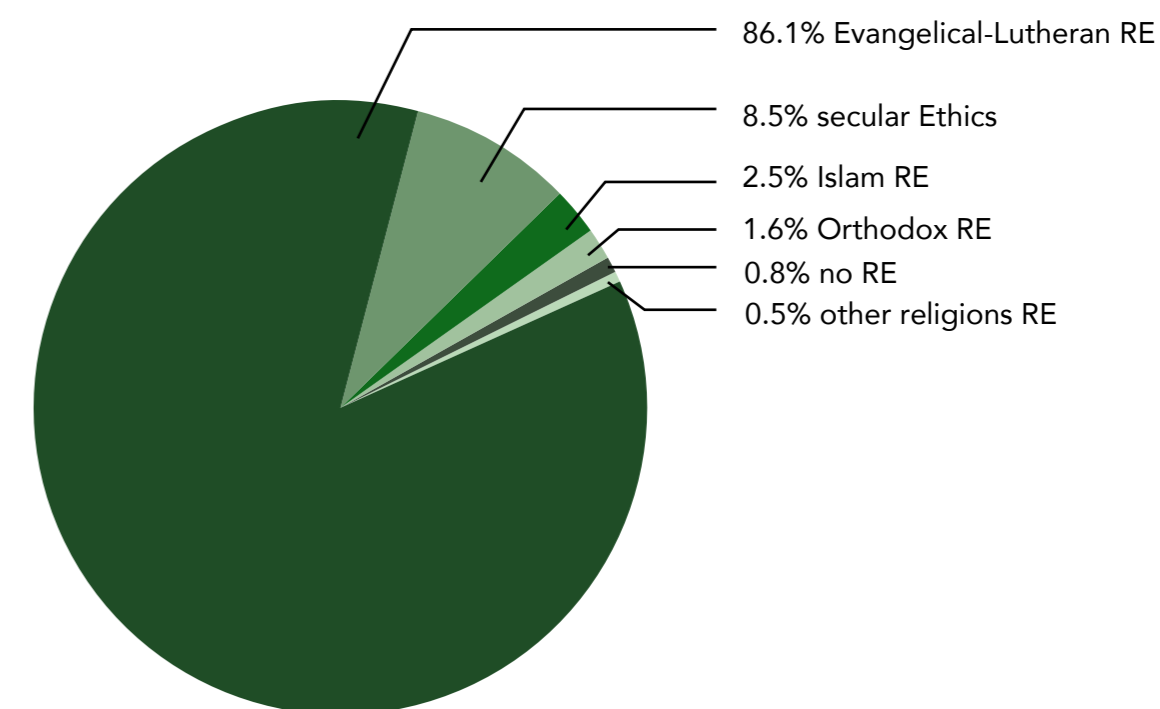
The focus on letting faith schools be a central part of the public education system distinguishes Denmark from the other Scandinavian countries that either have a focus on secularisation or Christianity.⁷⁴ Though some faith schools receive a lot of critique from some parts of society, such as the Danish Folk Party which negatively targets Muslim schools,⁷⁵ the dynamic religious landscape of the Danish education system is a part of the Danish values and part of generating trust in Danish society.

Hannah Macaulay

Finland: Religious education in accordance with one's own religion

In Finland, religious education (RE) is mandatory from the age of 7 at comprehensive school (grades 1–9) and in secondary education. Pupils receive RE of their own religion, if the denomination is registered in Finland, and when there are a minimum of three pupils of the same religion in that municipality.⁷⁶ In Finland, 67.6% of the population are members of the Evangelical Lutheran Church.⁷⁷ In 2018, 86.1% of pupils in primary school (grades 1–6) took part in Evangelical-Lutheran RE, 1.6% in Orthodox, 2.5% in Islam, 0.5% in other religions, 8.5% in secular Ethics, and 0.8% did not participate in RE.⁷⁸

Pupils attending RE in Finnish primary school (2018)



National curricula for RE are currently written for 13 religious groups in cooperation with the national board of education and the religious group. The Evangelical-Lutheran RE, as the majority education, is open to all pupils and students, and many non-Lutheran pupils participate in Evangelical Lutheran RE. Therefore, it is sometimes called 'general RE'.⁷⁹

Non-confessional teaching for all registered religious groups

RE in Finland is non-confessional.⁸⁰ This means that the contents of RE in each religion are based on that particular religion, but other religions and world views are studied as well. The aim is to give the pupil information, skills, and experiences to build their own worldview. Teachers do not have to be members of the religion they teach, but they do have to follow official university-level teacher training on the religion.⁸¹ Pupils with no religious affiliation participate in Ethics (also called Life Stance Education), which explores ethics, culture, philosophy, and critical thinking.⁸² Parents can also choose for their children not to participate in RE at school, if they receive RE at their own religious community. Jehovah's Witnesses are the largest group that does not participate in RE at school.⁸³

Private schooling is a rarity in Finland, as most children go to a municipal school. However, there are a small number of private religious schools that offer the children confessional teaching. Private schools do not have fees and they receive funding from the municipality. Most of these schools are Protestant Christian,⁸⁴ but there is also a Jewish school that has been in operation since 1918.⁸⁵ A small minority of parents homeschool their children, often due to religious reasons.⁸⁶

In kindergarten and preschool, RE is organised differently. Worldview education aims to help children understand and respect the cultural and religious background of each child in the kindergarten group. This can be done by reflection, discussions, field trips, and celebrating the festivities of different cultures and Finnish culture.⁸⁷ However, some teachers of kindergarten and preschool are uncertain on how to execute worldview education and feel that they do not have the required training to put it to practice. Thus, worldview education in different kindergartens varies much and some kindergartens do not practice it at all.⁸⁸

The history of RE in Finland

Historically, the first networks of schools were built and maintained by the Evangelical Lutheran church from the 17th century onwards. For a long time, Lutheranism played a strong role at public schools, even though their maintenance was given to municipalities in 1865. The Freedom of Religion Act was established in 1922, a few years after Finland gained its independence. This led to new legislation that provided RE for other than Lutheran confessions if there were twenty pupils belonging to a particular religious community. This was especially important for the Orthodox minority. The same law provided teaching of secular Ethics to pupils that did not belong to any religious community. This was the beginning of the system of separative religious education that is still in force in Finland, with some modifications.⁸⁹ The system implies the idea of democratic civil society where different faiths, beliefs, and worldviews can coexist.⁹⁰

In spite of the seemingly pluralistic model, a vast majority of pupils have received Evangelical Lutheran RE, as Lutheranism remained the majority religious affiliation in culturally homogenous Finland until recently. Towards the end of the twentieth century, Finnish society started to become more pluralistic which put pressure on transforming the nature of RE. Following the new Freedom of Religion Act in 2003, RE was transformed to be of non-confessional nature.^{91 92}

The role of RE in modern Finnish society

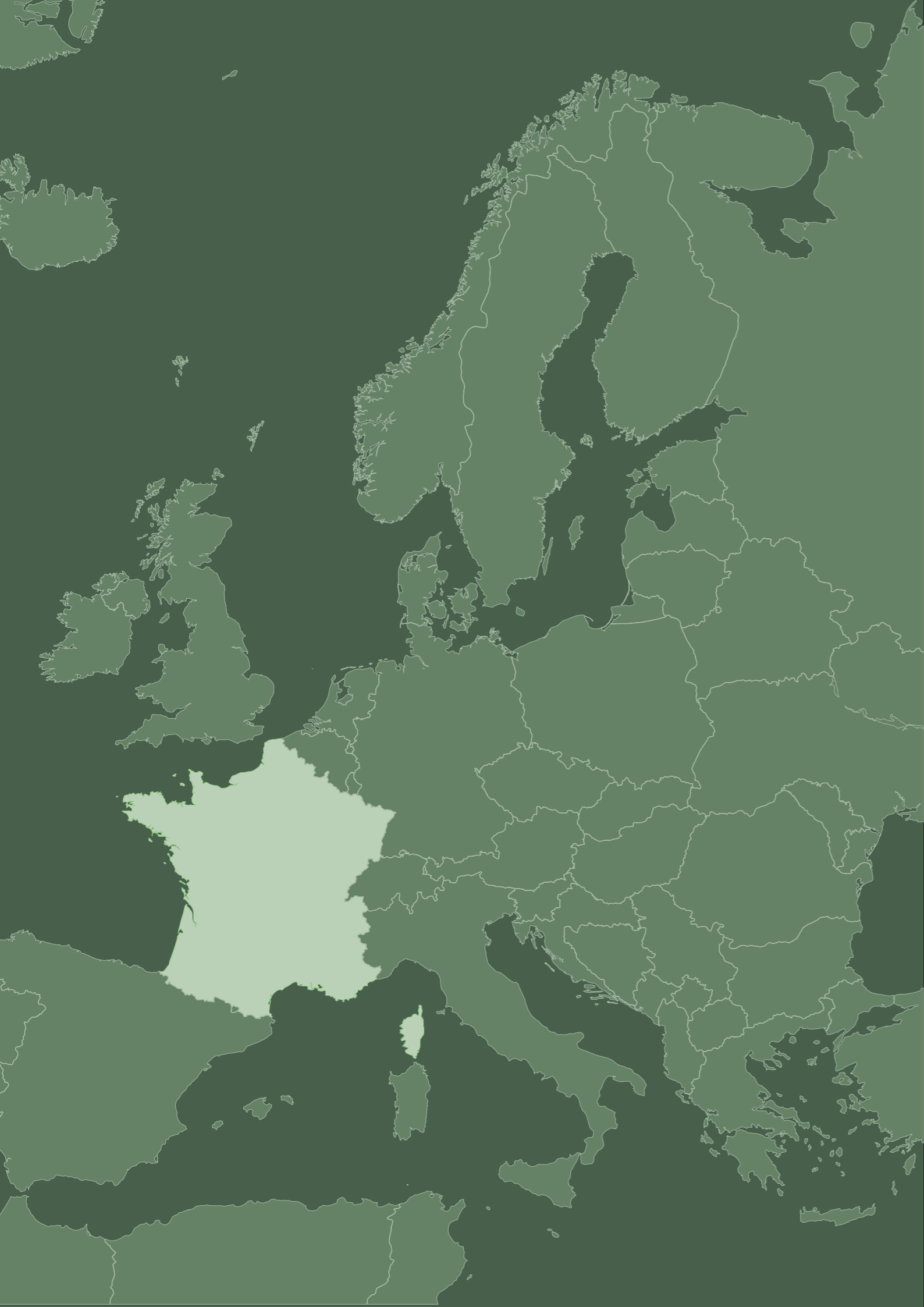
As the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Finland has had a strong role at schools and in society as a whole, there have been many ways local congregations have cooperated with schools, such as organising events and providing spaces for school celebrations.⁹³ Recently, the voices that aim to wholly separate public institutions and the church have risen, also on the governmental level. For example, there have been several instances where governmental officers have limited the cooperation of local schools with the Lutheran congregations.^{94 95}

During the last ten years, there have been vivid discussions in Finland about the nature of RE and the role of religion at school in general. The separative model of RE has been criticised for separating pupils and thus maintaining the gap between religions. In part, the critique may be due to the high expenses required for educating and paying the teachers of various religions.⁹⁶ In addition, there are not enough qualified teachers of minority religions. For example, there are only 20 qualified teachers of Islam in Finland, even though there would be a need for 100 teachers.⁹⁷

Some municipal schools have made their own decisions to start a new subject where pupils from various religions are taught together.⁹⁸ The public opinion supports such development towards a combined 'knowledge of religions' subject.⁹⁹ However, many RE and Ethics teachers are opposed to a general RE subject. One concern is that this would lead to more pupils dropping out of RE in school, as conservative parents would prefer their children to participate in RE organised by their own religious group. Another argument is based on studies of childhood psychological development, and states that children benefit from learning to understand and reflect first their own, inherited cultural and religious language before being able to understand different ones. Also, teachers of Ethics and minority religions fear that a general RE subject would focus too much on the Lutheran tradition, as it is still the majority religion in Finland.¹⁰⁰ As the subject of religion awakes strong emotions, the discussions about the future of RE are continuous, and often ideologically motivated.

For a long time, Finland has been a culturally homogenous society. Lutheranism has played a significant role which has diminished over time, along with the increase in societal secularisation. Today, the Finnish school system is a mainly secular one and the key goal of RE is understanding and tolerance between religions.

Meri Hannikainen and Pietari Hannikainen



France: A secular teaching of religious facts

In France, as President François Hollande stressed in 2015, religion has no place in schools, but this does not preclude discussing it through secular teaching of religious facts.¹⁰¹ Indeed, unlike most European countries, schools in France are secular, and this has been the case since the first secularisation laws of 1882 which pushed religious education outside the walls of the ‘School of the Republic’. Consequently, there are no specific courses on religion,¹⁰² except in private religious schools — under an association contract with the State¹⁰³ or outside a contract. However, this does not mean that religion is absent from the curriculum.¹⁰⁴

Teaching religions from the perspective of faith is an exception in France

The exceptional status of the Alsace-Moselle region¹⁰⁵ testifies to a former Republican way to reject theocracy and monitor religious authorities. Up until today, schools located in East France have been under a special status. Before addressing the situation at the national level, it is interesting to briefly outline this exception, its historical roots, and recent evolution.

In 1801, Napoleon Bonaparte established a treaty with Pope Pius VII to re-affirm Catholicism as one of the main faiths in France, and subject it to the laws of the Republic. This Concordat was abolished in 1905, when the State decided to withdraw from any religious concerns. Since Alsace-Moselle was German territory at the time, it was not affected by this separation between churches and the state. Up until today, the Concordat remains effective in East France. Under that status, four denominations are seen as traditional and supervised by the state: Catholicism, Reformed Protestantism, Lutheran Protestantism, and Judaism. The clerks of these denominations are paid as civil servants, and denominational education in schools is compulsory. However, parents can refuse to enroll their children in those denominational courses. This education is gradually tending to become a religious culture course rather than a catechism one.¹⁰⁶

Acting against growing religious inculturation

In the rest of France, as early as the 1990s, the problem arose of how to deal with the lack of religious culture among a growing number of students who, for this reason, found it difficult to understand symbolic references, artistic works, or historical events.¹⁰⁷ In 2002, the Debray Report, entitled ‘On the teaching of religious facts in secular schools’, addressed to the Minister of National Education, echoed this issue

and proposed several measures that promote the secular teaching of religious facts. This teaching has subsequently been gradually introduced by the Ministry.¹⁰⁸

The school does not transmit faith, it transmits knowledge

This teaching favours an objective approach to religion, based on a claimed distinction between the sphere of beliefs (which should not be taught in school) and the sphere of knowledge. Therefore, religion is taught instead as historical, social, and cultural facts through transdisciplinary teaching: history, literature, history of the arts, music education, art class, and philosophy.¹⁰⁹ In other words, the teaching of religious facts (e.g. rites, founding texts, customs, symbols, social events, and artworks) aims to present the diversity of representations of the world to better understand societies of the past and the cultural heritage of today. It is therefore a cultural and intellectual issue.¹¹⁰

Teaching religions and laïcité: a political challenge

From 2015 onwards, due to the Islamist terrorist attacks and the trauma they cause throughout society, the teaching of religious facts in schools, combined with moral and civic education, became a political issue.¹¹¹ Laïcité is a legal-political principle that regulates and protects cultural and religious diversity. This fundamental principle of the French Republic is in fact based on fundamental freedoms and a common rule that allows the differences of each person to be transcended and nourishes the republican ideal of the French nation: plural but one.¹¹² A vision of the nation that is hardly compatible with a multiculturalist vision and rejects all separatism.¹¹³ The teaching of religion in a secular framework is designed to contribute to training in citizenship, living in harmony with one another, respecting the freedom of expression of religious and cultural identities, and promoting dialogue in a spirit of respect and responsibility. On the 16th October 2020, the assassination of Samuel Paty, a history and geography teacher who showed his pupils a caricature of the Prophet Mohammed during a civic and moral education course, tragically reminded the population of the urgency of this issue.¹¹⁴

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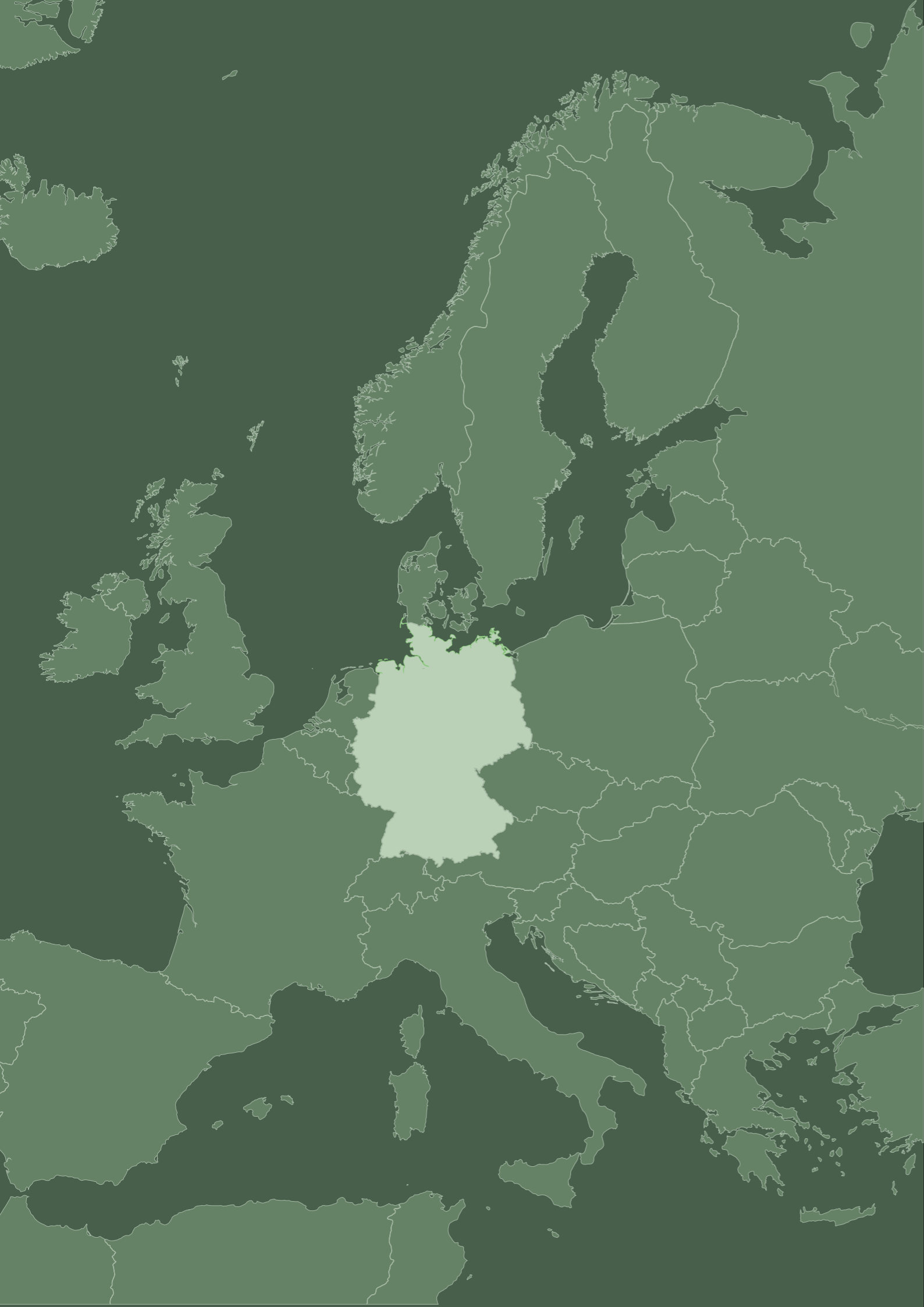
[A]lmost two-thirds of teachers feel that they are insufficiently trained to teach religious or secular facts in school.

In the face of teacher reluctance and training challenges

Despite this, the teaching of religion, unlike moral and civic education, is the subject of much reluctance on the part of teachers or political representatives, which affects its quality. This situation can be explained by anti-religious reflexes, the fear of talking about sensitive subjects, or the feeling of not being sufficiently equipped to deal with religions in schools. In fact, almost two-thirds of teachers feel that they are insufficiently trained to teach religious or secular facts in schools, and more and more French feel that religious facts should be taught more often in schools.¹¹⁶

Teacher training is now seen as a priority by public authorities,¹¹⁷ but the challenge is considerable. However, private initiatives can sometimes help. For example, this is the case of the association Enquête¹¹⁸ which, since 2010, has been designing and disseminating pedagogies and playful tools for teachers to educate about laïcité and religious facts, in order to develop a more peaceful and thoughtful relationship with children on these subjects.

Laurent Tessier and Clémence Sauty



Germany: Coping with diversity in Religious Education

Religious education (RE) is the only school subject mentioned in the German Basic Law (constitution).¹¹⁹ It is a mandatory subject given by religious communities at public schools in almost all German federal states, except in Berlin, Brandenburg, and Bremen. RE is also subject to recurring discussions, which have mainly revolved around the issue of dealing with religious diversity in the past decades.¹²⁰

On the legal context of RE

The special status of RE is defined by the Basic Law: it is a regular school subject to be taught “following the principles of the concerned religious communities.”¹²¹ This means that the formal and financial framework for RE is provided by the state, while the content of RE and the accreditation of teachers are left to religious communities. The achievements attained in RE are just as relevant for moving up to the next grade as in other subjects.¹²² The state must be strictly neutral in terms of religion and worldview and ensure that RE follows the fundamental educational aims established in state laws on the subject.¹²³

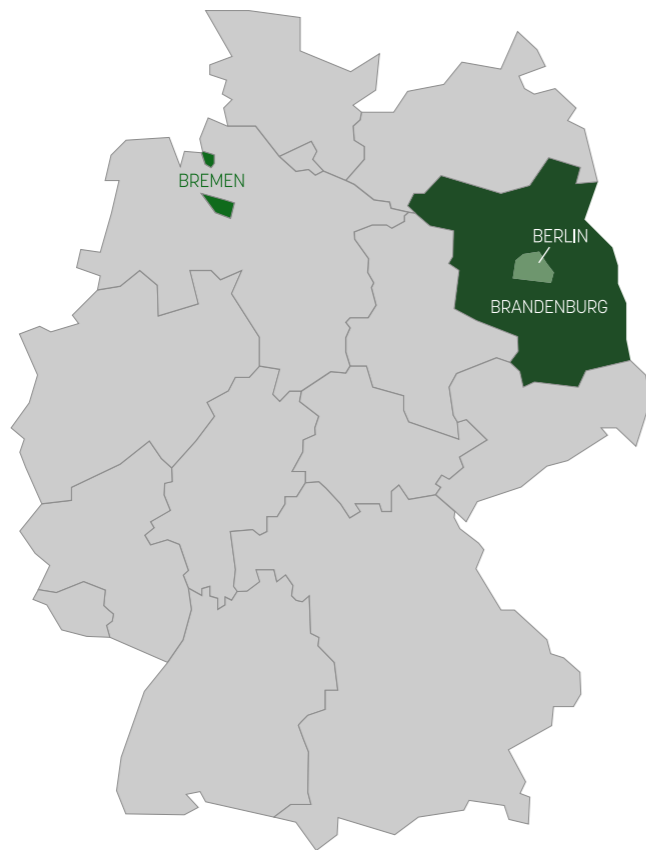
Owing to the standing of religious freedom as a basic constitutional right, students have the right to opt out of RE.¹²⁴ Nevertheless, those who do not want to take part in confessional RE must attend Ethics or other substitute lessons. In most federal states, students aged 14 years and above can make this decision without parental consent.¹²⁵

Diversification of RE in Germany

In contrast to most other federal states in Germany, where confessional RE is a mandatory subject, it is offered as a voluntary subject in schools in Bremen,¹²⁶ Berlin,¹²⁷ and Brandenburg.¹²⁸ Pupils in these federal states can also attend teachings given by worldview organisations, such as Life Lessons provided by the Humanist Association.¹²⁹ Non-confessional teachings on religion in general, such as the subject ‘Life Plans — Ethics — Religious Knowledge’ (in Brandenburg)¹³⁰ or ‘Religion’ (in Bremen)¹³¹ are offered in public schools as well, whereas lessons in Ethics were introduced as a compulsory school subject in Berlin¹³² in 2006.^{133 134} Since the Basic Law only recognises confessional RE, RE in these states is not exactly defined as RE by the law, but is still treated the same.¹³⁵

In the other 13 federal states, confessional RE is a mandatory subject, at least on paper. In practice, there are quite big differences concerning both the regulations and offers from state to state. For example, pupils in Sachsen-Anhalt must participate in RE classes or ethics lessons,¹³⁶ while students in North Rhine-Westphalia are obligated to take part in either RE classes or (Practical)

Exceptions to mandatory RE in German federal states



Philosophy.¹³⁷ In some federal states (Lower Saxony, North Rhine-Westphalia, and Baden-Württemberg), RE even takes place on a denominational-cooperative basis, such as the cooperation between Catholics and Protestants.¹³⁸ Since the early 1990s, a non-denominational model of dialogical interreligious pedagogy called 'RE for All' has been practised in Hamburg.¹³⁹

Recent developments and controversies in the context of religious plurality

Up to the 1960s, RE in public schools was taught in close cooperation with established churches (the Catholic and Protestant churches), which aimed to introduce the gospel to the pupils as the liberating Word of God.¹⁴⁰ Today, 60 years later, every institution which carries a share of responsibility for RE in schools faces the challenge of accommodating religious diversity and cultural heterogeneity in and through religious education.^{141 142}

The debates about RE in the context of religious diversity have led to two major changes. On the one hand, so-called substitute subjects for confessional RE were introduced, which reflect dialogue-based concepts.¹⁴³ On the other hand, there is

more diversity in RE offered, including, in addition to the Catholic and Protestant churches, numerous other Christian communities, the Jewish community, as well as Buddhist, Christian Orthodox, Alevi Islamic religious communities, and the Humanist Association.¹⁴⁴

While interreligious dialogues in and through confessional RE are considered desirable by religious communities, several researchers from philosophy and religious studies take a different position. They reject the confession-oriented approach and call for a respectful and distanced attitude towards religions. For them, non-confessional teachings on religions would enable students to learn together respectfully and peacefully, regardless of their religious affiliation.¹⁴⁵ This argument is also supported by some student representatives. For example, the Rhineland-Palatinate State Pupils' Association (LSV) calls for the abolition of confessional RE, saying it prescribes a certain worldview to the pupils and excludes other religious convictions and criticism of religion. However, this initiative has been strongly criticised.¹⁴⁶

The challenge of Islamic Religious Education

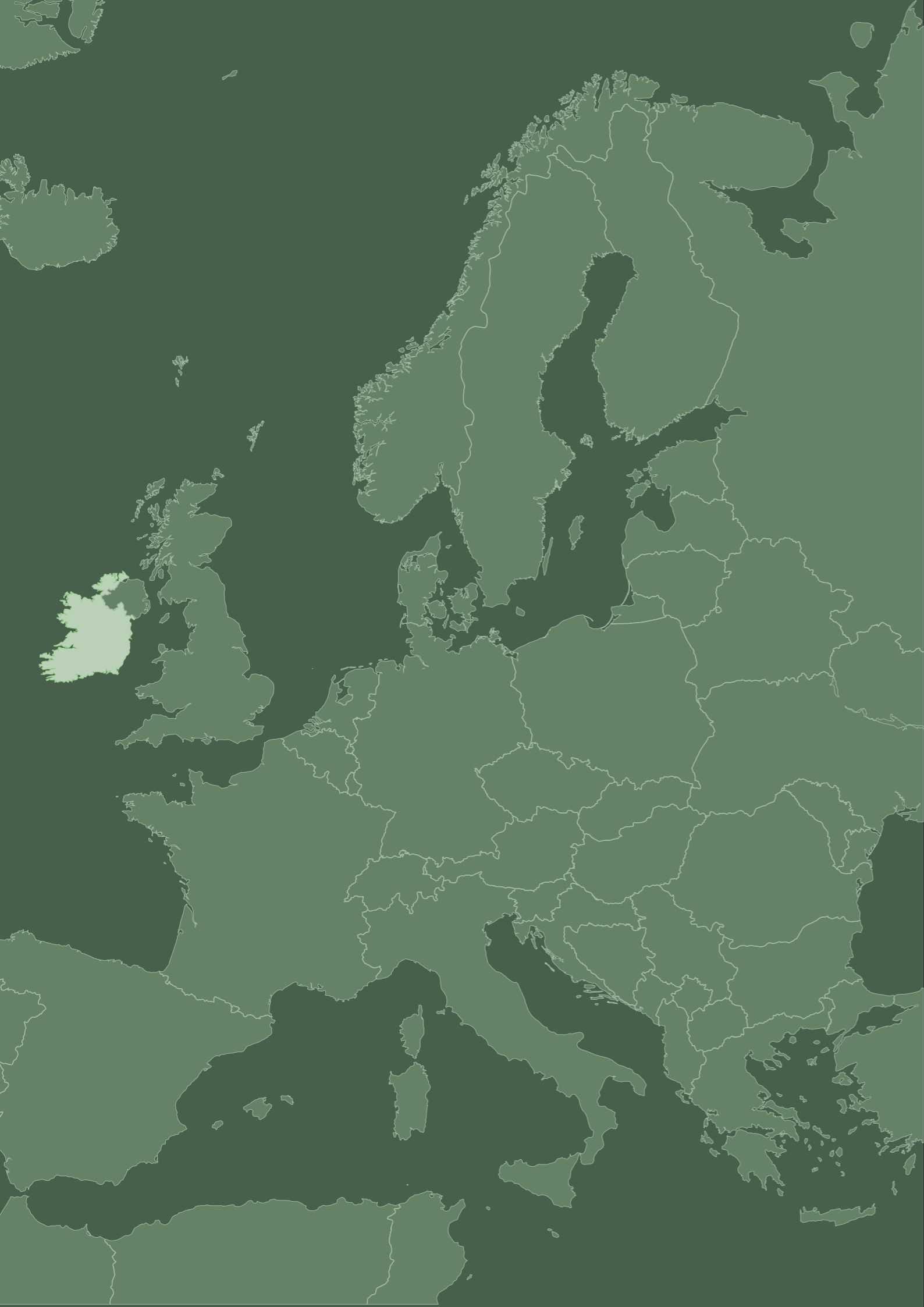
Of all the changes, the establishment of Islamic Religious Education (IRE) received the greatest amount of political, media, and academic attention.¹⁴⁷ IRE is regulated differently in Germany: some states have introduced IRE as a regular school subject (e.g. North Rhine-Westphalia, Hessen, or Lower Saxony), whereas other states launched first trials for specific school types or areas (e.g. Baden-Württemberg or Bavaria).^{148 149} Several states, such as Brandenburg and Saxony, entirely lack regulation.¹⁵⁰

IRE is considered an important instrument of integration and a preventive measure against radicalisation and segregation of the Muslim community. According to the information provided by the federal states, almost 60,000 students took part in IRE in 2020.¹⁵¹ The discussion around IRE, however, is that it is unclear which religious communities the state can or must cooperate with.¹⁵² On the one hand, Muslim organisations are not recognised as an official religious community in most federal states so far.¹⁵³ On the other hand, some of them — like the Turkish DİTİB — are financed from abroad and thus open to foreign (political) influences, as critics argue.¹⁵⁴

Rethinking Religious Education and plurality

The question of how religions and worldviews should be taught in schools, as well as the question of whether an (inter)religious or religious studies approach should be used, is the subject of heated debate in Germany. Advocates of both approaches use increasing religious diversity in society and classrooms as an argument for their respective form of teaching: while some see the distanced teaching on religion in general as the silver bullet, others argue that the ability to speak about one's faith is a prerequisite for learning to deal with religious diversity respectfully.¹⁵⁶ Nevertheless, both sides face the challenge of operating in a spirit of interreligious understanding, irrespective of whether it takes place in confessional or non-confessional RE.¹⁵⁷

Han Chang



Ireland: A strong religious presence in the education system

Intertwined relationship

While several European countries ensure the separation between church and state in public life,^{158 189} the same cannot be said for Ireland. The history of Ireland has been shaped by the influence of religious institutions in society, including in the education system. Christianity is the predominant religion in the country, with the largest denomination being Catholicism followed by Anglican and Protestant denominations.¹⁶⁰ These denominations have played a crucial role in defining the types of schools that are available and the form of education students receive.¹⁶¹

However, as the demographics of Ireland began to shift from the late 1980s onwards, so did the role of religion in education, with the rise in multi-denominational schools that welcomed students of all faiths and offered a more well-rounded approach to religious education (RE).¹⁶²

Denominationalism

Historically, and still to a great extent in the present day, Catholic, Anglican, and Protestant churches have had significant authority over the education system in Ireland. In particular, the Catholic Church has held significant power in Irish society, reflected in the 1961 census where 94% of Irish citizens identified as Roman Catholic.¹⁶³ This power of the Catholic Church has extended to “school ownership and teacher training, and the persistently ethnocentric curriculum.”¹⁶⁴

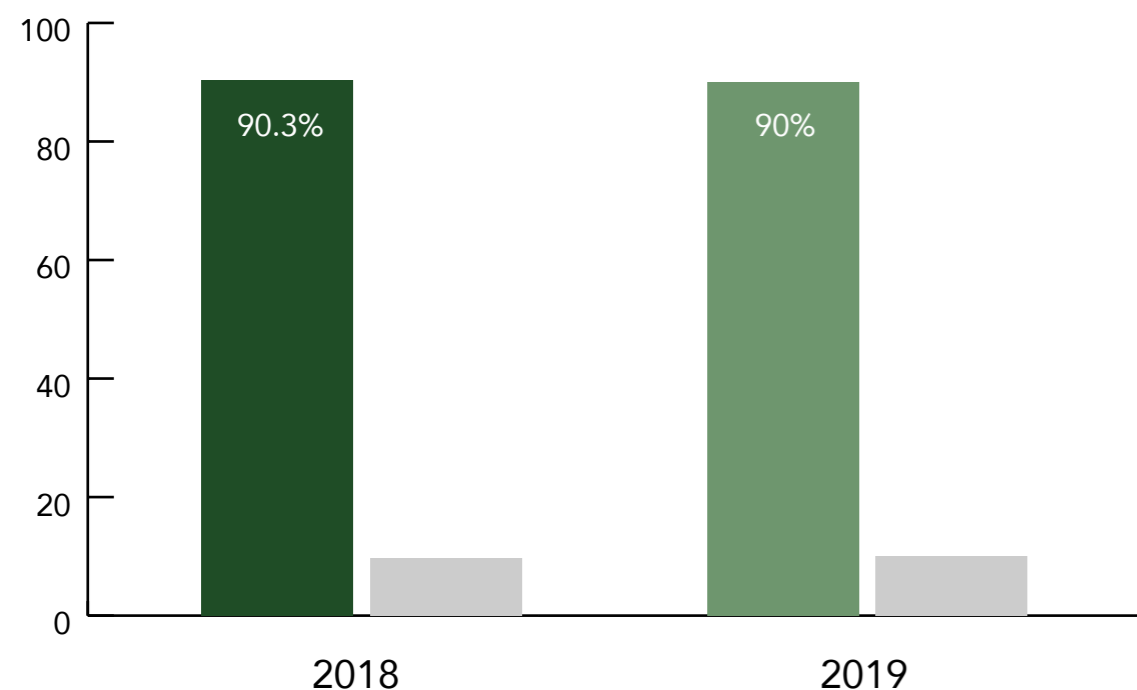
Due to the above, denominational schools became commonplace in Ireland, these being schools run according to the ‘principles of a particular religious group’.¹⁶⁵ This dominance is still greatly felt in the present day as it is estimated between 90-95% of primary schools are denominational and 90% of all schools in Ireland are under Catholic organisation.¹⁶⁶

The religious studies curriculum in denominational schools differs depending on the main religious ethos of said school. All types of Christian denominational schools teach their ‘perspectives’ on sacrament, the Church, spirituality, interreligious dialogue, and morals.^{167 168} Moreover, all Christian denominational schools in Ireland remain open to children who adhere to other faiths. However, the school’s faith, be it Catholic or Protestant, remains inherent to all teachings.¹⁶⁹

Shifting Irish landscape

For several decades, the dominance of denominational schools in the Irish education system was more or less reflective of Ireland’s demographics. However, a series of social and economic transformations that occurred in the past three decades resulted in a pushback against the religious institutions’ imposing role in education.¹⁷⁰

Enrolment in primary Catholic schools in Ireland



Firstly, a period of rapid economic growth in Ireland (known as the Celtic Tiger) between the mid 1990s-late 2000s, paralleled with increasing secularism,¹⁷¹ contributed to a change in outlook and religious affiliation of many Irish citizens.¹⁷² These changes were reflected in the 2016 census which revealed that 17% of Irish residents were born abroad, religious affiliation was declining and 10% now identified as 'No Religion'.¹⁷³

Alongside economic changes, other social shifts in Irish society, such as abortion being permitted¹⁷⁴ and same-sex marriage being legalised,¹⁷⁵ reflected that, for an increasing number of people, the Church was "no longer the main influence on the moral outlook and decisions of the Irish people."¹⁷⁶ Instead, secularism began to grow in the country as well as other religions, such as Islam and Pentecostal Christianity.¹⁷⁷ This having been said, there was a growing demand in Irish society for an increase in multi-denominational schools in Ireland.¹⁷⁸

Multi-denominationalism

In 1978, The Dalkey School Project in Dun Laoghaire, County Dublin was set up by parents as the first multi-denominational school in the country, where no one religion was favoured.¹⁷⁹ After this school was established, different educational charities and bodies, such as Educate Together (est. 1984) and Community National (est. 2008), were formed to "respond to an increasing diversity in Irish Society"¹⁸⁰ and help provide "equality-based, co-educational, child centred, and democratically run" schools.¹⁸¹

The development of these multi-denominational education bodies and schools has had a significant impact on the role of religion in education in Ireland. Such schools stress the equality and respect of all beliefs and give parents more responsibility over their child's education.¹⁸² Moreover, they ensure that 30-minute long, daily, formal religious instruction periods are made optional and take place after school (unlike in denominational schools, where non-religious students have to 'opt out' of these sessions).¹⁸³ For such reasons, multi-denominational schools are growing in popularity in Ireland.^{184 185}

What does the future hold?

Religious institutions, in particular the Catholic and Protestant churches in Ireland, have a long history of being intertwined with the education system. Yet, the rise in multi-denominational schools has reflected the changing times in Ireland and offered an alternative approach to parents.

However, while the growth in quantity and popularity of multi-denominational schools is likely to continue,¹⁸⁶ Associate Professor Emer O'Toole believes diversity and equality in education cannot be fully achieved with "the Catholic Church still running the show" as parents of no or other faith would likely have little option but to send their child to a school of Catholic faith.¹⁸⁷ With the majority of Irish schools still being run by the Catholic Church, the intertwined relationship appears set to continue.

Martha Scott-Cracknell



Italy: Should we learn about Dante or the Bible?

The relationship between religion and education is very important and controversial in Italy. As is well known, at the heart of the country sits the capital of Catholicism — the Holy See. For this reason, the Roman Catholic Church (RCC) has a say on many aspects of religious education (RE) in Italy.¹⁸⁸ We will analyse two important controversial issues that relate to religion and education in Italy: the issue of the teaching of the Christian religion in Italian public schools, and the issue of displaying crucifixes in classrooms of Italian state schools.

The teaching of Catholicism in public schools

In an agreement between the Holy See and Italy that was first made in 1929 and then updated in 1989, the teaching of weekly optional lessons on Catholicism must be provided to all degrees of the educational system, including kindergarten.¹⁸⁹ The Italian law, formulated in 1989, states:

“The Italian Republic, recognizing the value of religious culture and taking into account that the principles of *Catholicism* are part of the historical heritage of the Italian people, will continue to ensure, within the scope of the school, the teaching of the Catholic religion [...].”¹⁹⁰

Students can decide at the beginning of each study cycle whether they wish to participate in these lessons, and they can freely change their minds throughout the year or in the following school years.¹⁹¹

The controversy – Catholics vs secular

Italy's public opinion is divided regarding the presence of Catholic teachings in public schools. On the one hand, the Catholic Church, but also non-religious figures such as the famous philosopher and writer Umberto Eco, argue that knowledge of the Bible and of Catholicism are essential for the attainment of a deep knowledge of the Italian cultural, artistic, and historical heritage.¹⁹² According to Eco, there should be no difference between learning about Dante and Homer or the Bible and Moses, as all these characters and writings are essential in order to give an appropriate education to the young. In his own words:

“There is not one aspect of our culture, including Marxism, that has not been influenced by the culture expressed by the Bible ... Why should children know everything about Homer's gods and very little about Moses?”¹⁹³

“ Italy’s public opinion is divided re- garding the presence of Catholic teachings in public schools.

On the other hand, the more secular side in Italy,¹⁹⁴ but also some religious circles, argue that the teaching of Catholicism in public schools is in contrast with the secularism principle — i.e. the Italian state should be neutral in terms of the religion or non-religion its citizens would like to embrace — imposed by the constitution of the Italian Republic. For instance, the Waldensian Evangelical Church (CEV) argues that RE of the young should come from the families and churches, and should not be taught in state schools.^{195 196}

The issue of the crucifix

Another interesting example of the complicated relationship between education and religion in Italy is the display of crucifixes in public schools. This issue was first raised by Soile Lautsi, a Finnish-born Italian national, who asked the School Council in Abano Terme to take the crucifix off its walls, arguing that its display offended the principles of secularism that public schools should respect.¹⁹⁷

The case arrived at the European Court of Human Rights on 27 July 2006.¹⁹⁸ On 3 November 2009, the lower Chamber of the Second Section of the Court declared that there had been a violation of the European Convention on Human Rights. They argued that exposing the crucifix in public schools impinged the freedom of religion of the students and that it could be “emotionally disturbing for pupils of other religions or those who profess no religion.”¹⁹⁹ This decision caused tumult in Italy and the Italian government decided to appeal to the Grand Chamber of the European Court of Human Rights.²⁰⁰

The Court’s Grand Chamber decision

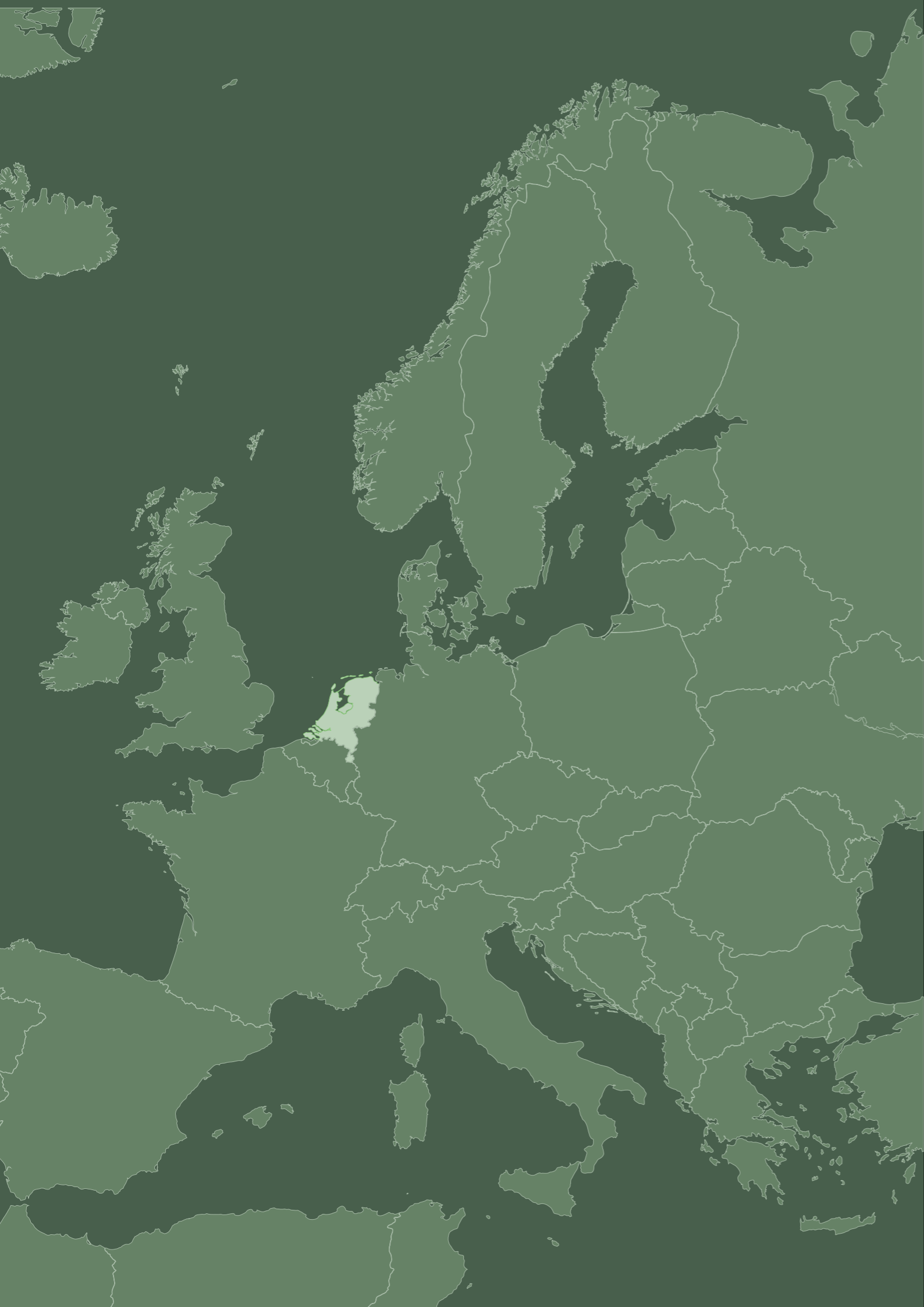
On 30 June 2010, the European Court of Human Rights’s Grand Chamber reversed the previous decision of the lower Chamber. The court ruled that crucifixes are tolerable in Italian classrooms. It was argued that this symbol is an “essentially passive” one and that there is no proof that it has a religious influence on the students. They also added that the influence of the crucifix on a wall on young kids “was not comparable

to that of didactic speech or participation in religious activities.” Finally, the court stated that there is no proof that “the [Italian] authorities were intolerant of pupils who believed in other religions, were non-believers or who held non-religious philosophical convictions.” Moreover, according to them, the displaying of the crucifix had not “encouraged the development of teaching practices with a proselytizing tendency.”²⁰¹

Education and religion in Italy are interconnected

The fact that the crucifix is an important symbol of the Italian culture and history underlines that Italy still considers itself a Catholic country.²⁰² Moreover, the teaching of Catholicism in school highlights the importance for many Italians and the Church to preserve this tradition. Nevertheless, many secular and religious people do oppose the presence of Catholicism in schools and public institutions. Yet, for now, it appears that the prominence of religion prevails in Italy.

Ghila Amati



The Netherlands: A clearly defined situation or a fine line?

Dutch 'public' versus 'special' education

When looking at the relationship between religion and education in the Netherlands, we can see that it is quite clearly defined. While 'public' education is not based on any religious perspective, 'special' education schools are allowed to teach from a specific ideological point of view.²⁰³ This ideology can be either religious or more pedagogical in nature.²⁰⁴ Schools that educate from a certain religious perspective can compel their teachers to share that particular perspective. However, no school is allowed to discriminate, by rejecting certain students or teachers, for example.²⁰⁵

The religious form of 'special' education is called 'confessional special education', and the non-religious variety is called 'general special education'.²⁰⁶ While the Netherlands is a secular state, both public and special education are financed by the government, as long as they adhere to certain quality standards.²⁰⁷

Facts and figures

The statistics paint a somewhat surprising picture, because the vast majority of Dutch schools actually teaches from a religious or ideological perspective. According to the Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS), 69% of all primary schools and 72% of all high schools taught from a certain religious or ideological perspective in 2019-2020.^{208 209} When looking at the number of students attending those schools, one sees a very similar distribution, with 71.6% of all students attending special education.²¹⁰

Schools with religious or ideological perspectives in the Netherlands (2019-2020)



69% of all primary schools



72% of all high schools

Explicitly religious education

As discussed above, only ‘confessional special education’ is explicitly religious. If we look at the last decade, we see a slight decline in the number of Catholic and Protestant schools, while the number of Islamic schools has grown by 60% in the same time period.^{211 212} There are only three Jewish schools in the Netherlands, which are all situated in Amsterdam. One of them has both a primary and high school, and has an orthodox orientation, where students are taught Jewish law, habits, and customs.²¹³ The other two are both secular schools; one primary school and one high school. All three schools have been in the news multiple times because they were targets of terrorism and anti-Semitism.^{214 215} While there are currently no Buddhist schools, there are about five explicitly Hindu primary schools in the Netherlands.²¹⁶

Formative education

Besides all the options mentioned above, a third type of education is ‘formative’ education. This consists of extracurricular religious classes that parents can request for their children, in order to provide them with certain religious principles in their personal development. This form of education also receives government funding.²¹⁷ While the Catholic, Protestant, and Humanist varieties of this are by far the most popular, the Netherlands currently also has two Hindu teachers and five Buddhist teachers providing formative education in a number of schools.²¹⁸ One of the strict rules is that teachers who provide formative education cannot evangelise or pressure children to convert.²¹⁹

What does Religious Education entail?

There is a difference between a ‘confessional special school’ — teaching from a certain religious point of view — and religious education as a subject in school. As seen in the numbers above, there are many confessional special schools in the Netherlands. Students of these schools will receive an education based on the dogmas of that specific religion. Most of the time, students will also come from a family that follows that religion, although these numbers are declining at many schools.²²⁰ In school, learning about other religions is also included, although the extent of it can differ per school.²²¹

In public schools, especially in primary school, classes on ideological movements in the Dutch multicultural society are mandatory. It is not explicitly stated that all religions should be taught.²²² If classes do incorporate religion, the five main religions covered are Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism. Humanism is also part of the curriculum.²²³

Is Dutch education influenced by religion?

As seen above, the majority of schools teach from a religious or ideological perspective. Thus, one could say that religion and ideology have a great influence on education in the Netherlands. Christian schools (both primary and high school combined) are the largest group with 4,243 schools in total.²²⁴ These numbers match with the fact that Dutch culture has strong Judeo-Christian roots.²²⁵

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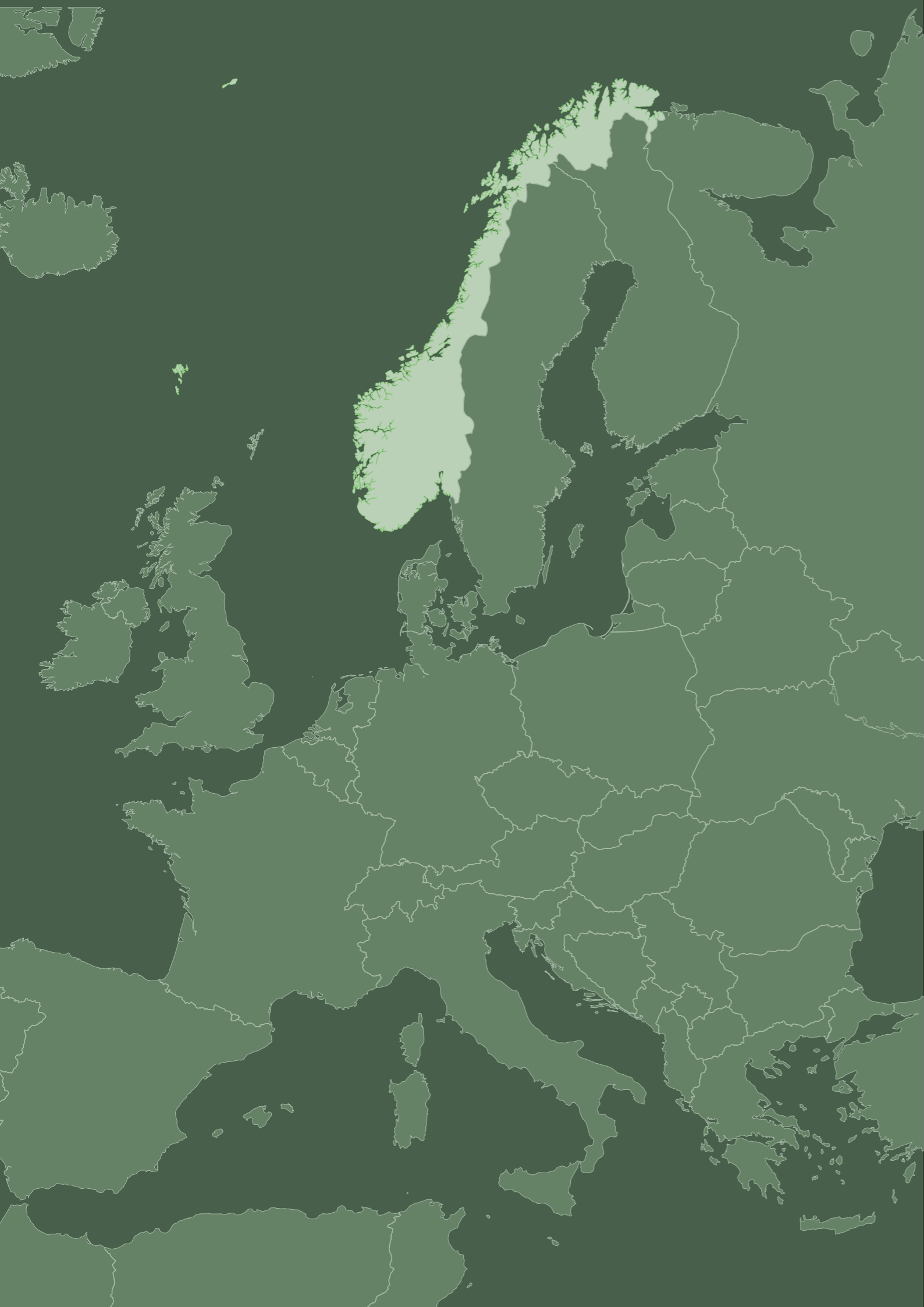
[T]eachers who provide formative education cannot evangelise or pressure children to convert.

However, the balance between freedom of religion and freedom of education, and the necessity to make students feel safe at school, is sometimes under pressure. In 2020, education Minister Arie Slob led to national discussion because he said that orthodox Christian schools were allowed to ask parents to sign a document describing the ‘core values’ of the school, which included denouncing homosexuality. Parents who refused to sign were not allowed to send their children to that school. As many as one in five Dutch Christian reformed schools thinks it is ‘morally unacceptable’ to be in a gay marriage, but the schools are still obligated to treat students equally.²²⁶ After receiving a lot of criticism, the minister took back his words.²²⁷

Christian reformed schools are not the only schools to receive negative news coverage. In September 2019, it was reported that Islamic schools in the Netherlands teach that Allah denounces homosexuality, that boys and girls should not look each other in the eye, and that people who have other religious beliefs should be killed. These Islamic schools follow the Salafi tradition: a fundamentalist and reactionary branch of Islam. Moreover, many of the organisations that these schools were part of were financed by the Gulf States, who promote their Salafi interpretation of Islam around the world. The Dutch inspection of education has recently started looking into this issue.²²⁸

In conclusion, it can be said that religion has a strong influence on education in the Netherlands. The majority of schools teach from a certain religious or ideological perspective. Of that majority, especially more orthodox oriented schools have the greatest impact and, as seen above, are most frequently reported on. The Dutch reputation of being a highly secular nation is therefore only partially justified, since the state not only allows but directly subsidises the teaching of religious ideologies to its children. In the end, theory and practice do not necessarily meet.

Astrid Hamberg and Timo Pieters



Norway: Christianity and controversies

Christianity fueling debate in Norwegian school system

In Norway, religious subjects in school used to be confessional and focused on a Lutheran approach to Christianity. In 1993, Norway changed its focus on Christian-based lessons to a more nuanced subject that includes other religions and philosophy due to the country's religious decline. However, a strong focus on Christianity remained.²²⁹

Religion as an obligatory subject in school has caused a lot of public debate in Norway, mostly because children used to only be allowed to abstain from the classes under very specific circumstances.²³⁰ In 2007, the European Human Rights Court sentenced Norway for breaking human rights because they favoured Christianity in their supposedly neutral religion subject. Norway was criticised for its strong focus on Christianity and for not allowing equal access to freedom of religion in the classroom.²³¹

Additionally, Norway was criticised for making the subject of religion obligatory and not allowing parents to withdraw their children, as is the case in e.g. Denmark.²³² Since then, there has been a stronger focus in Norwegian education on religion being more critical and nuanced.²³³ The critique also fueled a lot of debate in the other Nordic countries, which subsequently investigated the way in which their own education systems taught religion.²³⁴

Lack of religious freedom in the Norwegian school system

Today, Norwegian schools focus more on teaching religion from an objective angle and the Norwegian state has changed the religion curriculum in public schools in accordance with the European Human Rights Court's recommendations. The country also officially separated church and state in 2017, which has potentially impacted its RE structure.²³⁵ Though Norway has multiple Christian faith schools, the country has not allowed a single Muslim faith school to be established. This has been justified by stating that Muslim faith schools would 'halt' integration efforts and segregate the Norwegian Muslim community from Norwegian society.²³⁶

Many critics have argued that this is discriminatory against the Muslim community.²³⁷ However, several other Scandinavian countries have used Norway as an example in opposing Muslim faith schools. For instance, the Danish social democrats used the same integration argument, with reference to Norway, in order to argue against state funding for Muslim schools in Denmark.²³⁸

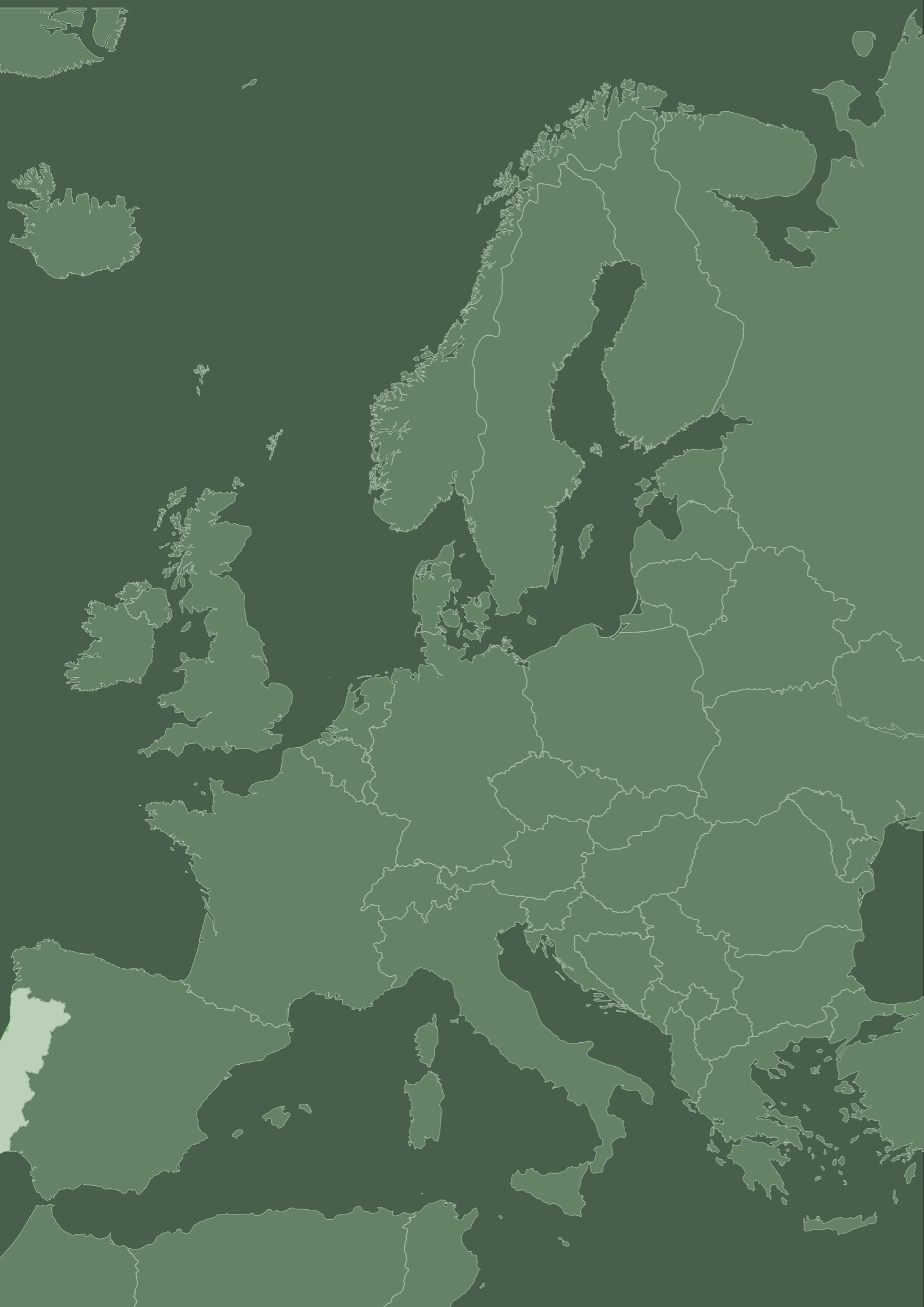
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Christianity’s influence and impact on cultural and social values cannot be ignored, despite religion’s general decline in Scandinavia.

Just a Norwegian issue?

Though Norway has had its distinct issues with religion and education, it seems that the issue regarding secularisation and education is a hot and contentious topic in all of the Scandinavian countries. As a consequence, all of these countries have a very different approach to RE. As Scandinavia is generally known as a very secular part of the world — Sweden was for instance named ‘the most secular country in the world’²³⁹ and Norway recently became secular — it seems that the topic of faith schools and the role of Christianity impacts many debates in all three countries.

Christianity is also vital to the more conservative or nationalist rhetoric in Norway,²⁴⁰ despite the more secular approach to religion, as it is a part of the country’s cultural values and history.²⁴¹ Christianity’s influence and impact on cultural and social values cannot be ignored, despite religion’s general decline in Scandinavia. It could be questioned if the controversies concerning Muslim faith schools could be tied into Scandinavian politics, and the right-wing parties’ growing anti-Islam rhetoric. This would suggest that the discussions regarding faith schools are not just a Norwegian issue, but rather a larger issue rooted in Scandinavian culture and history.

Hannah Macaulay



Portugal: the question of balanced religious education at public schools

Religious education at public schools

In Portugal, religious education (RE) at school is neither mandatory nor forbidden. Portugal is a non-confessional state, meaning that State and Church are formally separated. Therefore, RE is not confessional.²⁴² The Portuguese Constitution of 1976 ensures the freedom to learn and to teach²⁴³ and also guarantees that this freedom is extended to all private schools.²⁴⁴ As established in the Portuguese Act on Religious Freedom, '[m]oral and religious education classes in public schools are optional and not an alternative to any curriculum area or subject'.²⁴⁵

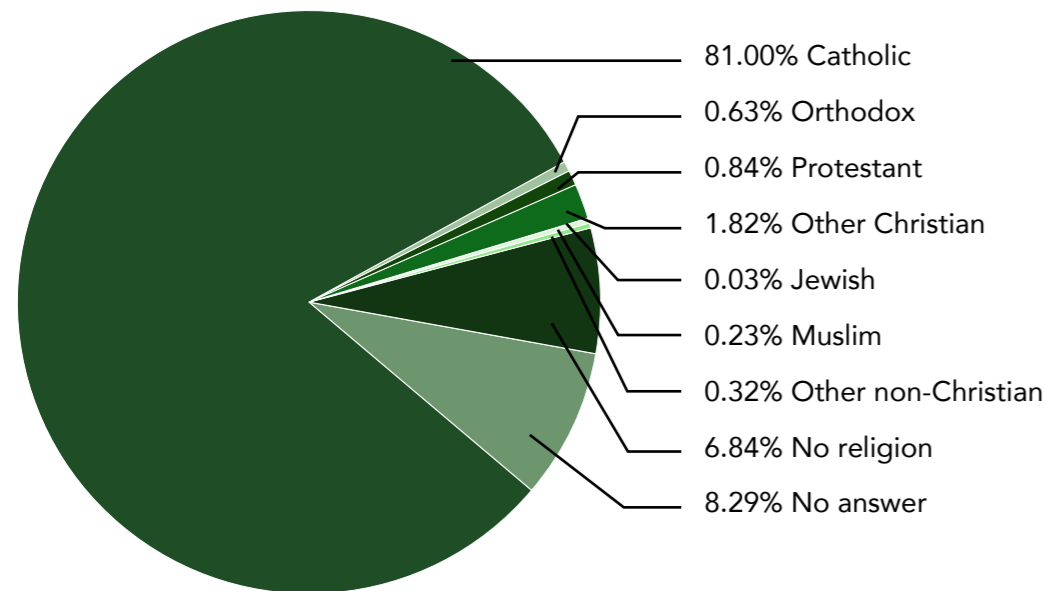
State, religion, and religious freedom

According to the Act mentioned above, churches and other religious communities are free to carry out their religious activities without interference from the State or third parties.²⁴⁶ Pupils under 16 years of age wishing to attend classes on RE must express this wish through their parents.²⁴⁷ RE programmes, teacher training, and class materials must be provided by the religious communities.²⁴⁸ However, for these classes to run, a minimum number of pupils must attend. This means that teaching of a particular religion may be impacted based on the higher or lower prevalence of a religion among the population.²⁴⁹ On the other hand, for Catholic RE, the training and recruitment of teachers, as well as the elaboration of the programmes, are paid for by the state.²⁵⁰ Therefore, the Portuguese State assumes as its obligation the task of religious denominations, which contradicts its laicity and the principle of separation between Church and State. In practice, the principle of equal treatment of the different religious denominations is also not observed.²⁵¹

Religious communities...

According to the last Portuguese population census held in 2011,²⁵² the majority of Portuguese people identify as Roman Catholic (81%), though only about 19% practice their faith and go to Mass regularly.²⁵³ Nevertheless, there are also many other religions, mainly due to the migratory flows that have occurred since the 1970s. Among the other religious communities, the following stand out: Orthodox, Jews, Hindus, Buddhists, Muslims, and Evangelicals, formed almost entirely by immigrants and their families.²⁵⁴

Religion in Portugal for the population aged 15 and over (2011)



However, the most recent Catholic Church statistics released by the Bishops' Conference, from 2014, put the percentage of Portuguese who call themselves Catholic at 77.03%. At the same time, there is an increase in the number of those who profess other religions and those with no religion.²⁵⁵ According to Alfredo Teixeira, Associate Professor at the Theology Faculty of the Catholic University of Portugal, this trend continues to this day.²⁵⁶

...and religious education

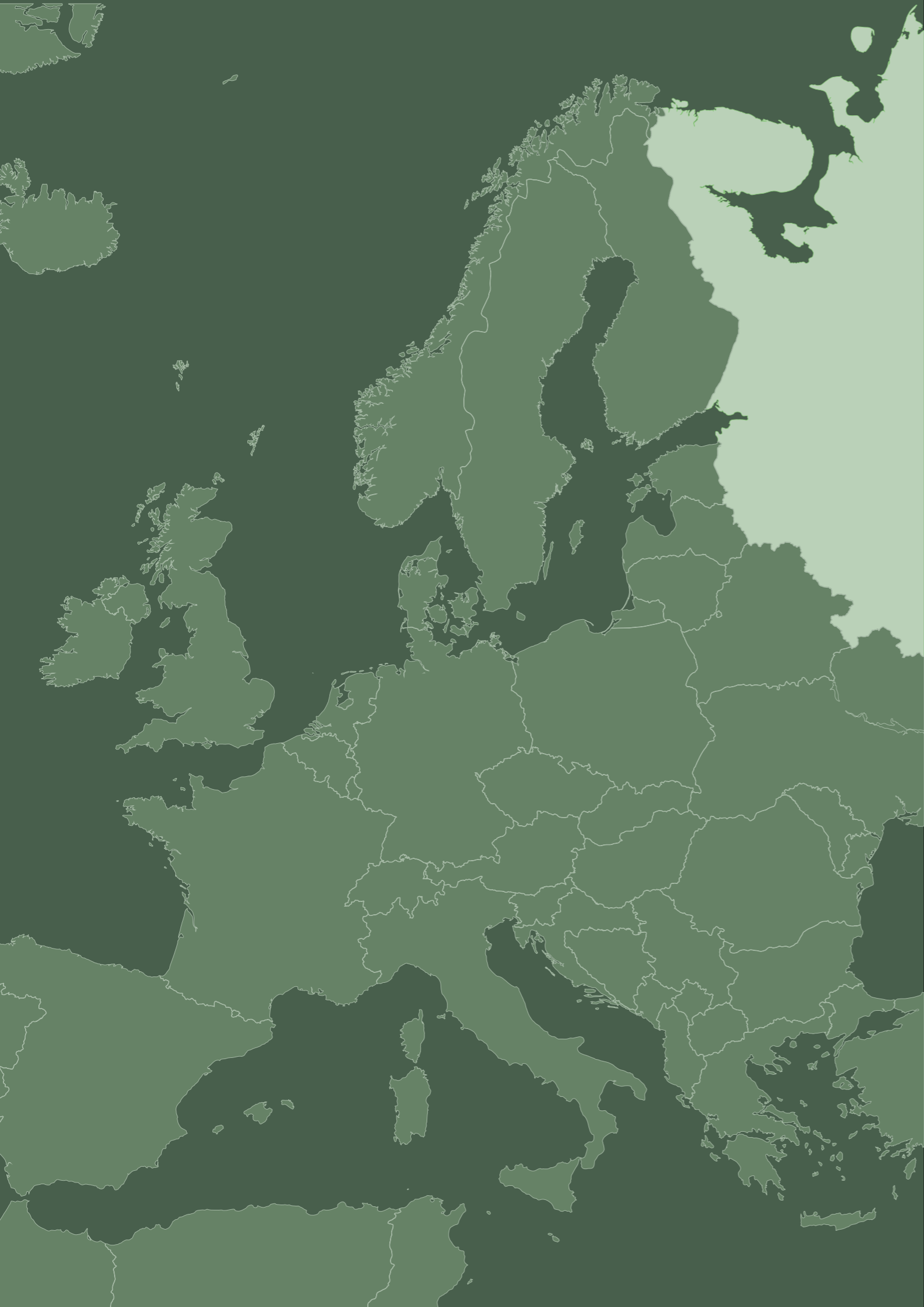
Besides the Catholic Church, only three more religions exercise the right to provide RE in public schools: the Aliança Evangélica Portuguesa,²⁵⁷ the Bahá'í,²⁵⁸ and the Buddhist²⁵⁹ communities based in Portugal.

Nevertheless, for André Folque,²⁶⁰ a member of the Commission on Religious Freedom, as RE in public schools is optional, there is "a significant gap in the [Portuguese] educational system" when it comes to teaching and learning about religion in general. That is why Portuguese researcher Fernando Catarino says that RE in Portuguese public schools remains almost exclusively Catholic and claims that there is a lack of a subject that addresses religion in a "cross-cutting and balanced" way.²⁶¹

The link between religion and public school

In the Portuguese case, as is the case for other European countries with a close connection between the Roman Catholic Church and national culture, there is still a strong link between religion and education. However, in recent years, there has been a discussion on the need to create a more inclusive and transversal subject at school. For some political parties, removing the subject of Catholic RE from public schools is one of the goals, not least because in May 2018, there were more non-practicing Catholics (48%) than practicing Catholics (35%) in Portugal.²⁶² Rather than asking what link there might be between religion and public school, José Brissos-Lino, Doctorate in Psychology and Specialist in the Science of Religions, proposes a reflection on what school is for. As suggested by him, if schools really want to prepare pupils for life, they should replace classes on RE of religious denominations with a subject on 'Introduction to Religions and Spiritualities'. Such a subject would deal with the religious phenomenon, without forgetting the agnostic and atheist perspectives.²⁶³

Maria Inês Nemésio



Russia: From state atheism to religious education

After a three-year trial, Russia officially introduced religious education (RE) in September 2012 as a compulsory subject in public schools.²⁶⁴ The subject is taught in the fourth and fifth grade (ages 9-11), but Patriarch Kirill, the head of the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) has declared to be in favour of making RE mandatory for grades two through ten.²⁶⁵

During the Russian Empire, a strictly Orthodox education in catechism was provided. However, the Russian Revolution in 1917 heralded decades of state atheism, during which all religion was frowned upon, and atheism was propagated in schools.²⁶⁶ During the Perestroika (the reform program instituted in the mid-1980s, which aimed at restructuring the Soviet economic and political policies), careful steps were taken to revive the relationship between the state and the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC).²⁶⁷ In the light of this campaign, the introduction of RE in some schools across the Russian Federation can be seen as a means to attract citizens to the Russian Orthodox Church.²⁶⁸

However, since the implementation of a Federal Law in 1992 which prescribed that all education had to be secular, the ROC has lobbied for reinstating RE.²⁶⁹ Although today the ties between Church and State seem to have almost returned to their pre-revolutionary strength, it has taken much deliberation to push through the educational reform in some bureaucratic structures which are still deeply secular.²⁷⁰

Religious flavours

In what way do you organise a subject as RE from scratch in a country in which Orthodoxy, which can be seen as the state religion, exists alongside approximately 23,000 recognised religious institutions?²⁷¹ The reformers were faced with the dilemma to either return to something that resembled pre-revolutionary Orthodox catechesis, or instate non-confessional religious schooling similar to those in various European countries.²⁷²

The model that was chosen ('Foundations of Religious Cultures and secular Ethics') was a disappointing compromise for the Russian Orthodox Church that had initially pushed for a more or less confessional subject.²⁷³ The current model offers compulsory classes for fourth- and fifth graders, but in six religious 'flavours' which parents can choose from: Orthodox Christianity, Islam, Judaism, Buddhism, secular Ethics, or world religions.²⁷⁴

Types of RE in Russia



Orthodox Christianity



Islam



Judaism



Buddhism



Secular ethics



World religions

According to a study from 2014, Russians have increasingly affiliated themselves with the Russian Orthodox Church since the collapse of the Soviet Union. In 2008, 72% of the Russian population identified as Russian Orthodox, while only 18% of the population stated that they did not identify with any religion.²⁷⁵ However, in 2012, nationwide only one-third of the children took the Russian Orthodox track, while the topic chosen by most parents for their children's religious education was 'secular Ethics'.²⁷⁶

In reaction, the Russian Orthodox Church published an appeal on its official website in which it warned parents that 'secular Ethics' is "an atheistic curriculum," disguised as an ideologically neutral subject. According to the ROC, the material taught in this class is opposed to "the foundations of religious culture," and therefore to the "spiritual and moral education that has been traditional in Russia."²⁷⁷

Theology in higher education: a contested subject

Similar to religious education in elementary schooling, theology was introduced only recently as a subject in higher education. Since 2015, theology has been taught at 48 institutions of higher education in Russia.²⁷⁸ However, the decision to accredit theology as an academic discipline incited debates about its scientific status, but also about the separation between church and state. In an open letter to president Putin in July 2007, members of the Russian Academy of Sciences voiced their concerns

about the considerations to add theology to the academic curriculum (and introduce religious education in elementary schools), stating that any scientific discipline should operate with "facts, logic, evidence, but by no means faith."²⁷⁹

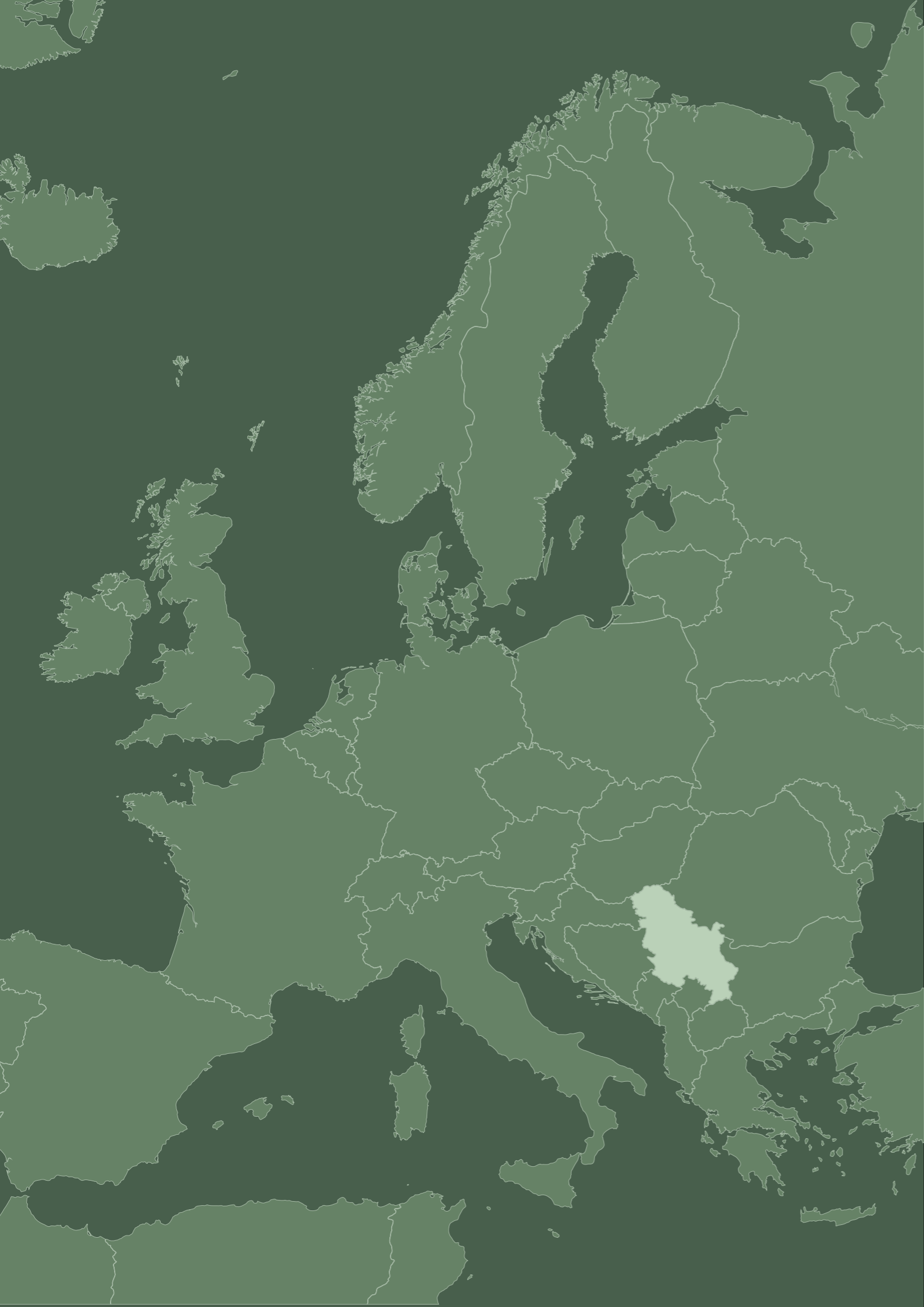
University cathedral

Meanwhile, on the premises of the 265-year-old Moscow State University, the largest university in Russia, the construction of a 46-meter-high, multi-domed cathedral is to start in 2021.²⁸⁰ Although the announcements of the constructions were received with little enthusiasm amongst the students, the rector stated that the new cathedral had been requested by more than 2,000 university employees.²⁸¹ The church is designed to accommodate 1,000 worshippers and will house the parish premises and the spiritual center of Moscow State University. A petition for the construction of a Pastafarian instead of an Orthodox church has already been signed nearly 5,000 times.²⁸²

Religious vs secular = Church vs State?

Although RE has become a compulsory subject in public schools, and theology has been accredited to an academic status, religious education in Russia remains to be a strongly contested topic in the public debate. The discussion can be boiled down to a concern about the separation of Church and State, roughly dividing the public opinion into two camps. While the proponents profess that an Orthodox upbringing is fundamental to the sustenance of the Russian culture and mentality; the adversaries are of the opinion that RE in schools presents a danger to the development of independent and conscientious individuals through religious indoctrination.²⁸³ For now, the demarcations between 'secular' and 'religious' might be as obscure as those between 'Church' and 'State', and – as one author aptly remarks – unless there is a consensus on what 'secular' actually means, its interpretation and implementation will continue to be very different in each specific case.^{284 285}

Warja Tolstoj



Serbia: Religious Education frozen at the starting point

There is no place for religious education in communism

After the Second World War, Serbia was one of the member states of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia which was behind the Iron Curtain. Religious Education (RE) was not present in the education system, and the Orthodox Theological Faculty was expelled from the University of Belgrade.²⁸⁶ The Serbian Orthodox Church had to support the secondary theological schools as well as the Orthodox Theological Faculty from its own financial resources.²⁸⁷ Agrarian reforms carried out in Yugoslavia deprived the Serbian Orthodox Church of large assets, so its financial resources were greatly reduced.²⁸⁸

For these reasons, the Serbian Orthodox Church had limited opportunities to develop its educational institutions. In secondary schools throughout Yugoslavia, as well as in Serbia, Marxism was taught, which propagated the communist regime.²⁸⁹ Religion was considered the main ideological tool of the 'exploiters' in the fight against the 'oppressed masses'. Therefore, people needed to get rid of 'harmful religious prejudices' and consistently instill in their consciousness a 'scientific view' of the whole world.²⁹⁰

The resurrection of Serbia and RE

The last decade of the twentieth century marked the emergence of nationalism in the Yugoslav federal states. This resulted in the disappearance of a unique sense of Yugoslav nationality, but also of the communist regime. In Serbia, nationalism and national symbols were reappearing, and the Serbian Orthodox Church guaranteed the Serbian identity. The civil war lasted for most of the 1990s, and during this time, Marxism was abolished as a subject.²⁹¹ Serbia emerged from the civil war as a member of the new Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, which consisted of Serbia and Montenegro. A major religious community in both federal republics was the Serbian Orthodox Church, which hoped that religious instruction would return to the education system.²⁹²

Confessional RE as an elective subject

As of September 2001, the new democratic authorities in Serbia decided to return confessional RE to primary and secondary schools in the Republic of Serbia.²⁹³ Upon its return, RE received the status of an elective subject. In the 2001 polls, about half of the students chose to attend RE classes.²⁹⁴

An alternative to RE is the subject of Civic Education. Each student opts for RE or Civic Education twice in primary school, and once in secondary school.²⁹⁵ If a student decides to attend RE classes, they also decide which denomination's

classes they will attend. Each student can choose between RE of seven traditional or historical religious communities: the Serbian Orthodox Church, the Roman Catholic Church, the Islamic Community, the Jewish Community, the Slovak Evangelical Church, the Christian Reformed Church, and the Evangelical Christian Church in Serbia-Vojvodina.²⁹⁶

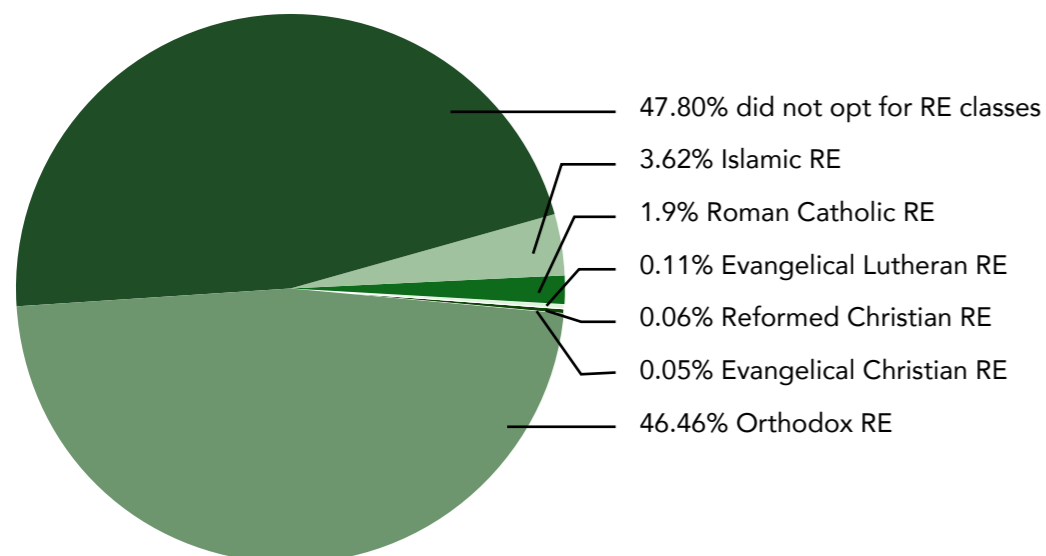
Religious communities and RE

All churches and religious communities which are registered in Serbia can establish their educational institutions, from kindergartens to faculties, in accordance with Serbian law.²⁹⁷ The state guarantees the right to RE in all state and private primary and secondary schools.²⁹⁸ Religious communities submit the curriculum of the RE to the Minister of Education, and the Minister then asks for an opinion on that proposal from the Commission for RE in Schools. Only after receiving an opinion from this Commission, the Minister decides on the adoption of the plan and program of RE.²⁹⁹

18 years later

After 18 years of RE being part of the Serbian education system, 433,490 students voluntarily opted for RE classes, which is 52.2% of all students in primary and secondary education.³⁰⁰ As seen in the chart below, most of these students attended Orthodox RE.³⁰¹

RE in Serbia



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RE in Serbia, almost two decades after its return to the education system, still faces significant challenges.

Orthodox RE has only one textbook approved for all grades, which has been in use since the return of RE to the educational system.³⁰² However, a new textbook of Orthodox RE is currently being prepared by religious teachers.³⁰³

RE teachers have a relatively weak status in schools, since they are employed on a one-year contract. The Education Minister at the time, Mladen Šarčević, has stated that the status of religious teachers will change and that they will receive permanent employment contracts.³⁰⁴

Another interesting issue is the fact that the majority of Orthodox religious teachers are female.³⁰⁵ The reason for this could be that male theologians can become deacons and priests. As soon as the opportunity presents itself, they often leave school and become clergy, while female theologians do not have that opportunity and generally remain in education.³⁰⁶

The challenge of RE remains unresolved

RE in Serbia, almost two decades after its return to the education system, still faces significant challenges. For instance, some question the decision of making RE confessional. In 2016, the Education Minister at the time, Srdjan Verbić, claimed that confessional RE leads to segregation among students because they are divided on the basis of religious affiliation.³⁰⁷ This issue remains unresolved. The Serbian Orthodox Church has stated that RE is a “moral pillar of Serbian education,” and that the subject has an important moral and educational character.³⁰⁸ However, as illustrated by the issues discussed above, Serbia RE has not progressed much since the moment it was returned to the education system. Rather, the subject has remained frozen in time.

Marko Pavlović

Spain: Religious education up for debate

The relationship between religion and education has a long and contentious history in Spain, with the question often closely linked to the political polarisation that has defined the country's recent past. In 2021, these divides continue to be a relevant feature of political and social discourse. With new legislation recently introduced with the aim of further scaling back the influence of the Catholic Church in public education, the question of how religion should be taught in the public sphere remains a topic of great importance.

The Catholic Church and public education: a brief history

Before looking at the debate surrounding the current legislative changes, it is important to briefly consider the history of religion in the Spanish education system.

Following the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939), the fascist dictatorship led by General Franco imposed an official state ideology of 'National Catholicism'. This ideology gave great power to the Catholic Church in forming social policy, leading to policies such as divorce, abortion, and homosexuality being illegal. In terms of education, the Francoist state aimed to utilise public education as a means of political indoctrination. This included placing Catholic rituals and ideas at the centre of the daily life of school children across the nation.³⁰⁹

However, in the years since the transition to democracy, completed in 1979, the influence of the Catholic Church in the public education of Spanish students has been in decline. The way in which these changes have materialised has been closely linked to the country's two-party political system, with the Socialist Party (PSOE) generally attempting to reduce the influence of religious ideas in secular education, and the conservative Popular Party (PP) aiming to maintain it.³¹⁰

The continuation of this battle between the two major forces in Spanish politics was evident in 2015, when the PP government introduced new legislation designed to protect the teaching of Catholic ideas in public education. This new law on education, known as LOMCE (the organic law on the improvement of educational quality), required that students were taught religious studies classes in which textbooks re-stated the 'fact' that the cosmos was created by divine inspiration, amongst other Catholic teachings.³¹¹

Meanwhile, as evidence of the depth of the division, in the same year, the PSOE maintained a political position which said that, if elected, they would 'pull religion courses from both public and private schools'.³¹²

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[T]he debate over religious education in Spain is closely linked to wider political polarisation and the ongoing battle over what role Catholicism should play in a modern, and secular, democracy.

The Celaa Law: the debate in 2021

Fast forward to 2021, and with the PSOE returning to government in a progressive coalition with the far-left Podemos party, the debate on RE has led to new legislative changes.

In late 2020, the Spanish parliament approved a wide-ranging set of changes to the country's public education system, including a specific focus on RE. The most significant of these was a reversal of the previous PP policy of mandating religious education for all students. Under the new laws, students will be allowed to take classes in either religious studies or a secular subject called 'Ethics and Values', with the qualifications for both subjects being considered of less value than other subjects when applying for further education or writing CVs.³¹³

The change to the teaching has predictably led to opposition from the Catholic Church. In one case, Bishop Beltran complained of the fact that the new law had been approved "without dialogue nor consensus" with church figures.³¹⁴ More broadly, the Bishops Conference released a statement in October 2020 in which they said that "the subject of Religion is left even further discriminated against and gravely threatened in the school curriculum."³¹⁵

Yet, whilst the criticisms of the law from the leading Bishops' organisations were focused more directly on the legislative change, the government's transformation of RE has been seen by other Catholic leaders as a part of a wider attack on their faith that they see as having been led by the progressive coalition. For example, Bishop Antonia Reig Pla complained that the new system of teaching RE was a result of "ideological bias."³¹⁶ Furthermore, in a more expressive example, the Bishop of Cordoba, asked whether next, after the education change, "they would ban us for breathing Catholic?"³¹⁷

It is therefore important to remember that the debate over religious education in Spain is closely linked to wider political polarisation and the ongoing battle over what role Catholicism should play in a modern, and secular, democracy.

Islamic education in Spain

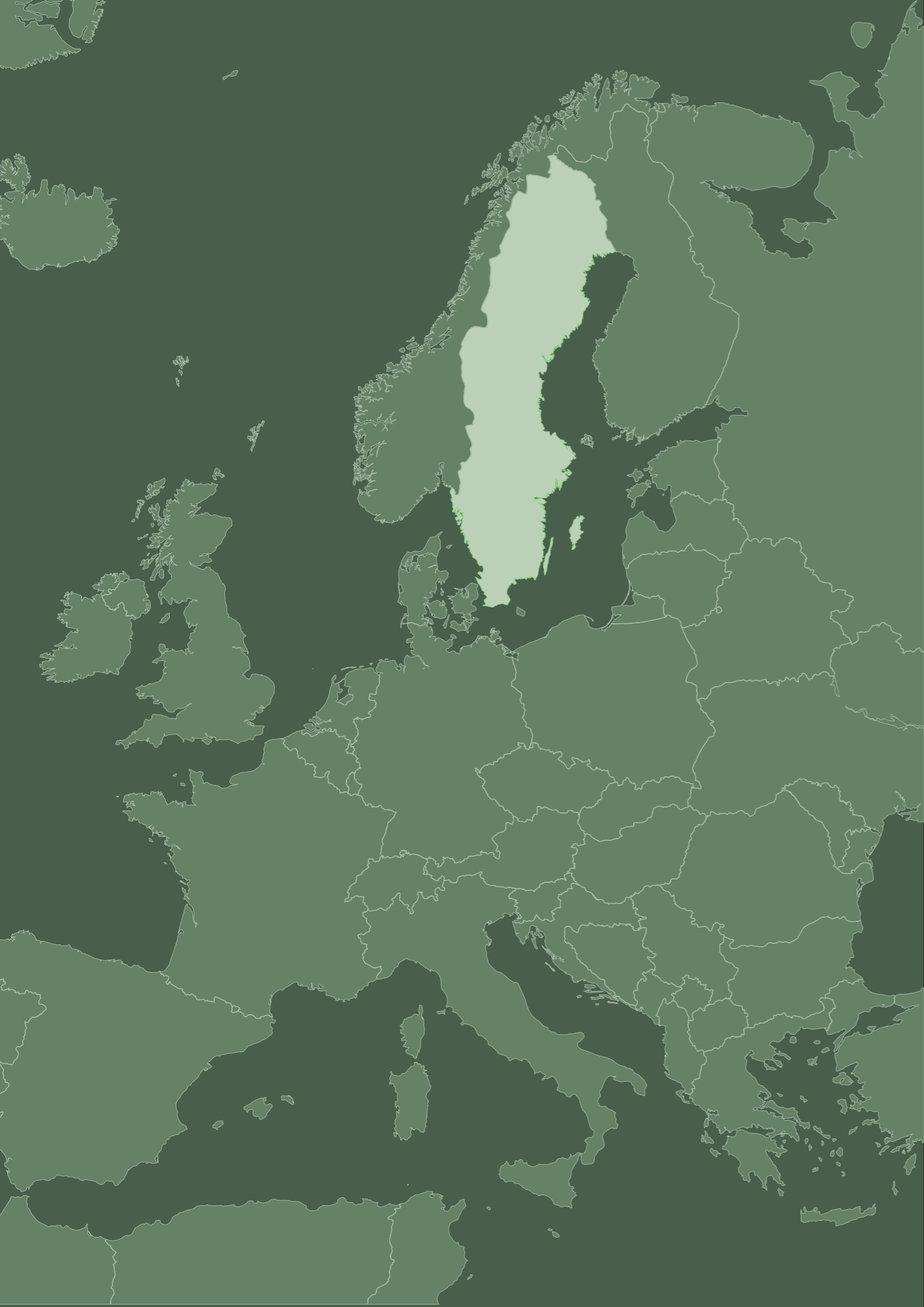
Before concluding, it is important to briefly consider Spain's Islamic community, which numbers around 2.1 million people as of 2019.³¹⁸ In particular, there is a large Muslim population in Catalonia, where 4.8% of citizens in 2016 followed the faith. However, crucially, in the age group of 16-34, that number rises to 8.7%.³¹⁹

With this young and growing Islamic population, the regional government of Catalonia, which under Spain's federal system has significant powers in dictating curriculum, has agreed to begin a pilot programme to trial the teaching of Islam in religious education classes. Under the plan, the Islamic Commission of Spain will appoint teachers to offer classes on Islam to students who wish to take them. These classes will be subject to the same rules as those applied to the teaching of the Catholic faith.³²⁰

The policy has received support not only from the Islamic community, but also from certain members of the Catholic faith. For example, the Bishop of Valladolid, Ricardo Blasquez, argued that the Spanish constitution extends to people who have migrated to Spain, and therefore if they want their children to receive education about their faith, then "it must be facilitated."³²¹

Blasquez's support is evident of the fact that although from a different faith, both Catholics and Muslims do share in the idea that whilst schools may be secular institutions, religion should not be removed entirely from education.

Freddie Scott



Sweden: A secular Scandinavian state

Sweden is a secular country, and its past Christian identity cannot be felt in the school system as much as in other Nordic countries that are also secular, such as Norway. There is a strong focus on teaching religion in a pluralistic way,³²² and though this is also the case in the other Nordic countries,³²³ Sweden has a particularly secular way of teaching religion, which is almost bordering on atheist.³²⁴ Sweden officially separated church and state in 2000,^{325 326} and many see the increasing secularisation as a result of the growing belief in science, due to the Enlightenment, and as a result of a democratisation process of the country.³²⁷ As a result of this secularisation, the country does not focus on teaching about Christianity in the education system as much, which separates the country from Norway that has a heavy focus on teaching about Christianity as a subject in school.³²⁸

RE in Sweden has been under fire for its 'problematic' approach to religion, as some critics see its strong secular focus as causing segregation within the classroom between religious and atheist pupils.³²⁹ Though schools are told to be objective and neutral, they generally teach with a strong atheist attitude.³³⁰ However, in 1996 in Sweden, parents were banned from withdrawing their children from obligatory religion subjects in school, a fact that continues today.³³¹ Despite the school system's secular focus, there is thus still an issue with allowing people to opt in or out of RE. This has been under debate in Sweden and other Nordic countries for a while.³³²

Faith schools in Sweden

Sweden also has faith schools that educate children within a certain religious framework. However, the Swedish Social Democrats recently proposed to outlaw all faith schools that are not a part of the public school system.³³³ This is a highly contended and debated area in Swedish society, especially when it comes to Muslim faith schools. For example, some Swedish politicians say that separating girls and boys as part of the school system, which some Muslim schools partake in, goes against Swedish values. Many critics believe that outlawing faith schools is a step in the wrong direction, and might actually lead to radicalisation of religious groups that are currently moderate.³³⁴ As voices in the debate have pointed out, the European Human Rights Court gives parents the right to choose a school for their children that aligns with their religious values, and it is thus unlikely that faith schools will be outlawed completely.³³⁵ However, according to some critics, it is still problematic that the debate targets a specific religious community in Sweden such as Muslim faith schools, as they believe this will only create more polarisation and divide in the country.³³⁶

Many have criticised the proposal to outlaw faith schools, including Eva Johnsson from the Swedish Christian Democrats, who says that faith schools make many

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It seems that there are two sides to the Swedish debate regarding education and religion.

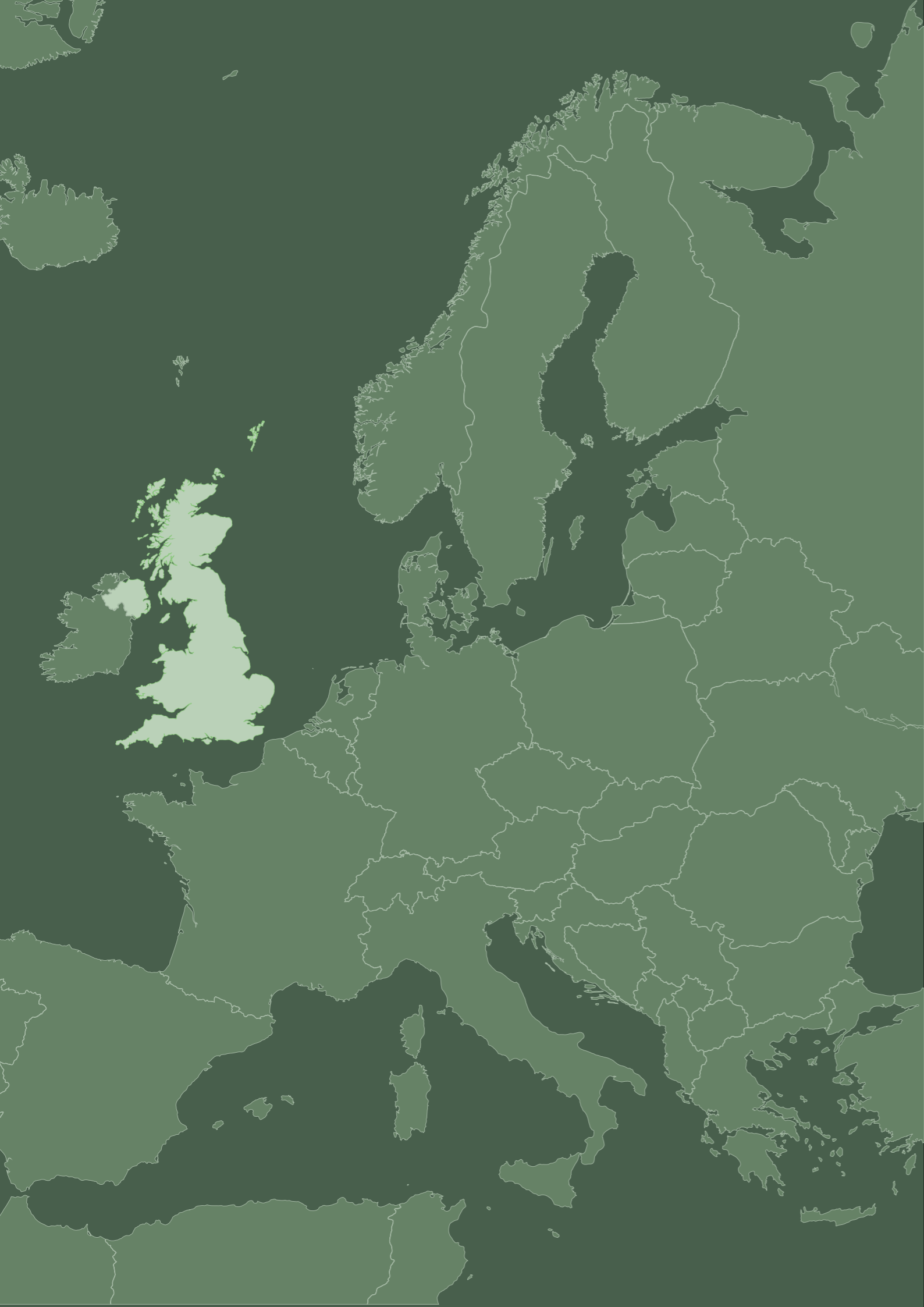
children with a strong faith background feel safer and more represented in the school system. She additionally argues that faith schools should not all be ‘punished’ just because there are a few extreme schools in Sweden.³³⁷ Many voices in the debate have actually argued that Sweden would benefit from more faith schools and a more diverse religious structure in society, as this would mirror the freedom of religion that the country strives to allow its citizens.³³⁸

Secularisation mission

Some see the proposals of outlawing faith schools in Sweden as a part of the government’s secularisation plan, rather than just a targeting of specific religious communities.³³⁹ For instance, in 2016, a school decided to ‘censor’ a Christian Christmas song by removing all religious symbolism, leading to a scandal in the country.³⁴⁰ Some critics commented that this type of censoring was taking secularism too far.³⁴¹

It seems that there are two sides to the Swedish debate regarding education and religion. One side wishes to secularise the education system fully, and make religion a strictly private matter that does not interfere with state-funded institutions such as public schools. This side tends to favour the more atheist teaching of religion, it seems. The other side, however, sees secularism as an expression of religious freedom and a ‘de-Christianisation’ of Sweden. It comes across that this side tends to favour more faith schools and more freedom of religion in the education system. They also seem to believe that a diverse set of faith schools should be allowed and that people should have the right to express religious opinions in the public realm. This leads back to a bigger global debate about secularisation that asks if it should lead to an expression of freedom of — or from — religion.

Hannah Macaulay



United Kingdom: Religious education in a changing world

Religious education in the UK

Religious Education (RE) is taught in schools across the United Kingdom (UK). It is part of the basic curriculum but not part of the national curriculum: unlike compulsory subjects like English and maths, RE is one of two subjects (along with sex and relationship education) where parents have a legal right to withdraw their children from class.³⁴² In other words, the provision of RE is compulsory in all publicly-funded schools, but it is not compulsory for any children to take the subject. What is actually taught as part of RE changes according to where in the UK a school is and what type of school it is. In terms of location, RE changes across nations: England and Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland. The regulation of RE also depends on the specific nation in the UK, and this has a close impact on what is taught as well.³⁴³

Religious education across nations

Mandated by the Education Act of 1944 and amended by the Education Reform Act of 1988 and the School Standards and Framework Act 1998, the syllabus in England and Wales is agreed locally by two different bodies, one permanent (Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education) and one occasional (Agreed Syllabus Conferences) to advise on religious education and to determine the content of religious education. These bodies seek to reflect the predominant place of Christianity in religious life, but also give an equal platform to the major world religions that reflect the religious diversity of their local communities. All parents have the right to withdraw a child from religious education, which schools must approve.³⁴⁴

Given Scotland has maintained its own civil and criminal law and its education system, religious education is determined by the Scottish Parliament. In Scotland, religious education is commonly known as Religious and Moral Education (RME). RME is similar to RE in England and Wales in that it consists of learning on Christianity and other world religions. A key difference, however, is that RME also emphasises the role of religion in Scotland's cultural history and identity. The Education (Scotland) Act 1980 gives parents the right to withdraw their child from instruction in religious subjects and religious observance.³⁴⁵

In Northern Ireland, the syllabus has been less inclusive of other world religions: it has been determined exclusively by representatives of the four numerically largest Christian denominations: Roman Catholic, Presbyterian, Anglican, and Methodist. There is, therefore, no prominent reference to other faith communities.³⁴⁶

In terms of schools, it is compulsory for all state-funded schools to teach RE, while faith schools have the flexibility to give priority to their distinctive faith ethos and values and have selection criteria that includes learners from that faith.³⁴⁷ In

English and Welsh law, special schools for students with learning disabilities are not required to give religious education. They can still offer it, but only if the syllabus is locally agreed and especially tailored to learning disabilities.³⁴⁸ As with other parts of the United Kingdom, parents have the right to withdraw their child from religious education and collective worship, in whole or in part.³⁴⁹

Recent developments

In the 1940s, Britain was a predominantly Christian country. Over the past 50 years, the UK's religious and cultural landscape has changed in unprecedented ways. Now, a significant proportion of people say they have no religion, while other religions besides Christianity have also gained more followers.³⁵⁰ With the population becoming more diverse and engaged with a globalised world than ever before, RE is undergoing an overhaul in the UK. The aim is for students to be taught in a way so that they are able to understand people from multiple backgrounds and outlooks.³⁵¹

In England and Wales, this would see a new nationally, as opposed to locally, determined syllabus called either 'Religion, Belief and Values'³⁵² or 'Religion and Worldviews'.³⁵³ Replacing religious education, this syllabus will not only be obligatory in all state-funded schools but no longer give parents the right to withdraw their children from classes. Moreover, while faith schools would continue to give priority admission to students of the school's religion, the proportion admitted on the basis of this religious criteria would be reduced. These proposed changes represent a significant shift in the UK since the Education Act 1944.³⁵⁴

A key issue that is also being revisited is the daily act of collective worship. All schools are required by the 1944 act to provide a daily act of collective worship with "a broadly Christian character"³⁵⁵ but an estimated one in three state schools do not follow this requirement. Charles Clarke, ex-education secretary, says that "the answer is not to insist on enforcement of an inadequate law, but to change the requirement in order to reflect society today."³⁵⁶

While distinct from RE, collective worship is likely to be affected by new developments in RE. Clarke as well as other lead reviewers of the UK's RE overhaul have called for collective worship to be replaced with worship "reflecting the diversity of the school."³⁵⁷ Collective worship will remain a requirement for all state-funded schools but will be "in keeping with the values and ethos of the school and reflecting the diversity and character of the school community."³⁵⁸

Religious education in a changing UK

The developments being recently proposed in RE appear to reflect significant demographic and religious transformations in the UK, but do they go far enough?

The National Secular Society advocates a comprehensive reform of RE. It calls for all publicly-funded schools, including academies with a religious designation, to not only teach about major faiths other than Christianity in the UK, but also non-religious philosophies.³⁵⁹ Moreover, the Society calls for confessional teaching of RE to be completely outlawed in the UK. Religious education, in other words, cannot become religious instruction. To even strike a balance between confessional and non-confessional teaching would amount to a bias for an exclusive viewpoint.³⁶⁰

While the reforms being proposed in the UK do recognise diversity and take it into account, they do not offer a full break from the interest of various faith groups, including the Church of England. The focus on the diverse representation of faith groups arguably reflects two key trends. Firstly, Christianity still remains a majority, if not the main, religion people identify with in the UK. Eurostat's 2018 Eurobarometer survey found that the majority of the UK's population, nearly 54%, is still Christian.³⁶¹ Secondly, religions other than Christianity, such as Islam, Hinduism, and Judaism, have established an unprecedented foothold in the UK, primarily through immigration. Eurostat's 2018 Eurobarometer survey found that over 6% of the UK's population belongs to these other religions.³⁶²

Whether the expected reforms in RE reflect a changing UK free of any bias remains to be seen. What is certain, however, is that the UK has moved on from the world in which the Education Act of 1944 was introduced.

Muhammad Faisal Khalil

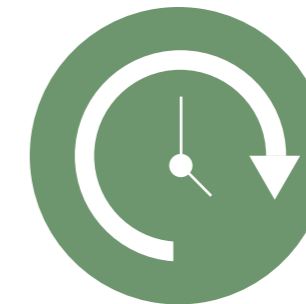


European trends in Religious Education

Having read this dossier, it is possible to identify three common trends in the relationship between education and religion among different countries in Europe. The first trend to be analysed is *the rise of Ethics* as an alternative subject to RE. Second, *the rising tension around diversity and RE* will be analysed. Finally, we will discuss *the strong impact of national changes on RE*.



Rise of Ethics



Rising tension around diversity and RE



Impact of national changes on RE

The rise of Ethics

The first trend that is visible across many European countries is the rise of 'Ethics' as an alternative subject to RE.

Pluralistic countries in favour of 'ethics'

Ten countries covered in the dossier³⁶³ offer an alternative to RE. While some countries, such as Austria, Croatia, and Finland, call this subject 'Ethics', others define it as 'Civic Education',³⁶⁴ 'Life Plans — Ethics — Religious Knowledge',³⁶⁵ or 'Foundations of Religious Cultures and Secular Ethics'.³⁶⁶

Yet, what all these countries have in common is that they not only allow students to opt out of religious classes, but also offer them an alternative subject that is aimed at enriching them culturally or morally. Nevertheless, in many of these countries, ethics often comes down to courses in citizenship and it has a less moral connotation than one might think at first glance.

Therefore, these countries embrace a liberal and pluralistic approach, and recognise both the importance of preserving RE while also proposing an alternative for those who are not interested in learning from a religious point of view.

Religion teaches us morality

It is very interesting to note that most of these countries propose the subject of 'Ethics' as an alternative to RE. This suggests that from the perspective of these countries, a key role of RE is to teach individuals how to act morally towards each other in society. As a consequence, these countries hope that even those who opt out of RE will still be taught the same ideals from a secular perspective. This underlines the perception that many European and pluralistic countries have today of the ethical (rather than spiritual or cultural) role of religion in their societies and emphasises the influence of secularisation in those states.

Ethics prevails

Currently, it seems that the majority of European countries analysed in this dossier (10 out of 17) opted for the subject of Ethics as an alternative to RE. This may reflect the changing nature of these societies, which are becoming more diverse and secular. Therefore, proposing the subject of Ethics as an alternative is an endeavour to cope with pluralism that is prevalent in many European societies. Moreover, arguably, establishing this more pluralistic approach to RE can be seen as a way to try and create a common ground in societies where such a thing is lacking or not possible to achieve.

It will be interesting to see if the few countries that have not yet embraced the subject of Ethics as an alternative to RE will do so in the future. Perhaps they will develop different and interesting alternatives that focus on other spiritual and cultural aspects of religions.

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[P]roposing the subject of Ethics as an alternative is an endeavour to cope with pluralism that is prevalent in many European societies.

Rising tension around diversity in RE

A second finding from this dossier is the rising tension in Europe around the issue of diversity in RE, especially regarding Islamic Religious Education. Two opposite tendencies are developing in Europe: an 'inclusive' and a 'non-inclusive' one.

Countries such as Austria, Spain, and Germany have shown a rather inclusive approach towards religious minorities, especially towards Muslims citizens, in RE. Denmark has had both an inclusive and critical approach towards religious minorities, while Belgium, Sweden, Norway, and France have undertaken a non-inclusive approach.

Inclusive countries and strategies

The example of Graz, Austria, illustrates one of these more inclusive approaches towards minority faiths. This city is proposing a new pluralistic and inclusive RE education project. As part of the project, shared teaching classes have been created by Islamic and Roman-Catholic teachers within the confessional RE.³⁶⁷

Several regions in Spain have also shown a rather inclusive approach towards the Islamic community. For example, the regional government of Catalonia has begun to teach about Islam in RE classes. Finally, some German states have established Islamic Religious Education (IRE) as a regular subject. This decision is seen by many as a way to increase integration of the Muslim population in Germany and minimise radicalisation.³⁶⁸

Inclusive but with criticism

In Denmark, different faith schools represent the three main religious communities in the country (Christian, Jewish, and Muslim). Yet, we have seen in the dossier that the Danish approach towards these schools is ambivalent. In the past years, the Danish government has, in fact, accused many of these schools of not conforming to democratic values.^{371 372 373}

Non-inclusive countries and strategies

On the other side, countries like Belgium, Sweden, and Norway have shown a rather non-inclusive approach towards minority religions in RE. For instance, in Norway, the establishment of Muslim faith schools is still not allowed in the country, even though several Christian faith schools exist. Some have argued Norway is afraid that Muslim schools will not allow the children to integrate into wider society.³⁷⁴ In addition, in Sweden, the Swedish Social Democrats have suggested that faith schools outside the public school system should be banned.³⁷⁵ In Belgium, Jewish schools were criticised for not offering enough sexual education,³⁷⁶ while a Muslim school was not recognised by the government as it was accused of not respecting children's rights.³⁷⁷ In France, the principle of *laïcité* prevails and religious identities are virtually erased inside schools. Religions are not studied, only religious facts are.³⁷⁸

The impact of national changes on RE

A third trend seen throughout the dossier is the fact that in many countries, significant political and national changes have influenced the approach towards RE.

Post-communist countries

This trend is evident in previously communist countries, where the end of communism brought increased religiosity in the country and therefore an increased appreciation and enhancement of RE. This is, for instance, the case in Croatia, Russia, and Serbia.

In Croatia, for example, the departure of the Communist Party that supported a strong atheistic philosophy and the suppression of RE and religious authority was followed by a return to religion. Thus, after the formation of the independent Croatian state, the Christian Church returned to be influential and powerful³⁷⁹ and RE returned to the school curriculum.³⁸⁰

The case of Spain and Ireland

Yet, we have seen in the dossier that national and political changes have influenced the approach to RE of other non-communist countries as well, such as Ireland and Spain.

In Spain, during the fascist government of Franco that followed the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939), the ideology of 'National Catholicism' was imposed on the state. As a consequence, the Catholic Church assumed a powerful role in political and social decision making.³⁸¹ Yet, at the end of Franco's dictatorship and the transition to democracy, completed in 1979, the Catholic Church slowly lost some of its influence and its role in Spanish RE began to decline.³⁸²

Finally, in Ireland, while for decades religious institutions were prevalent in the education system, social and economic changes of the past 30 years have resulted in a decline in the influence of religious authorities over RE.³⁸³ Economic growth affected social and religious identity and secularism grew. At the same time, many social and political changes, such as the legalisation of abortion³⁸⁴ and same-sex marriage,³⁸⁵ testified the decreased influence of the Church of Ireland. As a consequence, other religions — such as Islam and Pentecostal Christianity — began to grow in the country³⁸⁶ and the need for multi-denominational schools in Ireland increased.³⁸⁷

National changes and religion

Thus, it emerged from our dossier that important national changes may have a strong influence on the role of religion and RE education in European countries. While the end of communism brought a revival of RE in several countries, other political, economic, and social phenomena led to an increase in secularisation and a decreasing role of RE in schools.

Alternatively, in some European countries, the utilisation of religion by conservative, right-wing political parties is growing. For example, in Croatia and Spain, countries shaped by histories of significant political leadership, 'religiosity and cultural Christianity, often linked to national myth and nostalgia are themes that have been co-opted by populist movements'.³⁸⁸ This can be seen in some of the policies of Spain's Vox Party and Croatia's Democratic Union.^{389 390} It will be interesting to see whether this adoption of religious rhetoric by populist parties will have a bearing on the identity of RE in the future.

It is therefore important to keep an eye on the political situation of certain countries in order to understand changes in approaches towards education today and in the near future. It will be interesting to see how and if, for instance, the place of religion in society and RE within schools in European countries will be impacted as a result of the COVID-19 crisis.



A classification based on Religious Education

As we have seen from the chapters in this dossier, the relationship between education and religion is unique to each European country and shaped by the different historical, social, and political changes that have occurred in a particular nation. Moreover, the three trends distinguished above highlight how different topics, such as increased diversity, have contributed to the complexities of these varying relationships.

However, despite this, we have divided the European countries in this dossier into a few broad categories based on their approaches to education and religion. While these categories are by no means exhaustive, we believe they are a useful tool in identifying similarities in how different European countries have experienced and approached the relationship between education and religion.

The identified categories are 1) *limited role of religion in education*, 2) *connected past, complicated present*, and 3) *strong role of religion in education*. We will now unpack these categories further and give some of the most relevant examples from the countries covered in this dossier.

Limited role of religion in education

An analysis of the chapters in this dossier reveals two European countries that could fit into the first category: France and Sweden. Both countries are secular states and have a clear separation between church and state, a separation that has existed in France since 1882 and in Sweden since 2000.^{391 392}

This secular national identity impacts all aspects of public life in both countries, including education. However, it does not mean that religion is not taught in schools. Instead, in both France and Sweden, religion is taught but from a secular, objective perspective where religion is viewed as a historical, social, and cultural fact.

Indeed, in France, the secular approach to RE has not always been popular and in recent years has become a political issue. The tragic murder of Samuel Paty, a history and geography teacher who showed a caricature of the Prophet Muhammad to his students, is a reminder of the tensions related to secular education. Moreover, in Sweden, debates have occurred over whether secular education in the country has actually become atheist, resulting in classroom segregation between religious and atheist pupils.

Connected past, complicated present

Around 11 out of the 17 of the countries detailed in this dossier demonstrate some connection, in varying ways, between education and religion, and fall into the second category we have identified. In some way or another, education and religion

have come into contact with each other in the history of these European countries, histories that have led to considerable debate and challenges in the present day. As will now be discussed, for many of the European countries in this category, negotiations around the nuanced and ever-changing relationship between education and religion are ongoing.

The histories of Spain and Croatia are very different, yet, they both reflect the influence that political events have had on whether religion has (or has not) played a role in their education systems.

As discussed before, during the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939), General Franco's fascist dictatorship instated 'National Catholicism', a state ideology that gave significant power to the Catholic Church. At this time, education was used as a means of political indoctrination and Catholicism was central to the education system.³⁹³ Conversely for Croatia, the country fell under communist rule post Second World War and Christianity was replaced as the main form of authority. Due to this, from 1952, religion was not present in the Croatian education system.³⁹⁴

However, the end of fascism in Spain in 1979 and the Croatian civil war that began in 1990 and brought an end to communism, both impacted the relationship between education and religion. In Spain, the influence of the Catholic Church over education has declined and a more inclusive approach to RE has been proposed,³⁹⁵ whereas in Croatia, a resurgence of religion occurred and the traditional influence of the Roman Catholic Church remains clear.³⁹⁶

Secondly, the relationship between education and religion in Germany is a very good example of this category's title of 'connected past, complicated present'. Up until the 1960s, RE in the German education system was taught in close connection with the Catholic and Protestant churches.³⁹⁷ However, for the past sixty years, Germany has faced many changes in renegotiating the relationship between education and religion. This has included debates around non-confessional and confessional education, the diversity of RE offered, and the establishment of Islamic Religious Education.³⁹⁸ Indeed, these debates are far from being solved and reflect the complex nature of education and religion in Germany.

In comparison to Germany's education system that is shaped by a historic influence of Christianity but is currently more reflective of its diverse demographic, in Belgium, religion still plays an influential role in education. Up to the 18th century, the Catholic Church had dominance over education, but with the arrival of secularisation, the nature of RE had to adapt.³⁹⁹ However, despite RE being more diverse in the present day, a significant portion of pupils attend Catholic free schools, despite only 10% of the Belgian population identifying as practising Catholics.⁴⁰⁰ This fact, amongst others mentioned in the chapter on Belgium, highlights that religion still plays a prominent role in the Belgian education system.

Strong role of religion in education

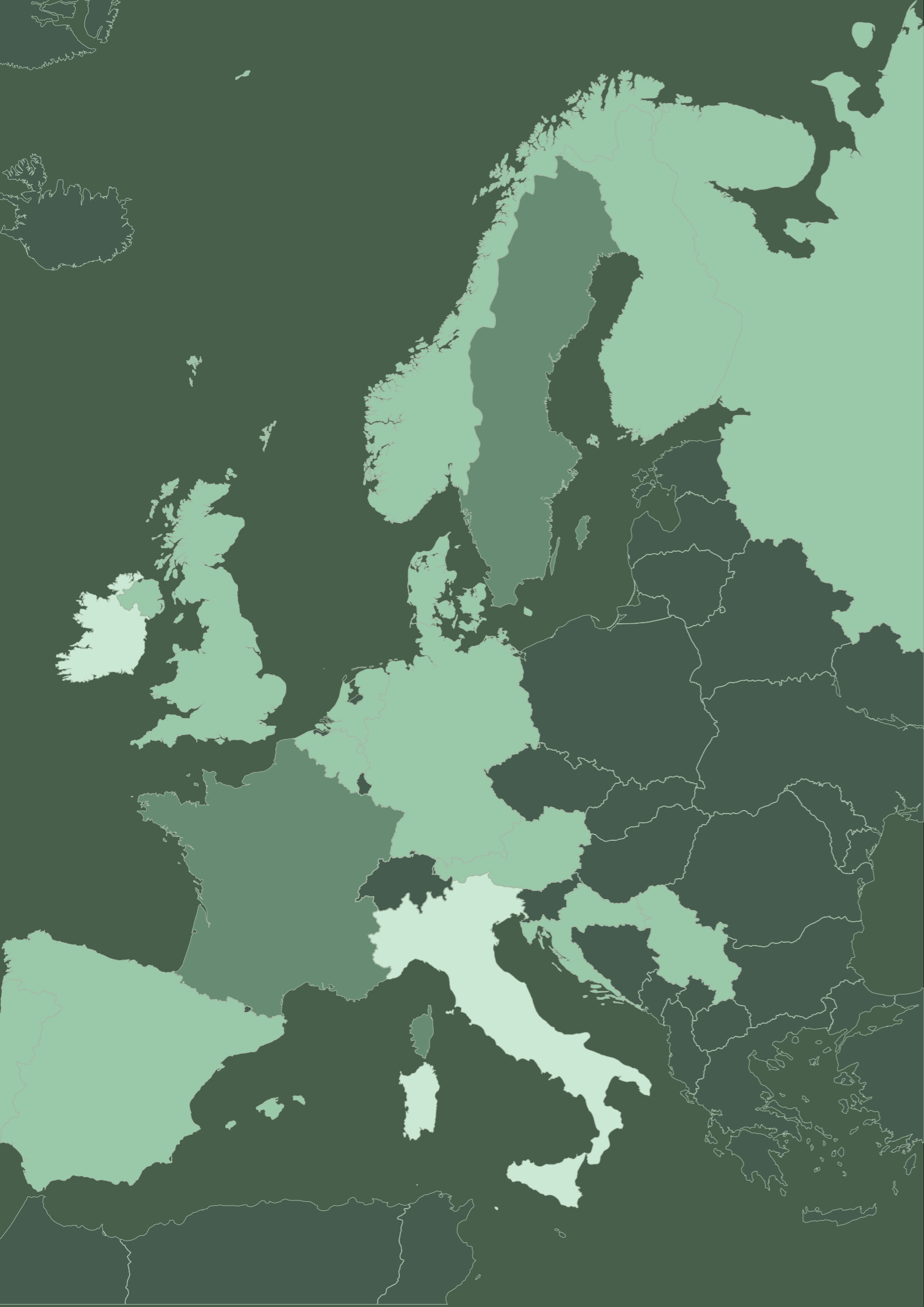
The final category we have distinguished is European countries that display a very strong connection between education and religion, often with one dominant religious tradition maintaining considerable influence over the education system. While religion plays an important role in education in some countries featured in

this dossier, such as Belgium and The Netherlands, only two nations maintain a very strong link in the present day. These two countries are Ireland and Italy.




Ireland's history has been shaped by the influence of Christianity in society, including in the education system. Catholicism, followed by Anglican and Protestant denominations, has played a crucial role in defining RE which is still greatly felt today, with around 90% of all schools in Ireland being under Catholic organisation.⁴⁰¹ Similarly, in Italy, there is a very close connection between the Roman Catholic Church and religious education. Many religious and non-religious figures alike believe that learning about Catholicism is an essential part of understanding Italian history.⁴⁰² While disputes have indeed occurred in Italy, for example over the display of the crucifix in public schools, the prominence of religion still prevails in the country.

Mapping RE in Europe

Therefore, these three different categories help us to reflect on the different ways in which the relationship between education and religion manifests itself across countries. Moreover, distinguishing these three categories has shown us ways in which European countries can be grouped based on similar approaches, histories, or challenges they face in the relationship between education and religion. Understanding these historical and current similarities and differences can also help to indicate what trends may occur within European countries in the future and how the relationship between education and religion could shift.



Mapping Religious Education in Europe

-  Limited role of religion in education
-  Connected past, complicated present
-  Strong role of religion in education



What does the future hold?

Having analysed the historical and current relationships between religion and education in 17 European countries, it is important to briefly consider what the future holds for these relationships across Europe. While it is not possible to say for certain, the evidence presented in a variety of chapters in this dossier has led us to a few potential suggestions.

Firstly, the steady increase in secularisation, particularly among young people,⁴⁰³ may have significant effects. In countries with a strong presence of one dominant religious authority (category 3), the relationship between religion and education might begin to change as a result.⁴⁰⁴ In Ireland, for example, we have already seen tentative moves in this direction, as the 2016 census revealed that religious affiliation was declining, a shift that is being reflected in the rise of multi-denominational schools.⁴⁰⁵ However, the Catholic Church remains prominent in the education system, a fact that has caused much debate within Ireland and is likely to continue to do so.^{406 407}

If this transformation, like in Ireland, does begin to occur in other countries where there is a strong role of religion in education, then such countries could possibly, in one way or another, shift into either category 1 (*limited role of religion in education*) or category 2 (*connected past, complicated present*). Whether a country from category 3 moves into category 1 or 2 is likely dependent on the degree to which secularism increases in parallel with a decline in the influence of religious institutions in the public sphere, such as education, in said country.

However, it remains difficult to predict and many factors, such as political climate and demographic shifts, could have an impact on which group category 3 countries move into. Indeed, such countries could also move into a different category we have not distinguished, or perhaps does not yet exist.

Growing tensions?

Reflecting on several of the chapters in this dossier, it is possible to distinguish two tensions around the transformational relationship between religion and education that are likely to continue to present challenges to some European countries.

Firstly, we can see that some countries such as Russia, Croatia, and Sweden, are attempting to understand and reflect the feelings of two different camps: traditionalists and progressives. In Russia, the division between traditionalists who support the maintenance of an Orthodox Christian authority over RE and the progressives who are concerned that this form of RE could result in religious indoctrination, is apparent. Similarly in Sweden, a separation exists between those who wish to remove religious authority over state-funded institutions and others who are fearful of the 'de-Christianisation' of the country. Therefore, continuation of tension between

the traditionalists and progressives looks set to continue in both countries.^{408 409}

Moreover, as long as populism and right-wing parties continue to grow in popularity, these tensions look set to be exacerbated in many European countries.

Secondly, countries such as Norway and Germany have seen demographic changes over the past decade which have impacted the nature of the relationship between religion and education. In the early 2010s in Germany, there was a growth in the country's Muslim population,⁴¹⁰ resulting in a growth in students receiving Islamic Religious Education (IRE). This has led to increasing tensions and debates in the country over how much control the German state can have over the decisions of IRE schools.⁴¹¹

According to statistics from 2019, Islam was the second-largest religion in Norway, making up 3.29% of the total population.⁴¹² However, despite having many Christian faith schools, Norway has not allowed any Muslim faith schools to be established, in fear that doing so would 'halt' integration efforts.⁴¹³ This has received much criticism from those who claim the position of the Norwegian government is discriminatory.⁴¹⁴ As the chapter on Norway indicates in its conclusion, there are significant concerns that this debate could become reflective of political positions and co-opted by right-wing parties. Thus, future tensions could arise based on the decision of different political parties to utilise RE as a means to further their political agenda.

Moreover, the rise of Islamic radicalisation and fundamentalism in several European countries may be another trigger for many governments to limit Islamic education in schools today and in the future. Therefore, it will be very interesting to see whether these non-inclusive tendencies in European countries will prevail and spread across other countries in the following years as well.

The challenge will be to find the right balance between democratic human rights and the religious values and views of specific religions. At the same time, Europe will need to keep an eye on radicalisation and fundamentalistic tendencies and — where necessary — stop them from growing.

The bigger picture

This dossier has analysed and identified various trends in the role of RE across European countries. It has highlighted both the many similarities between these countries but also the uniqueness of each of them. We have given an overview of the central issues in the relationship between religion and education in different European countries and have mapped them across three broad groups. Moreover, the dossier has emphasised changes to the relationship between religion and education that may need to occur, and has outlined tensions that might arise in the near future.

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 157. (PDF) Religion and Education in Europe: Developments, Contexts and Debates
 158. Between secularism and religion. The education in France before and after 1905
 159. Norway: State and Church Separate After 500 Years
 160. Religion - Religious Change - CSO
 161. Religious Education in Public Schools in Western Europe
 162. Church losing grip on schools as new figures show rise in multi-denominational sector
 163. Religion - Religious Change - CSO
 164. Underneath the Band-Aid: supporting bilingual students in Irish schools
 165. Denominational schools: A brief critical dictionary of education
 166. (PDF) Ireland: A Shift Towards Religious Equality in Schools
 167. Catholic Preschool and Primary Religious Education Curriculum for Ireland
 168. The Church of Ireland-Education
 169. Catholic Preschool and Primary Religious Education Curriculum for Ireland
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 172. Social effects of the Celtic Tiger
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 177. Ireland sees 73% increase in number of non-believers
 178. Multi-denominational education - here to stay
 179. The Dalkey School Project.
 180. Who we are-CNS
 181. Educate Together
 182. Religious Education in Public Schools in Western Europe
 183. Opinion: Religion is a choice - not an obligation. Let's make religious classes opt-in
 184. Church losing grip on schools as new figures show rise in multi-denominational sector
 185. Catholic church's dominance of education continues to slide
 186. Pupil numbers grew 10% at multi-denominational schools
 187. Ireland's attempts to secularise its schools have turned to farce | Emer O'Toole
 188. Stella Cogliervina, Religious education in Italian public schools: what room for Islam?
 189. Ora di religione
 190. Ora di religione
 191. Ora di religione
 192. La scuola, Dante e la Bibbia | RIFLESSIONI
 193. La scuola, Dante e la Bibbia | RIFLESSIONI
 194. "Ora di religione nel credito" Gelmini esulta per la sentenza
 195. Ora islamica? Meglio una scuola laica e pluralista di Maria Bonafede
196. Ora di religione
 197. Case of Lautsi and Others v. Italy, European Court of Human Rights (Application No. 30814/06) www.echr.coe.int/echr/resources/hudoc/lautsi_and_others_v_italy.pdf
 198. Crocifisso: Strasburgo assolve Italia, si chiude caso Lautsi
 199. European Court of Human Rights rules crucifixes are allowed in state schools
 200. «Il crocifisso resterà nelle aule»
 201. European Court of Human Rights rules crucifixes are allowed in state schools
 202. Religious Diversity in Italy and the Impact on Education: The History of a Failure
 203. 'Special education' in the Netherlands can refer to two different types of education. One is called 'speciaal' in Dutch, which refers to special-needs education. In this article, 'special education' refers to the Dutch equivalent 'bijzonder', which means education from a religious or ideological perspective.
 204. Pedagogical is related to how to raise or educate a child. An example of a common pedagogical ideology in the Netherlands is Montessori education.
 205. Openbaar en bijzonder onderwijs.
 206. Bijzonder onderwijs.
 207. Openbaar en bijzonder onderwijs.
 208. StatLine - Onderwijsinstellingen; grootte, soort, levensbes chouwelijke grondslag. Specific numbers: 4627 of 6707 primary schools is 69%, and 466 of 650 high schools is 72%.
 209. Ibid. The number of students had a similar distribution with 71% of all (1,502,127) primary school students attending religious or ideological schools, and 73% of all (950,447) high school students attending public high schools.
 210. Ibid. 71% of all (1,502,127) primary school students, and 73% (950,447) of all high school students attended religious or ideological schools.
 211. StatLine - Onderwijsinstellingen; grootte, soort, levensbeschou welijke grondslag.
 212. Islamitisch onderwijs groeit in tien jaar tijd met 60 procent.
 213. Joods Nederland: onderwijs - Cheider, Rosj Pina, Maimonides.
 214. Waarschuwing om geen keppel te dragen raakt open zenuw
 215. Directeur Joodse middelbare school: 'Leerlingen vinden beveiliging fijn'
 216. De Stichting Hindoe Onderwijs: Welkom.
 217. Vormingsonderwijs: aandacht voor levensvragen op openbare basisschool. Our phone inquiries revealed that departments responsible for formative education had received a 10 million euro subsidy in 2009.
 218. The Hindu teachers have been employed since 2009, while the Buddhist teachers only emerged in 2018-19. These numbers were provided by a secretary over the phone.
 219. This was explained to us through phone correspondence with Vormingsonderwijs: aandacht voor levensvragen op openbare basisschool.
 220. Reformatorisch Dagblad | Laatste nieuws en achtergronden
 221. Voorstel basiscurriculum Levensbeschouwing en Religie
 222. Kerndoelenboekje basisonderwijs | Rapport
 223. Voorstel basiscurriculum Levensbeschouwing en Religie
 224. StatLine - Onderwijsinstellingen; grootte, soort, levensbeschou welijke grondslag
 225. Hemel, E. van den. '(Pro)claiming Tradition: The "Judeo-Christian" Roots of Dutch Society and the Rise of Conservative Nationalism' in: Braidotti, R., B. Blaagaard and E. Midden (eds.). Transformations of Religion and the Public Sphere: Postsecular Publics. Palgrave Macmillan 2014.
 226. Eén op de vijf reformatorische scholen vindt homohuwelijk moreel onacceptabel
 227. Slob krabbelt terug: verklaringen die homoseksuele identiteit afwijzen gaan te ver
 228. Grote zorgen Tweede Kamer na onderzoek salafistische

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 229. Hvordan underviser man om religion? (del 2)
 230. Norge: Kristendomsfag overtræder menneskerettigheder
 231. Norge: Kristendomsfag overtræder menneskerettigheder
 232. Norge: Kristendomsfag overtræder menneskerettigheder
 233. Nordisk balancegang om religionsundervisning.
 234. Nordisk balancegang om religionsundervisning
 235. Norway: State and Church Separate After 500 Years
 236. Oslo afviser igen muslimsk skole
 237. Oslo afviser igen muslimsk skole
 238. Ekspert afviser forslag fra S om fjerne tilskud fra muslimske friskole
 239. Sverige er Vestens mest sekulariserede land
 240. Kristenkonservative har ennå stor innflytelse
 241. Kristendom, litteratur og historie er grundlaget for den danske kultur
 242. Constitution of the Portuguese Republic. VII Constitutional Revision. Part I - Fundamental rights and duties. Title II - Rights, freedoms and guarantees. Chapter I - Personal rights, freedoms and guarantees. Article 41 - Freedom of conscience, religion and worship, No. 4. Churches and other religious communities are separate from the State and are free in their organisation and in the exercise of their functions and worship. [and] Article 43 - Freedom to learn and teach, No. 3. Public education shall not be confessional. Constituição da República Portuguesa
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 245. Portuguese Act on Religious Freedom. Law No. 16/2001. Official Gazette No. 143/2001, Series I-A of 2001-06-22, Article 24 - Religious education at public schools, No. 2. Lei da Liberdade Religiosa
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 263. Visão | O que tem a religião a ver com a escola pública?
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 265. Religious Education in Russia: Inter-Faith Harmony or Neo-Imperial Toleration?, p. 117.
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 268. Religious Education as a Compulsory Subject in Russian Public Schools, p. 137.
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 276. Russia introduces mandatory religion class for all 4th graders
 277. НУЖНА ЛИ ШКОЛЕ «СВЕТСКАЯ ЭТИКА»? Адресуется всем православным учителям и родителям
 278. Теология в современном российском академическом пространстве, pp.229-230.
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 288. Država Božiji dužnik
 289. Marksizam: nefilozofske strane jedne filozofije
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 295. Закон о основама система образовања и васпитања, члан 60

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 298. Закон о црквама и верским заједницама: 36/2006-3, члан 40
 299. Закон о основном образовању и васпитању, члан 33
 300. „Пунолетство“ веронауке: верску наставу у Србији похађа 433490 ђака
 301. Веронаука у Србији „слави“ пунолетство, верску наставу похађа скоро пола милиона ђака
 302. „Пунолетство“ веронауке: верску наставу у Србији похађа 433490 ђака
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 304. Да ли Србија укида вееронауку у школама? Ово је одговор надлежних
 305. Posle 18 godina šta naša deca uče na časovima veronauke
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 307. Veronauka u Srbiji na testu: Ministar protiv vetrenjača
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 311. Why there's still faith in the Spanish education system
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 313. Los puntos más polémicos de la 'ley Celaá': del castellano a la religión
 314. Ginés García Beltrán: “Es una pena que España inaugure una ley nueva de educación cada vez que hay un cambio de gobierno. Nos merecemos algo más”
 315. La Iglesia confirma un incremento del 77% en la demanda de ayuda a Cáritas
 316. Reig se justifica: “El Estado de Alarma no ponía ninguna dificultad para celebrar el culto”
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 318. Muslims in Spain by nationality 2019
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 321. Ricardo Blázquez: “En estos momentos en que faltan líderes, el Papa sí lo es”
 322. Skolverket
 323. Nordisk balancegang om religionsundervisning.
 324. Religionsundervisningen får hård kritik
 325. Hur sekulariserad är Svensson?
 326. Religion in Sweden
 327. Sekularisering | Sekularisering och religionskritik | Religion
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 330. Religionsundervisningen får hård kritik
 331. Nordisk balancegang om religionsundervisning.
 332. Nordisk balancegang om religionsundervisning.
 333. Svenske socialdemokrater vil forbyde religiøse friskoler: Præster og imamer skal ikke bestemme
 334. De religiøse friskoler er under pres i Sverige
 335. De religiøse friskoler er under pres i Sverige
 336. Svensk forbud mod religiøse friskoler kaldes for kollektiv straf
 337. Svensk forbud mod religiøse friskoler kaldes for kollektiv straf
 338. Svensk debattør: Der er brug for flere religiøse friskoler
 339. Svensk skole kritiseres for censur af julesalme
 340. Svensk skole kritiseres for censur af julesalme
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 343. Religious education across the UK
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 347. Religious education needs overhaul to 'reflect UK', says report
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 351. FINAL REPORT. Religion and Worldviews: the way forward. A national plan for RE
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 359. Religious Education
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 361. Eurobarometer 90.4: Attitudes of Europeans towards Biodiversity, Awareness and Perceptions of EU customs, and Perceptions of Antisemitism. European Commission. (December 2018)
 362. Eurobarometer 90.4: Attitudes of Europeans towards Biodiversity, Awareness and Perceptions of EU customs, and Perceptions of Antisemitism. European Commission. (December 2018)
 363. These countries are Austria, Finland, Spain, Belgium, Croatia, Denmark, Germany, Russia, Serbia, The Netherlands.
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 365. The option of 'life plans - ethics - religious knowledge' as an alternative to RE is given in Brandenburg, Germany.
 366. The option of 'Foundations of Religious Cultures and secular Ethics' as an alternative to RE is given in Russia.
 367. PROJEKTSTART: “Christlich-Islamischer Religionsunterricht im Teamteaching”
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 370. Divergence in regulating Islamic religious education in Germany: the role of cultural and institutional opportunity structures
 371. Retsinformation friskoler
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 373. Otte ud af ni friskoler under nyt tilsyn er religiøse
 374. Oslo afviser igen muslimsk skole
 375. Svenske socialdemokrater vil forbyde religiøse friskoler: Præster og imamer skal ikke bestemme
 376. Inspectie geeft joodse school in Antwerpen laatste kans
 377. Islamitische school in Genk krijgt geen tijdelijke erkenning, leerlingen melden zich bij andere school
 378. Jean Baubérot - La laïcité française : républicaine, indivisible, démocratique et sociale
 379. Jugoslavija: razaranje i njegov tumači
 380. Vjeronauk u osnovnim školama dobija alternativu
 381. (PDF) Indoctrination and control: education in the Spanish Franco Regime
 382. Spain starts the academic year with the seventh educational law in 45 years
 383. Religious Education in Public Schools in Western Europe
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 396. Catholic Church Encroaches on Higher Education in Croatia
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 399. Levensbeschouwing en onderwijs in Vlaanderen Patrick Loobuyck
 400. Katholieke kerk voor het eerst in cijfers gevat: 52% gelovigen, 1,7 miljoen kaarsjes en het loon van de priester
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 402. Religious Diversity in Italy and the Impact on Education: The History of a Failure
 403. 'Christianity as default is gone': the rise of a non-Christian Europe
 404. What is the fate of religion in Europe?
 405. Multi-denominational education - here to stay
 406. Ireland's attempts to secularise its schools have turned to farce | Emer O'Toole
 407. Similarly, in other European countries such as Belgium and Italy, the Catholic Church still plays a prominent role in the education system.
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 409. Svensk skole kritiseres for censur af julesalme
 410. The Growth of Germany's Muslim Population | Pew Research Center
 411. Regulating islamic religious education in German states
 412. Religious communities and life stance communities
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