Between State and Religious Institutions: Religious Diversity in the Greek Educational System

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Abstract. The paper analyzes to what extent the Greek educational system meets the recommendations from the Council of Europe by featuring illustrative examples on the responses of the Greek Constitution. The leading research question consequently explores: How do the Greek State and the Eastern Orthodox Church shape state-sponsored school education in regard to the Recommendation of the Council of Europe? And more analytically: How does this impact religious diversity learning in Greece's primary and secondary education? Content analysis is formed using the data of the European and the official government documents. Examined dynamics of the daily school setting and specific content of classes like Religious Education are collected and analyzed. The resulting arguments favor consequential reconstructions and the teaching methods in specific subjects. This can be achieved by the State and the Church implementing their aims according to the European recommendations to respond to the students' present needs. Additionally, by offering subjects as religious studies and school setting examples as a non-religiously binding common school start session.

Keywords: Greece; Religious diversity; Secularity; State-Church-Relations; Council of Europe

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INTRODUCTION

Education in Greece is organized by the state in close collaboration with the Greek Orthodox Church. This is an issue because there are people who are not Greek Orthodox, practicing other - religious or not - convictions and are therefore ignored and marginalized.

A starting point was the comparison of how different Religious Education (RE) in Greece is from what I experienced in a German school. Pupils in Greece prayed every morning all together in the schoolyard; this unifying experience for the orthodox collides with who does not believe and does not have the choice to attend another RE class but orthodoxy. Efforts for more equality were made for Muslim students who do not have to attend or have Muslim RE in regions like in Thrace - but this is not provided everywhere. It surely is no easy undertaking to suggest mere guidelines and help this vast variety of cultures and states.

To what extent do state and church in Greece try to put these European recommendations into practice and where do difficulties still exist? This question can be analyzed through the prism of Religious Diversity. I preferred this perspective to religious minorities as this has been attempted quite often up until now, but also because a lot of atheist people would not necessarily see themselves as a minority. They are Greek Orthodox on paper, but they might not believe or go to church as they might not approve of the church's role in Greece. There are a lot of other points of view on this topic but for this paper, I will look at it through the lens of religious diversity. To investigate what has been done in order to help this diversity to flourish and also be respected and tolerated by everyone. What difficulties are there? What should still be done?

Ethnoreligious Greek Orthodoxy

The uncertainty connected with modern life often increases the need for faith and spiritual direction but, at the same time, sociologists record the phenomenon of a move away from traditional religions and the creation of small autonomous religious systems, depending on the needs and expectations of individuals (Hervieu-Leger, 2006). Even though the majority of Western Europe seems to move towards a more secularized societal model and atheistic way of life including new forms of religion and spirituality distancing themselves from organized religion - not without exception (Κομνηνού, 2018). One such outstanding example of an ethnoreligious identity is the one of the modern Greek Nation. The Greek Orthodox Church, as a governing body, has been connected to the survival of the Greek language and culture by

the preservative role the church played from antiquity through Byzantium to the Ottoman Empire. Therefore, the institutional church did not emerge from conflict between the state and society, as happened in other European states, but has maintained its roots in society throughout time, because it is linked to the traditions of the particular people (Zambeta, 2000).

In 1975, the Eastern Orthodox Church was established by the Greek Constitution as the prevailing religion of Greece (98% officially in 2017) (Koukounaras Liagkis & Ziaka, 2015). There are components of legal agreements between state and church in several sectors consequently building interplay and reliance amongst them and thus an indispensable part of the educational sector (Rothgangel, Rechenmacher, & Jäggle, 2020).

Political Coordination of Religious Education

According to the OECD, the Greek educational system belongs to the most centralized systems with more than 52% of decisions for secondary education made by central authorities in 2017. The main strategic goals are predefined by the government and put into practice by the Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs (MofERA). It is thought-provoking that these two sectors have been merged into one ministry for decades in order to organize education policy, implementation and administration (Ullman, Toledo Figueroa, Rawkins et al., 2020); almost 30 years ago Pollis already pointed out that the ministry as such shows the unification and importance of religion in education. Hence it shows the state's aims of promoting and preserving Greek Orthodoxy by imparting it to the students in several ways. She makes some strong political suggestions of change like splitting up the ministry into two whose decisions up until now were undermining religious minorities within and beyond education. She points out that Greece's 'ethnos' identity lacks space for a plurality of sub-identities and diversity and needs to be developed implicitly (Pollis, 1992).

In this paper, however, the focus will be mainly on the guidelines provided from the international level specifically by the Council of Europe (hereafter CoE). The document guiding the literature choices is the latest policy recommendation (*Recommendation CM/Rec(2008)12*, 2020) of the Committee of Ministers which states as its main argument that "all member states should include the impartial study of religions within the curricula of their school systems" including its amendments (Koukounaras Liagkis, 2015).

Amongst the various recommendations existing in the debate on RE the one of the CoE was chosen for the following reasons. Firstly, it specifically refers to the variable of the

diversity of religions and non-religious convictions and thus fits the initial research question of this paper perfectly. Moreover, it refers to Europe and some of its core values, such as the prioritisation of human rights, democratic citizenship and fostering dialogue between different cultural, religious and non-religious backgrounds (Council of Europe, 2008). Regarding the amendments and the documents the recommendations built upon, there are two which have to be mentioned and will be included for the analysis as they are intertwined and all refer to each other. The White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue which points out the significance of interreligious dialogue as a decisive output of the 47 member states of the CoE (Council of Europe, 2008) and the 2014 published Signposts by the CoE assist with the interpretation and practice upon the 2008 recommendation (Jackson, 2014).

Secularity and Religious Diversity

As a prelude to the recommendation analyzed further down, the secularization theory should be mentioned as it helps explain why decisions regarding RE in Europe have evolved as they have. The theory on secularism might still not have a precise meaning after its trajectory but it is indeed a crucial characteristic of modernity in the context of separating state and church matters juridically. The general understanding of education in Europe leads toward that of non-confessional education which has been the evolving trend for the past 50 years. It is indeed feasible for a state and a society to be both: religious and secular. In order to grasp secularism and ongoingly globalized diversity, it is important to include its continuously shaping connection with religion (Davie, 2013).

Classical theories of secularism argue that the development of science and the prevalence of reason render religion useless to man (Roth & Wittich, 1978). According to Durkheim, political and social organizations are gradually replacing the social role of organized religion (Jackson, 2015). However, a lot of valuable arguments still oppose this view; for example, the majority of students' reported that RE is of the most important subjects in guiding young people to move and collaborate in a diverse society (Conroy, Lundie, Davis et al., 2013). This can only work on the basis of diversity being a quality-enhancing tolerance and openness for interaction irrespective of the people's belief or not belief (Béraud, 2009). This is why this work focuses on the aspect of religious diversity (RD) as its functioning existence in society builds the basis for harmonious democratic coliving, empathy and respect to human rights. Furthermore, an important finding was religion as a factor for social development and attitude having a strong

impact and mainly positive results (Regnerus, 2003) on youngsters' personality and their prospects of life (Koukounaras Liagkis, 2016).

Conceptualising RD, as the condition, approach or policy where several religions and belief systems are able to coexist side by side with no prejudice or fear. RD allows for richness in cultures and beliefs to exist with less religious conflicts or suppression of minorities.

Further references include the importance of cultural and RD as ethnically heterogeneous backgrounds contributing to the creation of novel notions, knowledge transfer and higher productivity (Berliant & Fujita, 2008).

When applying these positive characteristics into the school environment, there is balance to keep in mind: "Since religion in general and RD, in particular, have the potential to cause conflict, there is an attempt to harmonize them. Religion is compatible with school when it does not cause problems, provoke conflicts, and is in no way disruptive" (Klutz, 2015, pp. 219-220). The plethora of cultural and religious backgrounds all over Europe has demanded that educational systems invest in different initiatives for harmonious coliving of the several religious identities in society and in the school environment (Koukounaras Liagkis & Ziaka, 2015). The need to illuminate from different angles time and again in order to resolve discrepancies as well as share best practices between the states is more than ever relevant and this paper aims to address the difficulties arising due to growing RD in the daily life of Greek primary and secondary education and particularly how it answers to the general recommendations of the CoE that have been made in the past couple of years. To that goal, this paper will address these issues with the question: How do the Greek State and the Eastern Orthodox Church shape state-sponsored school education in regard to the Recommendations of the Council of Europe? And more analytically: How does this impact RD learning in Greece's primary and secondary education?

Content analysis will be used to synthesize the aforementioned recommendations and the Greek Constitution on RE. The recommendation will serve as the main theoretical framework. Section one introduces background information to the topic and the research question. Section two focuses on the theoretical framework together with a literature review. Section three provides the analysis on variables of successful and unsuccessful implementations for RD against the backdrop of the theoretical frameworks of the CoE recommendations and the Greek governmental documents. Finally, section four doubles as the conclusion.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Literature Review: Religious Diversity in Greek Schools

As a consensus, the Greek State is deemed as a case study regarding the secularisation process although Greece belongs to the philosophy of modern-nation states of the Balkans; the ethnic identity unfolded strongly in contrast to the identity of the 'other,' impacting thereby the administration of minority as well as majority education policies (Tsioumis, Kyridis, & Konstantinidou, 2013).

Zambeta explains that strengthening the image of identity by the institutions and the exclusion of 'the other', religion or culture, grows conspicuously and peaks in ethnocentricity and knowledge control in the educational sphere. This extends to the secularist notion of the whole educational system, as the obligatory RE classes focus on the orthodox religion and contradict the constitution between the targeted "freedom of religion for all citizens" and the aim to bring the students closer to the nation's belief. As RD is flouted upon by not offering other RE alternatives, the missing separation between state and church as an obstacle to modernity is analyzed and books of RE, their biased views and historical mistakes criticized (Zambeta, 2000). She also argues against religious actions within education excluding students from lessons and rites without alternatives as the school is responsible for non-discriminating protection unexceptionally. The European legal order appears at present to be unable to overcome the historical relativity of political correlations and rise to the level that would allow protecting democracy institutionally (Zambeta, Askouni, Androusou et al., 2017).

On a different view, Liagkis stresses positive arguments for RE in schools proving it to be a Factor of Wellbeing (Koukounaris Liagkis, 2016). These findings are based on previous research that points out RE as one of the juridical interactions between religion and the state, particularly the new RE curriculum (2011) and Muslim RE in Thrace.

For a member of society to practice religious freedom - as part of their human rights - the church and the state must be distinct units. As multiculturalism and multireligiosity characterize Europe, its educational systems ha to reflect these features.

In 2008 the Committee of Ministers decided that nonpartisan RE were integrated by all member states into the teaching programs. The authors posed the conflicting question: "What are the educational policies of secular states toward their multi-religious citizenry and how is the issue of the majority's religious identity expressed in educational, political, and religious terms?" (Koukounaras Liagkis & Ziaka, 2015, p. 45). Schoolbooks prevail in both elementary

and high school, as the curriculum from 2003 is still a content-based one whose subject matter is essentially drawn from theology - based on a particular religion and belief - rather than from "religious studies" - based on different religions, cultures, and ways of life (Koukounaras Liagkis & Ziaka, 2015).

Theoretical Framework: Theories on Religious Diversity

One part of the theoretical framework accompanying this work is based on the conceptual explanation of RD and diversity in education by Liagkis. According to him, diversity was found to exist to provide a definition of identity, and so identity was created in reference to diversity (Koukounaras Liagkis, 2009). In light of this notion, he explains RD in three main ways: *Traditional diversity* comes up if one certain religion is prevailing, society is considered to be a religious society in which one religion holds cultural supremacy. The goal of education is to imprint certain religious beliefs and values like it was the case in Greece until the end of the 1990s.

The onset of the year 2000 gave way to *Modern Diversity*. As an outcome of secularization and immigration society is varied in terms of religion and morals. Globalization has progressively altered societies and religious discrimination has become more prevalent (Tohidi & Bayes, 2001). Diversity is manifested not only between religions but also within religion and thus, calls for a reaction from sides of education by nurturing a welcoming attitude toward otherness.

Postmodern Diversity is the consequence of humans creating their own identities by selecting individually from a series of values (Koukounaras Liagkis, 2015). The current individualization trend is emerging as a result of globalization and a postmodern centralization of the individual. It is within these conditions that education offers students a cognitive setting to build their identities from a plurality of wells that might be varied and conflicting (Barnes, 2012). Ambiguously, RD can refer to the internal diversity of a specific faith, the diversity of ties that individuals adopt with an inherited religious tradition or the fact that several religions are practiced in the same area (Koukounaras Liagkis, 2015).

Theoretical Framework: Committee of Ministers Policy Recommendation 2008 (CM/Rec(2008)12)

The recommendation of the CoE is the main part used as the theory in this work as a guiding framework through which the Greek educational system is analyzed. This is a more analytical approach to the question of the difference between secular and religious education or the role of religious discourse in education (Committee of Ministers, 2008).

The main reason why there are no documents referring to matters of religion from the CoE before 2002 is that this institution is based in France, a nation which follows the principle of the laïcité. Through the domain of human rights and its connection to intercultural education, this issue was put aside. Still - but this time owing to the secular and not secularist standpoint of the CoE - phrases like 'religious education' are not used. Instead, phrases like "[t]he religious dimension of intercultural dialogue" and "...the dimension of religions...within the intercultural Dimension of Religions...in intercultural education" draw the connection amongst the religious studies and the CoE's work underway in the area of intercultural education (Jackson, 2020).

It is worth noting that the principles of the recommendation envisage intercultural dialogue and its aspect of religious and non-religious beliefs as important elements in the building of both tolerance and cultural copulation (Jackson, 2014). This recommendation, incorporating ideas from the White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue, provides a powerful cultural rationale for the studies of religions and legitimation for compulsory RE (Koukounaras Liagkis, 2015).

Educational institutions should work as a *Safe Place* available for students to voice their opinions and standpoints including those that vary with their instructors or colleagues (Holley & Steiner, 2005). Acknowledging diversity and complexity at the local, regional, and international scale and the recommendation urges making connections among these, exploring matters of religion and identity, and fostering positive relationships with parents and religious communities as with organizations that engage in non-religious philosophies. The intent is to bring youth to a *Pluralism* of viewpoints and discourse in an environment of reciprocal tolerance.

The spotlight is on *Competence*, involving properly chosen pieces of *Information* combined with adequate *Abilities* that make intercultural and interreligious dialogue easier. The curriculum content is not proposed to cover everything but be based in part on the context. The goal is to impart knowledge, as well as to foster mutuality and challenge bias. The

recommendation recognizes the need for such an offering to be properly supported by strong *Teacher Training*, ample and diverse *Resources*, and continuous *Research* and *Evaluations*. In 2014, the CoE launched Signposts to help policymakers, educational institutions, and educators in the different nations to make sense of and respond to this recommendation (Committee of Ministers, 2008).

Methodology

The data used in this work is a collection from the documents of the CoE and the Greek government synthesized with some academic critical assessments on the topic. The focus of this content analysis is on how the Greek educational system corresponds to the recommendation of the CoE and its amendments outlining the framework based on the fact that the recommendations of the CoE are a standard by which Greece should comply. An overarching question keeping the paper together is whether Greece just as the other 46 European countries forming part of the CoE adhere to the agreements they concluded together as that is why they are official members. Parallel classical theories of secularism are leaving their stance which is interesting as there is an overarching understanding or belief in Europe that education should not be confessional. Those classical theories of secularism are showing that development (Jackson, 2014).

The aim of the paper is to analyze how and if the Greek educational system and framework meet the recommendations from the CoE by showing the findings and examples on how the Greek Constitution is corresponding to the recommendations and how it does not. This is done by pointing out and analyzing the specific categories explained in the previous section; they were chosen as they emerged from the literature of the recommendation and other authors like Liagkis have also used them.

ANALYSIS

In the following sections of the analysis, the following variables of the recommendation will be explored: *Research*, schools as a '*Safe Place*', *Resources*, *Pluralism*, *Knowledge and Information*, *Competence and Abilities*, *Teacher Education* and *Evaluations*. They are analyzed to explain the enhancement of public awareness for religions and non-religious

convictions. They will be compared to their actual implication in the Greek educational system and as to how they are stated in the Greek governmental document.

Research

Research is an important factor supporting the productive development of RE and the way of teaching it as it is described in the recommendation examined here. Mitropoulou states that little Research has been done on these matters in Greece and that it has also been rather circumstantial than systematic by specialists and academics (Rothgangel, Rechenmacher, & Jäggle, 2020).

Though the search for the background information and the literature review of this paper have shown several and recent publications on the way RE is taught and it could and should change. Several authors and academics like Zambeta, Liagkis, Tsaliki and their colleagues have analysed, criticized and suggested on the thematic from various angles as from the national, minority or secularity perspective.

The majority of their findings support a more open and including school policy to fit with today's world (Jackson, 2020). This is difficult to live out in practice though whilst a 'Safe Place', as will be explained in the next section, is not given for everyone, especially students of minority convictions or atheists (Jackson, 2014).

Safe Place

One of the most important preconditions as stated in the recommendation is the "provision of a safe learning space to encourage expression without fear of being judged or held to ridicule" (Abu-Nimer & Smith, 2016, p. 399). Intercultural and interreligious dialogue serve as key elements of intercultural and interreligious capacity building. A safe space for meeting the 'the other' has the potential to be an impactful pedagogical asset for the development of these skills (Jackson, 2014).

A few regulations in the Greek system seem to stand in the way of those principles. In most of the state schools, for example, there are no alternatives to the Orthodox RE, seldom in the form of another religious belief and never in the neutral form of an ethics class or as religious studies. Consequently, there is no opportunity to provide communication amongst students and create an atmosphere to practice insight exchange and comprehension.

Another important point to mention here is the so-called hidden curriculum which includes unwritten codes of conduct and ethical norms that are practiced in everyday school life and shape the current political, social and economic order of the students' life. The daily practice of the morning prayer and the frequent liturgy attendance are only two examples; during these children and teens of other convictions can silently stand by or are in some cases excused and do not have to attend. In both cases, the majority of the school society is taking part and no alternatives are given. The risk of the perception not to belong or even to feel excluded is high and thus forming a space that is - contrary to the present goal - rather repulsive and odd for individuals with other religious belonging or agnostic standing. These traditional practices seem to hinder an optimal environment at which to study where students are able to acquire both concise information and participate in conversations and pedagogical exercises led by teachers with adequate expertise and moderation skills. The recommendation recognizes that such an offering must be underpinned by good teacher preparation, Evaluation, as well as continuing Research and plentiful and diverse Resources which will be analyzed next (Jackson, 2020).

Putting the focus on how educators can be supported in teaching besides their training formation, probably the most significant Resource is the book they have at hand. Each subject has its own textbook for each school year paired with a guidebook on how to be taught, published after being checked by the MofERA (Koukounaras Liagkis, 2013). This goes specifically for the school years 3-12 as the first two grades of elementary school do not provide separate RE classes the age-relevant learnings of which are included in other subjects based on the cross-topic curriculum.

With regards to the recommendation, another important Resource constitutes the exchange of best practices amongst the educators on the matter of the subject's contents and pedagogical practice. This - combined with what will be said in the section on Teacher Training - lacks dedicated time and space for educators to come together for example during congresses and seminars. The same goes for Resources provided by the state in order to have the financial means to realize such fruitful meetings. Financial support for the educational sector is below the European average (4,6%) at 3,9% of the GDP in 2017 not irrespective of the country's attempts to recover from the socio-economic crisis it still finds itself in (Ullman et al., 2020).

One characteristic that has to be mentioned here is the way those books are written by professors recruited by the MofERA and therefore also by the church. The content and the wording in the religion books in Greece as Komninou showed in her research lead to the

exclusion of values of other cultures and religions by the error-rich way those are projected and explained (Κομνηνού, 2018). By a correct and balanced context the RD of the population would be respected, the importance of which is projected next.

Pluralism

With this principle, the recommendation describes a plurality of aspects and discussions of reciprocate tolerance. The aim is to teach students respectful interaction and awaken their interest for the enriching plurality they live in (Committee of Ministers, 2008). "In the name of the Holy and Consubstantial and Indivisible Trinity" is the beginning of the Greek Constitution and gives a good image of how closely the state and the church are connected in Greece (Greek Constitution, 1975, art. 1). In Article 3 Paragraph 1 their relationship is further explained as "[t]he prevailing religion in Greece is that of the Eastern Orthodox Church of Christ (Greek Constitution, 1975, art. 3). To come back to the leading questions of this analysis: How are plurality and RD shaped in this context? Under the same article, it says further, "[e]ducation shall aim at [...] the development of national and religious consciousness" for the citizens of Greece and thus focusing on a denominational way of education that concentrates on Eastern Orthodox RE (Greek Constitution, 1975, art. 3). In consequence, there does not seem to be much space or even the frame for other religions and non-religious convictions.

However, an ambiguity of policymaking was reflected in the 1985 educational reform stating that the freedom of religious consciousness is inviolable. The law's guidelines stipulate that primary and secondary education must "encourage the student's loyalty to the country and faithfulness to the authentic elements of the Orthodox Christian tradition" (Greek Constitution, 1975, Law 1566/1985, Art. 1.1). The ambiguous nature of the educational policy on these points is demonstrated by the passage of another provision under the very same law, stating that "freedom of religious consciousness is inviolable" (Greek Constitution, 1975, Law 1566/1985, Art. 1.1; Zambeta, 2000).

While non-denominational, the new curriculum is still an open Christian curriculum, dedicating as little as 10% of the subject matter devoted to the study of world religions; drawn primarily from the British practice, it specifies the incorporation of theological, epistemological and educational concepts, and continues to be a required course (Koukounaras Liagkis, 2013). This makes it difficult to be informed about the plurality of culture and religion in the country

and the world in the first place. Information and Knowledge are forming the basis for a better understanding of this existing RD.

Information and Knowledge

The present curriculum presents itself with two salient features. Firstly, it seeks to shun the equation of RE with theology, which all previous curricula did, and, secondly, it offers essentially a constructivist framework for both instruction and education on religions, concentrating on learning instead of teaching. Whilst not undercutting the former curriculum, it taught useful facts presented in an outmoded and old-fashioned manner in what was controlled by the teacher as well as the student through the instructing textbook, a fixed item of material that appeared frequently confusing and repetitive to the students, whereas the revised version puts the student at the heart of the educational experience through the use of modern educational techniques (Zambeta, 2000).

Building on the above notion of leaving a 10% window for the study of other religions seems very little in order to reach these protheses in line with the recommended aims by the CoE. There, Knowledge and Information about religions and non-religious beliefs that shape the person's conduct in society are advised to be provided in an effort to build tolerance, mutual understanding as well as trust; fostering knowledge of the various symbols and traditions of RD is also stressed.

Moreover, because of the renewed curriculum and the transformation that has taken place in its philosophy and pedagogy, teachers in elementary and secondary schools are given the freedom to create their own class content within the framework of the subjects chosen for each class. In everyday practice, though, this translates into the fact that some Greek educators could design a class unit that may or may not incorporate other religions, thereby opting for strictly Christian or Orthodox topics, or to present students more "professionally" to just a portion of the themes included in the syllabus for each religion class (Koukounaras Liagkis, 2013).

While this approach has been the target of criticism by some of the more conservative theologians and religion teachers, it underscores how it provides the earlier curriculum with fresh pedagogical toolkits, such as the interaction between students and teachers.

Competence and Abilities

The educational techniques used in the updated syllabus provide much greater student- and teacher-friendliness. They offer more interactive options in each class and the potential for autonomous learning on the student's side through the facilitation, not the needed interference, by the teacher. In this way, the student's learning of other Abilities is linked to an ecumenical perspective and comprehension of how their society works by being legitimately linked to the teaching of religion (Koukounaras Liagkis, 2015).

These characteristics are largely in line with what the Committee of Ministers recommends, namely to "promote critical evaluation of the reliability and validity of sources", "nurturing a sensitivity to the diversity of religions and non-religious convictions as an element contributing to the richness of Europe" and "promoting communication and dialogue between people from different cultural, religious and non-religious backgrounds" (Committee of Ministers, 2008).

Since the objectives of both sides, the European Recommendation and the Greek curriculum, seem to aim at the same goals on paper, some arguments are critical of their application in practice. These optimistic intentions need space and time expenditure in order to be taught and understood. It comes back once again to the 10% - window which presents an almost impossible time frame to work through all other religions and their characteristics to prepare the students with the Abilities described so far.

Another point to stress is the freedom the educators are given to choose the topics and pedagogical practices in class. Of course, this flexibility is crucial for the individual class design according to the needs of each student group. But how far would long-standing teachers with more traditional and probably conservative attitudes and beliefs which are typical for a lot of Greek areas be willing and able to change and restructure (Tsaliki, 2017)? Therefore, a qualified evaluation system would have to help out and give an outlook about how those goals are actually applied in the classroom and in a system that has been catechetical for decades.

A survey on educators who are trained to teach religion in secondary schools found two distinct categories based on their opinions about how religion ought to be taught in schools. The first considers that the Orthodox Christian religion and tradition should be preserved in its current format, whereas the second considers diversity to be better explained by studying the common or not elements of religions (Karamouzis, 2015). Thus, this sample shows an alignment with the direction of the curriculum and the recommendation target.

Some more of the main prerequisites in the educational institutions to enable the above aims are inclusive and open learning environments (as the 'Safe Space') but also adequate Teacher Training which will be discussed next.

Teacher Education

In elementary school, RE is taught by elementary school teachers trained in the Faculties of Elementary Education of the Greek universities on the majority of the subjects taught in the grades 1-6 (elementary school years). RE as a module however is optional. In secondary schools, on the other hand, educators instruct a particular subject for which they have been trained in the specific faculties of Orthodox Theology of the Greek universities (Tsaliki, 2017). Educators for bilingual schools like the ones in Western Thrace with Muslim faith also have to graduate from a University Department on their topic of instruction (Rothgangel et al., 2020).

The CoE issued the Signposts in 2014 to guide member-state policymakers, educational institutions and teacher trainers in understanding and responding to the recommendations (Jackson, 2014). The Signposts are focusing mainly on the training the educators receive after their graduations and alongside their professional life focusing on crucial up to date topics as RD.

The government and some other entities host yearly training seminars for teachers of religion. One of them is the congress by the Inter-Orthodox Center of the Greek Church, organized every 12 months in the capital. Unfortunately, attendance is restricted to not only 1% of the RE teachers of the country (< 150 participants) (Koukounaras Liagkis, 2013).

In the reports prepared following the integration evaluation of a pilot project conducted in 2014, elementary school teachers expressed their difficulties to educate the topic of RE because they had not enough specific formation in the subject and because of the lack of a dedicated textbook including information on other faiths. Likewise, teachers at the secondary level found it challenging to draft their curriculum, although they expressed the opinion that the inclusion of elements of epistemology and the pedagogical perspective in the RE subject was indispensable. Their opinion might be justified by considering they obtained a particular formation for RE (Koukounaras Liagkis & Ziaka, 2015). Here, the question arises whether they are in the knowledge of the Signposts or if these are not helpful.

Evaluations

In practice, therefore, so far, a researcher may have encountered a variety of approaches to RE in the classroom, since teachers in Greece are free to choose in terms of what they consider to be the intended meaning of their profession and its importance for learners. Educators, meanwhile, have simply never been judged for their level of professionalism only due to the fact that they are public servants. No formal evaluation of educators existed prior to 2013) (Koukounaras Liagkis, 2013).

Afterward, compulsory internal evaluation took place at educational institutions, for three years only to be stopped again in 2015, after resistance by the teachers' unions. In 2018, the state passed laws on a revised compulsory internal evaluation. While earlier versions were top-down, the law incentivized educators to assess the school jointly along with a number of wide-ranging topics before formulating a school improvement strategy.

According to the OECD, attempts to transform the status of evaluation with meaningful procedures of accountability continue; data management and institutional capacity were enhanced as well as the capacity and development of more constructive ways to evaluate students. In addition, the current system of assessment and evaluation was found to be in need of enhancement in its entirety and advised to form a long-term project to develop a framework for assessment and evaluation centered on wellbeing and learner achievement (Ullman et al., 2020).

The impacts of the Greek State and the Eastern Orthodox Church on RD in RE are perceivable on all the above variables regarding their developed and less developed characteristics. Through the filter of the recommendation the connections amongst these were shown.

CONCLUSION

The way of coworking between church and state mainly in the structure of the MofERA shows that secularism in its separationism form is still not ensured in Greece. As suggested 30 years ago a separation between education and religious affairs but in this regard, little has changed, still causing challenging consequences (Pollis, 1992).

Legislation and curricula in Greece about RE appear generally consistent with the European directives. Nevertheless, the establishment of interreligious dialogue or the space for

students to explore other religions on the principles of Pluralism are not provided, with the exception of certain classes related to different beliefs. In the updated curricula and the everyday teaching practice, there are remarks about other common religions. There is, nonetheless, not sufficient explanation about the elaboration of the interreligious exchange and its positive outcomes even though the freedom of expression of all convictions, shown at the European level and partly in the Greek Constitution and the educational regulations. The teacher's role, the daily school practices on the topic of RE need to be put more into consideration what can be concluded through the analysis of Resources and Teacher Training. Exchange and further education as suggested have still a lot of room for improvement in the Greek system where financial resources provided by the state could support this efficiently.

Furthermore, there is a lack of sensitivity to the equal dignity of every individual. Attempts to make more room for the students to express their needs and opinions on the matter will have to be strengthened, and even more, as the migration and refugee rates in Greece are radically rising. Enacting a mono-cultural education in a multicultural population is anachronistic and would not foster a nurturing and amicable RD. This gives rise to questions on the type of schooling provided to respond to the demands of this varied student population forming an including, interreligious and intercultural educational system. The Research done on these matters seems to already offer explanations to plenty of perspectives and suggestions in order to make room for RD to thrive. It is a question of the state to implement those despite possible disagreement from beside the church.

The efforts the Greek State has made in the last years (Evaluation system) in order to fit with the European recommendations and guidelines deserve recognition to one extent taking into account how deep, long-lasting and complex this two-way relationship of state and church is (Bash, 2008). Still, there are a lot of challenges to overcome and a long way of change foreseen as the state on the one hand seems to try and hold the orthodox national identity and conscience alive to a high degree and struggles evidently with the realization of its aims on the other.

Some ideas on how to shape a more inclusive - and not only tolerating - environment in school could be the following: A silent gathering in the mornings with space for everyone to pray and meditate (for non-religious convictions) together. The directorate of the school could try to build relationships with different religious and non-convictional communities and organize visits for all students to their respective churches or meeting places. It is also crucial to create cooperative learning through pedagogical exercises in which pupils of all backgrounds

can be included and participate. Regarding the books as the main subject Resource, new less confessional versions should be conducted by a mixed author team focusing on RE as the study of religions. In this way, RE in Greece which has moved from a catechetical to a confessional subject can keep moving towards this aim. Furthermore, the percentage of time spent on the country's main religion and 'the rest' needs a clear turnaround as does the evaluation system. In giving teachers the freedom to decide how to shape their syllabus, some kind of check-in between the state, the school board, the teachers and the students needs to be introduced.

The analysis showed that the section of the Evaluation of new progress, as well as assessments and testing methods on the progress of the aims, are almost absent in Greece. Thus, this part of the system is in most need of attention and a leading determined hand - may that come from the population's side, a national or international crackdown - and always by spreading awareness on the positive outcomes for the country's individual needs. They are meant to be an adjustable point of contact rather than a rigid structure (Jackson, 2014). The same goes for the Greek State and its Eastern Orthodox Church.

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