

To
Directorate General for Education and Culture
European Commission
Rue de la Loi/Wetstraat 200
B-1049 Bruxelles/Brussel

Statement from CoGREE as a contribution to the public consultation "The Future Development of the European Union Education, Training and Youth Programmes after 2006".

The Coordinating Group for Religious Education in Europe (CoGREE) welcomes the opportunity to comment on some of the questions raised in the Public Consultation Document "**The Future Development of the European Union Education, Training and Youth Programmes after 2006**".

CoGREE promotes the co-operation of six organisations which deal with a range of issues concerning the teaching of religions in schools and of Christian and religious responsibility in the area of European education policy.

We completely agree with the statement of Viviane Reding that this is **a vital time for the future of education**. And we also support her view that the role of education and training is of high importance "in equipping people with the skills to respond to the new challenges of new technologies and globalisation, in combating social exclusion, and in promoting understanding between different cultural groups."

We emphasise clearly that as actors in the area of Religious Education, in co-operation with religious communities, associations of teachers of religious education and others supporting good practice in religious education in European schools, we want to contribute in an active way to making these aims tangible.

The White Paper "European Governance" has rightly emphasised the particular **importance of the role of churches and religious communities in the civil society of Europe**. Also the processes after the disastrous atrocities of September 11 2001 in New York and Washington have strengthened the public opinion that the role of religions for living together must be recognised more carefully than before. Therefore we strongly support the initiative to launch a debate about common ethical principles and a more active democratic participation of European citizens in creating the future of Europe.

We are well aware that in the field of education the discussion about religion and society has included issues of religious diversity as well as the demand of **intensified inter-religious dialogue and inter-religious education**. Especially the education and culture department of the Council of Europe has worked out a specific project which extends intercultural education activities to "enabling individual Europeans to engage in dialogue based on mutual tolerance and understanding on matters involving religion."

It is with this background that **we request that the EU activities should give space and support to projects dealing with values education and religious education as well as to create more opportunities for religious communities and humanistic organisations to**

take responsibility in the process of working out proposals for the new phase of programme action in education to start in 2007.

We have followed the structure of the questions for our contribution:

A. Type of action

A. 1

Community programmes to strengthen inter-cultural co-operation should support also those activities that promote an inter-religious and inter-confessional co-operation in the area of education and training.

When in the text of the public consultation it is said the existing programmes "also help reinforce intercultural dialogue" (p. 21) it has to be stated, that an **enlargement on the area of religions and values education in the frame of school education is urgently needed.**

Intercultural learning should include interreligious learning.

And interreligious learning is not limited to youth organisations or the area of non-formal education but there is a need for specific initiatives in schools.

The "**support for exchange of good practice and networking**" (p. 20) should include the field of religious communities and humanistic organisations, that contribute through their activities to tolerance and mutual understanding

This seems to be also valid for organisations in this area, if "the support for the establishment and operation of European organisations in the fields covered by the programmes" (p. 20) is an eligible task of the European Commission.

A. 2

As a new type of action we propose an **integrated programme for supporting education initiatives, which are aimed to shape the initiative "Giving a Soul to Europe."** The self-understanding of religious communities implies the promotion of spiritual and ethical values for Europe, which are dealt with in the respective education programmes. In doing so the **aspect of religious education** in schools is of high importance. Especially in this field with its different approaches it is the aim to realise the children's right to religion in the plurality of the tradition of European culture. Living together in the diversity of a plural society benefits from the acceptance of diversity, the knowledge of one's own parentage and the skill for dialogue with the other. Religious education in the public school contributes to this. The proposed programme should especially **support innovative approaches to identity formation and interreligious understanding for living together in Europe.** Even though national education systems have developed different solutions concerning religious education in schools, there is a need for a more intensive co-operation concerning the contribution of religious education in the developing Europe, and intensified recognition and processes of mutual learning and developing understanding.

A. 3

As partners in the dialogue for the development and monitoring of the proposed programme we see the following organisations:

- „A Soul for Europe“ – the existing network should be strengthened. Religious communities, world view and humanistic organisations are working together,

to develop and support spiritual and ethical based contributions for the future of Europe.

- The Conference of European Churches (CEC) and the Council of European Bishops Conferences (CCEE) contain all Christian confessions and denominations in Europe, which also take co-responsibility for the public education system.
- The Coordinating Group for Religious Education in Europe (CoGREE) is an alliance of professional organisations, having a common concern for the promotion of the contribution of religious education for living together and understanding in Europe.

B Geographical coverage

The coverage of the existing programmes should include especially **Russia and the former Soviet states** beside the member states and the EU applicant states. In this context also the participation of the **Orthodox churches** in the public educational discourse should be encouraged.

The **development of an Islamic concept of education within the framework of the European Union** is similarly an urgent task as is the participation of Turkey and non European Islam as dialogue partners in the public educational discourse in Europe.

Münster, 13 February 2003

on behalf of the CoGREE steering group

Peter Schreiner
Secretary of CoGREE