

## Islam in Education in European Countries

# Religious Diversity and Education in Europe

*edited by*

*Cok Bakker, Hans-Günter Heimbrock,  
Robert Jackson, Geir Skeie, Wolfram Weisse*

Volume 18

Globalisation and plurality are influencing all areas of education, including religious education. The inter-cultural and multi-religious situation in Europe demands a re-evaluation of the existing educational systems in particular countries as well as new thinking at the broader European level. This new book series is committed to the investigation and reflection on the changing role of religion and education in Europe. Contributions will evaluate the situation, reflect on fundamental issues and develop perspectives for better policy making and pedagogy, especially in relation to practice in the classroom.

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Aurora Alvarez Veinguer, Gunther Dietz,  
Dan-Paul Jozsa, Thorsten Knauth (Eds.)

# Islam in Education in European Countries

Pedagogical Concepts and  
Empirical Findings



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## Foreword

Islam is on the rise in Europe and throughout the world. The religious and public expressions it takes are as manifold as the opinions others hold of it and its adherents. Recently, one dominant feature in the public perception of Muslims has been the belief that they are at least strictly devout, if not militants or even terrorists. However, we can also observe a growing understanding of and respect for both their religion and the role they play in society. Still, much work remains to be done in academia, research and the public arena in order to reduce resentment and allow an open and equal interaction of the various groups in the population.

As an example of an early voice calling for mutual understanding, I would like to quote Paul Ricoeur. Roughly 15 years ago, he made an impassioned public statement in a radio broadcast that touched on three major points: In terms of the societal role of Muslims, he proposed a necessary perspective shift. Instead of admonishing them to integrate into the majority French society, he emphasised the potential of Muslims to contribute ‘communitarian’ values to that society. These values, strongly represented in Muslim communities, mainly in families, could serve as a resource for societal cohesion in France as a whole, where growing disintegration at the family and group level is observable, (Ricoeur, 1993, 202). Further, he argued against seeing the “*grid of secularisation*” (“*grille de secularisation*”) in France as the only standard to judge Islam in the political sphere. On the contrary, he viewed the public expression of religion by Muslims as a contribution towards questioning the deteriorating monoperspectively laïcal system and its dominant position in France. Third, he specifically criticised the mainstream position opposing the wearing of headscarves – which in France is even forbidden to pupils at school – by formulating the provocative statement: “*I cannot help but feel that there is something silly in the fact that a Christian girl may expose her buttocks in school while a Muslim does not have the right to cover her head*”.<sup>1</sup>

Another philosopher, Jürgen Habermas from Germany, has recently referred to the new role of religions in Europe and the need to acknowledge the presence religious minorities, including Islam, in the public arena of contemporary democratic societies. Habermas’ high opinion of religious tolerance as the “*pacemaker for multiculturalism*”, (Habermas, 2005, 263), ties into his conviction that real tolerance can only begin beyond discrimination, (Habermas, 2005, 264). With reference to different contexts – including the French – he stresses the political relevance of including minority groups like the Muslims in a democratic society as the central question.<sup>2</sup> He views their inclusion as a necessary step towards a fully

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1 « *Je ne peux pas m’empêcher de penser qu’il y a quelque chose de bouffon dans le fait qu’une fille chrétienne puisse à l’école montrer ses fesses tandis qu’une fille musulmane n’a pas le droit de cacher sa tête.* » (Ricoeur, 1993, 204)

2 “*Integrating religious minorities into the commonwealth serves to increase our sensibilities for the legitimate claims of other minority groups. The recognition of religious groups is well placed to take on this exemplary function because it can tangibly demonstrate and create broader awareness of the claim that minorities have to inclusion.*” (“*Die Einbeziehung religiöser Minderheiten ins politische Gemeinwesen*”)

multicultural citizenship rather than as an act of integration into the majority system: “A multiculturalism that understands its nature fully is more than a one-way road towards a defensive cultural identity of groups coexisting in parallel. An equal coexistence must not mean a separate existence. It depends on the integration of all citizens – fully cognizant of their subcultural affiliation – into a shared political culture.”<sup>3</sup>

The points Paul Ricoeur, Habermas and others have emphasised form the necessary basis for an argument that sees the role of religions and interreligious dialogue not only as an issue for theology or interreligious learning, but as a vital question for the core values our society needs in order to ensure peaceful co-existence of people with different cultural and religious backgrounds, (Council of Europe, 2008).

This makes it more necessary than ever to analyse current developments in our societies. Research in this field forms a daunting task for academics, who must empirically address the question whether and how the aims expressed by these philosophers can be realised. One of the international research projects looking into the possibilities and limits of interreligious dialogue is the REDCo project. The results presented in this book have been produced in the context of this Europe-wide study. Thus, a brief introduction of this research project is in order.

The research project REDCo: ‘Religion in Education. A Contribution to Dialogue or a Factor of Conflict in Transforming Societies of European Countries?’ was funded by the European Commission between 2006 and 2009. It included universities from Estonia, Russia, Norway, Germany, the Netherlands, France, England and Spain. Its purpose is to establish how religions and values can contribute to dialogue or tension in Europe (Weisse, 2007). Researchers from both the humanities and social sciences co-operated in it to develop a thematic and methodological approach designed to gain better insight into how European citizens of different religious, cultural and political backgrounds can live together in peace and enter into a dialogue of mutual respect and understanding. Its focus lay on education, especially schools. From a historical perspective, (Jackson, Miedema, Weisse & Willaime, 2007), it studied the emergence of religions and religious values. Differences between countries were looked into, showing their impact on modern Europe and the lives of its citizens. The main aspect of the project, though, was to empirically establish how the religious differences existing within European societies today can be addressed in education without creating conflict or exclusion. Qualitative, (Knauth, Jozsa, Bertram-Troost & Ippgrave, 2008), and quantitative studies, (Valk, Bertram-Troost, Friederici & Béraud, 2009), targeting students in the 14-16-year age group and, looked into students’ percep-

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*weckt und fördert die Sensibilität für die Ansprüche anderer diskriminierter Gruppen. Die Anerkennung des religiösen Pluralismus kann diese Vorbildfunktion übernehmen, weil sie auf exemplarische Weise den Anspruch von Minderheiten auf Inklusion zu Bewußtsein bringt.“* (Habermas, 2005, 274)

- 3 *„Denn Multikulturalismus, der sich nicht missversteht, bildet keine Einbahnstraße zur kulturellen Selbstbehauptung von Gruppen mit je eigener Identität. Die gleichberechtigte Koexistenz verschiedener Lebensformen darf nicht zu einer Segmentierung führen. Sie erfordert die Integration der Staatsbürger – und die gegenseitige Anerkennung ihrer subkulturellen Mitgliedschaften – im Rahmen einer geteilten politischen Kultur.“* (Habermas, 2005, 278)

tions of dialogue or conflict within their different national educational systems. These studies were complemented by studies of observed teaching practice in situations of both dialogue and conflict. In addition, a qualitative study of classroom interaction was undertaken, (Avest et al., 2009), together with an analysis of the responses of teachers to religious and cultural diversity in the different countries represented in the project, (van der Want et al., 2009).

Though initially not regarded as a focal point, the question of Europe's Muslims had been an inherent part of the REDCo project from the start. In the process of data collection and analysis, Islam as a religion and the position of Muslim teenagers in all countries studied took on greater and greater importance. One of the researchers even spoke of an "*Islamisation of the representation of religion*", (Mathieu 2009, 87). Viewed from the perspective of the project's results, this book represents an outcome of great social relevance. It analyses the question what teenagers in Europe think about to the possibility of entering into or continuing dialogue with others. Analyses of the educational and political contexts of a number of individual countries such as Spain, the Netherlands and England are combined with comparative analyses of the beliefs and opinions of Muslim teenagers throughout Europe. The data were generated by both qualitative and quantitative methods. In addition to the views of the teenagers themselves, some of the contributors direct our attention to the priorities of Muslim confessional schools by highlighting case studies showing the perspectives of teachers and headmasters of such institutions.

I would like to thank all contributors to this book, especially the editors Aurora Alvarez Veinguer, Gunther Dietz, Dan-Paul Jozsa and Thorsten Knauth. For translations and language editing, thanks go to Volker Bach and Francis Iprgrave. Thanks are also due to our publishing house, the Waxmann Verlag, especially to Beate Plugge for her professional support. And we thank the officials of the European Commission that made our research project and the publication of this book possible.

This publication offers a mosaic of new research results on European Muslim teenagers' thinking and Muslim education. It is not the intention of this book to offer final results – how would this even be possible in a field characterised by such forceful and complex dynamics as Islam in Europe? But I view the contributions collected in it as relevant cornerstones for ongoing research in the field that can contribute to a more reliable and differentiated understanding of the position of Muslim teenagers in Europe and of Muslim education. It also presents a productive basis to triangulate its findings with the results of other research projects (see eg. Niehaus, Tayob & Weisse, forthcoming 2010) and of future research.

More empirical evidence from research such as that presented here is direly needed. We also hope our findings will add to the foundations of a more informed and balanced discussions in the academic as well as in the public sphere, in order to support the aims that we share with Paul Ricoeur and Jürgen Habermas.

Wolfram Weisse  
Coordinator of REDCo

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## **Introduction**

Religious education and the place of religion in public education is a ‘hot topic’ in different European countries; and it is particularly ‘hot’ when it comes to Islam in Education. Relations between Muslims and the public education systems of Europe are often characterised by tensions. There is often still a perceived incommensurability between the claims of individual Muslims or Muslim communities on the one hand and the aims of public education in Europe on the other. This is not only the case in secularized and strongly laïcist countries such as France. Even those countries who accept the right of Christian denominations to teach their beliefs inside their schools tend to exclude Muslim pupils from the very same right. The relatively recent presence of Islam in much of Europe, the internal diversity of Muslim communities, the lack of a centralized, hierarchical church-like structure – different arguments are used to justify such a discriminatory treatment of one of the largest faith communities in Europe.

Nevertheless, as this book aims to illustrate, there are already rich and diverse experiences throughout Europe of how to integrate Islam into the national and regional school systems, particularly in primary, but also in secondary education. Accordingly, this book provides some analyses of the ways in which Islam is integrated in education in certain regions of Spain, the Netherlands, France and England. These analyses are paralleled by empirical findings concerning the role of religion in the life of young Muslims, their views concerning religion in school, and the impact of religion in education and society in Spain, the Netherlands, Norway, Germany, France and England.

This book is published within the framework of the REDCO project (*Religion in Education. A Contribution to Dialogue or a Factor of Conflict in Transforming Societies of European Countries*). The project was funded by the European Commission within the framework of the FP6 Specific Programme ‘Integrating and Strengthening the European Research Area’. The REDCO project’s main purpose was to establish the potentials for and limitations of religion in the educational fields in eight different European countries (Germany, Norway, the Netherlands, England, France, Spain Russian and Estonia).<sup>1</sup> Although the place of Islam in education did not form a direct research question in this project, it was consistently addressed throughout the research process. Consequently, interesting data on this issue emerged from our quantitative and qualitative research.

In many ways this book presents a multidisciplinary analysis of concrete and contextual experiences in the respective countries, and each paper is written from a different disciplinary background (sociological, anthropological, pedagogical, historical or theological). However, they all offer a mirror that can contribute to

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1 For more details on the REDCO project findings, cf. the REDCO collection: Jackson, Miedema, Weisse & Willaime (2007), Knauth, Jozsa, Bertram-Troost & Iprgrave (2008), Valk, Bertram-Troost, Friederici, Béraud (2009), and Ter Avest, Jozsa, Knauth, Rosón & Skeie (2009).

understanding, and consequently, contextualization of the current dynamics and tendencies that Islam in education is facing in different European countries.

Currently, at the European level, it is possible to detect a serious lack of academic production concerning the situation of Islam in education. In most countries the academic production in this area is growing substantially, and atomized analyses from each country are already emerging, since religious diversity is undeniably a hot topic in most European contexts. In this publication, we try to focus our attention on experiences that have incorporated the diverse pedagogical approaches in different countries. It is true that this book does not aim to produce a comparative comprehensive analysis on the European level. Rather, the main purpose is to present the empirical findings from different countries, each with their own significantly different traditions and histories in the way in which Islam is (re)presented, thought of, and managed in each national pedagogical context.

This book underlines the fact that Islamic schools in European countries fluctuate considerably in terms of management, structure, size, teachers' training, academic results and pedagogical positions. Most of them are new phenomena in the educational landscape, often with little support at the national and supranational level, and they are strongly dependent on the structure of the educational system, the relationship between religious communities and the state, integration policies, and the political opportunity structure in each country.

Rosón, Tarrés and Moreras' chapter "Islam and Education in Spain", offers an interesting overview of the history of Islam and Muslims in Spain, as well as presenting some results from case studies carried out within the REDCO project in the regions of Andalusia and Murcia and the Autonomous City of Melilla. According to the authors, the debate on religion in Spain between the perception of the loss of the Catholic Church's monopoly and the verification of the plural religious presence has been resolved. However, there is no specific training or diploma to become a teacher for Islamic religious education in Spain and the introduction of Islamic religious education was delayed for years. The majority of students taking Islamic religious education courses are at the primary level, with a minority at the secondary level. Ignorance, lack of interest, discussions relating to the suitability of the teaching staff in relation to their religious or non-religious affiliation, the suitability of their academic and pedagogical training, low levels of interest and a lethargy in responding to or implementing changes on the part of the administration, which reflects a lack of enthusiasm affecting both parents and communities. These are only some of the problems when it comes to teaching Islamic religious education in Spain. They illustrate the contextual factors in Spain, where the religion traditionally taught in school has been Catholicism and where, until recently, Islamic religious education did not exist, regardless of whether or not there were Muslim students in the schools.

Wingerden, Westerman and Avest's analysis of the situation in the Netherlands illustrates that Islamic religious education has only recently become part of the public debate there. The Dutch example, like the Spanish one, indicates the extent to which an analysis of Islamic religious education can be related to an analysis of migration policy. In both of these cases we can observe different concrete examples of diversity management, where Islamic religious education becomes an additional

'tool' for coping with and responding to the problems caused by migration processes.

Paradoxically, the Netherlands already had a significant Muslim population during the second half of the twentieth century, but no claims about Islamic religious education had been made. Only after family reunions in the 1980s did Muslim parents decide to enter the Dutch pillarized system by opening Islamic Schools of their own.

Van den Kerchove's chapter, "Islam within the Framework of "Laïcité". Islam and Education in France" analyzes Muslim teenagers' points of view about religion and the difficulties faced by teachers in teaching about Islam inside classrooms, trying to accommodate the principle of "laïcité" inside the schools with the role that Islam has for the identity of most Muslim students. 84% of Muslim teenagers in the French sample consider religion to be important and almost the same figure (83%) agree with the statement that students should be able to wear discrete religious symbols at school. For 84%, family is the most important domain of religious socialization and the first place where religion is discussed, whereas friends are the second most important domain of religious socialization.

Breen's chapter, "A Qualitative Narrative of the Transition from Independent to Voluntary Aided Status. A Problem for the Concept of the 'Muslim School'", analyzes life-history interviews with the headteacher of a confessionally-defined school in England which receives state funding. It analyses all the structural changes that accompanied the transition process from 'independent' to 'voluntary aided status'. The author claims that it would be a mistake to use the term "Muslim school" as a homogenised concept since the conditions and circumstances differ considerably between independent (privately funded) and voluntary aided status schools (voluntary aided schools with a religious character are funded up to 85% by the Local Education Authorities). Consequently in-depth analysis should be conducted and the generic term "Muslim school" should be avoided in the English context.

Niehaus's comparative chapter, "Emancipation or Disengagement? Islamic Schools in Britain and the Netherlands" presents the institutionalisation, functioning and self-understanding of Islam schools in Britain and the Netherlands. The chapter analyzes whether Islamic schools promote processes of identity formation within a democratic society or whether they rather lead to disengagement from the wider society. Analyzing the idea of "Islamising the curriculum" and on the requirements to follow "national secular" curricula, Niehaus concludes that the focus has changed in the last decades from an "Islamisation project" to a new emphasis on providing good academic results and preparing active citizens, seeking to offer a "secular" education within an Islamic environment.

Jozsa's final chapter, "Muslim Students' Views on Religion and Education. Perspectives from Western European Countries", traces some general trends with regard to Muslim students, in comparison to Christian students and those with no religion, from a comparative analysis of the REDCo quantitative studies in six countries: England, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Norway and Spain. The chapter shows substantial communalities between the Muslim students in the sub-samples which were analysed, and significant differences between Muslim students on the one hand, and Christian students and those with no religion on the other.

The six contextual factors mentioned above demonstrate the evident need to reopen an active debate on the European level about different models of religious education and their practical dimensions, since, as this book shows, they have become powerful and clear indicators of national diversity management policies. Furthermore, the cases analyzed illustrate the types of intercultural relations that operate in each of the geographic arenas chosen, as well as the relations with the “others” that predominate inside each given school system. These factors are therefore relevant not only for future comparative discussions on Islamic religious education in particular, but also for identifying more general “quality indicators” and “good practices” for inter-religious and intercultural diversity treatment inside European schools.

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## **Islam and Education in Spain<sup>1</sup>**

### **1. Introduction**

This article provides an in-depth analysis of the general context surrounding the ways in which Islamic religion is taught in Spain. Particular attention is given to case studies carried out under the auspices of the REDCo project in the regions of Andalusia and Murcia and the Autonomous City of Melilla, and then extended to the rest of Spain. Operating in the background is the historical framework of Islam and Muslim communities in Spain (part 2), as well as the regulatory – political and legislative – framework (part 2.1 and 2.2) which guarantees the right of parents to ensure that their children receive religious and moral instruction in accordance with their own convictions in public schools. However, the implementation of the rights of these groups, on both a national and regional/local level (part 2.3) has been insignificant and/or inoperative, and has only managed, if such a thing is possible, to make the concept of ‘minority’ increasingly more negative in the setting of a Spain that is, at the same time, increasingly more plural and multi-religious. In order to fully analyse this context, we will thoroughly explore both the empirical findings (part 3) and pedagogical reflections (part 4) on Islamic Religious Education (IRE) which were developed over two years within the framework of the REDCo European project.

### **2. A brief overview of the history of Islam and Muslims in Spain**

For many centuries, Spain was a country of migrants. Throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century and until the end of the 1980s, people emigrated to Europe, Latin America and even Australia, while, at the same time, it became a country of destination for a certain group of retired Europeans and North Americans who discovered Spain and its shorelines a pleasant place to spend the final stage of their lives. However, from the middle of the 1980s onwards, a change in direction has occurred: from being a country of emigrants, Spain has become a country of immigration for people from the lands south of the Mediterranean, Latin America and, at the end of the 1990s, from Eastern Europe as well.

Spain is now a country of immigrants, much like most other countries in the European Union. Although the proportion of immigrants is low in comparison with neighbouring countries, and indeed in comparison with the classic countries for immigration, the increase in migratory flow in recent years has been notable. This has led to concern amongst some people, who have gone as far as to suggest that such immigration has become a problem, acquiring the dimensions of a ‘national

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<sup>1</sup> We gratefully acknowledge the crucial collaboration of the other Granada and Melilla REDCo team members Francisca Ruiz, Iman Katarzyna Kluza and Latifa Abdelmalki.

problem', despite the fact that the proportion of foreigners in Spain (including EU citizens) represents approximately 12 per cent of the total population.<sup>2</sup> Moving away from the well-worn mono-directional perspective of migratory processes and analysing the data qualitatively, it is clear see that Spain is witnessing a very heterogeneous model of migration, with at least four different strands, which at times interweave, and with different source and target destinations: Europeans, Latin Americans, East Europeans and Africans (basically Moroccans). Less than 20 per cent of the people in these migratory processes are Muslim or Arab in origin.

However, to all intents and purposes, the perception and visibility of the Muslims who are settling in various regions of Spain is, for a large part of the local population, far superior to the perception and visibility of any other immigrant group, for example the aforementioned Latin American influx. A large part of the immigrant population which comes to Spain (López García, 1996; García Castaño, 2001; Martín Muñoz, 2003; López García-Berriane, 2006), is made up of Muslims, most of whom are Arabs. They form part of a heterogeneous process of migratory flows, generated directly by the demand for labour (Gil, 2004) in sectors characterised by high seasonality and a lack of regulation. Therefore, it is important to distinguish, on the one hand, between Arab Muslims who have residence permits or are in the process of arranging their papers and, on the other hand, the unknown number who are, at present, illegal immigrants in Spain. To this total must also be added the Moroccan and Palestinian students who decide to study in Spain rather than in their traditional alma mater, France. This number is increasing, with almost sixty thousand qualified students/immigrants living temporarily in Granada, and they have, in turn, begun to generate their own transnational migratory process (González, 2007). Furthermore, there is also the Muslim population that resides permanently in Ceuta and Melilla, the Spanish enclaves in the North of Morocco.

Parallel to this, and especially in Andalusia, political and social movements have arisen which are characterised by a special religious feeling, of proximity to Islam. These groups of Muslim and neo-Muslim converts began to refer to a population process which was a thing of the past, considering that Islamic Andalusia transcended the values of mythical al-Andalus, and offered an alternative which was more cultural than political. It was at this point, in 1989, that the Spanish Federation of Islamic Religious Entities (FEERI) appeared, in order to offer cohesion for most of the neo-Muslim communities. During the 1990s, this type of movement began to grow, thanks to the international impact of migration. It was at this time that the Union of Islamic Communities of Spain (UCIDE) appeared, on 10 April 1990.<sup>3</sup> Both the UCIDE and the FEERI fought to control the representation of Muslim communities in Spain, but not before embarking upon a process of criticism and self-evaluation which is still ongoing (Rosón, 2008).

These hesitant beginnings found their voice in the appearance of a new Law on Religious Freedom (Organic Law 7/1980, 5 July, on religious freedom). This law gave the Spanish state the chance to define the process of cooperation with religious communities that have what is known in Spanish as '*notorio arraigo*', or well-known, deeply-rooted beliefs, in Spain. Accordingly, and by the unanimous

2 See the data of the Instituto Nacional de Estadística (National Statistics Institute), 2007, available online at: <http://www.ine.es>, last accessed August 19, 2009.

3 Although it originated in Andalusia at the end of the 1970s.

decision of the Ministry of Justice's Advisory Commission on Religious Freedom, Islam was declared to have '*notorio arraigo*' in Spain as of 14 July 1989.

On 19 February 1992, the Islamic Commission of Spain (CIE) was officially formed by the two existing federations which contained most of the Islamic groups inscribed in Ministry of Justice's Registry of Religious Entities. This body, designed to be the sole interlocutor for Muslims in Spain<sup>4</sup> when its legal representatives signed the Cooperation Agreement on 28 April 1992 (Tatary, 1995:169), was formed out of the need to establish some common guidelines for negotiating, signing and monitoring the agreements adopted between the Commission and the state. These federations initially brought together 300,000 to 450,000 Muslims from different communities and associations, and organised a representative body made up of six members with five representatives. These numbers have increased over time, but it is important to note that not all Muslims or Muslim communities take part in this process of institutionalisation.

The Cooperation Agreement meant the articulation, structuring and classification of the legal references needed for group action (Escudero, 2006). In other words, it serves as a legal framework that had not existed until that time in the organisation of Muslim communities on a state level.<sup>5</sup>

As of that moment, mosques, schools of the Koran, organisations etc., began to appear, creating the first meeting places between Spanish converts to Islam and immigrant Moroccan workers. The search for an identity evident in this process was closely linked to the social construction of a common shared space, forging characteristics and hallmarks of identity which brought similar groups together and, at the same time, marked their external differences.

At this time, it is possible to speak of a 'first-second' generation of Muslim children attending Spanish public schools, especially at the primary level (between 6 and 12 years old). This is an important challenge for Spanish civil society, which is facing a growing cultural and religious diversity and demands for educational and social rights. These rights, as will be seen below, are protected by regulations and laws, although their practical application has been very slow and, in some cases, discriminatory and non-existent. Additionally, this study will show how an IRE teacher is found, the type of profile the teaching staff has, and how the classes

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4 The body representing Islam and Muslims to the citizens, the administration and, in short, the Spanish state.

5 The main points stipulated in the Cooperation Agreement are: (1) A statute certifying Imams and other Islamic religious leaders which establishes the specific rights deriving from the exercise of their religious activities. (2) Islamic right to worship in the army, penal facilities, hospitals and public establishments. (3) Legal protection for mosques and places of worship. (4) The conferring of civil status to marriages held according to Islamic religious rites. (5) Islamic religious education in public and semi-public schools. (6) Tax exemptions for certain Autonomous Community goods and activities belonging to the Islamic Commission of Spain. (7) The commemoration of Islamic religious holidays. (8) The regulation of Islamic cemeteries and burials. (9) The registration of the seal guaranteeing Halal food products and their availability in public centres. (10) And, finally, the participation of the Islamic Commission of Spain in the conservation and promotion of Islamic artistic and historical heritage. For more details, see: Cooperation Agreement between the Spanish State and the Islamic Commission of Spain <http://religlaw.org/interdocs/docs/coagrpstislaiccom1992.htm> (English version) (accessed 25 November 2008). For a legal study of the contents of the Agreement, see Jiménez-Aybar, 2004.

are given in Spain. Finally, the current map of IRE will be defined for the different regions.

## **2.1 Regulatory framework of religious education in general, and IRE in particular**

Article 27.3 of the Spanish Constitution guarantees the right of parents to ensure that their children receive religious and moral instruction in accordance with their own convictions.<sup>6</sup> It is important to bear in mind that the Constitution is an open legal regulation which permits for different interpretations, and that it must be developed according to different regulations. The right to religious education that is guaranteed by the state means that parents have the right to choose the type of education that their children receive. This does not necessarily mean that a system of denominational education or a specific subject must exist, but rather that it is the parents who determine the denominationalism or lack thereof in a school, as well as how the denominational religious information is given. That said, the state must guarantee these options.

Regardless of the debate that sprang up around the interpretation of the regulation,<sup>7</sup> the Spanish state opted, beginning with the concordat with the Vatican in 1953,<sup>8</sup> to guarantee the inclusion of Catholicism and other religions in non-university education, following the constitutional principles of non-discrimination, equality and the non-denominationalism of the state. Thus, in the 1980 Organic Law on Religious Freedom,<sup>9</sup> Article 2.3 directly states that the state must adopt the measures needed to provide religious education in public teaching centres.

The different organic laws on education that have followed since 1978 include the provision for the denominational teaching of religion, from the 1990 LOGSE (Law on the General Organisation of the Educational System) which, in its second additional provision, admitted the educational proposals only from those denomi-

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6 Spanish Constitution, Art. 27.3: “The public authorities guarantee the right of parents to ensure that their children receive religious and moral instruction in accordance with their own religious convictions”.

7 For the past several years, a debate has been taking place over the presence of denominational education in schools, based both on different interpretations of the Constitution and different interpretations of the laicism of the state. This debate goes beyond religious education and relates to both the model of the state that should be derived from the Constitution and the Spanish and/or autonomous community education model.

8 The 1953 Concordat was ratified on 3 January 1979 and consists of four Agreements: 1) the Agreement between the Spanish State and the Holy See concerning Legal Affairs of 3 January 1979; 2) the Agreement between the Spanish State and the Holy See concerning Education and Cultural Affairs; 3) the Agreement between the Spanish State and the Holy See concerning Economic Affairs; and 4) the Agreement between the Spanish State and the Holy See concerning religious affiliation in the Armed Forces and military service for clergy and religious figures.

9 LOLR, Art. 2.1c: Every person is guaranteed the right to “receive and give instruction and religious information of any nature, whether spoken, in writing or by any other procedure; to choose both for oneself and for minors or disabled individuals under one’s custody a religious and moral education which is consistent with one’s own beliefs, both inside and outside of the educational setting”.

nations that had agreed to sign a Cooperative Agreement with the State, to the 2006 LOE (Organic Law on Education), which is currently in force and which follows the same guidelines,<sup>10</sup> with the difference being that denominational religious teaching is now established as compulsory for schools but voluntary for students, and it does not affect the final marks as far as obtaining scholarships or university access.

The Cooperation Agreement referred to in the LOE, in addition to the Concordat with the Holy See, decrees that the signatories representing the three religions in 1992 – the Federation of Evangelical Religious Entities of Spain (FEREDE), the Federation of Hebrew Communities in Spain (FCJE) and the CIE – have ‘*notorio arriago*’. These three Cooperation Agreements in Article 10 refer to the educational setting, which in the case of Islam establishes the following:

*“Muslim pupils, their parents and any school governing bodies who so request are guaranteed the right of the first mentioned to receive Islamic religious teaching in public and private subsidised schools at the infant, primary and secondary education levels, providing, in the case of private institutions, that the exercise of such right does not conflict with the nature of the school itself”.*<sup>11</sup>

The importance that the debate concerning the presence of religion in schools has acquired in Spain in the last few years is an indicator of the recent transformation in Spanish society’s perception of the social relevance of religion. Two closely related processes have been generated. Despite the facts that, in Spain, references to religion are still commonly made in the singular, and that matters relating to religion are identified as a private (and exclusive) matter belonging to the main religious tradition (the Catholic Church), important indicators of public opinion reveal a diversification of religious expression and a plurality of new forms of worship flourishing in Spanish society. The first process shows that the religious panorama in Spain has diversified, with several alternatives to Catholicism, which is losing its monopoly in the religious sphere. However, at the same time that these alternatives are becoming present, social perceptions and constructions that define new religious alternatives are also being formed. The first process of demonopolisation has been accompanied by another one, favouring the generation of religious alternatives, the definitions of which incorporate references with a cultural and historical content as a means of establishing a gradation of this otherness.

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10 The LOE, in its second additional provision, establishes that “the teaching of other religions will be adjusted as established in the Cooperation Agreement signed by the Spanish State and the Federation of Evangelical Religious Entities of Spain, the Federation of Jewish Communities of Spain, the Islamic Commission of Spain and, when appropriate, any religious denominations that may sign in the future”.

11 The legal counterpart of this article from the Cooperation Agreement is found in Royal Decree 2438/1994 of 16 December, which regulates religious education, the Order of 11 January 1996 (BOE 18.1.96), which approves the curriculum for Islamic religious education in compulsory nursery, primary and secondary school, and in the Resolution of 23 April 1996, which authorises the signature of the Agreement on the Economic Contracts and Appointments for people responsible for Islamic religious education in primary and secondary public schools. Finally, Royal Decree 696/2007 of 1 June regulates the employment relationships of religion teachers who are not already civil servants in education.

Therefore, the debate on religion in Spain has been resolved between the perception of the loss of the Catholic Church's monopoly (a monopoly that, it is thought, was favoured by successive democratic governments which maintained their privileged status thanks to the Concordat signed in 1979) and the verification of a plural religious presence, which is in part a result of the settlement of different immigrant groups in Spain. If there is a single religious denomination that is identified with the phenomenon of migration in Spain, it is, without a doubt, Islam. Muslim communities are perceived as transplanted communities of immigrants, with very few social roots and a little desire to integrate with society. Islam, then, is perceived as the most obvious expression of this religious otherness, from which Spanish society seems to differentiate itself objectively. Certainly, the construction of this *religious opposite* is fed by stereotypes with a long history, but it is also based in socio-political contexts that are close at hand: since the attacks of 11 March in Madrid, the perception of the nature of Muslims as essentially contrary to the principles, values, desires and will of Spanish society has increased exponentially. And these new perceptions have also actively contributed to a reorientation of the debate on religion in Spain, especially in reference to questions related to financing recognised religious denominations and religious education.

## **2.2 Legislation relating to IRE**

### **2.2.1 Teaching staff assignments and requests**

With regards to IRE teaching staff assignments and requests, it is the parents who must request IRE classes for their children in schools. Today, the enrolment sheets for public and private publicly subsidised schools in the autonomous communities which offer this course<sup>12</sup> give parents the option of deciding whether their children will take religion classes and in which religion, or of deciding whether they wish to choose extracurricular activities. For there to be an IRE teacher in a school, it must have a group of at least 10 students, if possible from the same year and, if not, students from different levels will be grouped together to meet this minimum.

Once the requests have been made, the Autonomous Communities must communicate the list of schools where there is a demand for these classes to the Ministry of Education. The Ministry, in turn, informs the CIE, which is responsible for proposing to the relevant education administrations people suitable to teach Islamic religion at the different educational levels. In the case of the Union of Islamic Communities of Spain, the selection of candidates for IRE teacher posts is done after these candidates have taken a class on Islam and teaching, given in each of the districts where they are present. The central and Autonomous Community administrations are responsible for deciding the destination and start date for IRE teaching staff.

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12 The Spanish constitution establishes the right to the autonomy of the nationalities and regions that make up Spain. An Autonomous Community is a territorial entity granted legislative autonomy and executive powers, as well as the power of self-administration through its own representatives. At this time, Spain is made up of 17 Autonomous Communities and two Autonomous Cities (Ceuta and Melilla).

### 2.2.2 IRE teaching staff

The IRE teaching staff, like that of other religions, is regulated by Royal Decree 696/2007, which establishes the requirements that must be met, as well as the employment situation for teachers who are not yet administration civil servants. Candidates must meet the academic requirements demanded of other teachers (have the diploma of *Magisterio* for primary school or *Licenciatura* for secondary school) and have a declaration of eligibility or equivalent certification from the CIE. The teaching staff chosen by the UCIDE must also “speak perfect Spanish”. The autonomous communities, in turn, can add further requirements, such as the command of any co-official languages. At this time, the question of whether continuing training of teaching staff should include a course on the Spanish legal code and constitutional values is being considered.

There is no specific training or diploma for IRE teachers, which means that training in this field is uneven and, given the CIE’s ineffectiveness in unifying the criteria, depends on the federation that has proposed the teacher. Those attached to the FEERI have usually taken the class “Professional Expert in Islamic Religion, Civilisation and Culture” (initially given by the National University of Distance Learning and currently by the Carlos III University)<sup>13</sup>. With the UCIDE, the teaching staff is selected from among those who have passed a prior course and an examination organised by the federation. The course is a week-long class in which three instructors teach materials relating to Islamic theology, Arabic and IRE pedagogy, and didactics, at the end of which the candidates are examined on these materials. Subsequently, continuing training is offered to the students through conferences on Islam and periodic encounters. However, some Muslim communities believe that the IRE teaching staff training should be controlled, in some way, by the Moroccan Ministry for Religious Affairs.

Religion teachers are generally hired as employees with an indefinite contract, in accordance with the Workers’ Statute. In communities which do not have power over religious education, the central administration is responsible for salaries, while in the opposite case, the autonomous administration has the responsibility.

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13 Inter-university distance learning course in “Professional expert in Islamic religion, civilisation and culture”, which is already in its fourth edition and has been completed to date by around 500 students (taking 500 class hours between December and June). Designed, coordinated and implemented by the Didactic Engineering Laboratory of the UNED (Mr. Germán Ruipérez) and the Islamic Council (Mr. Mansur Escudero), it seeks to offer a multidisciplinary vision of Islam and train experts in this area, therefore meeting an objective demand for trained personal in this field (NGOs, directors, judges and public prosecutors, journalists, human resources directors, lawyers, teachers at all education levels and disciplines – also for Catholicism – intercultural mediators, security forces, religious leaders, etc.) who will receive the university title, “Professional expert in Islamic religion, civilisation and culture”. This post-graduate course is based on the methodology of blended learning, the combination of multiple approaches to learning. Blended learning can be accomplished through the use of ‘blended’ virtual and physical resources. In this case, the classes are given over the Internet, using the UNED learning management platform, WebCT, and some voluntary face-to-face meetings.

### 2.2.3 The IRE course

Finally, considering the course itself, as with other religion subjects, it must have a minimum load of 315 hours in primary and nursery school and 175 hours in compulsory secondary school. The programme for this course must follow the curriculum approved in 1996, which stipulates the contents of each subject at the different levels of nursery, primary and compulsory secondary school. For the most part, the approved curriculum follows traditional guidelines for teaching Islam, both in the appropriate content for the different age groups, and in the level of intensity, which is also age-appropriate.

The different teaching materials available to IRE students, since 2006 and at the initiative of the UCIDE, included a specific manual, *Discovering Islam*. This is a manual geared towards first year primary students, the goal of which, in addition to teaching Islam, is to standardise this subject in educational institutions. It is a pioneer initiative written in Spanish, with a format similar to a support manual used for the subject of Catholic religion in schools. A second manual is being prepared, entitled *Getting to Know Islam*, geared at third and fourth year primary students.

However, and despite the fact that the regulatory framework is complete, putting the course on Islamic religion into practice was delayed for years, until the 2001-2002 school year in Ceuta and Melilla and the 2005-2006 school year on the peninsula. Currently, very few autonomous communities have established this course due to difficulties in “negotiating with education authorities ... who have transferred religious education and payment of the teaching staff [to the communities]” (Planet 2008, 46). In fact, IRE is only taught in those communities which directly depend on the Central Administration for religious education.

Here it is important to note that, due to the quantity of Muslim – and more specifically, Moroccan – foreign students in some autonomous communities, the so-called ELCO-Arabic Plan (Teaching the Language and Culture of Origin) was developed.<sup>14</sup> This began to operate in Spain in 1994 as a result of the Hispano-Moroccan Cultural Cooperation Agreement, according to which Morocco, through the Hassan II Foundation, is responsible for the coordination and payment of Moroccan teachers who belong to it, while Spain is responsible for authorising this program in the Autonomous Communities and schools that request it (Mijares, 2006). The Autonomous Communities that offer this programme are: Andalusia, Catalonia, the Canary Islands, Extremadura, La Rioja, Madrid, the Basque Country and Aragon. Some of these classes are given during school hours, as an alternative to Catholic religion, which could lead to some confusion between the ELCO Programme and IRE; even when ELCO is given in the afternoon after school (which is

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14 There is also an ELCO-Portuguese Plan. This programme is supported by the “European Community Council Directive of 25 July 1977 on the education of children of migrant workers (77/486/CEE), the third article of which establishes that, in accordance with their national situations and legal systems, and in cooperation with the States of origin, the member States will adopt the pertinent measures in order to promote, in coordination with regular education, education in the mother tongue and about the culture of the country of origin for the children of workers from Council member states who are of the age of compulsory education. This Directive does not bind union member countries to a specific type of education, but at least establishes a relative guarantee for the mobility of workers” (Trujillo, 2008:4).

common in Andalusia, for example), learning Arabic is often confused with religion classes<sup>15</sup>:

*“ELCO is a completely different thing. With IRE we depend on the Ministry and they depend on the Moroccan Consulate. In any case, it is very common that people confuse us, even the classmates confuse one thing with the other, that I’m not teaching Arabic but rather Islamic religion and that it’s not the same thing ... I don’t teach Arabic and if I did it would be at a very basic level; I teach Islam”* (IRE teaching staff coordinator in Andalusia)<sup>16</sup>.

## 2.2.4 Autonomous communities where IRE is taught

The autonomous communities where IRE has been established are those that have not had powers relating to religious education transferred to them. These are: Andalusia, Aragon, the Canary Islands and the Autonomous Cities of Ceuta and Melilla.<sup>17</sup> Since the 2008-09 school year, this group has also included the Basque Country.

Different federations have complained about the fact that IRE has not been established in public schools, even though it is a right recognised in the Cooperation Agreement and in the LOLR. They have also claimed that some autonomous communities, like Madrid, Valencia and Murcia, do not even want to listen to their demands. In general, the most common justifications from the autonomous communities where IRE has not been implemented are: lack of requests, the lack of a single and valid interlocutor for all of the Muslim communities, and the lack of suitable instructors to teach the subject.

The case of Catalonia is unique, since it is dedicated to having inclusive, non-segregated schools and has found that voluntary, denominational religious education can produce situations of discrimination. This community is considering the option of teaching a course on ‘Religious Culture’, which would be a non-denominational subject, and which would study religion as a cultural and constitutive element of history. This class would eventually replace all denominational religious education in public schools and would not contradict the constitutional guarantee that parents can ensure that their children receive religious and moral education in the school. However, this option means revising the Concordat with the Holy See and the Agreements with minority denominations and the Constitutional Court is presently debating the competency of the Generalitat of Catalonia in this matter.

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15 Concerning Arabic, it is important to note that some Muslim groups in Andalusia have requested making Spanish and Arabic co-official languages based on the existence of al-Andalus in the past. Ceuta and Melilla have also made this request, although on different bases, and since the 2008-09 school year, have had permission from the Ministry of Education to give IRE classes in Arabic. Furthermore, some Andalusian secondary schools began the 2008-09 school year with a pilot experiment to teach Arabic as an optional second foreign language although, to date, there is no data on the number of students who have requested this class to date.

16 Interviewed by authors 29/09/2008.

17 Cantabria does not have these powers either, but it does not teach IRE because the minimum number of requests has not been received.

In Ceuta and Melilla, where nearly half of all pupils are Muslims – the majority ethnically Arab in the case of Ceuta and Amazigh in the case of Melilla – the polar opposite is true. In this demographically and socially polarised context, the local school authorities had to concede equal treatment for the Muslim religious communities much earlier. Islamic instruction was accordingly introduced for the first time in 1996. The first pilot project failed, however, as the local Muslim communities in Melilla did not agree on the list of selected IRE teachers (Moreras, 2005). In Ceuta, the first IRE classes were introduced in January 1999, but – contrary to the Catholic religion classes – were relegated to an extra-curricular afternoon timetable, where they were attended by few pupils and soon cancelled by the school authorities. Finally, more regular IRE classes started in both cities in 2002.

Given the diversity of justifications from the Autonomous Community administrations for not teaching IRE, the UCIDE, on behalf of all of the religious bodies federated in it, has proposed an action plan that unifies the criteria and arguments for the administrations:

*“Since 1996, we have been asking for the Agreement to be applied. Sometimes we are told that the situation is that classes in Islam are undesirable because of Islamic terrorism, but I tell them that when Islam is taught at home, we don’t know what the mothers and fathers are teaching and it’s not controlled. If we teach it in the mosques, the community controls it, but if Islam is taught in schools, then it is controlled by the whole world and by the Ministry, and that is much better and more controlled”* (UCIDE General Secretary)<sup>18</sup>.

The current situation is that IRE classes began in the 2005-06 school year with 32 teachers across Spain. In the 2008-09 school year, according to the data provided by the UCIDE, there are 41 teachers teaching this subject and around 120,000 requests for it throughout the country, although no official figures have been provided on the number of students taking the class.

The current distribution of the IRE teaching staff is as follows: 17 teachers in Andalusia, 2 in Aragon, 10 in Ceuta, 11 in Melilla, 1 in the Canary Islands and 1 in the Basque Country<sup>19</sup>. All of these teachers, without exception, give IRE classes in several schools and, at times, in different cities. This creates an important problem with schedules and the possibilities for teaching this subject, since the school schedules at different schools must be matched and administrators must work with the real possibilities available to them, meaning that the classes are not always taught in an appropriate way.

The majority of students taking IRE are at the primary level, with a minority at the secondary level (only in Ceuta) and they are practically non-existent in nursery school. The profile for IRE students is similar in the different Autonomous Communities: mainly Moroccan and with a growing number of children from mixed

<sup>18</sup> Interviewed by authors 29/09/2008.

<sup>19</sup> Five Basque schools will provide classes in Islamic religion in the next few weeks at the primary school level (6 to 12 years old). They will be the first schools in Basque history to do this experiment. The Education Ministry has authorised schools at Miribilla (in Bilbao), Maiztegi-San Miguel (Iurreta), Legarda (Mungia), Learreta-Markina (Berriz) and Landako (Durango) to teach classes in Islamic religion and at this time is completing the hiring process for the teachers. *El País*, 08/11/2008.

marriages (one partner Moroccan and the other from a different nationality); sub-Saharan students are in the minority, both because there are fewer of them than Moroccans and because their parents do not know that the possibility of IRE exists in some Autonomous Communities. Therefore, from this point onward, this study will concentrate on the case of primary education.

### 3. Empirical findings for IRE

The research for the fieldwork in the REDCo project was conducted from 2006 to mid-2008 in primary and secondary schools and their surrounding communities in cities in Granada, Melilla and Murcia (Purias). The research incorporated a range of methodologies including 58 ethnographic interviews in Andalusia (36 interviews), Murcia (6 interviews) and Melilla (16 interviews). The sampling procedure adopted consisted of snowball and judgement sampling. The snowball approach involved using a small group of informants who were asked to put the researchers in touch with a person (teachers, pupils, headmasters, etc.) who was then subsequently interviewed. Informants for the IRE study were selected on the basis of their IRE, neighbourhood and school context, as well as on their personal experiences which had provided them with special knowledge. In this respect, we carried out 19 interviews with pupils, 20 with parents, 14 with teachers and 5 with headmasters. Four additional interviews were also conducted in order to learn more about the context in Huelva and Madrid. Quantitative and qualitative questionnaires were given to secondary school pupils and participant observation was carried out in the classrooms, schools<sup>20</sup>, NGOs, religious centres and neighbourhoods.<sup>21</sup>

#### 3.1 IRE in primary education

Primary education consists of six school years for pupils aged from six to twelve and is organised into three cycles of two years each. At this stage of education, classes in Islamic religion are only given to a minimum percentage of the total of the 120,000 students that have requested it.<sup>22</sup> In Catalonia, where, as noted above, there are no plans to implement IRE, there has been a curious decline in the number of requests for this type of education in primary school in relation to the number of students with Moroccan origins. For instance, for the 2006-07 school year, a total of 1,341 requests were tabulated, which represents 16% of the Moroccan pupils. Here, the different positions reflect the current status of IRE in Spain, i.e., the

20 We would particularly like to thank the inestimable help offered by the Santa Juliana public nursery and primary school (Granada) and IRE teacher Mr. Anwar González.

21 For more details about how we organised the structure of the interviews, cf. Rosón & Álvarez, 2009; Dietz et. al., 2008 and Álvarez & Rosón, 2009.

22 A total of 105 hours during the school year, or 3 hours a week. The percentage of students taking Islamic religion out of a total of enrolled students in 2001-2002 was 0.28% and 0.39% in 2005-2006, according to the percentage distribution of students by religion/activity studies. Source: Statistics on Education in Spain at non-university levels, M.E.C. Office of Statistics. At other levels, such as secondary and nursery school, the percentage is insignificant.