

*The 114th European Workshop: Religious Diversity and Intercultural Education**

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Globalization which has been experienced all around the world since the beginning of the 19th century can be seen almost in all components of a society. As a natural consequence of this process it is seen that any change emerged in a particular segment of the society would trigger the changes of the others. For instance increasing multi-cultural population in western countries has given the rise to appearance of new concepts such as pluralism, cultural and religious diversity and Interreligious dialogue. And a result of it, the issues on “inter-cultural, multi-cultural, inter-religious and multi-religious education” has been started to be taken into the agenda of different international organizations. In this context, *The Council of Europe* has become one of the organizations which aim to promote awareness and encourage the development of Europe’s cultural identity and diversity and to seek solutions to problems facing European society such as discrimination against minorities, intolerance, xenophobia and terrorism right after its foundation in 1949¹. Especially Pestalozzi Program, the training program of the council for education professionals (particularly for the teachers of primary and secondary schools), which was set up in 1949 within the framework of the European Cultural Convention, has given the opportunity to the teachers to be acquainted with the works of the Council of Europe, to be involved in a multicultural experience, to share their own information, ideas and understanding with colleagues from other countries. In the frame of this program, almost fifty European Workshops are organized each year. Mostly the

* *114th European Workshop* was organized by M.E.B. (The Turkish Ministry of National Education) in Donaueschingen/Germany between 13th and 17th of November, 2006.

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¹ The Council of Europe which is one of the most organized bodies in Europe was founded in 1949 by 10 countries, and Turkey became a member of the Council three months after its foundation. Today it has 47 member countries and 1 applicant country. The council consists of four main parts which are the committee of ministers, the parliamentary assembly, the congress local and regional authorities and the general secretary.

themes of these workshops major on social and cultural issues such as human rights, intercultural dialogue, diversity and functioning democracy.

114th European Workshop: *Religious Diversity and Intercultural Education* between 13th and 17th of November 2006 could be considered as a part of council's intercultural education activities. The concept of the workshop which has been taken place in Stattliche Akademie für Lehrerfortbildung Donaueschingen, one of most important advanced education and training academies of Baden-Württemberg², was specialized on *Religious Diversity and Intercultural Education*, one of the most popular discussion themes of the recent years. 29 participants from different countries include Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Lithuania, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia, Turkey and United Kingdom have been attended to this workshop consists of two presentations, one round table, one lecture, four optional workshops and three optional training trips. Participants have been chosen by the Ministry of Education of the countries and financially supported by their ministries. Variety of the participant countries has become one of the effective advantages of the workshop for exchanging the ideas and experiences amongst the colleagues from different backgrounds.

The workshop which has begun with an overview of the program and the participants on 13th of November has continued with brief introduction of the Council of Europe's educational activities in the morning of 14th of November. This part of the workshop has consisted of two presentations and one round table. First presentation entitled "*The European Workshop in the context of the Education Program of the Council of Europe*" was made by Villano Qiriaz, Secretary of the Steering Committee for Education. Qiriaz in his speech firstly spoke about the history of the Council of Europe, its development, aims and future plans. After this brief history he focused on the intercultural education adventure of the council after 1970's when the increase of the number of migrants and refugees has been seen in Western Europe. "The Integration of

² Shortly after the workshop the academy has been decided to be closed down. Today the seminars and in-service training courses have been held at the other three centers of Landesa-kademic in Esslingen, Comburg and Bad Wild/bad.

Migrants' Children into Pre-School Education" Symposium in 1976 was an important step on the way to improve intercultural education policy of the council. After 1989 the key concept of the activities of the council has become "minorities and democratic citizenship" and after 2002 religious diversity has been added to the topics which are mostly discussed.

After Qiriazı's instructive presentation on the history of the Council and its works, John Keast who is one of the advisers of the council for religious education, made a presentation on the project of "*The Challenge of Intercultural Education Today: Religious Diversity and Dialogue in Europe*" and the reference book titled "Religious Diversity and Intercultural Education: A Reference Book for Schools" which has been prepared as a result of a collaborative effort of many experts participated the project³. The project has been started in 2002 and during the ongoing activities of the project many reports on both theoretical and practical sides of religious and interreligious education have been published⁴. The reference book which is the main result of the project consists of four sections. At the first section of the reference book, theoretical background of the project has been discussed. Firstly it is underlined that religion has been taken into the consideration as a cultural phenomenon because this concept also allows the scope of the religion to include humanist view points as well as theistic ones. Secondly, the role of religious, philosophical and cultural convictions go beyond the private sphere and because of that the consideration of the public roles of religion is necessary. The third point which is underlined in the theoretical background is the manifestation of religious diversity, not just in religious symbolism but also in the world-views.

At the second section of the reference book which can be regarded as a bridge between theoretical and practical part, the pedagogical approaches which must be used in intercultural education have been introduced. In this chapter cooperative approach which mainly based on the idea that all successful works are the result of a cooperative work is underlined. Creation of a safe space where all

³ The book has been published in 2007 by The Council of Europe.

⁴ For further information see project's website:
http://www.coe.int/t/e/cultural_co-operation/education/Intercultural_education/_Intro.asp

pupils can express themselves and a successful dialogue can take place and the need of empathetic communication in the classrooms to improve the relationships with others is also added to the pedagogical approaches. On the other hand among the pedagogical considerations the phenomenological, the interpretive, the dialogical and the contextual considerations have been listed. The third section of the book deals with the school ethos, governance and management, school life and activities and the curriculum and it stresses that a consistent and holistic approach is required to a more effective intercultural education. The last section of the book is based on the examples from different schools across Europe to show the different practices of the approaches.

The reference book has been published one year after the workshop by the Council of Europe. When the main aims of the project are considered, the content of the book will be understood better. It basically aims to raise the awareness of decision-makers, educators and teachers about the implications of the religious dimension of intercultural education and most importantly to draw educators and teachers' attention to new approaches, positive experiences and approaches in intercultural education in both curricular and extra-curricular activities to understand religious diversity in European countries and to cope with the problems emerge through misunderstanding or lack of understanding. So this reference book should be considered as a tool to improve religious education quality at the classrooms.

After this overview on the works of the Council of Europe two presentations and a round table on "Religion and Culture" have taken place to introduce the different national approaches to religious education of the participant countries.

The main lecture of the workshop, "*Migration and Education in a multicultural Europe*" presented by Dr. Heike Lindner from Pädagogische Hochschule Heidelberg took place after this round table. Lindner, in her lecture discussed the religious education in terms of "immigration" and "integration". After explaining the situations and the demographic results of migration in European countries she focused on the terms of intercultural and inter-religious dialogue from the hermeneutical approach giving examples from Habermas and Luther's works. She also used two protestant schools, one in Leipzig and the

other in Hoyerswerda, as good examples of intercultural education and integration of disadvantaged students into school life. Lindner in her speech also implied that intercultural education should not be only taken into the consideration as a part of diversity of different culture or religion's confrontation but also as a part of the diversity of different social or financial layers at the same society by giving the both examples from old DDR states.

After these first day presentations on the past and present situation of intercultural education, at the second day four optional workshops have been offered to the participants. Participants were free to choose one of these four workshops concerning their own interests in the morning and one in the afternoon. The names of the all workshops are:

- *"Guess who is Coming to Dinner. A Workshop on Inter-Faith Dialogue by Young People"* by John Keast
- *"Praxisforum School and Islam"*, Project of the Körber-Foundation/Germany by Werner Staubach from Fulda
- *"Religion and Culture in the Kanton of Zürich"* by Johannes Kilchsperger
- *"Intercultural Project of the Gymnasium Jean Sturm, Strasbourg"* by Eric Schiffer and Michel Jerman from Gymnasium in Strasbourg

The two workshops which I participated were Mr. Keast's *"Guess who is coming to dinner!"* and Mr. Staubach's *"Praxisforum School and Islam"*. With the idea of using the theme of Dinner as a workshop topic Mr. Keast has aimed to help the participants to find the way to deal with the daily issues between the believers of different religions. It has been asked to the participants to find three different persons from different religions or from different sects throughout the world history to prepare an imaginary dinner table with all details including the table order and menu and to write a dialogue between these people. As it is known, one of the most important critiques addresses to interreligious dialogue discussions is the given importance to the theoretical part of the discussions. In this way, the main aim of the Keast's workshop was basically draw attention of

the participants to the occasions which they can face in their everyday life, to show how inter faith dialogue may be conducted between believers of different religions in an imaginative way and to generate some ideas and solutions to possible daily life occasions through a variety of co-operative and empathetic learning activities and tasks.

While Mr. Keast's workshop was focusing on the daily life situations, Mr. Staubach's workshop titled "*Praxisforum School and Islam*" emphasized on formal education. In his workshop Mr. Staubach who also works at Hessisches Landesinstitut für Pädagogik expressed his experiences with his pupils, particularly Turkish children and their families, at the Kindergarten of Körper-Stiftung in Fulda and how they deal with the integration problems of the children and their families. He underlined that society must work together for the common purposes regardless of any religious, social or cultural differences. One of these purposes is, of course, the creation of a peaceful society. To accomplish this purpose it is important to bring children from different backgrounds together, to give them essential education on how they can integrate themselves to the society where they live in and most importantly to protect them from the harmful addictions and their consequences.

At the last day of the workshop three optional synchronous training trips have been prepared for the participants. These were "*An Intercultural and Interreligious Project at the Applied University*", "*The Project of Islamic Religious Education at a Primary School in Freiburg*" and "*A Multireligious Project of a Kindergarten in Freiburg-St. Georgen*". With these excursions participants found a chance to visit the different educational institutions.

At the first meeting at Evangelische Fachhochschule Freiburg Prof. Dr. Wilhelm Schwendemann has given detailed information on the developments and the aims of the intercultural curriculums in Germany. In his speech Prof. Schwendemann introduced his works titled "Dem Islam begegnen. Stationenlernen-Lernen mit allen Sinnen" on religious education as teaching material for schools. Main Islamic concepts such as the mosque, the Koran, the Prophet Mohammad and the five pillars of Islam have been used in a multi-cultural approach as the key concepts of these books which have been taught till

6th grade. The second meeting has been held at Adolf-Reichwein-Schule in Freiburg and the main theme of this meeting was the curriculum of the school which based on intercultural and interreligious education. It has been underlined that according to the state law the teacher of the school must be trained by German authorities or German institutions, the teaching language of the school should be German and the teacher of Islamic religious education class must be represent the religion, with other words must be a Muslim. It is also important to mention that this religious education at the classes is not an education about religion, but education from inside of religion because the students are Muslims. In this context Sunni education has been accepted as the main approach of the curriculum. On the other hand because of that the curriculum of the school has been newly started to be applied, it is needed to stabilize the curriculum firstly and then the presentation of differences between the Islamic approaches might be taken into the consideration at the curriculum.

After the sessions of the workshop the final speech has been made by Peter Schreiner who has participated the workshop as one of the experts of the Council of Europe from Comenius-Institut Münster. Schreiner in his speech titled "*The Role of Religion in Intercultural Learning*" has summed up the whole workshop and especially focused on the meanings of main concepts such as teaching, education, diversity and how these concepts should be understood today in the sense of religious education. He also spoke about the differences between European countries that are always considered as same. To him dealing with the problems of the society, firstly it is very important to be aware of religious and cultural diversity in the society.

One of the most important messages which has been underlined during the conference was that teaching is not just a basic linear transmitter between the teacher and the student, but a process which constantly renews itself. Teacher must gain a new understanding and perception with every new student and must develop a new perspective to cope with the new circumstances and the problems. On the other hand to create a peaceful and safe classroom for the students is the duty of the teacher. Therefore the teacher must be aware of the students' convictions and their tendencies and learning about the other societies,

cultures and civilizations give teachers a new perspective to approach their students.

In the case of Turkey, especially with the process of accession to European Union some modifications have been made concerning religious education classes. One of the most important modifications is certainly the application of inter-religious educational approach in religious education curriculums. It is obvious that, in years ahead new modifications will take place. In this context, it is important to examine and analyze the curriculums of other European countries. 114th European Workshop was successful to comprehend the differences between European countries and their problems.

The year of 2008 has been fixed as the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue. I hope these workshops and works will be helpful for building understanding between believers of different religions.