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ERENews

European Religious Education Newsletter

EDITORIAL

By the Editorial Staff



As of January 2023, ERE-news finally has its own website (<https://erenews.uniroma3.it/>). It has been a collective effort that has involved the entire editorial staff in the creation of the content, the management of the page, and the training we have been offered. We would like to thank Patrick Fiore, webmaster of our new site, and Prof. Carla Noce who allowed this achievement to be realised.

In this issue of ERE-news, in addition to the usual space in which the press review, reviews of books and reports of training and research opportunities are all devoted to our *focus* of interest, *i.e.* the teaching of religion and religions and the debate between the religious fact, secularism and school, the editorial staff decided to elaborate, within the second part of our issue, a precise and in-depth reflection on the “alternative class” (“ora di alternativa”) to the teaching of the Catholic religion.

The basic question that has allowed us to construct a multi-voice debate with various protagonists who, in different roles, have been interested in the subject is: is the State's failure to organise this teaching, the absence of any specific criteria for the recruitment of teachers, just a legislative vacuum or a lack of political intention?

As always, the monographic section is constructed from interviews-dialogue involving different interlocutors; our attempt to give voice to the polyphony with respect to this subject was enriching and, above all, allowed us to analyse the subject of

investigation from several points of view and to problematise it in detail and without discounting anyone.

We interviewed Roberto Grèndene, national secretary of the UAAR; Michele Madonna, professor of Canon Law and Ecclesiastical Law at the University of Pavia; Cristina Costarelli, school director and president of ANP Lazio; Ivano Mariconti, president of Co.Ge.D.; Laura Marzi, author of the novel *La materia alternativa*, Mondadori, 2022.

We are grateful to them for their helpfulness in the discussion and for the plurality of perspectives and ideas on which, by virtue of their contributions, we had the opportunity to reflect.

Completing the issue is an in-depth article dedicated to the teaching of religion within school legislation in Portugal, edited by Giulia Conti (trainee at EREnews and student of the University of Turin), and an article entitled 'New minister, new ministry' which takes a critical look at some of the changes taking place in the ministerial headquarters in Viale Trastevere, edited by Filippo Mariani.

FIRST SECTION

Reasoned press review

Keywords: Russia-Ukraine conflict, France, Journée de la Laïcité, Spain, LOMLOE, Portugal, Germany, teaching Catholic religion, teaching ethics, teaching Islam

This section offers news, in-depth analysis and considerations related to the world of schools, with a specific *focus* on the teaching of religions and/or ethics in schools in several European countries.

ITALY.

The reception of Ukrainian refugees and the role of Italian schools

By Sara Giorgetti and Filippo Mariani

According to the numbers provided by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 159,968 Ukrainian refugees have arrived in Italy (data updated to 16 August) since the beginning of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict. Over 150,000 people have applied for a residence permit and temporary protection succeeding the EU directive 2001/55/EC. A total of 6.6 million Ukrainians fled their country because of the war. 3.8 million of them have applied for EU temporary protection or for a similar form of assistance in other host countries.

The commitment to Ukrainian refugees in recent months has been one of the prerogatives of Centro Astalli, a Jesuit Refugee Service with over forty years of background in supporting people who arrive in Italy fleeing war, violence, and poverty. The data provided in the centre's annual report show a significant increase in the number of Ukrainian families arriving in Italy and hosted in shelters. A similar record is noticeable in the statements of Centro Astalli's president Camillo Ripamonti.

Concerning children, Save the Children had led research regarding the impact of the conflict on involved children. Roughly 40 percent of the refugees are children. The survey highlights the psychological conditions of Ukrainian children, involving the different strategies deployed by European countries to welcome and integrate them into their school system. One out of three minors did not attend school before summer, while one out of four did not enrol in any local school during the academic year 2022-2023.

Regarding the school education of young Ukrainian refugees, there have been no substantial changes since last August. The 24th of February 2022, the day of the

outbreak of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, brought with it a criticism of our society's typical behaviour: the fear that time would lead to perceiving the conflict and its consequences as normal. We register papers and the public's lesser interest in the topic. The reasons why this is happening could be found both in an ongoing conflict that became permanent, and in the rising price of energy supplies during the winter.

The numbers of Ukrainian students fleeing the conflict registered on the website of the new Ministry of Education and Merit are at a standstill as of 13/06/2022, such as the Ministry's initiatives in this area of interest. The 2022-2023 Summer Plan that was supposed to enhance the services provided for young Ukrainian, nor the ministerial document for the integration of students from migrant contexts (March 2022) have been updated.

Interviewed by Save the Children, a part of Ukrainian parents stated that prefer to not enter their children into Italian schools. They would prefer the online learning programme developed by the Ukrainian government for the pandemic for their children's instruction instead. These families are not planning to stay in host countries, wishing to return to Ukraine as soon as possible. A barrier to Ukrainian children's integration into European schools is the language gap. The specific language courses stated by host countries are not perceived as adequate enough. In addition, there are cultural differences, anger, bewilderment, and anxiety regarding the future of their lives and their country.

Although the start of the school year has not brought any new national directives from the MIUR, many initiatives have been implemented by single Italian schools to create an easier and more welcoming integration system. For instance, the trilingual encyclopaedia (English, Italian and Ukrainian) promoted in schools in Bologna, or the Friuli-Venezia Giulia's Learning Italian digital text based on fairy tales. In the context of local initiatives, we would like to mention the primary and secondary school PAI models (Individualised Learning Plan) designed by the Milan School Office. These individualised learning plan has been created to identify any gap between Ukrainian and Italian students and to detect the Ukrainian student's relational, social, and linguistic starting point.

Lastly, it is also useful to return some proposals and articles already stated in the previous issue of EREnews, such as the worthwhile initiative of the FIM (Italian Federation of Nursery Schools) to make its school network available to facilitate the reception and education of Ukrainian children.

Read more:

<https://www.centroastalli.it/tag/ucraina/>



<https://www.savethechildren.it/blog-notizie/ucraina-un-minore-su-2-ansioso-preoccupato-per-il-proprio-futuro>

<https://www.tecnicadellascuola.it/il-report-save-the-children-il-ruolo-della-scuola-per-la-salute-mentale-dei-minori-ucraini-in-europa>

<https://it.euronews.com/2022/11/23/unenciclopedia-trilingue-per-lintegrazione-scolastica-degli-ucraini>

<https://www.dire.it/23-11-2022/837807-dal-friuli-venezia-giulia-un-e-book-per-far-imparare-litaliano-ai-bambini-ucraini/>

<https://www.istruzione.it/emergenza-educativa-ucraina/>

<https://www.orizzontescuola.it/recupero-apprendimenti-studenti-ucraini-indicazioni-elaborazione-pai-e-modelli/>

<https://milano.istruzione.lombardia.gov.it/20221116prot0018620/>

<https://www.istruzione.it/emergenza-educativa-ucraina/index.html>

<https://www.istruzione.it/emergenza-educativa-ucraina/racconti.html>

<https://www.miur.gov.it/-/torna-il-piano-estate-laboratori-musica-sport-inclusione-previste-attivit -con-gli-studenti-e-per-l-accoglienza-dei-ragazzi-ucraini-bianchi-il-piano-d>

https://ec.europa.eu/migrant-integration/library-document/supporting-inclusion-displaced-children-ukraine-education_en

<https://www.istruzione.it/emergenza-educativa-ucraina/allegati/Factsheet%20-%20Schools%20-Ukraine-links.pdf>

https://www.ismu.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/MSNA-in-Italia_Aprile-2022.pdf

<https://www.agensir.it/quotidiano/2022/5/17/scuole-materne-fism-un-fondo-di-condivisione-per-laccoglienza-dei-bambini-ucraini/>

<https://www.chiesadimilano.it/news/chiesa-diocesi/le-scuole-dellinfanzia-della-diocesi-pronte-ad-accogliere-i-bambini-ucraini-500394.html>

<https://www.varesenews.it/2022/03/le-scuole-dellinfanzia-della-diocesi-milano-pronte-ad-accogliere-bambini-ucraini/1441604/>

<https://www.ilfattoquotidiano.it/2022/03/28/i-bimbi-ucraini-nelle-scuole-italiane-sono-oltre-5mila-fondi-per-mediatori-e-psicologi-per-gli-altri-alunni-stranieri-invece-restano-carenze/6537794/>

FRANCE.

School, secularism, and the religious fact. The survey «*Les enseignants face à l'expression du fait religieux à l'école et aux atteintes à laïcité*» (IFOP)

By Federica Candido

IFOP (Institut d'études opinion et marketing en France et à l'international), on the occasion of the National Day of Secularism (9th December), published a study entitled: *Les enseignants face à l'expression du fait religieux à l'école et aux atteintes à laïcité* .

The survey was conducted on a sample of 1,009 teachers, representative of French primary and secondary school teachers. Questions were submitted via an online questionnaire.

The results of this study deserve careful reflection on the complex relationship between school, secularism, and the religious fact, both in France and in other European countries.

The survey on teaching and secularism conducted by IFOP returns a snapshot of the state of tension in French public and public schools. In particular, this study explores the complex dynamics that arise from the



short-circuit that is triggered when some of the main themes connected to secularism and religions are discussed in schools: most teachers report a feeling of fear in dealing with the theme of secularism and the religious fact; moreover, one of the most striking data is the consequent self-censorship that teachers impose on themselves when dealing with themes relating to the religious sphere. In fact, 52% of teachers say they have self-censored their teaching (in 2020, 43% said they had self-censored). The subjects that are predominantly affected are history and geography (64% of teachers declare that during lessons on these subjects they have avoided making comments and considerations that could have given rise to misunderstandings or disagreements). Similar attitudes are also found in other school disciplines: literature (58%), languages (56%) and gym class (51%).

As is well known, the French parliament approved (17/03/2004) the Law 228/2004 on religious symbols at school (the so-called 'anti-veil' law), which forbade the wearing in schools of symbols or clothing that ostensibly reveal a religious affiliation (the so-called 'ostensible' symbols are explicitly referred to, and the application circular mentions the Islamic veil, the kippa and the objectively oversized cross).

The IFOP survey emphasizes that 71% of schoolteachers claims to have experienced an episode of violation of the principle of secularism at least once. Within the context of these violations, we find some examples that teachers have denounced: the wearing of headscarves or kippas by students, the encouragement among them to wear clothing indicating religious affiliation, the refusal of students to remove clothing denoting religious affiliation.

Indicative of this is the fact that some teachers interviewed, especially the younger ones, are more open to a slackening of the rules of secularism. The teachers, in fact, complain about the lack of a stance taken by the national education system, especially two years after the murder of Samuel Paty (77% say that the Ministry of Education has not properly understood the challenge faced by the school in the aftermath of Paty's murder).

In this regard, it is noteworthy that, in the “secular” France, 62% of teachers under the age of 30 say they are in favour of school canteens offering students who so wish a meal corresponding to a religious diet. Moreover, if the percentage of teachers who would like to authorise parents accompanying their pupils on school trips to wear religious symbols is rather small (26%), this increases significantly to 51% when teachers under 30 years of age respond to the interview.

Is the suggestion to consider everyday religious aspects in the public space an indication of a change in mentality? Or is it a proposal vitiated by fear of the advance of fundamentalism and fanaticism?

Certainly, the religious fact and belonging to a religion are no longer issues that can be evaded. Even more in public contexts and, even more so, in schools, where the citizens of the future are trained.

It is therefore necessary to return to reasoning on these issues, starting with some questions that are posed to us today by the current French context but that will soon involve us all:

- Could a 'ostensible' religious symbol be a violation of freedom?
- How can one discern a 'ostensible' religious symbol from a 'sober' one?
- Why prohibit religious symbols but allow political or other signs?

Read more:

- <https://www.ifop.com/publication/les-enseignants-face-a-lexpression-du-fait-religieux-a-lecole-et-aux-atteintes-a-la-laicite/>
- <https://atlantico.fr/article/decryptage/laicite-l-education-nationale-a-heurte-l-iceberg-de-l-islamisme-y-a-t-il-quelqu-un-a-bord-pour-eviter-le-nauffrage-eleves->

[professeurs-sondage-ifop-derives-france-pap-ndiaye-dialogue-debat-enseigner-thomas-pierre-guylain-chevrier](#)

- <https://www.lyoncapitale.fr/actualite/la-france-des-profs-a-peur-francois-kraus-ifop>
- https://www.lemonde.fr/idees/article/2022/12/27/la-laicite-a-une-fragilite-originelle-celle-d-etre-incomprise-par-une-partie-de-la-jeunesse-francaise_6155772_3232.html

SPAIN.

The situation of religious education at school after two months of LOMLOE

By Giulia Conti

With the beginning of the new school year in Spain, the new law of the school system (the so-called LOMLOE¹, of which we have already given ample account in previous issues) has fully entered into force.

As we know, this bill has made significant changes involving all grades of Spanish public school, including regulating access to university. Among the many, there are great news regarding the students' *curriculum*, the objectives that they have to



achieve, the school organization and the teaching of religion, a subject that has aroused many reactions.

Let's see what is deducible from the LOMLOE regarding the hour of religion. First of all, the new law aims to eliminate the obligation to attend an alternative class to that of religion, which must remain a mandatory proposal in the *curriculum* of all schools; moreover, it is stated that the evaluations obtained in this field will not be counted in the academic average nor in that required by any notices of competition. What is promoted is, instead, a greater attention to practicality and transversality, with the

¹ Also known as the Celaá Law, after the Minister of Education who proposed it. It was approved on 29 December 2020.

mandatory inclusion of subjects such as "civic and ethical values"² or even education to peace, critical spirit and creativity.

Perhaps the most interesting statements emerge precisely on the teaching of ethics and civil values, until last year indicated as an alternative to the hour of religion. The new legislation includes gender equality, value and respect for diversity, development of critical spirit and a culture of non-violence. These are issues that, according to the spokesman of the union ANPE Ramón Izquierdo, should be studied and mastered by all; in this sense he appreciates the changes provided by the LOMLOE with which this teaching was made mandatory and no longer alternative to religion. Izquierdo comments: "I don't believe that students who decide to attend the religious teaching should be limited by this subject and vice versa. For example, the teaching of religion: it is not right that those who do not pursue a confessional religion, whether Catholic, Muslim, Jewish or evangelical (who are those who enjoy an agreement with the State) are forced to remain watching without doing anything". For these students, the trade unionist proposes a teaching of "culture of religions" without the confessional part, stating that "The LOMLOE leaves this door open, although it seems that not all communities will do so".

But taking into account these considerations, what do those who do not use religious teaching do? In the absence of precise indications, for now, each community has organized itself. In the Valencian Community, for example, pupils can leave school whenever possible; in Madrid there are no indications, therefore each institution handles the issue as it wants; in Galicia was established the "Competency Project", in which students will work on the development of an idea and its implementation; In Castile-Leon, a proposal was made to introduce a second language. Among the various examples, the case of Catalonia is very interesting: since September, the teaching of Islam has begun from the first grade to guarantee all 84000 Muslim pupils the right to receive religious formation. Obviously, this decision provoked a harsh controversy that sees, on the one hand, those who oppose this teaching asking for a secular and equal for all, on the other the Muslim community, which claims this right by accusing opponents of xenophobia. The results of this controversy and its effects, however, will be visible later in the school year.

Finally, what can be said about the new situation in which religious teaching is two months after the beginning of the school year? The Spanish Episcopal Conference

² In this regard it is established that it will aim to "mobilize the set of knowledge, skills, attitudes and values that allow students to become aware of their personal and cultural identity and to address fundamental ethical issues" (<https://www.rtve.es/noticias/20220908/cambios-educacion-curso-2022/2399362.shtml>).

(CEE) in its official bulletin dated 24 June 2022³, expressed dismay at the disastrous decrease in the number of religious students, which, for the first time in more than twenty years, seems to have fallen by 60%. This decrease, according to Fernando Villalba, responsible for the educational policy of the union itself, is due to "a clear process of secularization in society" which has meant that "gradually the demand for religion over the years has been reduced". Since the new school year has only just begun, we do not have enough data to confirm whether or not this decline has occurred, however, it does not seem that the trend will reverse in the coming years as with LOMLOE this discipline is ultimately destined to lose importance.

Read more:

<https://www.rtve.es/noticias/20220908/cambios-educacion-curso-2022/2399362.shtml>

https://www.huffingtonpost.es/entry/vuelta-al-cole-lomloe-profesores-padres_es_630cdf2ee4b07744a2f8eeed

https://www.eldiario.es/sociedad/prohibido-ensenar-nadie-alumnos-no-elijan-religion_1_9135582.html

https://www.abc.es/espana/abci-cataluna-empezara-impartir-clases-islam-desde-primaria-colegios-publicos-202009210927_video.html

<https://www.conferenciaepiscopal.es/comunicado-sobre-curriculos-de-religion-catolica/>

https://www.eldiario.es/sociedad/espana-paga-factura-record-clases-religion-pesar-descenso-alumnos_1_9237935.html

GERMANY.

Teaching Islam at school and/or propaganda?

By Giulia Nardini

Islamic religious education in German schools is an issue against. The doubt is that a politicised and fundamentalist version of Islam is being broadcast during Islam class. There is a suspicion that religious instruction is for political Islam organisations

³ Full text: <https://hacianuevocurriculo.educacionyculturacee.es/Nuevos-Curriculos-de-Religion>

an instrument of power and political propaganda aimed at children and young people in state schools. For years, the Ministry of Education has been looking for an institutional contact person among the various associations of moderate Islam in the territory to whom religious instruction in schools could be entrusted.

The problem is that there is still no recognised religious institution that can be entrusted with the 'teaching of Islam in schools. After all, according to the Muslim Basic Law, the State cannot offer any religious instruction, which must be left to the recognised religious communities.

This problem is felt in various regions of Germany:

In Baden-Württemberg on 19 September 2022, Education Minister Theresa Schopper visited the Friedrich-Schiller-Gymnasium in Ludwigsburg to experience on site how the religious instruction of Islam is implemented. She took part in a lesson together with the director of the Sunni School Council Foundation, Amin Rochdi, and the headmaster, Ulrich von Sanden. Afterwards, the minister said: 'The religious education of Islam in Baden-Württemberg is going well. The cooperation between the Sunni School Board Foundation and the schools is working'.



The Friedrich-Schiller-Gymnasium in Ludwigsburg has introduced Sunni-style Islamic religious education in the school year 2021/2022 in grades 5, 6, 8 and 9. In all school levels, around 50 pupils are currently taking part in religious education. "The Friedrich-Schiller-Gymnasium is a global ethical school. All cultures and religions are

welcome here and we want to promote exchange. That is why I think it is very positive that the country offers Islamic religious education and we are happy to offer these classes,' says the headmaster, Ulrich von Sanden. The cooperation with the foundation works well. He adds: 'The IRU's religious education teachers work closely with the departments of other religions and with the ethics department in the classroom and in the school's global ethics projects'.

In the 2006/2007 school year, the teaching of Sunni-inspired Islam (IRU) was introduced in Baden-Württemberg in a model project in ten primary schools. This is because the percentage of Sunni Muslims in Baden-Württemberg is estimated at

85%. In the summer of 2010, the offer was extended to secondary schools. The model project was offered until the summer of 2019.

As of 1 August 2019, the Sunni School Council Foundation was established, which is responsible for the teaching of Islam in schools and also for authorising teachers to teach (so-called *idschaza*).

"Like all federal states, we were faced with the challenge of offering well-founded Islamic religious education because we do not have a clear and recognised referent like the Christian communities. With the Sunni School Board Foundation, we therefore chose an innovative way to enable students to have a denominational religious education,' says Education Minister Theresa Schopper. The cooperation with the foundation is going well. "The feedback from the schools is very positive. Classes are now being offered in 111 schools of all grades in the south-west, and about 6,500 Muslim children and young people are using them - and the trend is clearly upwards. A list of the schools is available on the website of the Sunni School Board Foundation. (<https://km-bw.de/,Lde/startseite/service/2022-09-19-Kultusministerin-Schopper-besucht-islamischen-Religionsunterricht>)

The problem that many critics raise is that the foundation is just a fictitious construction, without grip and relevance in the local Muslim community. A year ago, Prime Minister Winfried Kretschmann, who is also the state government's commissioner for churches and religious communities, described the foundation as a transitional construction, a difficult balancing act in constitutional terms.

The same problem is perceived in the North Rhine-Westphalia region, where according to Düsseldorf-based Islamic scholar Michael Kiefer, the Imams of local mosques continue to come mainly from abroad. And the relationship between politicians and Muslim associations is often marked by distrust.

"This can be changed. - says Kiefer- To do this, the German State should put an end to the dependence of local Muslims on funding from abroad by offering local Muslim communities long-term funding. Only when this changes,' says Kiefer, 'will the often financially weak mosque communities be able to break away from the Islamist or nationalist influence of Ankara or Qatar'. Kiefer presented this proposal in his book 'Islampolitik in Deutschland' (published by the Federal Agency for Civic Education). Kiefer teaches at universities (currently at the University of Osnabrück) and works in an integration project for Muslims in Düsseldorf. For decades he has been an expert in integration theory and practice and an expert advisor to politicians. So, his word carries weight. (<https://www.welt.de/regionales/nrw/article241390425/Islamwissenschaftler-Mit-der->

[religioesen-Neutralitaet-des-Staates-ist-es-de-facto-nicht-weit-her.html?icid=search.product.onsitesearch\)](https://www.welt.de/regionales/hessen/article239644553/Wieder-islamischer-Religionsunterricht-mit-Ditib.html?icid=search.product.onsitesearch)

The struggle for the teaching of Islam also continues in Hessen schools.

Despite all controversies, in this school year (2022/2023) there will again be religious education of Islam in Hessen in cooperation with the Turkish mosque association Ditib. The state government respects the recent court decisions. However, there are still doubts as to whether the Hessen Mosque Association is sufficiently independent from the Turkish state, explained the Minister of Education during the meeting of the cultural policy committee in the state parliament. "That is why we will closely accompany the lessons with classroom visits".

In Hessen, the so-called denominational religious education of Islam was introduced together with Ditib for the school year 2013/14; initially at primary schools, and from 2017/2018 also at the first secondary schools. In April 2020, the Ministry of Education announced that it would suspend classes in the following school year, citing doubts about the association's suitability as a cooperation partner. It is questionable whether the necessary independence from the Turkish state exists. According to the ministry, a scientific evaluation in 2019 concluded that Ditib was not sufficiently independent of the Turkish state.

Ditib explained that religious education and the educational needs of Muslim students can only be fully met through denominational religious education. On this point, the State's secular teaching of Islam is insufficient and questionable under constitutional law.

The Minister of Education has said that the State Government adheres to the objective that in Hessen there should also be an offer of denominational religious education for students of the Muslim faith. (<https://www.welt.de/regionales/hessen/article239644553/Wieder-islamischer-Religionsunterricht-mit-Ditib.html?icid=search.product.onsitesearch>).

SWITZERLAND.

Teaching Islam in Switzerland

By Sara Giorgetti

Around 400,000 Muslims currently live in Switzerland. A quarter of these are concentrated in the canton of Zurich, where many are teaching youth groups or

giving private lessons, with the aim of imparting the basic knowledge of this religion to the younger generation.

Imam training at Swiss universities

Imams play an important role in Islamic communities throughout Switzerland as bridge-builders between mosques and society. In the past year, therefore, the Swiss Centre for Islam and Society (SZIG) trained 65 imams as part of the project "Muslim Organisations as Social Actors" (MOGA). Workshops were offered both for imams who have just started their work in Switzerland and for imams who have been active in Switzerland for some time. The topics of the workshops organised concerned the Swiss religious landscape, generational change and the challenges posed by the pandemic. Speakers included members of the academic community, administration, social institutions, and leading figures from Muslim communities. For the first time, seven women working as pastoral workers or teachers in mosques also participated in one of the workshops.

Many of the new imams, prompted by the workshops, chose to attend language courses to learn the official languages of the federal government and to foster integration and dialogue. The courses showed that a generational change is also taking place among imams and that there are now some second-generation imams who have grown up in Switzerland. The MOGA project was funded by the State Secretariat for Migration (SEM), the Office for Combating Racism (FRB), the Fondation Pierre et Laura Zurcher, the Ernst Goehner Foundation and the Paul Schiller Foundation. The partner was the Swiss Federation of Islamic Umbrella Organisations (FIDS) together with Albanian, Turkish and Bosnian associations and several cantonal associations.

Read more:

- https://www.unifr.ch/szig/de/agenda-news/news/27881/?utm_source=news&utm_medium=&utm_campaign=redirection_from_homehttp%3A%2F%2Fwww.unifr.ch%2Fszig%2Fde%2F
- <https://www.unifr.ch/szig/de/>
- <https://www.unifr.ch/szig/de/weiterbildung/projekt-moga/>

New training course for Imams in the Canton of Zurich

As of 2022, a new training project for imams has also been activated in Zurich in the 'Zurich Competence' course. "In this form, the project is actually new for Switzerland," says researcher Andreas Tunger from the University of Lucerne. The new continuing education focuses only on Muslims in the canton of Zurich, the course lasts longer than at the University of Fribourg



and is extremely practice-oriented. Canton Zurich offers the course because many Muslims teach as volunteers in their religious communities and should be able to complete their training if they so wish. According to Zurich government councillor Jacqueline Fehr (SP), 'Imams and other workers play a central role for the Muslim community, and thus also for society as a whole and for the state. It is therefore important that these key people have the necessary skills to do their job well.

How does the training work? The course consists of eight days, with some theoretical parts relating to pedagogy, freedom of religion and communication; content of social interest, which promotes integration and interreligious dialogue, is also conveyed. The Association of Islamic Organisations in Zurich (VIOZ) welcomed the new training opportunity.

The course was organised in cooperation between the Canton of Zurich, the Swiss Centre for Islam, the University of Fribourg and VIOZ. It is a long-term project, currently planned and financed for three years with approximately CHF 405,000, much of which was raised through charitable initiatives.

Read more:

- <https://www.srf.ch/news/schweiz/integration-von-muslimen-zuerich-will-imame-weiterbilden>
- <https://www.zh.ch/de/news-uebersicht/medienmitteilungen/2022/01/zuerich-kompetenz-imam-weiterbildung-stoesst-auf-grosses-interesse.html>

Teaching Islam to children in public schools

Since the Muslim community currently present on Swiss territory is constantly growing, the last few years have also seen an increase in requests for more organic

projects and structured courses to teach Islam to children. This would help Muslim children consolidate their identity, prevent radicalisation and teach them the basic principles of this religion correctly. But how does one study Islam? Where? And what are the challenges?

As of September 2022, with the start of the new scholastic year, a pilot project started at the school in Neuhausen, Canton Schaffhausen, in the north of Switzerland: an afternoon course on teaching Islam to fourth-grade primary school



classes. On Friday afternoons, children can attend a course at the Kirchacker school in Neuhausen to learn the basic principles of the Muslim faith. It is an open course on a voluntary basis, in which twelve children, six boys and six girls, have so far joined. The course leader, Nimetulla Veseli, is not really a teacher, but an imam from the Albanian mosque in Schaffhausen. He aims to give the children a correct picture of the Islamic religion by providing basic information in Arabic and German. Islamic religious education in a public school is very rare in Switzerland, in fact, apart from the pilot project in

Neuhausen, there is only one similar project in Kreuzlingen (TG).

The municipal councillor in charge of Neuhauser, Ruedi Meier, has emphasised several times that Islam lessons are not actually offered at school, but the school only provides the room. He also states: 'I see a positive implication in the classroom. Children can learn about Islam. Without any extremism'. The Islam classes are designed to teach Muslim children about their religion, while also discussing current issues and learning elements of Arabic. This approach allows them to read the Koran critically, without taking away time or replacing any of the compulsory morning lessons. In-depth discussion and correct interpretation of the texts are also aimed at preventing radicalisation, as it has been shown that Muslims who radicalised in the European context often had not received a good basic education. These lessons take place in a public primary school, bringing several advantages according to the local authorities: the infrastructure and spaces are more suitable for teaching than mosques, the children come from different communities and therefore bring different traditions with them. The school headmaster, Ruedi Meier, fully approves of the initiative and emphasises how this project in fact takes place in a serene atmosphere and in full transparency: "We know the teaching material, we know the people who teach. A teacher accompanies it all'. The lessons on Islam are also intended as a project to prevent radicalisation, which is why the federal government and the federal police office (fedpol) contribute to the funding.

Very different is the position of the school authorities in Schaffhausen, the main city of the canton of the same name, where the project of teaching Islam in schools has been denied, because, according to Christian Ulmer, president of the municipal school council, Buddhists, Hindus or Jews could also ask for space with the same

right, and therefore the public school cannot afford to grant space and funding for everyone.

Read more:

- <https://www.srf.ch/audio/kontext/islam-im-klassenzimmer-was-lernen-schweizer-kinder-vom-islam?id=11883411>
- <https://www.srf.ch/news/schweiz/islamunterricht-in-der-schule-in-schaffhausen-unterrichten-neu-auch-imame>
- <https://www.shn.ch/region/kanton/2022-08-10/neuhausen-und-der-islamunterricht>
- <https://www.srf.ch/audio/kontext/islam-im-klassenzimmer-was-lernen-schweizer-kinder-vom-islam?id=11883411>

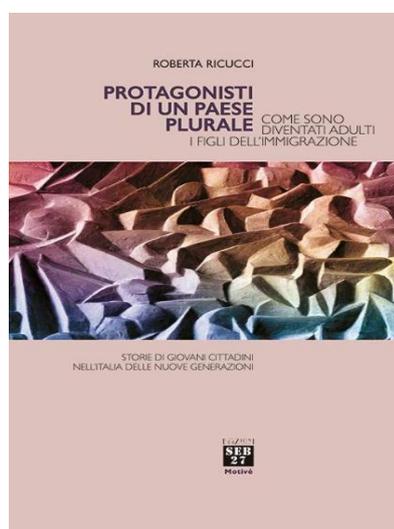
SECOND SECTION

REVIEWS

Roberta Ricucci, *Protagonisti di un Paese plurale. Come sono diventati adulti i figli dell'immigrazione*. Torino, Seb27, 2021.

By Isabella De Paolis

Protagonisti di un Paese plurale is a book, published in May 2021 and edited by Seb27, by the sociologist Roberta Ricucci⁴ who addresses an issue, both problematic and delicate, that the subtitle reveals with all frankness, *How the children of immigration have become adults*.



I would like to start from an observation on the title (and we wonder if it was the intention of the author herself to lead us to this reasoning) which, in our opinion, opens to a dual interpretation. Let us dwell on *Protagonisti di un Paese plurale*: if, on the one hand, the reference to the children of immigration mentioned in the subtitle is evident, it is equally true that 'all of us' are the protagonists of a plural country. From the educational to the academic field, from the public spaces of institutions and sport to the world of the affective sociality and that of work, each of us is, daily, within a series of socio-cultural relationships and interactions combined with plurality and pluralism, which wink to religious diversity. First of all, it is an invitation to read a book that, thanks to a skilful pen that balances data, facts and testimonies, offers a lucid picture of a generation on which "after a season full of attention [...] silence has fallen" (Ricucci)⁵. But the book also wants to be a warning, which involves us all, to reflect on legal gaps and breaches and on discriminatory and penalizing attitudes that, to date, prevent a real integration policy, effective and factual.

The text is based on an introduction and a guide to reading, by the same author, which define two essential starting points to understand the message of the book. It is highlighted, first, the need to overcome the labels *tout court* of the world of

⁴ Roberta Ricucci is Associate Professor at the Department of Cultures, Politics and Society, University of Turin and teaches Islam, migration and integration process; Sociology of international mobility; Sociology of Islam and she is member of FIERI (Forum internazionale ed europeo di ricerche sull'immigrazione).

⁵ Ricucci R. (2021). *Protagonisti di un Paese plurale. Come sono diventati adulti i figli dell'immigrazione*.

youth and, similarly, those more specifically linked to the Muslim faith or to the migratory phenomenon in favor of a more welcoming approach that considers young Muslims - who very often were born in Italy - an integral part of youth, in Italy. Secondly, Roberta Ricucci reiterates a central *topos*, that is, the one around the identity of Muslim boys and girls who, too often "to be accepted, they tend to identify with their Italian peers, at the expense, however, of an annulment of the richness of their identity"⁶.

Therefore, the author asks herself: who are the children of immigration today?

The Turin sociologist gives us, through the pages of a book very pleasant to read, the authentic testimonies, collected as part of the research that preceded the writing of the book, of young people of the Muslim faith who, without veils or trappings, told about their experiences and their condition ("We all look like gang members. Some of us have a past in a gang, but not all of us [...] At some point your father tells you: "Get ready, it's time to get out". You know the time will come, but you don't know how hard it will be, how many times you have to shut up and say nothing. We do it out of respect for our mothers. And our faith. Only this helps us. A few burst and cannot find their place. And for them the road becomes the house. It becomes the place where they are recognized and so they end up becoming part of the gangs")⁷, they have given voice to their emotions ("You never stop being an immigrant if you don't want to. It's a mental attitude [...] Yes, there is racism, but what you have inside you is stronger")⁸, they spread the shared commitment ("We do a lot of good things for the community, we want to link the association and the mosque to the territory. We organize activities for Muslim families...")⁹, they revealed their fears ("They rarely ask me what job I want to do. Maybe they take it for granted that the immigrant children have no ideas.")¹⁰, they showed their pride ("But do you feel more African or do you feel more Italian? Afro-Italian, because I'm sick of being told what I am or what I am not. I'm too African to be Italian and I'm too Italian to be African. I am Afro-Italian, because the world has changed")¹¹.

And, as in a musical score, alongside the accounts of the *protagonists* - in addition to statistical data in the form of clear and explanatory tables and histograms - there are the acute and punctual reflections of the author who wonders about the lack of attention of adults to a generation that, between denied rights and feeble concessions, between *ius soli* and *ius sanguinis*, is approaching the academia or

⁶ Ivi, p. 13.

⁷ Ivi, p. 93.

⁸ Ivi, p. 20.

⁹ Ivi, p. 65.

¹⁰ Ivi, p. 52.

¹¹ Ivi, p. 125.

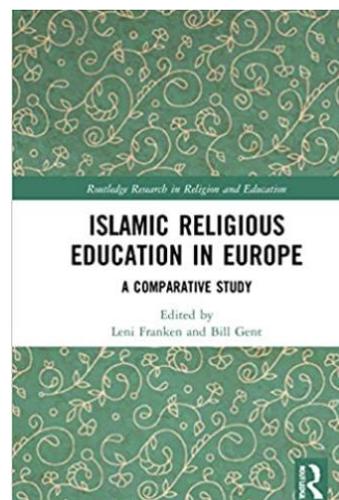
the world of work. Both these worlds, however, are unprepared to welcome them and the evident criticalities are, as Roberta Ricucci points out several times, due to the fact that they have not considered them as priority interlocutors. It is, therefore, to engage at a collective, organized and programmatic level in what the sociologist defines as "one of the most important challenges facing politics and civil society". The world of fashion marketing¹², albeit shyly, is already taking steps and we hope that the debate on this issue will not be crystallized in the scientific sphere but will open to the declination and implementation of effective and stimulating policy strategies, for all the actors involved.

In this regard, it would be interesting to give voice also to the representatives of the civil society who, daily, deal with young Muslims and young people. From the operators of the public administrations to the teachers and researchers of the academia, to the non Muslim faith peers, to the sports educators we could draw interesting experiences, impressions and reflections of emotional involvement which like the backstage talk could contribute to an even more accurate overview.

Leni Franken e Bill Gent, *Islamic Religious Education in Europe: A Comparative Study*, London, Routledge, 2021.

By Isabella De Paolis

The text, edited by Leni Franken¹³ and Bill Gent¹⁴, is a recent contribution to the comparative analysis of the religious education in Europe that, in a particular way, focuses attention on Islam. The starting point of the research activity, concretized in this volume, was born from the reflection on the awareness of the importance, recognized and shared by present and plural societies, about the challenge that concerns the teaching of the Islamic faith and that aims to find a way where Muslim



¹² The reference is to the current advertising campaign promoted by Benetton 2, on social media and magazines: <https://www.instagram.com/p/Ch-FPDitc9W/?igshid=YmMyMTA2M2Y=>.

¹³ Leni Franken is Senior Researcher and Teaching Assistant at the university of Antwerp, Belgium.

¹⁴ William Anthony Gent (1949-2020) taught for 15 years in Birmingham before moving into advisory and inspection work in the London Borough of Redbridge (1988-2008). As editor of the journal of the National Association of Teachers of RE (NATRE), he was awarded the prestigious Shap Award in 2012 for its contribution to education in religions. In 2012, he also chaired the national expert panel during the opening phase of the RE Council's review of RE in England. As an Associate Fellow of the Warwick Religions and Education Research Unit at the university of Warwick, much of his work

communities, on the one hand, and the political world, education and stakeholders, on the other, can walk together.

The book opens with an introduction written with four hands by the editors - and with a subtitle that takes us back to Kierkegaard "With Fear and Trembling"¹⁵ - which highlights how controversial and problematic the scenario of religious education in Europe is and, in support of this, lists the most recent projects and the most well-known initiatives carried out at community level. Initiatives and projects that, supported and coordinated by European networks that have disseminated data and good practices, have addressed the critical issues between religious education and the evolving lay states, stressing the need to ensure a constructive dialogue within a matter of strategic importance for our pluralistic societies.

The editors continue, therefore, with the description of the text's main aim, starting from the consideration that the population of Islamic faith is expected to grow in Europe - for the well-known causes related to migration, family reunification, refugee crises and wars - and that the current and future scenario, in the field of religious education, imposes an adequate literacy *on Islam* and *about Islam* "since Islam is in the most European nation-states the second-largest religious group, there is also an urgent need for Islamic literacy, non-only for not Muslims, but also for Muslims who are raised in Europe but are often ignorant of their traditions"¹⁶.

The framework within which European countries are compared, albeit with different premises and approaches, has a common denominator, which is to consider, in state schools and not, a constructive and integrated dialogue between the model of religious education *tout court* and the teaching of the Islamic religion, with all the critical issues related to the management of the phenomenon of radicalisation towards Muslims and, consequently, to the promotion of a feeling of equality and equity that must arise between the school benches.

The first part of the book deals with the teaching of the Islamic religion in 14 European countries where the Islamic religion is recognized and where there is a total Islamic presence equal to or greater than 5% of the census population (with the sole exception of Finland which does not reach 5%) that is, Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Denmark, England, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Norway, Netherlands, Sweden and Switzerland. These are true reports of individual countries where, according to an equal and shared model, a general framework of relations between Islamic communities is presented: the secular state and the confessional

in recent years has involved research into aspects of Islamic education for which he had a growing international reputation.

¹⁵ Fear and Trembling (original Danish title: Frygt og Bæven) is a philosophical work by Søren Kierkegaard, published in 1843 under the pseudonym Johannes de Silentio.

¹⁶ In Franken L. and Gent B. (2021). (eds.). *Islamic Religious Education in Europe: A Comparative Study*. London, Routledge, p. 6.

faith with historical hints that help the reader to better understand the individual specificities; the teaching model of the Islamic religion or curricula, textbooks, teacher training and supervision of central ministerial bodies; current issues, noteworthy initiatives and future perspectives. All this is accompanied by final notes, always proposed for each country, which refers to bibliographical indications and very useful websites. If, at times, this section could be boring because of a recurring reference to numbers, data and percentages that, however, provide the reader with an authentic and impartial photograph, it gives way, at the same time, to sociological considerations that, highlighting topical issues that now call for the use of pedagogical, educational-formative or normative interventions, now lapping on unresolved but evergreen philosophical-religious issues, now plead the cause of the contrast of discriminatory and stigmatizing phenomena, involves the reader to a critical analysis. The comparative approach of this research stimulates a comparison with one's own country of origin, residence, or study, and urges the reader (who does not necessarily have to be an expert) to pay attention to evaluating specific connotations, challenges and critical issues through a clear, organized and linear presentation of the content. It should be noted that the study does not provide for the analysis of countries such as Turkey, Bosnia and Herzegovina, with an Islamic majority population or Montenegro and North Macedonia, which respectively have a Muslim population of 20% and 30%.

The second part of the volume offers a series of scientific contributions on the teaching of Islam in the European schools according to a multi-disciplinary approach that, by providing to speak with a qualified and skilled reader, raises queries and open questions relating to current and controversial issues. It is highlighted the need to frame the topic of Islam in Europe now as a transnational and global phenomenon, now as an intercultural claim arguing for the guarantee of the principle of equality *tout court*, now as an educational need that calls for a normative-legal perspective that recognizes the requests between public and private, secular and religious, confessional and non-confessional entities of the contemporary plural world. Moreover, the urge to overcome, through a literacy of Islamic culture and religion, the stereotypical, impartial and misleading but unfortunately still shared vision in Europe of a patriarchal, violent and anti-liberal Islam is reiterated. In this regard, the Norwegian historian of religions Marianne Hafnor Bøe refers, in her contribution¹⁷, to a literature of post-colonial movements, both of young Muslim activists and of Islamic women, which opens up new challenges and new objectives. A pedagogical perspective and the possible directions that politics, school and universities could take together are raised in the last three essays of this section¹⁸ through a series of questions and doubts that open up to interpretations and deconstructions of the issues proposed in the various contributions of the text that are moved by a common denominator, or the awareness that only a dialogue able

¹⁷ In Franken L. and Gent B., *Islamic Religious Education in Europe: A Comparative Study*. London, Routledge, 2021, pp. 272-75.

¹⁸ In Franken L. and Gent B., *Islamic Religious Education in Europe: A Comparative Study*. London, Routledge, 2021, pp. 276-90.

to negotiate and to literate religious and cultural diversity could lay the foundations for a cohesive, democratic and inclusive society.

The volume closes with a plea by Leni Franken who suggests, considering a post-secular society, to assess the strengths and weaknesses of teaching 'about Islam' and teaching 'into Islam' and in this regard she mentions authoritative scholars to be referred to.

The last paragraph is devoted to underlining the theoretical approach of this study, which does not seek to propose an *'empirical focus, containing qualitative and quantitative data'*¹⁹, and therefore invites experts in the field to consider it and to write about it. It is to be hoped, therefore, that the Belgian scholar's exhortation will be received as soon as possible, so as to be able to rely also on the authentic contribution of those concerned, pupils and students, parents and teachers, publishers and inspectors, stakeholders and institutional authorities and in order to be able to count on a comparative and complete study of the teaching of the Islamic religion in Europe that will be exhaustive in all of its parts.



Andrea Lehner-Hartmann, Karin Peter, Helena Stockinger, *Religion betrifft Schule*, Kohlhammer, 2022.

By Sara Giorgetti

The religious situation in Austria has undergone great changes in recent years. The number of those practising religions other than Christianity is constantly growing. As recent surveys show, the religious spectrum is becoming increasingly broad. This diversity of worldviews is reflected in Austrian society and schools. For this reason, Catholic theologians Andrea Lehner-Hartmann, Karin Peter and Helena Stockinger, professors at the universities of Vienna and Linz, have produced a

¹⁹ In Franken L. and Gent B., *Islamic Religious Education in Europe: A Comparative Study*. London, Routledge, p. 304.

book in which they address the issue of how a multi-ethnic society can be reflected in the school world.

"Religion Affects School" addresses numerous issues: the authors deal with the use of religious symbols at school, the issue of clothing, dietary rules, but also humour and its limits. The book aims to make a concrete contribution to the topic of the relationship between religions and schools. The stated aim of the volume is 'to promote a well-founded and constructive approach to religion and religiosity in schools'. Lehner-Hartmann, Peter and Stockinger address concrete issues and frictional contexts of everyday school life, trying to make theoretical considerations tangible with different examples.

For a more in-depth review on the volume: "Störfaktor oder Bereicherung: Religion in Schulen", by Irene Klissenbauer in <https://religion.orf.at/stories/3214763/>.

Bombelli M., *L'albero, le radici e le fronde. Itinerario storico-filosofico delle religioni*, Aracne, Roma 2018.

See: <https://www.mariobombelli.eu/lalbero-le-radici-e-le-fronde-dettaglio/>

Bombelli M., *Disincanto della religione, ingenuità della ragione? Dalla esclusione, al riconoscimento, alla correlazione*, Mimesis, Sesto San Giovanni 2021.

Review in *Rivista Studi Ecumenici di Venezia* available at: <https://www.mariobombelli.eu/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/studiEcumenici.pdf>

NEW RESEARCH OPPORTUNITIES

Call for papers

By Sara Giorgetti and Martina Cittadini



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Thirteenth International Conference on Religion & Spirituality in Society. School of Theology, Laboratory of Pedagogy and Religious Education, National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, 20-22 June 2023:

Since 2011, 'Religion in Society' has been exploring the relationship between religion and society, looking to build an epistemic community that enables connections that transcend disciplinary, geographical and cultural boundaries.

The Thirteenth International Conference on Religion and Spirituality in Society focuses on the theme 'Religion in the Public Sphere: From the Ancient Years to the Post-Modern Era'. Researchers from religious studies, political science, theology, education, cultural studies, historical studies, philosophy, and law are invited to explore the role of religion in the public sphere from ancient times to the post-modern era, the construction of identity, the development of narratives, legal issues and the contribution of religion to culture and education.

Read more: <https://religioninsociety.com/2023-conference>



La religione civile. Enrico Castelli Institute for Philosophical Studies, Philosophy Archive XCI - 1/2023:

Issue 1/2023 of the 'Archives of Philosophy' is dedicated to the subject of civil religion from a historical-philosophical perspective. The aim is to address the question of the relationship between religion and politics in history, declining it in two aspects: the necessity of religion as an element that guarantees peace in a society and the sacralisation of the forms and institutions of politics. This call for papers is aimed at contributions that address these issues with particular reference to authors or philosophical currents of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Read more: <https://www.istitutoenricocastelli.it/2022/07/archivio-di-filosofia-xci-1-2023/>

New and Minority Religions, Crises, and Resilience: Overcoming Inner and External Obstacles, Centre for Studies on New Religions (CESNUR), Vilnius, Lithuania, June 21-24 2023:

New and/or minority religions are always at the leading edge of social experimentation in various contexts, from teaching to everyday practices to legal issues. The Pandemic has brought the world to a standstill for almost two years and religions have had to adapt to the new reality.

Researchers are invited to discuss how new or minority religions face social and political crises, adapt to them, overcome internal and external challenges and demonstrate resilience.

Read more: <https://cesnur.org/2023/vilnius-cfp.htm>.

MONOGRAPHIC SECTION

The teaching of the alternative subject to the Catholic religion in
Italian schools

Interview with Roberto Grèndene, national secretary of the UAAR

By Francesco Carta and the editorial staff

On 3 December 2022 we met Roberto Grèndene, national secretary of the UAAR, the Union of Rationalist Atheists and Agnostics, with whom we spoke about secularism, religious instruction and alternative time.



[watch the video interview on our website: [link](#). To read the full interview, see the Italian version in this issue of ERENews].

Interview with Professor Michele Madonna, Professor of Canon Law and Ecclesiastical Law

By Federica Candido, Martina Cittadini, Giulia Conti, Sara Giorgetti Filippo Mariani and Michele Trabucco



Michele Madonna is a professor of Canon Law and Ecclesiastical Law at the University of Pavia. In the interview with him we tried to clarify, from a juridical point of view, the historical phases and the most important legislative steps concerning the teaching of the Catholic religion in the Italian state school, in particular we tried to shed light on what has often been defined as the 'matter of nothing': the alternative teaching to the IRC.

[To read the full interview, see the Italian version in this issue of ERENews].

Interview with Antonello Giannelli, president of ANP (Italy).

Edited by Michele Trabucco, Federica Candido, Sara Giorgetti

We interviewed Antonello Giannelli, president of ANP Italy, on the issue of alternative teaching to IRC (teaching of “ora alternativa”). The ANP is the most representative trade union association of school headmasters in Italy.



[To read the full interview, see the Italian version in this issue of ERENews].

Interview with Cristina Costarelli, headmaster and president of ANP Lazio.

Edited by Michele Trabucco and Filippo Mariani

We interviewed Professor Cristina Costarelli, headmistress of the Liceo Newton in Rome and president of ANP Lazio, on the issue of alternative teaching to IRC. The ANP is the most representative trade union association of school headmasters in Italy.

[To read the full interview, see the Italian version in this issue of ERENews].



Interview with Ivano Mariconti, president of Co.Ge.D. (Coordinamento Genitori Democratici)

By Giulia Conti, in cooperation with Martina Cittadini and Filippo Mariani



We interviewed Professor Ivano Mariconti, president of Co.Ge.D. (Coordinamento Genitori Democratici) in Lodi and religion teacher at a high school in the same city.

We asked him a few questions on the issue of alternative teaching to IRC, to investigate this delicate question not only from the point of view of teachers, but also from those of parents.

[To read the full interview, see the Italian version in this issue of ERENews].

Interview with Laura Marzi based on her novel: *La materia alternativa*, Mondadori, 2022

By Federica Candido, in cooperation with Sara Giorgetti and Michele Trabucco

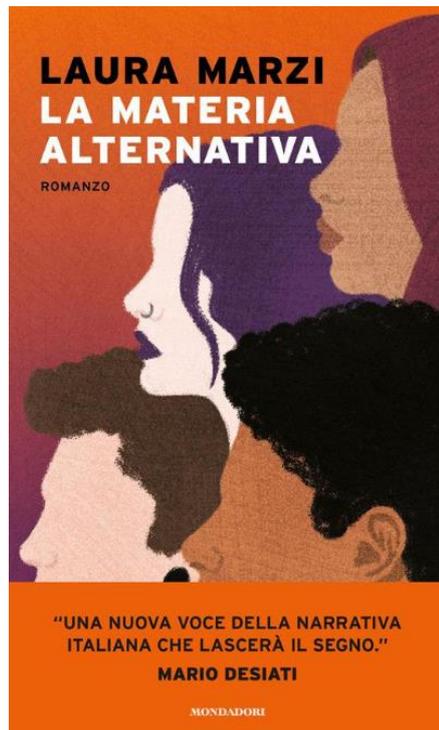


Laura Marzi is the author of the novel *La materia alternativa*, a story inspired by her concrete experience as an alternative-subject teacher in a Roman high school. The book offers a very interesting (and authentic) insight into the world of schooling and into the atavistic precariousness that characterises it; moreover, the story of the protagonist and her students, whom we follow as the school year progresses,

gives us a snapshot of the social, religious and ideological complexity that runs through our societies.

We asked Laura Marzi some questions about the alternative subject.

[To read the full interview, see the Italian version in this issue of ERENews].



SPACE FOR IN-DEPTH ANALYSIS

By Giulia Conti

Teaching religions at schools: Portugal

School and religions

In Portugal, as in other countries, families can choose between public (essentially free), private (secular or not) and international schools. The school curriculum is structured into five levels, some compulsory others optional: *jardins de infancia* (kindergarten), *ensino básico* (basic education), *ensino secundário* (secondary education), *cursos de especialização tecnológica* (post-secondary education for those who have obtained a technical degree), *ensino superior universitário or politécnico* (academic training or polytechnic).

As in Italy, in Portugal the teaching of religion is partly curricular, this means that it is offered compulsorily by the State but can be chosen optionally by the parents or the pupil. The guidelines for religious teaching, whose correct name is "Religious and Moral Education" (*Educação Moral e Religiosa*), are dictated by the Portuguese Bishops' Conference and integrated into national school legislation. Moreover, the contents of the lectures and the professors in charge are trained and hired by the diocese but, if they work for a public school, they remain salaried by the State.



Evolution of religious teaching and new proposals

The legislation of 1971 defined Roman Catholicism as the official religion of the Portuguese Nation with all that ensued for teaching in schools. Today, however, the status of religious education in Portugal has profoundly changed, but to understand the current situation we must proceed step by step. The first changes concerning the religious question occurred with the Constitution of 1976, in which no reference was made to any particular religion (as had happened previously granting Christianity a privileged position) and guaranteed freedom of worship by prohibiting any kind of

persecution. As regards religious instruction in schools, Article 43 excluded from public education any religious orientation and prohibited public school from being confessional.

Thus, with the Constitution of 1976, the relations between the State and the Church were clearly delimited, forbidding the former any religious positioning and excluding from scholastic teaching any reference to Catholic doctrine: religion, considered a private matter, could be freely taught and spread, but not included in the state educational system.

Things changed again with Decree Law No. 323/83, by which the teaching of Catholic religion and morals had been reintroduced into public institutions. However, following some protests about the document's unconstitutionality, in 1987 Portugal has finally reached the current situation: the government is responsible for offering the student religious instruction at school with non-compulsory attendance, based on the religious orientation declared by his or her guardians. In other words, religion remains a private matter, but the State provides its teaching according to the guiding norms dictated by religious institutions.

Today, the arrival of immigrants from different regions of the world makes the Portuguese society increasingly diverse but the Portuguese school organization still does not follow this new socio-cultural dynamic, however, there are several proposals for the renewal of religious teaching. Among the most interesting, there is certainly the hypothesis of a new teaching formulated by the author and professor of Religious Studies Paulo Mendes Pinto. He proposes to replace the existing religious teaching with a "teaching of religions" fully integrated into the school curriculum and based on the assumption of the cultural and religious diversity that characterizes Portugal and Europe, having regard to the knowledge of religions which is a prerequisite for the intellectual and civic formation of Portuguese students. What is fundamental for Pinto in this new conception is to offer to all, believers and non-believers, the knowledge of the role of religions in society and the dynamics that their presence and interaction entails in it²⁰.

Read more:

Website of the Ministry of National Education:

<https://www.portugal.gov.pt/pt/gc21/area-de-governo/educacao>

Decreto-Lei 323/83:

<https://dre.tretas.org/dre/11955/decreto-lei-323-83-de-5-de-julho>

Regulations on religious instruction of the Directorate General for Education:

<http://www.dge.mec.pt/educacao-moral-e-religiosa>

²⁰ P. M. Pinto, *Para uma Ciência das Religiões em Portugal: cidadania & cultura*, Lisboa 2005.

Program of religious teaching in schools proposed by the Episcopal Conference:
http://www.dge.mec.pt/sites/default/files/ficheiros/eb_emrc_programa_novo.pdf

A LOOK AT THE CURRENT EVENTS

Considerations and in-depth analysis by single members of the editorial staff on current issues and how they are reflected in the school world.

Keywords: Ministry of Education and Merit, Giuseppe Valditara, IRC

A new Minister, a new Ministry

By Filippo Mariani

The last October the Meloni Government has been declared Giuseppe Valditara as the new Minister of Public Education, renaming the Ministry *Ministero dell'Istruzione e del Merito* (Ministry of Education and Merit). He has been professor of Roman Law at Turin University and in 2000 was the councillor for Education in Milan Province, in addition to being the supervisor of the School and University Reformation by Minister Gelmini (Berlusconi IV Government, 2008-11). Even then, the idea of “merit” was already existing in Valditara’s beliefs. In a 2014’s article²¹, Valditara stated the possibility of applying in Italy a theory debated at that time in American society: to illegitimate the laws against teachers’ dismissal and for the



evaluation of their professional value. The idea explained in the article, partly accomplished in Valditara’s amendment to the Law 240 (Reformation of University) is to recognize the most deserving teachers by allocating a salary increase. Increases that must be accumulated in an «excellency fund» in the event that they were not delivered. Nonetheless, the

concept of merit explained by the new Government seems to concern the students as well. In the Fdl programme *Appunti per un programma conservatore*²², it is stated that «the progressive school has enlarged the inequity and betrayed the Constitutional article 34 concerning the talented and deserving people». Based on that document, the target seems to be a meritocratic school system, by prizing and enhancing the excellencies and the capacities of the single person. While doing so, the hope is to not change the Educational one to a system that is not offering the

²¹ <https://www.ilfattoquotidiano.it/2014/06/19/riforma-delluniversita-merito-e-istruzione-possono-convivere/1033063/>.

²² <https://www.immoderati.it/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/572496616-Appunti-Per-Un-Programma-Conservatore.pdf>.

same opportunities to everyone, not safeguarding fragile children. They could be left behind as less “talented” or “deserving”. Gives us food for thought the Minister’s assertions at the tv programme *A cena da Maria Latella* (25 November 2022)²³, where he stated that he will send a letter to the parents to help them to choose the right school for their children, basing the choice on the Regional industries needs and on the salary proposed. Building on this, the new school of “merit” seems to be very similar to the meritocratic but strongly class-based school of the post-World War II: that same school described and opposed by Don Milani, overcome with a more inclusive and welcoming educational system. Going back to the idea of “merit”, Valditara oppose often the concept of “penalty” to it, building a combination that appears to be not very suitable for Education. For instance, taking the previously mentioned article, he suggested to not perceive the teachers’ professional evaluation as a «penalty concerning civil servants», but as a «promotion for who is properly working». The “penalty” should be applied to the students as well, to correct unaccountable behaviours. On the 21st of November 2022, during the event *Italia Direzione Nord – A true Event*²⁴, the Minister stated that the school must provide «costs» for those students who are not respecting the rules. These penalties could be also community services, «even humbling themselves, hurray for a fundamental element in the children’s growth as the humiliation», so that children can become more responsible e respectful about the school community. Later on, Valditara recanted his assertion, stating that he was referring to the concept of «humility» instead of humiliation. Nonetheless, it is difficult to place the previous declaration in an educational context.

Following this overview, Giuseppe Valditara’s political ideas and statements seem not to be compatible with an inclusive and welcoming school. The debate on the teaching of the Catholic religion risks not being handled by the new Ministry – not with substantial modification goals. The Minister’s closeness to the Legionari di Cristo (he has been the Law faculty of the European University of Legionari di Cristo of Rome principal), such as the celebration of organisations like “Pro Vita & Famiglia” for his election as Minister of Public Education, suggest a catholic identity not interested in reforming IRC (Catholic Religion Education). The effort of Valditara’s political area against the LGBTQ+ “propaganda” in schools implies that the new Government has probably any interest in creating a school subject similar to “ethic education” to teach equality and respect of diversity. Similarly, the new Minister could be not interested in building a school subject concerning all the religions, or other religions’ teaching complementary to IRC. In accordance with the government values of God, Homeland and Family, Valditara wrote articles regarding the prosecution of Christians in the contemporary world and promoting the urge for a

²³ <https://video.sky.it/news/cronaca/video/a-cena-da-maria-latella-quinta-puntata-795346>.

²⁴ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-K8cNwqHvc&t=1300s>.

naval blockade against immigration. In 2016, he published the book *The Roma Empire destroyed by immigrants. How the migration flows have broken down the most majestic State of Ancient Times*. It is hard to see the possibility to open a debate on IRC, considering that Catholicism seems to be perceived as a core value of our society menaced by foreign cultures and beliefs. Moreover, Valditara has always been a proponent of the unique teacher in the schools, a concept that could open a new series of problems regarding both religious and alternative teaching. Certainly, it is too early to evaluate the Government's actions. Currently, the premises for the school of "merit" seem to not be compatible with the school of equal rights and equal opportunities.

Read more:

- <https://www.ilfattoquotidiano.it/blog/gvalditara/>
- <https://www.ilfattoquotidiano.it/2015/04/20/immigrazione-le-politiche-italiane-hanno-fallito-occorre-il-blocco-navale/1605616/>
- <https://www.ilfattoquotidiano.it/2014/06/19/riforma-delluniversita-merito-e-istruzione-possono-convivere/1033063/>
- <https://www.ilfattoquotidiano.it/2014/11/15/rom-come-ripensare-lintegrazione/1212345/>
- <https://www.ilfattoquotidiano.it/2015/04/07/kenya-e-le-stragi-di-cristiani-nel-mondo-il-silenzio-degli-intellettuali/1570670/>
- <https://www.legionaridicristo.it/>
- <https://eventi.ambrosetti.eu/lifesciences2019/speakers/giuseppe-valditara/>