

# **The framework for RE in**

## **Greek schools**

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According to the article 16 of the Greek Constitution (1975), a central aim of public education is “to develop the religious consciousness of the pupils”. Article 3 of the Constitution states that the prevailing religion on Greece is the Eastern Orthodox Church of Christ. Therefore, the Constitution is often interpreted as obliging the state to provide RE within the Eastern Orthodox dogma. Moreover, the Church of Greece has the right to be heard in state education matters related to religion and the Church. After 2001 Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs as well as experts started to interpret the article 16 as expressing the state’s obligation to provide pupils with an education that develops their religious awareness of any religion.

The framework for RE in Greek schools is provided by the basic Law for Education (1566/1985) which orders that all students on a mandatory basis have to have been taught the ‘authentic’ tradition of the Orthodox Church (article 1, paragraph 1). Besides article 13, paragraphs 1-2 of the Constitution guarantee the basic right to freedom of religion and associate it with the development of religious consciousness. Moreover, according to the Law 1566/1985 State has to provide RE to any religious community who wants to organize its RE on condition that 5 students would apply for it. Since 2013 only Catholic community was a case in point for that and in their case they only applied to have their RE teachers though they have followed after 2003 the official Curriculum and textbooks of Greek RE. There are a number of Muslims including migrants and the Muslim minorities in Thrace (North Greece), together with minorities of other religions. The only numbers that are official are from the native Muslims who live in Thrace and are recognized as a minority according to the Lausanne Treaty (1923). They are entitled to their bilingual educational system which is attended by 11.197 (2003) students. At the same time an increasing number of Muslim adolescents register at Greek Secondary schools in Thrace because the

Minority schools could not satisfy all the applications due to their limited capacities. For them, since 2013, Greek Ministry of education has, also taken a step further to introduce an optional Islamic RE in the Greek state schools of Western Thrace, where the Muslim minority lives. In accordance with the RE Curriculum, the Islamic RE will consist of two hours lessons per week. One hour of reading the Qur'anic texts in Arabic, and one hour devoted to the class on Islam in Greek.

Of course, every student has a right to be exempted from RE through an application, which must be signed by the two parents, arguing that he has reasons related to other doctrine, religion or religious consciousness, in general.

### **RE in Greece (2016-17)**

Today RE is an integral part of education, an ordinary subject in the curriculum. In primary school RE starts at the age of 9 (Year 3) and continues for 4 years until the age of 12 (Year 6) for two hours per week. So it is in secondary school (Gymnasium) that RE is taught in all three years. In fact, the state provides seven years of RE for all students as have all the previous curricula of compulsory education since 1985. There are 3 more years of RE in Lyceum (2 hours per week in the two first classes and 1 in the third) and 2 years in Vocational education (1 hour per week in the first two classes).

The school year of 2016-17 RE in Greece has been on the edge of a big change. The new Curriculum of 2016-17 started to be developed in 2009 and firstly was implemented as a pilot scheme for 3 years, from 2011 to 2014. Finally became a law and applied to Primary and Secondary schools in August of 2016 for the school year of 2016-17.

The new Curriculum of 2016 is explicitly infused with European RE approaches although there is a basic layer of a denominational RE. The basic aim of the curriculum is religious literacy so it is focused on educating citizens so as to develop religious consciousness, to enable individuals to begin to make sense of conflicting and contradictory understandings of the universe and for their place and to be open to dialogue and tolerant of diversity. At the same time 'Learning about' and 'Learning from', terms, derived from the British pedagogical and epistemological experience as well as constructivist approach are used in the rationale of the curriculum. In fact the orientation of the new curriculum differs in terms of curriculum developing. Its

provision has changed from a curriculum focused on content and aims to one oriented on process and results and as a product of emancipated teachers dominated by representation of learning actions and interactions that facilitate students to enquire, construct and evaluate knowledge by themselves.

The basic criteria for the actions and interactions that the curriculum seeks to promote are:

- to contextualise knowledge with everyday life,
- to support the acquisition of knowledge together with its implementation,
- to present current issues, related to students' lives

by active learning procedures in developing their own coherent patterns of experience and knowledge.

As a result, the impact of the particular criteria is significant on the content of RE. The content of RE remains basically Christianity (Orthodoxy and other Churches and denominations), religions of the book (Judaism and Islam) and other world religions (Hinduism, Buddhism). Nevertheless the constructors of the Curriculum officially declared that the new Curriculum in any case is not confessional or catechetical. The new curriculum not only is still founded on the Orthodox theology and tradition but also its aim implicitly is to construct open minded religious identity.

Finally, to sum up the current Greek situation, it is vital to comment on the basis of the pedagogical approach to RE. Until 2016, when the new Curriculum for RE started to be applied, textbooks were dominated the everyday school practice since the previous Curriculum of 2003 remained a content-focused designed Curriculum containing basically content derived more from 'Theology' (related to a particular religion and faith) instead of 'Religious studies' (related to different religions, cultures and traditions). Despite the aforementioned situation in RE only a few parents wish to withdraw their children from RE even though it is possible by law and historically this has been the case with some Muslims and Jehovah's Witness parents in particular.

During 2016-17 State after the opposition of the Orthodox Church and a number of RE teachers decided to move on to some changes to the Curriculum, in particular as regards the content and to publish for every grade 'student educational material' a short of textbook to help efficiently the educational process in the classroom since such a need appeared persistently during the first year of the implementation.

Concluding, the new curriculum for RE has a main characteristics It basically provides a basic constructivist approach to teaching and learning from and about religions focusing on learning not on teaching. But it is still a Christian Curriculum focusing on Religious Studies more than religious Studies. The study of world religions is estimated at 10% of the whole RE curriculum. The content remains basically Christian in Greek compulsory education and the step forward to Religious Studies is slight.

It is, however, the most radical change in RE after the establishment of the Greek State in 1832 due its pedagogical perspective and its philosophical basis of the curriculum.