RELIGIOUS EDUCATION POTENTIAL TOOL FOR SOCIAL COHESION

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Contemporary Europe

- What is the situation in contemporary Europe?

Celebrate beautiful European diversity!

- The contemporary countries which are faced with the pluralism and its problems are entailed the following question:

- **How is it possible that the peoples with different religion coexist in one country?**

- The secularization of the public institutions have started in the beginning of the 19th century.

- **The social cohesion** and the integration of the society, especially of those with a multicultural and multi-ethnic sign, mean **achieving a high degree** of **stability and safety** in the state and the region.

- The process of social integration is additionally burdened in the multicultural and multi-ethnic societies due to the population structure and their different culture and ethnic communities, which contain different value systems and different norms for social behaviour.

- The aim of this complex process is to **strengthen the social cohesion** and **the integration** of the members of the special groups in the society, and at the same time preserving their identity. These two seemingly contradictory processes can be synthetized if there is a **climate of tolerance and intercultural dialogue.**

- The question about the unifying factor is the key question for Europe today.
- Which one is the **cohesion factor?** What is the unifying thing?

- The linking element in a colourful collective as EU has many possible answers:

1. One of them **is the return of the basics of the religious identity** as a common value and homogenised substance. If the national component loses or cannot be the linking element, but is the element that divides, than the religion/Christianity, the linking through the religious principles and the mutual things for the majority are entailed as an objective possibility.

2. The second possibility is contained in the **redefinition of secularism** or as Hantington calls it "**a cosmopolitan alternative**". This alternative is entailed mostly from demographic and economic reasons. Europe becomes older and the need for new labourers in the future will radically increase in the future. In order to survive in the competence with the other developed countries and regions, it will have to import work force from the undeveloped non-European countries and regions.

- Some European governments believe that the **multi-religious diversity and the education** represent a potential tool for social cohesion.

- The British and the European studies (REDCo, 2008), show that the children who have some religious education are more tolerant than those with no religious education.

- **The influence of the religion over the social cohesion** and the development of the values has been researched in many western democracies.

- For example, the question "Can religion act as a pillar of humanity?" will have a positive answer by May (2006); Diez de Velasco (2007); Miedema (2006); Nord (2007); de Souza (2006); Yablon (2007), Selcuk (2006) and Jackson and O'Grady (2007). These scientists support the argument that the learning of religion offers a bridge that connects the religion and the education, and it offers a promotion of responsible citizenship.

- negatively answered by Onfray (2007), DaWkins (2006), Harris (2006) and Hitchens (2007) or those that aren't familiar with the moral in religion.

THE ROLE OF THE RELIGION IN THE CONTEMPORARY WORLD

In the contemporary world is happening an ongoing revival or reconstruction process of the religions.

This revival is visible through:

- the increase of the new religious movements (especially fundamental and national);

- the crystallization of new diaspora – communities with strong religious identities;

- the deep transformations in the framework of the large religions;

- and the increasing importance of the religious components in the Constitution of the contemporary public sphere.

- One of the emphasised and discussed fields related to the religion and the state in Europe is the **educational system**. In contemporary Europe the accent on **secularity is continuous as a characteristic of the educational process**.

- The **schools are centres of disagreements** isn't surprising, because since the creation of the modern state, the **schools have served as one of the most important tools for modification and maintenance of the social cohesion and the creation of "common citizenship"**.

- The school system nowadays should consider that the contemporary societies (the people) **need to be educated about religion and they should have religious education if they want to be free.**
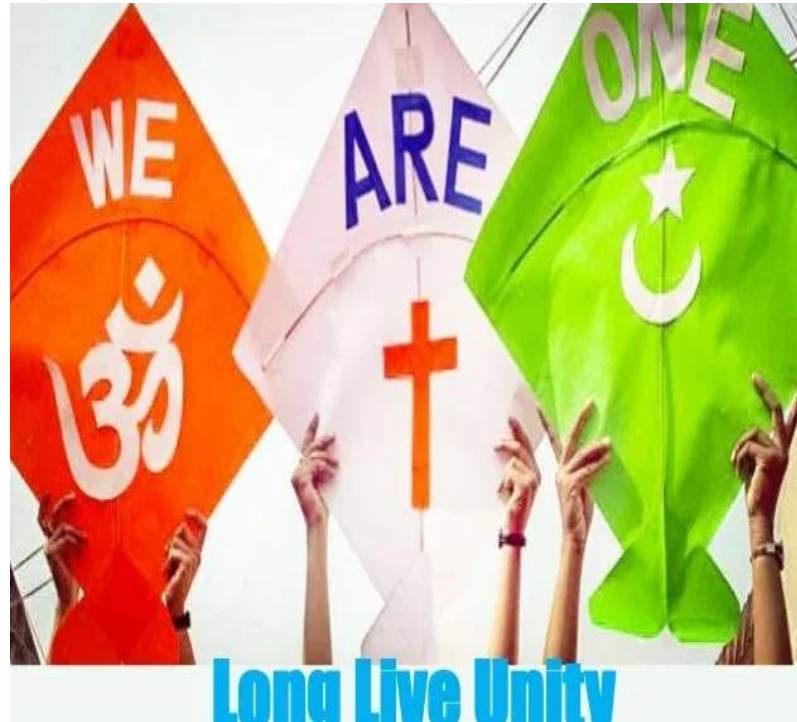
- The religious identities will be recreated in the religious and in the state schools with the aim to return the social cohesion.

- If we consider the teaching of religion in the state schools, it is clear that the deduction will be that all around Europe (including France, Russia and the other post communist countries) is believed that the religious teaching should be part of education. The models are different and go **from confessional teaching in one religion to non-confessional teaching in other religions.** The differences aren't small, but in both cases the old dogma which obliged the church and the family (not the schools) on religious education seems obsolete. Even the secular country cannot allow itself to ignore **the importance of religion as an instrument for understanding the contemporary world.**

- We need a new concept of secularism that will reflect in multicultural and multi-religious societies.
- The concept can be described **as "a secular state and an open society"**: a concept where the separation of the state from the church enables the religion to influence not only the private life, but also the public life.
- . The religion is not only a private thing, but it also influences the public debate. The churches are social subjects outside the individual and have the aim to influence the public sphere.
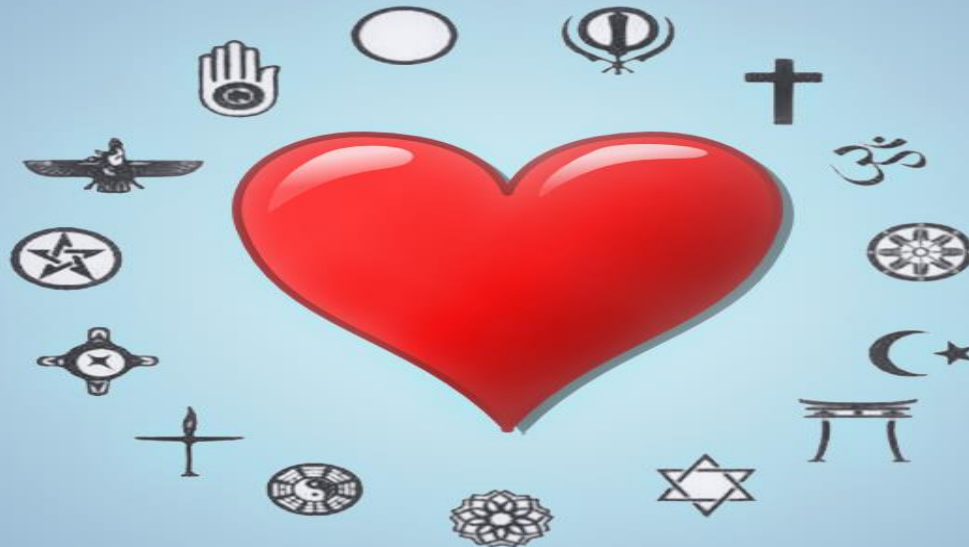
- My opinion is that there should be a new type of democracy: **plural democracy**, which wouldn't be based on a silent cultural similarity, but on the **confirmation and the acceptance of the idea for diversity**. This recreation of democracy, which is based on the true 'us' from all of the people, communities and cultures, is a real challenge that needs to be faced. Europe has become multicultural and multiconfessional society. The major challenges for the contemporary democracies in Europe are to affirm and include the cultural differences.

- The education and the media have an important role in moulding the perceptions of religion.

- The **freedom of the press** is the basic characteristic of democracy;

- We must include diversity in the **educational system**. The young people should be able to learn about the cultural realities and to communicate with people from different origins since their early childhood. The intercultural exchange can be an efficient instrument in the teaching of religion – it should be reformed so that is included in pluralism and the emphasis should be put on the dialog between the religions. The education should encourage and develop the curiosity and the ability to think by oneself, to ask questions and never to accept anything without understanding the reasons.

THE PURPOSE OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

- Developing and teaching young people **how to build multiculturalism**;

- This goal is achieved through the role and responsibility of schools, the **shared history and identity and the religious dimension** of multicultural society;

• The **religious dimension** means **achievement, harmony and coexistence** with neighbors and different ethnic groups, which requires knowing more about others, their religions and cultures, thus **building a sense of respect and understanding**. School systems are the ones that should insist on enhancing harmonious relationships between different communities, respect for other religious traditions and different religions functioning separately.

Thank you for your attention