

# Signposts – Policy and practice for teaching about religions and non-religious world views in intercultural education



Robert Jackson

COUNCIL OF EUROPE



CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

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## Foreword

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**R**ecommendation CM/Rec(2008)12 by the Committee of Ministers to member states on the dimension of religions and non-religious convictions within intercultural education was a landmark in the history of the Council of Europe's educational work. Before 2002 work on intercultural education did not include religion. Religion was regarded as a matter for private life. Gradually, it became apparent that religion was increasingly a topic of concern also to the public sphere. This view was made concrete by the events of 11 September 2001 in the United States and their analysis and public discussion worldwide. The view was taken that all young people should have an understanding of religions and beliefs as part of their education. Thus, the Council of Europe began its first project on the religious dimension of intercultural education in 2002 under the supervision of the Steering Committee for Education. Subsequently, in 2007, a reference book was published on this topic for use by educators across Europe. The year 2008 saw further discussions which contributed to the Council of Europe's *White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue – Living together as equals in dignity*. In the same year, the Council of Europe brought together representatives of European religious leaders and humanist organisations, together with representatives of institutional partners within the Council of Europe and from various international non-governmental organisations. This was the first Council of Europe "Exchange" involving representatives of religious leaders and civil society organisations in Europe to discuss educational issues in relation to the changing climate about religion in the public sphere. Such important exchanges have taken place annually since then, and their consultative and collaborative nature is reflected in the present text. Also in 2008, the Committee of Ministers issued its recommendation on the dimension of religions and non-religious convictions within intercultural education.

We now have the pleasure of publishing a document which aims to assist policy makers, schools and teacher trainers – and indeed other actors in education – in utilising the recommendation in their own particular national, regional and local contexts. The title of the document, *Signposts*, is especially appropriate, for the intention is to facilitate discussion and action by users in member states, who themselves need to address a range of issues in their own settings. We are very grateful to the members of the Joint Implementation Group, set up jointly by the Council of Europe and the European Wergeland Centre, who have conceived the ideas in *Signposts* and discussed draft material since they first began working together in 2010. We are particularly grateful to Gabriele Mazza who, having been the initiator of this project as Council of Europe’s Director of Education, served as Chair of the Joint Implementation Group, to steer it in the right direction. We are equally grateful to Professor Robert Jackson, the Vice-Chair and Rapporteur of the Group of experts who has written the text on behalf of his colleagues, and who has used various drafts of the document in consultative meetings with potential users in different parts of Europe since 2011. Professor Jackson has been involved in all of the Council of Europe’s projects relating to religious diversity and education since 2002, and has been active in this field in his role at the European Wergeland Centre, as well as at his home base at the University of Warwick.

The next step is for policy makers, schools, teacher trainers and their students, together with all relevant professional associations in individual states and at the European level, to use *Signposts* as a tool for their deliberations and action. The whole document can be used, or individual chapters on specific topics can be made the focus for discussion or study.

I sincerely hope that *Signposts* is used widely across Europe, together with the Council of Europe recommendation.

I commend *Signposts* to you.

**Snežana Samardžić-Marković**  
**Director General of Democracy**

# Preface

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**T**he purpose of *Signposts* is to help implement Recommendation CM/Rec(2008)12 on the dimension of religions and non-religious convictions within intercultural education in the member countries. How can a recommendation resulting from a major effort of co-operation among governments fail to be followed by any observable form of implementation and any discernible impact within national contexts? One of the most frequently given, and easiest, answers to this question is that the Council of Europe cannot rely on an army to defend its values and to enforce respect of its norms and standards, particularly when they are as soft as non-binding “recommendations”. Ensuring and, even more, assessing the impact of certain types of Council of Europe’s initiatives and pronouncements, including recommendations, are arduous processes, which are dependent upon a complex set of conditions and circumstances. These include the perceived relevance and urgency of a given measure, its diverse socio-political environments, and the willingness and capacity of the national body politic and governance system to confront itself with exogenous, collective experience and to draw lessons from it.

For many years the sometimes insufficient presence, at national level, of the political will to take notice and act upon international pronouncements has been fuelling, internationally, conversations about the need to “bridge the gap” between theory and action, policy and practice which are very much alive today. That this is so probably gives the measure of the difficulties involved, and of the level of frustration that it can produce in the many protagonists of political co-operation, active in a variety of fields, including education. Frustration which is compounded by the awareness that with political will, proper dissemination and encouragement at the national level, the common efforts deployed internationally can bear fruit.

The European Wergeland Centre (EWC) on education for democratic citizenship, human rights and intercultural awareness was created by the Council of Europe and the Norwegian authorities precisely for the purpose of bridging the gap between policy and practice, and their collaborative initiative to improve the potential for implementation of the Recommendation CM/Rec(2008)12, which is at the origin of *Signposts*, must be noted and saluted.

The intergovernmental activities which led to Recommendation CM/Rec(2008)12, the elaboration of the recommendation itself and now the publication of *Signposts* show an ongoing commitment to the inclusion of studies of religious convictions in education, for at least five reasons. First, the converging roles of the Parliamentary Assembly, of the Human Rights Commissioner, of the Council's intergovernmental co-operation mechanisms and of the Secretariat in harmoniously and consistently bringing the "problematique" of the dimension of religion in intercultural dialogue and understanding to the fore. Second, the rapidity and effectiveness with which the intergovernmental process was conducted, leading to the timely adoption of Recommendation CM/Rec(2008)12 by the Committee of Ministers. Third, the subsequent willingness of the Committee of Ministers' Deputies to pursue a decade-long process of direct involvement in this multifaceted subject area, through the organisation of significant related events – the "Exchange" – in member countries. Fourth, the active role, in concert with the EWC, of the Council's Secretariat, not only in initiating this process as a whole, but also, in sustaining it to this day by generating a document, *Signposts*, aiming precisely at maximising the efforts already involved in the production of the recommendation, and at improving its chances of being selectively and thoughtfully implemented in member countries. Lastly, let us be aware that *Signposts* would not have seen the light without the already mentioned collaboration between the Council of Europe and Oslo's European Wergeland Centre. In fact, the EWC itself is the concrete outcome of a well-inspired, extraordinary collaborative initiative fuelled by the Council and the Norwegian authorities to help face the challenges of the 21st century in terms of democratic citizenship, human rights and intercultural education in Europe. The resounding success of this institution is a source of legitimate satisfaction on the part of those who were instrumental to its creation, both in Oslo and in Strasbourg, not least within the Council of Europe Secretariat. *Signposts* owes its existence to one of the recognised strengths of the Council of Europe: its ability to pursue issues through coherent activities of a sufficient duration, avoiding ephemeral initiatives and applying a whole range of both well-tested and innovative working methods. Through the work of two successive projects, the production of a forward-looking recommendation and, today, of the *Signposts* document, the Council has once again positioned itself as a path-opener and a standard bearer in a crucially sensitive area for the political, social and educational future of Europe.

The next challenge, as we have suggested, is to succeed in reaching higher levels of operationalisation in the member countries. This cannot be achieved by applying a single, ready-made recipe, which does not exist, but rather by exploiting the recommendation and *Signposts* to trigger a broader process of dissemination, debate, contextualisation, experimentation and well-targeted action research. Much has been accomplished already by the Group of Experts responsible for the first phase of the follow-up to the recommendation, including a first common pedagogical framework for classroom practice, the clarification of persisting linguistic and semantic ambiguities and a first exploration of the nexus between intercultural education, on one side, and the phenomenon of faith-based and non-faith-based belief and value systems, considered concomitantly on the other. Yet much remains to be done, especially in relation to the dimension of adult and out-of-school education, the necessary articulation with a stronger lifelong learning

and socio-cultural, community development perspective, and the implications for the initial and in-service training of teachers and other resource persons.

The Group of Experts, which I have had the privilege of chairing, is conscious of the “work in progress” nature of *Signposts* and of the magnitude of the challenge admirably met by its author, Professor Jackson, as Rapporteur, in providing overall coherence to their thoughts. Yet this work has just begun, the next phase having to involve more conversations with more actors and constituencies including families, media, faith and secular institutions, associations and experts, in addition to teachers and teacher trainers. But as a group representing a wide range of backgrounds and sensitivities, including both believers and non-believers (and perhaps something in between...), its members have all shared the same faith in the value of intercultural education in producing greater empathetic understanding of each other’s communalities and differences, the same belief in the need to multiply ways and means of dealing with the dimension of religious and non-religious world views, and the same trust in the capacity of Council of Europe to lead in this effort.

*Signposts* points to the future and powerfully contributes to the Council’s priorities as a foundation block of the yet to be constructed broader conceptual and operational framework (not unlike the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages) in which democratic and civic competences (including intercultural skills) can be identified and made to contribute to the nurturing of democratic culture. The Council of Europe builds its action upon the strength of its values, the quality of its argumentations and the relevance of its experience in order to inspire men and women of goodwill in their never-ending quest for meaning and for more accomplished forms of human coexistence. Helping to move from merely human to truly humane progress (while avoiding regression) is one of the missions of education in general and of intercultural education in particular. The Council of Europe does not have an army, but draws its force from its capacity to be at the service of a historical, long-term effort to promote democratic culture and human rights, personal growth and common humanity. May *Signposts* prove itself as a genuine contribution to this formidable task.

**Gabriele Mazza**  
**Chair of the Joint Expert Group Council of Europe/Wergeland Centre**



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Gratitude is also expressed to guest speakers at various meetings of the Joint Implementation Group (see Appendix 2); to the members of the Council of Europe Education Committee for its kind supervision and support of the Survey and especially those members who responded to the online questionnaire, to researchers, teacher trainers, teachers and students who provided material for illustrative examples of particular activities, to researchers from different parts of Europe who provided information about their work, and to teachers, teacher trainers, policy makers, advisers and researchers who gave feedback at conferences and meetings (held between 2011 and 2013 in Austria, Belgium, England, Estonia, Finland, France, Iceland, Ireland, the Netherlands, Norway and Sweden) where Professor Jackson spoke about the development of the document.



## Chapter 1

# The recommendation: background, issues and challenges

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### The recommendation

In December 2008, the Council of Europe circulated an important recommendation from the Committee of Ministers to member states on the dimension of religions and non-religious convictions within intercultural education (Council of Europe 2008a). The recommendation grew out of work done in this field within the Council of Europe since 2002, building on its earlier work in intercultural education and related fields. The recommendation offers exciting possibilities for discussion and action in member states concerning studies of religions and non-religious world views within intercultural education.

The present publication – *Signposts* – has been written to facilitate discussion, reflection and action. It is written primarily for policy makers at all levels, for schools (including teachers, school leaders and governors) and for those involved in teacher training across Europe. It is intended to be of encouragement and assistance in discussing and making full, practical use of the Council of Europe's 2008 recommendation.

### Religion and schools in Europe

With regard to religion, partly because of diverse histories of religion and state, together with various cultural differences, there are some different approaches to the place of religion in the curriculum of schools in European countries, and varying attitudes towards this from stakeholders, including policy makers, schools, teacher trainers, parents and children. All states are potentially influenced by factors such as secularisation, and supranational or global influences, including the migration of people, and many have gone through processes of change in recent decades.