

newsletter

December 2019, No. 14

Editorial

It was surprising to learn that education in the first instance was not included in any of the portfolio of the designated EU Commissioners under the new European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, who started her office on 1st December. Mariya Gabriel, commissioner from Bulgaria, was assigned for “innovation and youth” including also aspects of education but not explicitly. In the mission letter of President von der Leyen to her it is stated: “Education, research and innovation will be key to our competitiveness and our ability to lead in the transition to a climate-neutral economy and new digital age. It is about equipping people with the knowledge, life experience and skills they need to thrive. Our world-leading science, research and innovation capacity can help us find European solutions to the most pressing global issues.” In this statement, education and competitiveness are seen as closely connected, while a climate-neutral economy and a new digital age is mentioned as challenges and aims.

Mariya Gabriel was former Commissioner for the Digital Economy and Society. In the hearing with the European Parliament she emphasised her commitment for “high quality and innovation-driven education and training systems” as well as expanding digital education opportunities as a priority. Also the tripling of the budget of Erasmus+ is part of her agenda. Thanks to the intervention of the EP CULT Committee, the commissioner’s portfolio name has changed and she is now responsible for “Research, Innovation, Education, Culture & Youth”.

We will carefully monitor what stimulus will be given through this process of a Europeanization of education and continue to strive for a more holistic concept of education that is sensitive for the whole person and not just for her employability. The dignity of each human being demands education for all and justice for all in terms of educational opportunities.

Digitalisation will also influence the way in which we deliver the ICCS & IV newsletter in future. Due to a new website of ICCS (see report in this newsletter) we have now a rich digital instrument for making and delivering the newsletter in a new format. Wait and see. We hope that this will also enrich the relation to all readers.

Wishing you all a blessed Christmas and a Good and Happy New Year 2020.

Dr. Tania ap Siôn and Dr. Peter Schreiner (ICCS)
Michael Jacobs and Piet Jansen (IV)

Information from IV and ICCS

IV: The General Assembly 2019 took place in Vienna

On invitation of the Evangelisches Schulwerk A.B. Wien and the international education network PILGRIM, this year's IV General Assembly took place in the Austrian capital on 15-16 November. The theme of the meeting was "Contributions by Christian Schools to Education for Sustainable Development" and, using the example of over 200 PILGRIM schools, it showed ways to an ecologically sustainable and spiritually conscious education. Oberkirchenrat Schiefermair also highlighted the legal framework for denominational schools in Austria, and the headmistress of the Evangelische Volksschule on Karlsplatz, where the General Assembly took place, presented her impressive concepts of promoting outstanding talent and of the all-day care. Thirty participants from 12 European countries experienced a successful conference in an inviting atmosphere in an architecturally unique school building. The programme was rounded off by a "Protestant city walk" on the second day.

In the statutory part of the General Assembly, the 2020 budget was adopted. The proposal for a "mentoring system" to intensify communication between the Board and the member associations between the annual general meetings met with unanimous approval. The next AMV 2020 is expected to take place in Riga (Latvia).

IV: board discussed current developments

Immediately before the General Assembly on 15-16 November 2019, the IV Board met at the Evangelische Volksschule am Karlsplatz. It received the report of the financial audit 2018 and discussed the budget planning 2019, so that it could be adopted in the General Assembly. The financial situation of the IV is solid, the last years ended with a positive result, so that reserves could be formed. However, revenues will decline in 2020 due to reductions in contributions.

The future of the office in the church office of the EKD in Hanover, which is very important for the work of IV, was also discussed. In 2020 President and Secretary will discuss with the head of the education department of the EKD, Dr Sandler-Koschel, how the work of IV can be ensured in the long-term even in view of financial reduction and how it can be strengthened in cooperation with ICCS and EKD.

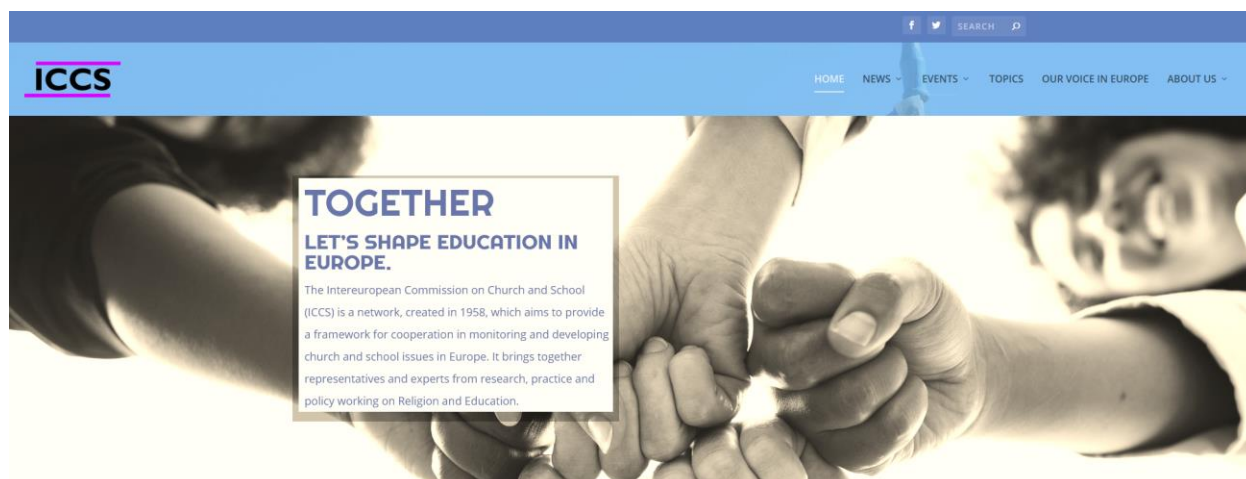
The feedback on the study trip for head teachers and education experts to Berlin/Brandenburg in September was very positive (see below). Bianca Kappelhoff, research associate at the Comenius Institute, also presented her thoughts on the redesign of the ICCS website, which would give the joint newsletter a different form. It would then be linked to the two websites and sent by e-mail as an html newsletter rather than as a PDF attachment, as it was previously the case. The Board took a positive stance on this proposal.

ICCS: 280 characters of news



Take a look at a Protestant school, follow the EU commissioners hearings or discover how a British RE organisation takes part in the Labour Party conference – all this you can do in almost real time thanks to the new [ICCS twitter account](#). Since August, ICCS has used this platform in addition to its [Facebook page](#) to spread the latest news about RE, school and church issues.

ICCS: Modern, handy, pink and blue – the new website of ICCS



1 Front page of the new ICCS website

A big step has been taken by ICCS this year and is brought to you as a Christmas gift. A completely new website has been developed and is now ready to use via the new URL www.iccs.icu. It gives ICCS an innovative and refreshing design and offers the opportunity to integrate a variety of elements from informative texts via videos and photos to social media content. The front page is the heart of the website. It is structured in several sections in order to integrate various perspectives on what ICCS is all about. The sections “Topics” and “Our voice in Europe” highlight two of ICCS’ core concerns: the exchange among research and practice and the political engagement on a European level. But take a look for yourself by clicking on www.iccs.icu.

IV: report from Crete meeting of the European Christian Convention (ECC)

As a new member of the European Christian Convention (ECC), the IV participated in the Second General Assembly from 7-10 October 2019 in the Orthodox Academy of Crete - so to speak in the cradle of Europe. The main subject of this MV was the question of the place and time of the ECC, a large ecumenical assembly of Christians in Europe. The Executive Committee, chaired by Sven Giegold (Germany), MEP, reported on various discussions with church leaders in Zurich, Strasbourg and Vienna, all promising at first, but ending with the withdrawal of Catholic partners in the cases of Zurich and Strasbourg. In Vienna the dialogue was interrupted by the change of bishop in the Protestant Church, but will be continued soon and seems quite promising. The General Assembly spoke out in favour of Vienna as the favourite place of the ECC. A desirable period for this major ecumenical event is the years 2023-25.

ICCS: “future lab” with correspondents at Loegumkloster (DK) in 2020

The future orientation of ICCS' work will be the subject of a consultation to be held in Loegumkloster, Denmark, from 2 to 4 June 2020. The board and the national correspondents will discuss how to take up the current challenges in the field of church and school, which (digital) instruments and projects serve to advise and develop common positions, and how to further shape representation and participation in church (CEC and CPCE) and European political institutions. The board prepared the gathering in a virtual meeting via ZOOM on 25 November.

ICCS and IV: Inspiration and lasting impressions – the study tour 2019 to Berlin

Berlin 30 years after the Fall of the Wall – what an exciting time to visit Protestant schools in this area. Eight school leaders from the Netherlands, Estonia, Romania and Poland took the opportunity and participated in the study tour offered by the CoGREE member organisations ICCS and IV. From 24-27 September 2019 visits to three different schools and meetings with administrative officers were provided for the group.

One of the schools was the “Evangelische Schule Pankow”. Headteacher Gunnar Hermann not only presented the school but also explained how they promote the school’s development. Thanks to a self-evaluation, teachers, students and parents develop regularly a new school programme together deciding on the main development goals of the school for the next couple of years. The “Evangelische Schule Frohnau” and the “Evangelische Schule Neuruppin” on the other hand are characterised by the fact that they are both primary and secondary schools. So most of the students spend their entire school life there. At both schools, the very good relationships between

students and teachers and the “family spirit” school culture impressed the visiting group. In Frohnau, headteacher Christine Behnken discussed with the group the challenges of having a rather homogenous student body. How do you confront these students with life outside their “bubble”? Students from the 11th grade English class then showed the school leaders around and answered questions. In Neuruppin, former student Albert, who graduated this summer, took over this task. In addition to that, the group had the chance to get a glimpse into a 1st grade lesson, to



2 The participants in front of the Evangelische Grundschule Pankow

discuss with a teacher and to converse with Deputy headteacher Dr Bettina Labahn. What makes the school special is the focus on art, music and drama as well as their extensive project work, especially with external partners from the city community. The goal: to give every student the chance to discover his or her special talent.

The school visits were rounded off by meetings with officials from the overarching church and school structures in Berlin and Brandenburg. Whereas Dr Friedhelm Kraft explained the system of Religious Education, Rainer Gronen from the regional school foundation explained the work of his umbrella organisation for the Protestant schools in Berlin and Brandenburg. He and his colleagues take care of administrative tasks, employ teachers, offer counselling, exchange and teacher training. Currently, a special focus is on the topics of digitalisation, diversity and educational quality. The guided city tour through Jewish Berlin turned out to be an intriguing extra to the study tour programme. The tour guide impressed everyone with her deep knowledge about the Holocaust and the development of Jewish life in Berlin. Something especially positive: the Jewish community is growing again. By the end of the tour, all participants were very grateful for these opportunities of exchange with locals from Berlin and Brandenburg, as well as within the group. Full of ideas for their respective schools, the participants went to catch trains and flights to return home.

EREnews issue 2019-3 published

A new issue of the EREnews has been published by its editor Flavio Pajer (Italy). The aim of EREnews, quarterly multilingual electronic newsletter published since 2003, is to inform about events, documents, publications related to the religion/s managing in the public educational and academic space in the European Union. You find the current as well as older issues [here](#).

CoGREE and member organisations



CoGREE: Klingenthal 2020 plannings go ahead

The 5th-9th October 2020 is an important date to highlight in your calendar. It is the date of the next Klingenthal Colloquy. At their December meeting in Düsseldorf, Germany, the CoGREE steering group reflected on the last colloquy and discussed the focus theme of the next one in 2020. The group decided to develop further a theme about the challenge of how to take a stand for religion in education. Often, the role of Religious Education or religion in education in general is questioned in the public sphere. That criticism might come from parents or teachers at a school or administrators and government officials from local to European level. How do we react to this criticism? And how can we tell our stories? That will be at the heart of the programme. Traditionally, the programme will also include a visit to Strasbourg and an exchange with officials from the European institutions.

EFTRE: Conference in Dublin in August 2019 – the story of reconciling realities



3 EFTRE themed cupcake

During the last days of August, the EFTRE network came together in Dublin, Ireland, to hold its triannual conference. Old friends reunited in joy and welcomed new members into their midst.

Around 60 delegates from 22 countries had come together to think about “Reconciling Realities in Religious Education”. It turned out that the island of Ireland was the perfect setting for this mission.

Speakers from the island – North and South – examined the topic from various angles on the first day. Pdraig Ó Tuama, theologian, poet and member of the Corrymeela community in Northern Ireland, drew attention to the fact how much words and storytelling affect our perception of realities and what needs to be done in those terms to reconcile realities especially regarding Northern Ireland. Anne

Looney, Executive Dean of the Institute of Education of the DCU positioned Religious Education in relation to the emerging field of Education future studies – an approach that might help reconcile realities in RE with current social changes and challenges.

Altogether, the conference was characterised by innovative reflections about RE in Europe combined with humour, vivid illustrative examples and opportunities for deep thinking. Participants appreciated the well-balanced mix of further keynotes, practical workshops, visits in the city of Dublin and opportunities for socialising. The workshops covered a wide range of

approaches from how to use technology in RE to addressing controversial issues, using drama techniques or the use of sacred texts in the RE classroom. The contributions from 12 nations to these workshops demonstrated in a very inspiring way the richness of RE across Europe. Thanks to the warm and welcoming atmosphere, the participants are already looking forward to the next EFTRE gathering in Rome in 2022! The invitation from the Italian representatives was welcomed with enthusiasm! You can find more information on www.eftre.net.

EuFRES conference 2020 about intercultural dialogue – enrol now !

EuFRES is proud to announce that the next conference will be held in Vienna from April 15th to 19th, 2020. The topic of the meeting is: Intercultural dialogue in Europe. Contribution of catholic Religious Education in schools. According to the EuFRES tradition, academics and people responsible for religious education in state schools from European countries will take part in the conference. EuFRES has its roots in the catholic environment but is open to other faiths. As it was during the previous conference, translation and interpretation of speeches will be provided in the following languages: Italian, English, German, Spanish and Polish. Those interested in attending are asked to register before 1 January 2020. For further information about the conference topic, the agenda and the registration information, please read more [here](#).

PILGRIM: Dr Hans Hisch stepped back as director

On Wednesday, 12 November 2019, a new board of directors was elected for the Vienna-based ecological-spiritual education initiative PILGRIM, which operates internationally. The founder and long-standing director Dr. Hans Hisch was appointed Honorary President. The new director Dr Herta Ucsnik was unanimously elected and sees an important focus on the promotion of education for sustainable development in schools. At the following ceremony for the award of the PILGRIM Youth Prize to the Islamic Gymnasium Vienna for the project "Year of Sustainability: Ecology - Society - Social Affairs", she emphasised how important the cooperation of religious schools and pupils is for the environment. Thanks to Hans Hisch for the many years he spent building up PILGRIM!

EFTRE: Hands on: new Executive drives important decisions forward

After the conference is before the conference. At their meeting in late November, the EFTRE Executive looked back at the conference in Dublin this year and started to plan the next one ahead. As it will take place in Rome, Italian board member Orazio Ruscica participated in the meeting and will be co-opted into the Executive until then. The Executive decided on the 25 -28 August 2022 as provisional conference date. Ideas for the conference theme will be discussed further at the next board meeting, which will take place on 27 and 28th March 2020 in Valencia, Spain.

Furthermore, the Executive decided to undertake the development of a new EFTRE website to incorporate current and future technological capabilities. New Executive member Bianca Kappelhoff from Germany will from now on work with and support the Secretary Elisabeth Faber to develop a more efficient approach to managing membership of EFTRE.

GPENreformation: Action-packed start of the ERASMUS+ Project "Schools joining up for Communities of Peace"

Have you ever written a project proposal? Have you? Then you'll know how far it is from the first idea to the drafting and approval of the application to the actual start of the project... But: Slow and steady wins the race! This was proven by the kick-off event of the EU-funded project "Schools joining up for Communities of Peace", which took place on October 24 and 25 in Berlin.

Fourteen coordinators of the nine project partners from six European countries (Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Netherlands, Poland, United Kingdom) met in the middle of Berlin to get to know one another, to work together on the project vision, the contents, milestones and the distribution of responsibilities. In particular, the output of the project, a digital map that enables interactive journeys to places of peace and conflict by means of the "Actionbound" application, was the subject of lively discussion. The workshop of Lotta, who works for Actionbound, caused a lot of hustle and bustle: With "The Roof is on fire" and "Who is my sib?" the participants themselves developed their own digital rallies, which led to a wild hunt through the conference room and the whole building.

The project will start with a video conference for the participating teachers in December. The team is looking forward to great action!

CEC and CPCE



CPCE launched new working group on education

The Community of Protestant Churches in Europe has established a new working group on education. The specific task of the group is to monitor and supervise the Religious Education syllabus of European schools that is currently under revision. European schools are educational institutions set up by the European Union's Member States and the European Union. The Schools follow a specific curriculum and offer the European Baccalaureate diploma. The school system consists of two years of early education (nursery cycle), five years of primary and seven years of secondary education. Religious Education so far was taught according to the regulations of the Member States. Dr Peter Schreiner was nominated as a member of the CPCE working group.

Council of Europe and European Union



EU: New funding opportunity for exchange on religion

From 2020, there will probably be an interesting new funding opportunity offered by the European Union. The "Global Exchange on Religion in Society" programme has been announced as a kind of Erasmus+ for disseminators from civil society actors working on faith and social inclusion (also religious and worldview organisations). The programme will bring together groups of 20-25 participants working on similar themes, traveling to a place of particular relevance to the subject,

visiting local institutions and NGOs, sharing their own experiences and learning from one another. This may also be an opportunity to intensify exchanges among IV and ICCS and other CoGREE members.

A first call for proposals will be launched in the first half of 2020 at the latest by which time more detailed information on application and funding modalities will be announced. A total of €1.5 million is to be made available by the European Commission. Further information can be found on the website of the European External Action Service: <https://tinyurl.com/t83oop5>. New developments will also be covered on the ICCS website.

EU: fundamental rights and rule of law – trends from a civil society perspective

At the invitation of the Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA), a sub-organisation of the EU based in Vienna, the IV took part in a conference on "Fundamental Rights and the Rule of Law - Trends in the EU from the Perspective of Civil Society". It took place on 5 November 2019 in the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) building in Brussels. The EESC is a consultative body of the EU and represents the perspective of organised civil society (employers, workers, stakeholders). It has 350 members from all 28 EU countries and prepares statements for the European Parliament, the Council and the Commission.

In 2018, a Working Group on Fundamental Rights and the Rule of Law was set up with 21 members and will visit all EU Member States in the coming years. The first five visits in 2018/19 went to Romania, Poland, Hungary, France and Austria and resulted in a report which was presented to the public during the conference. The country-specific conditions in the areas of media, civic space and discriminated groups were analysed in more detail and discussed with regard to preventive measures and intervention strategies. The aim of the working group is to develop effective mechanisms for safeguarding fundamental rights and the rule of law, including under Article 7 of the EU Treaty ("infringement procedure").

Council of Europe: Conference of INGOs took place in October 2019

From 28th to 31st October the biannual meeting of the Conference of International Non-Governmental Organisations at the Council of Europe took place in Strasbourg.

Over 300 organisations are recognised by the Council of Europe in Strasbourg. Among these are large aid organisations such as Caritas or Amnesty International, as well as small interest groups such as the COMENIUS Association. Executive Secretary Sören Lenz participated on behalf of the Conference of European Churches (CEC). Unlike other large international organisations, the INGOs have a participatory status with the Council of Europe, i.e. they have a say in bodies and intergovernmental working groups.

One of the main topics discussed was migration and the growing hostility towards migrants and asylum seekers on the Internet. At the meeting special rapporteurs of the Human Rights Committee declared with concern that "the web has become an agora of anti-migrants" that is particularly influencing young people. In her report, Iamvi Totsi, Vice-Chair of the Human Rights Committee of the Conference of INGOS explained that "the fear of terrorism was exploited in the context of migration". She called on the NGOs to continue their engagement with the matter. In the context of the session of the education and culture committee the proposal of a European Cultural Identity White Paper has been discussed. The INGOs were asked to comment and supplement the current draft. Sören Lenz said: "We are not happy that religions don't play a major role in the proposed text. Within the group of Christian NGOs we will discuss this further and participate in the consultation process."

Another important decision at the meeting was the adoption of a declaration on the situation in Northern Syria, condemning the invasion of Turkish troops and calling on all member states of the European Council (in particular Turkey) to “immediately provide humanitarian and emergency assistance to the population of the crisis region, drawing on the expertise of NGOs, observers and monitoring organisations, in particular those focusing on the protection of children, the elderly, the physically or mentally disabled and women”. CEC will continue to participate actively in the INGOs conference and several intergovernmental bodies (bioethics, education and culture, etc.) where it holds observer status.

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Members of the Board of ICCS

Dr Tania ap Siôn (Secretary, Wales), Prof Dr Heid Leganger-Krogstad (Norway), Kaarina Lyhykäinen (Finland), Dr Peter Schreiner (President, Germany).

Members of the Board of IV

Dr Marián Damankoš (Slovak Republic), Judit Hallgató (Hungary), Michael Jacobs (Secretary, Germany), Piet Jansen (President, Netherlands), Bertrand Knobel (Treasurer, Switzerland).

Information and News

Please send information and news to:

Bianca Kappelhoff (kappelhoff@comenius.de), Dr Peter Schreiner (schreiner@comenius.de) or Michael Jacobs (michaeljacobs@netcologne.de)

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