

Martin Rothgangel / Ednan Aslan / Martin Jäggle (eds.)

Religious Education at Schools in Europe

Part 5: Southeastern Europe

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In cooperation with Sabine Hermisson and Maximillian Saudino

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Religious Education at Schools in Republic of North Macedonia

The Republic of North Macedonia is a secular country with a separation of church and state. The churches and religious communities in North Macedonia have the right to found religious educational institutions on all levels of education, except for the elementary level, for the education of clergy and other personnel. Hence, the two most common religions in North Macedonia: Orthodox Christianity and Islam have their own educational institutions in middle and higher education with old traditions and many years of experience.

In public education, religious education is found only in elementary education, where the subject *Ethics in religions* is learned as an optional subject in sixth grade. According to the curriculum this subject has the purpose of developing a sense of responsibility, the capacity to tell good from evil, prudence, to understand the significance of spiritual and material, respect toward religious wealth, religious traditions and religious differences in the world, as well as of increasing the children's personal integrity and dignity.

1 Socio-religious background of the country

According to the global study: “Religiousness and atheism” of “Gallup International” Macedonian citizens of North Macedonia are the most religious in Europe. Eighty eight percent of Macedonian citizens consider themselves religious. Answering the same question “Do you consider yourself do be a religious person or atheist, regardless if you visit a liturgy place or not?”, eight percent of Macedonians consider themselves non-religious, and only two percent consider themselves atheists.¹

1 In Republic of North Macedonia, “Brima Galup” has conducted a field survey, face to face in the participant's home, on a representative sample of 1204 participants at the age of 15 years in the period from 1st to 24th of November 2014 year. (<http://telma.com.mk/vesti/istrashuvanje-88-od-gragjanite-vo-makedonija-se-religiozni>).

The majority religion in the Republic of Macedonia is Orthodox Christianity. It is confessed by 64,8 % of the population, most of whom are ethnic Macedonians (*Census of Population, Households and Dwellings in the Republic of Macedonia, 2002: 334*).

Christian life in the territory of the Republic of North Macedonia was continuously present since early Christian times. Since the first centuries, there have been Christian centers with bishop's seats: Stobi, Heraclea, Bargala, Skupi, and others. In the ninth century, the most prominent among the disciples of St. Cyril and Methodius, the brothers who created a Slavic alphabet, were St. Clement and St. Naum of Ohrid, who have continued their missionary activities in Ohrid. Naum, who was a monk, retreated to the south shore of the Ohrid Lake, where he built a monastery and formed a brotherhood; he is considered the founding father of the monasticism in North Macedonia. St. Clement, instead, established a well-organized school in Ohrid, where in seven years, 3500 students were educated. Later, he was appointed bishop of the Dremvica and Velika Diocese, the territory around the Ohrid Lake. This diocese soon grew into the Ohrid Archbishopric. This Church of Ohrid, as autocephalous, held jurisdiction over various territories during different periods, sometimes even from the Danube and Dalmatia to the Black Sea and Sicilia, but the seat was always in Ohrid, in the territory of North Macedonia. Exactly 250 years ago, in 1767, the Ottoman administration abolished the Ohrid Archbishopric and its dioceses were given to the Constantinopolitan Patriarchate. With its abolition, the Archbishopric of Ohrid provoked a deep impact not only on the ecclesiastical, but also on the civic history of that area, because, for centuries, it was positioned between the most important institutions which left a strong imprint on the history and the destiny of the population on the Balkans (Gjorgjevski 2017: 2).

In the nineteenth century, the Ottoman Empire, under international pressure, allowed the national Orthodox churches of neighboring Bulgaria, Greece, and Serbia to work in various parts of North Macedonia. During the Balkan Wars of 1912–1913 and during World War I, the territory of present-day North Macedonia came under Bulgarian rule; after the war, in 1920, it became a part of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia wherein the renewed Serbian Orthodox Church took on the dioceses in this part of Republic of North Macedonia. This state of affairs lasted until 1941, when, after the beginning of the World War II, the Serbian hierarchy left North Macedonia and the people and Bulgaria established the jurisdiction of the Bulgarian Church in the eastern part, while a small part of western North Macedonia fell under the jurisdiction of the Albanian Orthodox Church. These forced changes of foreign church jurisdiction provoked a revolt among the people and the native clergy, who decided not to ever allow a church administration which is not of the North Macedonian people. In 1943, on the first liberated territory in Debarca, near Ohrid, at the Assembly held by the priests from that region, as well

as at the Clergy-Laity Council held in 1945 in Skopje, a renewal of the Ohrid Archbishopric and an independent church were demanded (Gjorgjevski 2017: 3).

At the Clergy-Laity Assembly held in Ohrid in October 1958 (attended by priests, monks, and faithful people), the Ohrid Archbishopric in the form of the Macedonian Orthodox Church was renewed and Bishop Dositej, vicar of the Serbian Patriarch, was elected the first Head of the Church. The name “Macedonian Orthodox Church” was taken following the example of the other Orthodox churches. Immediately after this decision for the renewal of the Ohrid Archbishopric, the Council of the Serbian Orthodox Church, held in July 1959, concluded that the dioceses in the People’s Republic of North Macedonia had established an independent church and the Constitution of the Serbian Orthodox Church was no longer valid for those dioceses and for their bishops (Gjorgjevski 2017: 4).

In the period that followed, mutual understanding was missing: the Serbian Orthodox Church insisted on an autonomous status of the MOC, while the Macedonian Orthodox Church demanded complete independence, i. e. autocephaly. Thus, in 1967, at the Clergy-Laity Assembly in Ohrid, the attendees voted to renew the Ohrid Archbishopric as an autocephalous Macedonian Orthodox Church.

With the renewal of the Ohrid Archbishopric as the church of Macedonian people in the country and abroad, it started with organizing its church life, to establish its own educational institutions – a Seminary and a Faculty, and to renew the monastic life. However, the opposition of the Serbian Orthodox Church to the new reality officially isolated the Macedonian Orthodox Church from the other Orthodox churches. For all the subsequent efforts to gain recognition, the autocephaly of the Macedonian Church is not yet recognized by other Orthodox churches in defense of Serbian opposition.

After the several meetings at the end of the twentieth and the beginning of the twenty-first centuries, in 2002 in the Serbian city of Niš, Macedonian and Serbian Orthodox Church officials met to discuss the status of the Macedonian Church. The Macedonian side was asked to sign an agreement that would downgrade the Macedonian Church to an autonomous body within the Serbian Orthodox Church and the Macedonian Church would be renamed the Archbishopric of Ohrid. This proposal was unanimously rejected by the Macedonian Synod and the Macedonian people. But, one of the bishops of MOC, metropolitan Jovan (Vranishkovski) of Povardarie, had crossed over to the Serbian Orthodox Church, which used his departure to appoint him as “exarch of the Serbian Orthodox Church in North Macedonia” (at that time, Jovan was already accused in Macedonia for canonical offences and criminal activities). With a decision of the Archierarchs’ Bishops’ Council of the Serbian Orthodox Church on 24 May 2003, a parallel Synod of the Serbian Church for North Macedonia was

formed, led by Jovan, with the election of two new bishops, one of them being only 25 years of age. The Serbian Orthodox Church in Macedonia ("Orthodox Archbishopric of Ohrid" – OAO) is still not registered in North Macedonia as a religious community nor does it have legal status (Gjorgjevski 2017: 5).

In 2004, the Macedonian Parliament adopted a declaration that supported the Macedonian Orthodox Church, all efforts and decisions made by the Macedonian Synod, as well as its commitment to preserving its integrity, significant status, and role in the social life of the country. On November 2009, the Macedonian Orthodox Church at its regular Clergy-Laity Assembly, changed the Constitution and added to its name the title "Archbishopric of Ohrid" (Gjorgjevski 2017: 5).

Islam is the second largest religion in North Macedonia. It is confessed by 33,3 % of the population, mostly ethnic Albanians, and fewer Macedonians – Muslims, Albanians, Turks or Roma (Ibid).

From a historical perspective Islam was brought to North Macedonia by the expansion of the Ottoman Empire over the Balkan Peninsula and its conquest in the fourteenth century. During this period the Islamization of the country began. The unequal social-economic position of Christians in relation to Muslims and their status of second class citizens, were the biggest reasons to accept the new religion. The magnitude of the Islamization in the cities is also shown by the fact that in the second half of sixteenth century, a quarter to a third of the Muslim population in the cities were Islamized Christians (Chepreganov 2008: 143).

In the middle of the eighteenth century, Albanians intensively started to settle on the territory of today North Macedonia. Today there is an Islamic religious community in the country. The majority of Muslims in the Republic of North Macedonia are followers of Sunni Islam.

Islam has always been represented by a state organ since the days of the Ottomans in the region until the dissolution of the Yugoslavia in the 1990s. Since then, the institution that has played a mediating role between the government of North Macedonia and the followers of the religion of Islam in the country has been recognized to be the Islamic Religious Community (Idriz, Ali, 2016).

There are also other churches, religious communities and groups with followers in the Republic of North Macedonia. The most significant ones are the Catholic Church (eastern and western rite) (0,3 %), United – Methodist church and other Protestant churches (0,02 %) and Jewish community in Macedonia, counting around 200 followers (*Census of Population, Households and Dwellings in the Republic of Macedonia 2002*: 334).

The Catholic Church in North Macedonia is part of the worldwide Catholic Church, under the spiritual leadership of the Pope in Rome. There are around 20,000 Catholics in the country Catholic believers from North Macedonia mostly include Albanians, ethnic Macedonians and Croats and are most concentrated in

the Skopje and the Southeastern Region of North Macedonia. In North Macedonia there are Catholics of Byzantine-Catholic rite that fall under the jurisdiction of the Macedonian Apostolic Vicariate. The Catholic Church of the East or Byzantine rite falls within the union of Roman Catholic and East Orthodox churches. It uses the Macedonian language in the liturgy. The church was founded in the year 1918, with the creation of the kingdom of Yugoslavia and when small parts of Macedonians converted to Catholicism, in what is known as the Kukush Union. The Exarchate was dissolved in the year 1924. In the year 2001, after Yugoslavia fell apart, the Holy See re-established the Apostolic Exarchate in North Macedonia and appoints the Roman Catholic bishop of Skopje as the head of the Apostolic Exarchate in Macedonia.

Protestantism in North Macedonia started growing in the second half of nineteenth century. Its influence was limited in east part of North Macedonia, with a few followers in Bitola. It spread through the first American missionaries, who came after the official establishment of diplomatic relations between the Ottoman Empire and the USA (Cacanoska 2001). With the opening of the first missionary headquarters, opportunities were created for planned action and the conscious spread of Protestantism, primarily among the Christian population, because the Islamic followers who converted were punished by death.

In the Republic of North Macedonia today there are more minority Christian religious communities, most followers of which are from the following groups: the United-Methodist church, the Baptist church and the Evangelical church.

The history of Jews in North Macedonia starts with the Roman Empire, when Jews came to the region for the first time in the fourth century B.C. The oldest evidence for the existence of Jews in North Macedonia is the old synagogue in the ancient city of Skupi, originating from third century B.C. The Jewish community in North Macedonia was also numerous in Macedonian society under the Ottoman Empire, when the second large wave of Jews came from Spain and Portugal (Jewish Virtual Library – Macedonia <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/macedonia-virtual-jewish-history-tour>).

Today there are around 200 Jews in North Macedonia, almost all of whom live in the capital Skopje, Štip and Bitola. The suffering of the Macedonian Jews during the Shoah is commemorated in the memorial center of the Holocaust of Macedonian Jews in Skopje's center.

2 Legal Frameworks of RE and the relationship between religious communities and the state

The Constitution of the Republic of North Macedonia, ratified in 1991, determines the legal position of religious communities and guarantees the freedom of religious confession. Freedom of religious expression is guaranteed freely and publicly, individually or in conjunction with others. Religious communities and groups existing in the country exist separately from the state and are equal by Constitution and law. It is further stipulated that the religious communities and groups are free to establish religious schools and social or charity institutions in an act prescribed by law (Constitution of Republic of Macedonia 1991).

Constitutional legal position and guaranteed freedoms and rights

With the Constitution, in its provisions for the basic freedoms and citizen rights, it is stipulated that the citizens of Republic of North Macedonia are equal in freedoms and rights regardless of gender, race, skin, color, national and social origin, political and religious beliefs or financial and social position.

The Constitution also guarantees the freedom of belief, conscience, opinion and public expression of opinion. The Constitution equally guarantees the national minorities living in the country protection of ethnical, cultural, linguistic and religious identity.

These freedoms and rights can be limited only in times of emergency or war for the prevention of damage to the right of free expression of faith, and may not discriminate on the basis of gender, race, skin, color, language, faith, national or social origin, financial or social position. Even in such situations the freedoms and rights regarding the freedom of believe, consciousness, opinion, public expressing of opinion or religion mustn't be limited.

There isn't national religion in Republic of North Macedonia

The relations between religious communities and groups in the country are regulated by the Constitution of the Republic of North Macedonia, The law on bodies of the country's government and the rules within the church, religious community or group.

Item 19 of the Constitution of the Republic of North Macedonia regulates that the Macedonian Orthodox church, the Islamic religious community, the Catholic Church, the United-Methodist church, the Jewish community and other religious

communities and groups are separated from the state and are equal before the law. This clearly implies that in the Republic of North Macedonia there is no national religion.

The country is secular with religion separated from it. This means that the country hasn't got the right to interfere with church matters, nor the church to interfere with state matters.

The Commission for relations with religious communities and groups is established as a separate body from the country's government by the law on the bodies of the country's government. This body has the status of a legal entity. In item 29 of this Law it is stipulated that the Commission for relations with the religious communities and groups handles the legal position of religious communities and groups and the relations between the country, religious communities and groups.

Rights and obligations

In North Macedonia religious discrimination isn't allowed. Religious conviction doesn't free the citizen of the obligations he or she has according to the Constitution.

The churches, religious communities and groups have the right to organize themselves internally with their bodies of management, hierarchy and authority and to appoint persons who will represent them and will establish acts regarding such matters.

The country respects the identity of churches, religious communities, groups and other forms of religious associations and establishes a relation of constant dialogue and forms of constant cooperation with them.

The church, religious community and group carry their activities according to positive regulations of the Republic of North Macedonia, international declarations and conventions on freedom of religion and its expression. The country's bodies within its authorities and powers create conditions for the uninterrupted performance of the activities of the church and the religious communities.

The freedom of expression of religion or conviction can be limited by law if it's necessary for the interest of public safety, the order, health, morale or protection of rights and freedoms of others.

Religious lesson and educational activities

The church and religious communities can perform religious lesson. The religious lessons can be held in rooms where religious rites and other ways of public expressing of religion are practiced, as well as in other public or private spaces and places, if there is no harm to public order and peace. The curricula and programs in religious educational institutions must comply with the Constitution and the law. The body of the country's government authorized for education can review the curricula and programs of the religious educational institutions (Constitution of Republic of Macedonia, 1991).

Any citizen of the Republic of North Macedonia may teach at a school in religious sponsorship with the exception of when the church or religious community needs proper staff, the curriculums in a religious educational institution can be also taught by a foreign citizen with approval of the body authorized for the relations between the country and the religious communities. The church and the religious communities manage the religious educational institutions individually (Constitution of Republic of Macedonia, 1991).

3 Developments in the country's education policies

It can be said that the educational system in the Republic of Macedonia was long based on a single organizational and didactic – methodical structure. However, the social changes are going in the direction of emphasizing individuality. The specific differences between students create the need for empathy, respect, cherishing of difference and mutual development. Hence requests for the modification of the education in such direction have appeared.

The executive agency for education, culture and audiovisual politics describes the education system of Republic of North Macedonia in the following way:

“The education system in the Republic of North Macedonia reflects the needs of the society for education and science, as to the permanent need of education and science in the economic, social, technological and cultural development of Macedonian society as whole. The educational process contributes to the development of creative and work potentials and influences the quality of life of every citizen in Macedonian society. As a result, the Ministry of education and science enables constant development of the educational system, moral education and science in the Republic of North Macedonia” (European Encyclopedia on National Education System 2013).

The educational system in North Macedonia is comprised of three subsystems: Elementary education lasting nine years. It is free and obligatory for all children between the ages of 6 and 15, regardless of gender, religion and nationality. The

educational activities in elementary education are defined and regulated with the Law on elementary education and the curricula for the nine-year period of elementary education. The mission of this subsystem is to educate and lead. Next comes high school education, which is split into general high school education (gymnasium) lasting for four years and vocational education (vocational high schools) lasting for two, three or four years.

High school education in the Republic of North Macedonia is obligatory for all adolescents between the ages of 15 and 18 years. The activities and responsibilities of high school education are defined and regulated by the Law on high school education and the Law on vocational education and training. High school education is free in public high schools, but the students have the legal possibility to attend private high schools.

University education implements undergraduate, master and doctor studies in university institutions and institutions which are autonomous or independent. In North Macedonia there are five state universities and fourteen private universities. Their activities are defined and regulated by the Law on university education. The curricula and programs for the subjects in elementary and general high school education, as well as the common subjects in vocational education are prepared by the bureau for the development of education in Republic of North Macedonia, and the vocational subjects by the Center for vocational education and training. The task of insuring the quality of educational institutions falls upon the State educational inspectorate.

In order to separate education from politics and political situations within a society, the educational process should be continually improved by implementing principles of interethnic and intercultural tolerance. To promote dialogue as a means of peaceful conflict resolution and the de-politicization of education as well as to reduce certain tensions among students, parents, teachers and other societal factors, the non-governmental sector in the field of education and the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of North Macedonia published the Declaration for the De-politicizing of Education, Multiethnic Tolerance, and Non-violent Communication on September 9th, 2009. With the signing of this declaration, all participants in the educational process as well as the societal factors involved, are obligated, within their means, to contribute to the de-politicization of education, the promotion of interethnic tolerance and the advancement of dialogue, as a basic means for communicating and solving conflicts through:

- Consistently and indiscriminately implementing constitutional principles and legislation concerning the educational process and the accepted international regulations.

- Consistently implementing control mechanisms, functions and quality standards that work towards respecting these regulations, to counter favoritism of individuals based on their ethnicity or political orientation.
- Regularly tracking the conditions and relations among students, emphasizing ethnically mixed schools as well as promoting the goal of this declaration through meetings of the relevant state and local authorities, school boards and parent committees, student organizations and non-governmental organizations, with the aim of promptly and effectively resolving conflicts.
- Increasing the professional capabilities of the teaching staff for reacting appropriately in tense situations through continuous professional education on mediation, the peaceful resolution of conflict and affirmative communication.
- Implementing projects for students' intensive socialization, especially students coming from different ethnic and religious backgrounds, where students' creativity and inventiveness is emphasized.
- Promoting cooperation and dialogue between the Ministry of Education and Science, municipalities, schools, the civic sector, parents and students, for continuous and mutual problem solving of everyday issues.
- Continuously promoting new policies, measures and activities whose aim is the complete and consistent implementation of the core goals of this declaration.

The contribution and the role of formal and informal education to the building of interreligious and interethnic tolerance among primary school students in the Republic of North Macedonia. The Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of North Macedonia, civic organizations and other signatories of this declaration are committed to focus on respecting and realizing the aims and the regulations brought about by this declaration. The Ministry of Education and Science takes it upon itself to regularly follow the implementation of the regulations of this declaration and to regularly report to the signatories and the public about the advances in the process of de-politicizing education, as well as informing them about interethnic tolerance and non-violent communication (Declaration for De-politicizing Education, Multiethnic Tolerance and Non-violent Communication 2009).

As a result of the declaration's obligations, the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of North Macedonia and non-governmental organizations have conducted a series of projects in education with the aim of strengthening interethnic and interreligious tolerance among students. In this same vein the following subjects were introduced as elective courses in elementary schools in North Macedonia in the year 2010: *ethics in religions, introduction to religions and classical culture in European civilization*.

The subject *ethics in religions* covers ethics as a science of morality; then, common principles of religious learning (Orthodox Christian learning, Islam, Judaism, Catholic and Evangelical – Methodist learning). It is expected that the students will be introduced to ethics and morale values of the implied religions by attending this course; to accept and respect human behavior among people; to become acquainted with the different religions of people in North Macedonian society and to develop skills of tolerance, dialogue, respect and cooperation with others (Curriculums for the subject ethics in religions 2010).

The curriculum for the subject *introduction to religions* enables the students to familiarize themselves with the values of world religions, the nature of religion, its origins and significance for man in general. The goals of the curriculums are: to introduce the students with the nature and values of different religions; to learn to respect different religions; to understand the role of religions in the modern world and to develop capabilities and skills for dialogue and cooperation with different religions (Curriculums for the subject introduction to religions 2010).

The curriculum for the subject *classical culture in European civilization* offers the students an introduction to classical culture as a source of foundational cultural, scientific and social principles upon which modern Europe is built and provides paradigms desired and necessary in forming of young generations. The frequent implementation of this kind of content is considered to facilitate the acceptance of some universal moral and civil virtues and will contribute in building of young persons with wide cultural knowledge (Curriculum for the subject classical culture in European civilization, 2010).

4 Role of religiously sponsored schools, including any changes and developments, legal relationships

As mentioned earlier, in North Macedonia, churches and religious communities have the right to establish religious educational institutions from all degrees of education, except for elementary education, for teaching of holy persons and religious servants. Accordingly, there aren't any religious schools of elementary education. The schools from the middle to higher education are organized by the Macedonian Orthodox Church and Islamic religious community, respectively. They independently run the religious educational institutions in middle degree of education, but the certificates given in these institutions aren't approved by the state.

The Orthodox Faculty of Theology "St. Clement of Ohrid" is a part of Ss. Cyril and Methodius University in Skopje. The certificates are approved by the country, and so graduated students can continue their studies in master studies

on other similar faculties in the country, for example the Philosophical faculty, Philological faculty and Faculty of History. The Faculty for Islamic Science in Skopje is not a part of any University in North Macedonia.

The remaining churches and religious communities, because of the small number of followers, don't have organized religious schools. Among them there are organized lectures in religion for interested followers. These are practiced in the churches and religious institutions, usually right after the end of the liturgy (Koceva & Petrovski 2015).

a) Religious schools of Macedonian Orthodox church

Continuing the teaching mission of the Saint Clément's school of Ohrid, according to the modern tracks of theological sciences, but in the apostolic spirit, the theological high school "St. Clement Ohridski" and the Orthodox theological faculty "St. Clement Ohridski" within the Macedonian Orthodox church, teach young theologians, teachers for religious science and priests each year.

Macedonian Orthodox theology is a theological high school where the students are taught and educated in the spirit of the Holy story of the Holy Gathering and Apostolic Orthodox Church and are prepared to perform their church liturgies: ministrations, religious teaching and others, and also gain the possibility to go further to the Orthodox theological faculty.

The learning in theology lasts for five years and ends with the obligatory passing of a finished theological exam. Only male students can enter the school. Female can study theology only at Orthodox Faculty of Theology in Skopje, because there is no orthodox theological high school in North Macedonia for female.

In schools of Macedonian Orthodox theology other subjects aside from the theological sciences are taught, such as for example: Macedonian language, English language, history, etc. Out of curriculum activities contain the following sections: theological debate, literature section, school choir, environmental section, humanitarian section, Red Cross section and Sport section. The sections are run by professors.

Macedonian Orthodox Theology in Skopje exists for 50 years and around 1400 students have graduated since its forming. More than 90 % of the active clergy in Republic of North Macedonia, as to half of the highest clergy in Macedonian Orthodox church, graduated high school in Macedonian Orthodox theology.

The Orthodox theological faculty "St. Clement Ohridski" in Skopje is founded in 1977 year, ten years after the restoration of the Macedonian Orthodox church. It is actually the restoration of St. Clément's University from 1130 years ago as its direct heir. Since its foundation the Faculty has enlisted 1386 students, 417 of

whom have graduated. At the faculty the requirements for entrance are the same for both sexes, male and female. A certain number of females (about 30) that graduated have begun to follow the religious teaching profession, starting in the college year 2009/10. The subjects learned at the Faculty are theological in nature, ranging from the area of bible studies over systematic liturgy, to church history and catechist discipline. Students who haven't finished theological high school are also awarded the opportunity to enter the faculty, but are required to pass an entry exam. The students who graduate from this Faculty receive a university diploma.

The Orthodox theological faculty "St. Clement Ohridski" in Skopje, which has existed for 30 years, is the youngest joint member of the University "St. Cyril and Methodius" in Skopje (Statute of UKIM, item no. 58). In the college year 2008/09 the Faculty gained State accreditation with full funding from the government. The Faculty is likely to develop and transform with increasing speed according to European standards for education and science. The faculty has pledged to work according to the European Credit Transfer System and the Bologna convention. Drafting its constitution took a long time, because it was supposed to be done not only according to the Constitution of the Macedonian Orthodox church, but also according to the regulations and provisions of the Law for University education in the Republic of North Macedonia.

Since the year 2015, at the Orthodox theological faculty offers master's programs, but large numbers of graduated theologians from this faculty today do these at famous theological centers in the world outside the country.

The Faculty publishes an annual miscellany of its professor's works, while the Union of students publishes a newsletter with the title "Pravoslaven blagovesnik". The newsletter comes out once a semester, and its goal is to stimulate the work of the students, so it has a special mission for those who are interested.

There are also plans to reorganize the Faculty and to introduce at least 4 curriculums, including new subjects (Report for self-evaluation of the Orthodox Faculty of Theology "St. Clement of Ohrid", Skopje, 2013).

b) Religious schools of the Islamic religious community in North Macedonia

In North Macedonia there is one Islamic high school in Skopje – the "Madrassa Isa Beg", that continues the tradition of an earlier madrassa carrying the same name, founded in the fifteenth century. The Madrassa has been expanded by adding several distant classes for girls in Skopje and Tetovo, and one distant class for boys in the city Stip. Over 2500 students have graduated from the madrassa from its founding until today. The school educates staff for the needs of the Islamic religious community, but also for the religious needs of all Muslims.

Students who want to continue their education on the Faculty for Islamic sciences in Skopje are awarded full scholarships by the Islamic religious community.

The curriculum is simple for all Islamic classes in North Macedonia and the same is approved by the Riasset, suggested by the Professors council. The program is fully reviewed every four years and is analyzed each year. Within the program, the students learn 30 subjects for four years. Except for the vocational theological subjects, the following sciences are taught in the madrassa: history, geography, computer science, mathematics, biology, philosophy, sociology, logics, didactics, chemistry and physics. Albanian, Turkish and Macedonian language in the madrassas have the status of native languages while Arabic has the status of a vocational language. English is learned as a foreign language. Besides the regular lessons, the students are obliged to finish a Ramadan internship.

The faculty of Islamic sciences in Skopje is the highest educational institution of the Islamic community in North Macedonia. It was founded by the Islamic religious community in the year 1997. Male and female candidates who have finished Islamic high school in North Macedonia or abroad are eligible to enter the faculty. Candidates from any other high school in North Macedonia or abroad may also enroll, but these candidates are required to pass an entry exam of the Faculty. The student structure according to sex at level of the Faculty stands at an almost consistent 45:55 in favor of women (Report for self-evaluation of the Faculty of Islamic sciences in Skopje, 2015). The studies of the Faculty of Islamic sciences are regular, and the graduated students gain university diploma. Besides the students from North Macedonia, the doors of this faculty are also open to foreign students. By now more than 150 students have graduated from the Faculty of Islamic sciences. The Faculty is only accredited to give lessons for the first cycle of studies in the area of general theology.

The student parliament at the Faculty of Islamic sciences was founded in the year 2001. From its founding until today it has been engaged in a multitude of cultural, scientific and vocational activities. The student union publishes its publications in printed and electronic media.

5 Conceptions and tasks of RE

These are the tasks of the educational institutions within the Macedonian Orthodox church: education of clergy and other personnel for the needs of the Church, as well as the development and promotion of theological sciences.

Tasks of the educational institutions within the Islamic community in Republic of North Macedonia are: raising the intellectual awareness in different areas of Islamic sciences, training and expert training of staff for the needs of the Islamic community and wider.

Higher education institutions within the Macedonian Orthodox church and the Islamic religious community have the following tasks: deepening and intensifying of the scientific researches in different areas, especially in Christian and Muslim environments, organizing seminars, workshops and courses of a national and international character. Students have the opportunity to study ancient languages the Bible is written in and other oriental languages.

The lessons in religious science for children and adults that are organized by all churches, religious communities and groups in North Macedonia, especially right after liturgies, have the task to introduce the believers with the essence of faith, which will enable them to properly confess it and celebrate religious holidays. The religious science plays a key role in the building of a system of values especially in the younger believers. Its task is to help in strengthening of the spiritual and cultural development of the believers.

The optional subject *ethics in religions*, taught in sixth grade of elementary school, contains religious education, and has the following set tasks: to introduce the students to the ethics and moral values of Christianity, Islam and Judaism; to teach them to treat others humanely; to introduce them with different religions among people in Macedonian society and to develop skills within them for tolerance, dialogue, respect and cooperation with others (Curriculum for the subject ethics in religions 2010).

6 Practice/reality of RE in different schools

In the public education system in the Republic of North Macedonia, religious science was first implemented as a pilot project in the study year 2002/2003 in the fifth grade of elementary school, with two lessons a week. The lectures were organized as an optional course for students showing interest for this subject. The goal of the subject was for the students to gain basic knowledge of their religion. The lectures were organized separately for Orthodox students, as well as for Catholic and Muslim students. The United Methodist Church and the Jewish community in North Macedonia have also entered with their own curriculum, but the lessons weren't implemented, because there weren't enough students to form a class. The classes for this subject were held by graduated theologians. Unfortunately, besides the interest shown by the students, this project didn't live to be realized in the following study year with the explanation that such a concept of religious lectures, where students are split according to their religion and everyone studies only for his own religion fosters divisions in the student body.

In the study year 2008/2009 the subject ethics in religion was re-introduced in elementary school, with two lessons a week, but this time as an optional subject, according to the Law on elementary education in Republic of North Macedonia

for the year 2008.² The lectures on religious science were held in fifth grade. The students could choose between Orthodox, Islamic, Catholic, Methodist and Jewish religious science, as to the subject history of religions.

The curriculum for the subject of religious science had an explicitly religious character; the emphasis was put on catechist education, the lectures were held by theologians, and the students were split based on their religion. Such an implementation of the curriculum is according to the essence of the subject *religious science*, understood in its narrow sense, which means teaching of religious catechism. Just because of this, the curriculum was marked by the Constitutional Court as a religious act within the state institutions, and as such standing in conflict with the Constitutional guarantee for the freedom of religious persuasion from item 16 part 1, the freedom of religion and religious groups from amendment 7 in the Constitution, but also item 13 from the Law on elementary education, which explicitly prohibits religious actions in elementary schools.

The fact that the lectures on the subject *religious science* were implemented through a ministerial decision for implementing of a program was seen as one of the weaknesses of implementing of religious science in the public education in Republic of North Macedonia. The law on elementary education doesn't present an implementation of a lecture through implementing of a decision in none of its provisions.

Such oversight by the authorities was used by the Constitutional court as an alternative basis for dropping of the decision that implemented the subject religious science. Namely, analyzing the disputed act from aspect of ministerial authorities for its implementation and the form through which the subject was introduced, the Court has concluded that, the implementation of a program and a decision are totally different by authorities, according to item 55 part 1 of the Law on organization and work of the organs of state governing" (Koceva, 2015: 139). Therefore, instead with a decision, the lectures on the subject *religious science* should be implemented with a ministerial act Program, as it is said in item 26 part 1 of the Law on elementary education and item 56 part 4 of the Law on organization and working of state governing bodies. Because of the mistakes made that were social and pedagogical in nature, the subject was dropped after one year. Meanwhile, around 70 % of the students, following their parents' decision, visited the lectures on *religious science*, while 30 % visited the alternative subject: *history of religions*.

2 Implementing of religious education in schools implied the need of changes in the Law on elementary education. So, in the new Law on elementary education from 2008 year, in item 26 is provided that in elementary school can be performed religious education as an optional subject (Law on elementary education 2008).

After the cancellation of religious science by the Constitutional court, the Bureau for the development of education didn't give up the idea to bring it back to schools. It announced a competition for the formation of a team of experts who worked on creating a curriculum for the subject *ethics in religions*, where ethical values of religions are to be learned.

Today, with the Law on elementary education in Republic of North Macedonia item 25 (part 2) in the elementary schools the educational work is organized and accomplished according to a curriculum and program, suggested by the Bureau for the development of education and affirmed by the Minister for education and science (Part 3). The curriculum for elementary schools contains obligatory and optional subjects, supplementary and additional lectures. According to item 26 in elementary school religious education can be done as an optional subject.

On September the 1st, 2010 religious education was implemented in VI grade of elementary school as an optional subject, together with two more alternative subjects,. Religious education in Republic of North Macedonia is realized through the optional subject *ethics in religions*. It is an optional subject chosen by the students in elementary public schools with two more optional subjects: *introduction to religions* and *classical culture in European civilization*.³

The students choose between three subjects: *introduction to religions*, *classical culture in European civilization* and *ethics in religions*. The curricula are prepared according to the age of the students. In the beginning of the study year the class teachers are obligated to give to the parents the curriculums of three optional subjects that the children can pick from. Based on the curriculum, the parents decide for the subject their child will learn.

The subject *ethics in religion* for its concept and content is made to teach the ethical dimensions of the religions spoken for in the Constitution of Republic of North Macedonia: Christianity (Orthodox, Catholicism and Evangelic – Methodist Church), Islam and Judaism. According to the curriculum, this subject has 2 lessons a week or 72 hours a year. The content of the program *ethics in religions* is a firm basis for the accomplishment of basic tasks with the goal of teaching about the ethics as a science for good and morale; knowledge about basics of ethics and basic ethical concepts in different religions such as: Christianity, Islam and Judaism.

The nature of the subject, its conceptual structure and the specifics of the content enables the students to familiarize themselves with the different religions of people in Macedonian society and to respect them. The goal of this subject is to

3 The three optional subjects, are in fact implemented for Vth grade for the students with eight-year elementary education or for VIth grade for the students with nine year elementary obligatory education.

incentivize the development of skills for tolerance among students, dialogue, understanding and cooperation.

The content of the subject *Ethics in religions* is split into three themes: ethics as a science of morality (taught for 10 lessons); ethics in religions (taught for 20 lessons) and the third theme has the status of a chosen module. Depending on the religion, the students learn one of five offered modules: ethics in Orthodox Christian teaching; ethics of Roman Catholic teaching, ethics of Evangelic – Methodist church; ethics of Islam and ethics of Judaism. Each module of choice supposes 42 lessons and is split into three components regarding theoretical bases of religious teaching, its ethical and moral basis (Miraschieva 2010).

The subject *ethics in religions* follows the changes by a didactic – methodic aspect in order to fulfill the demands of a modern lecture concept with all its aspects.

7 Observations on alternative subjects/learning areas like ethics, philosophy etc.

The students from elementary school, who didn't choose to follow lectures on the subject *ethics in religions* can instead make a choice between two subjects and follow lectures on the *introduction to religions or classical culture in European civilization*.

The subject *introduction to religions* is an optional subject for the students in sixth and seventh grade of elementary school. The extent of lessons for the subject is 2 lessons in a week or 72 lessons during the study year. The students can choose the subject in sixth grade (as a starting learning) and continue to learn it in seventh grade, or, to choose it only in sixth, respectively seventh grade as a starting learning.

The curriculum for this subject enables the students to introduce themselves to the values of great world religions: Judaism, Christianity and Islam, as well as to the nature of religion, its origins and significance for people in general.

The following are set as goals of the subject *introduction to religions*: to introduce the students to the importance and significance of religion in people's lives and in society; to introduce to them to the reasons and the beginning of the appearance of religions and their function; to introduce to them the fact that there is almost no human community where there aren't certain elements of religious beliefs and practices, and to review the question whether this means that man is a religious creature (*homo religius*); to introduce to them the dominant monotheistic religions in the modern world: Judaism, Christianity and Islam; to introduce to them the nature and values of different religions and to teach them

to respect different religions in everyday life; to introduce to them the role of religions in the modern world and for them to develop capabilities and skills for leading a dialogue and cooperation with people who are different from themselves, because in this way they will also learn themselves (Curriculum for the subject introduction to religions 2010).

As a result of the learning of religions and their customs, it is expected that the students will awaken to the need to get to know different beliefs from theirs and will have a larger tolerance toward others, different from them and their persuasions. In such way it is expected to achieve larger confidence and cooperation between the students, who will be future citizens of Republic of North Macedonia.

The lectures on the subject introduction to religions are held by teachers who have graduated from the philosophical faculty, who carry the title Bachelor professor in Philosophy or Sociology.

The subject *classical culture in European civilization* is learned as an optional subject in VI, VII or VIII grade in nine-year elementary school. The subject is taught two lessons during the week, respectively 72 lessons during a study year. The learning of this subject should enable the students to gain knowledge of ancient classical culture (Hellenic and Roman), as a basis of European science and art; to recognize the influence of certain parts of classical culture in modern European civilization, and also in Macedonian culture. At the same time, the students should be able to realize the continuity in development of European civilization through realizing its roots, in-between dependence of language and cultural – civilization processes and appearances and in such way to incentivize taking a wider interest in national and widened cultural flows. The introduction to the world of ancient classical culture can develop a differentiated self-awareness in the students for the rich cultural inheritance of North Macedonia; it can strengthen their sense of national identity to a demos with rich and long history, embedded in the ancient roots of European culture (Dimovska, T. 2008).

Besides this, classical (Greek – Roman) culture, as a source of founding cultural, scientific and social principles upon which modern Europe is built, offers paradigms, desirable and necessary in forming of young generations. The frequency of such contents is expected to ease the acceptance of some universal moral and civilization values and to contribute in building of young persons with wide general culture.

The lectures on the subject of classical culture in European civilization are held by teachers with degrees in classical studies or classical philology, who carry the title Bachelor classicist or Bachelor classical philologist. When such staff is lacking, the lectures can also be held by teachers with degrees in the history of art with archeology, philosophy or other groups with a classical language.

8 Dealing with religious diversity

Religious education has the goal to give incentives to the students for responsible behavior in school, family and life. It is expected that it will develop a spirit of tolerance and respect of the differences between people in them, especially in terms of faith. The lectures on this subject, enable the students to familiarize themselves with the religious values of people different from them, and through this it is expected that the students will build and develop their personal religious and cultural identity more easily.

The teachers teaching religious education point toward positive feelings of tolerance developed among the students from different religions during the realization of the lectures including religious education. Still, the influence of religious lectures on interreligious tolerance and society in general is yet to be the subject of research with the appearance of several generations in the school system that have heard lectures on *ethics in religions and introduction to religions*.

9 Religions in schools outside of RE

In public education in the Republic of North Macedonia with the Law on education it is forbidden for the students to use any kind of religious symbols, or publicly practice prayers. Religions in schools, outside of the optional subjects including religious education, are learned only when they are in direct or indirect connection with the curriculum in the subject history. The contacts and conflicts among Christians, Muslims and Jews from the past until today are usually treated. Here Judaism is studied most often in the context of anti-Semitism or the Holocaust, or of the conflicts in the Middle East. Islam is studied through its historical expansion, through the penetration of the Ottomans into the Balkans and the five century occupation of North Macedonia by the Ottoman Empire. Christianity is observed as a religion that spread with the Crusading wars in the time of the “dark” middle ages. The differences between Orthodox, Catholicism, Protestantism and other newly formed Christian communities aren’t made clear enough.

Lessons on the subject Macedonian language and literature, and in the lectures on native language of other nationalities in North Macedonia also touch on the topic of religious literature. Students also gain basic knowledge on art threaded with religious content through the work of famous artists learned about in lectures on art and music.

10 Training of teachers of RE: institutes, structures, priorities issues

The lectures on the subject *ethics in religions* are held by theologians who have finished theological faculty and post graduate studies on methodic of religious education.

Professional training of teachers plays a key role for the realization of lectures that are modern and of high quality. Therefore, the teachers teaching ethics in religions are regularly included in training sessions and seminars, organized by relevant subjects, to permanently increase their knowledge and develop their consciousness for interreligious tolerance.

11 Empirical research concerning RE

In the year 2014, in Skopje, a survey was conducted on a sample of 358 students of Macedonian and Albanian nationality following lectures on one or two optional subjects: *ethics in religions or introduction to religions*. The research project was conducted in order to gain insight of the contribution of these optional subjects to the students' relation to interreligious tolerance and respect between the students, the building of religious values and the desire to help others.

According to the survey the students who studied ethics in religions expressed greater appreciation for others than those who attended the subject Introduction to Religions. Attendees of ethics in religions reported having positive exchanges with students different from themselves and are aware that all religions have developed ethical principles and that people are worthy of respect. They also have respect for the values of students of other nationalities or religions.

The students of Albanian nationality learning the subject *ethics in religions* most appreciate solidarity toward poor of all the religious values. The students of Macedonian nationality, avoid situations that could be a reason for religious conflicts more than their Albanian classmates (Jovkovska 2014).

In the year 2013, in North Macedonia, a survey was conducted on a sample of 370 participants (high school and students) with the aim of examining the differences in preferred life styles in adolescents depending on the type of education. Adolescents learning religious subjects and ethics (education in religious educational institutions) were included, then adolescents learning only ethics and adolescents not learning neither religious subjects, nor ethics during their education.

The most obvious difference discovered in this study was that the adolescents learning about religious subjects and ethics can find a balance between their

personal needs and the needs of others. This conclusion can be seen as an benefit of the influence of the type of education or the choice of life styles, besides the fact that the priorities of all adolescents (participants in this survey) are family orientation. Love and marriage are still the most important life values of young people today (Jovkovska 2015).

12 Desiderata and challenges for RE in a European context

The key goal in the development of the educational system in North Macedonia is the opening and moving education towards the accomplishments and experiences of European countries, and especially countries in the EU. Therefore, approaches and politics should be identified that will contribute to religion becoming a factor that promotes dialogue in the context of European development, instead of being a driver of conflicts.

Religious education, through the process of education, plays an important role in the building of a system of values in the students – building religious and moral values: helps in building of general, basic and common human values, such as: democracy, nationality, individualism and pacifism, as in strengthening of the spiritual and cultural development; enabling crucial familiarizing with the other, through learning of other religions.

We think that in modern society, where a crisis of moral values is present, it is necessary for the students to form their personal view of the world while educating them, to get to know the basic ethical principles of religions, to develop skills for moral reasoning and to encourage them to respect their classmates and people with religious persuasions different from theirs. This is the goal of the optional subject *Ethics in religions*. Such a form of education contributes to the students' successful walk on the road toward the European family.

Still, one year of learning this subject, within the total education of the students, is a short time period to achieve all planned goals of the curriculum. For these reasons we recommend, like in many European countries, that the religious education in North Macedonia continue to be learnt in more years of elementary education, and be present in middle and high education. In this case, it is sure that the expected results for building of high morale persons with developed skills for interreligious and interethnic tolerance, in-between respect and coexistence will be more obvious.

The form of religious education, contributing for better understanding of religious pluralism and giving opportunity for learning of religious values, including values of peace, should be available to all students in the educational system. Religious education can be a field for research of values in relation to languages of religion and can become a “laboratory for peaceful education”. Such

approaches toward religious education, of course, require teachers well trained in the teaching of religions.

13 Further information

Further information about religious education in Republic of North Macedonia can be found at the following websites:

- Orthodox Faculty of Theology “St. Clement of Ohrid” – Skopje <http://www.pbf.edu.mk/>.
 Faculty of Islamic Science – Skopje <http://www.fshi.edu.mk/eng/>.
 Madrasa Isa Beg – Skopje <http://www.medreseja-isabeu.com/>.
 Textbook “Ethic of Religion” (module: Orthodox Christianity) by Petko Zlateski http://www.e-ucebnici.mon.gov.mk/pdf/Etika_vo_religiite_5_mak.pdf.
 Textbook “Ethic of Religion” (module: Islam) by Naser Ramadani http://www.e-ucebnici.mon.gov.mk/pdf/Etika_vo_religiite_5_alb.pdf.
 Textbook “Introduction to Religions” by Biljana Shotarovska and Tatjana Gjeorgjievaska. http://www.e-ucebnici.mon.gov.mk/pdf/Zapoznavanje_na_religii_5_mak.pdf.

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