

Religion and Values in Education in CEE Region

Gabriella Pusztai

University of Debreceni Egyetem

gabriella.pusztai@ella.hu

After the political transformation there have been particular researches in some countries in CEE region about the role of churches in education. During these researches it became evident that the question was worth elaboration in comparative perspective. Important antecedents were EU publications issued in the '90s that undertook the task to overview and compare parts of the national education systems that were run by non-governmental actors. These publications dealt with the present situation of these non-public schools in European education systems and beside the most important statistical data they also gave a comparative analysis of the legal measures concerning the legal frameworks, types of schools, conditions of school foundation, state support from public funds, relationships with state curricula, recognition of school leaving certificates and status of teachers (Eurydice 1993, Saha 1997, Eurydice 1999). They dealt, however, only with the then EU Member States and because of the special methodology, they were not really sensitive to the cultural traditions of the individual countries. Obviously they did not advert to the topic either, how religious education appears in the public education system or how public schools relate to the religious freedom of students belonging to various confessions. During a comparative analysis certain historic characteristics, e.g. religious, denominational composition of a given country, the circumstances of the evolvement of the modern state and state administration can help analyse not only the extent (Archer 1979) and support of the school system run by churches and other non-state actors but the present characteristics of religious education in state schools (eligibility, fit in the timetable, conditions of joining and dropping a course) as well (Tomka 1992).

There are a number of sharply contrasting views on the respective roles of the Church and the State in education in. According to one paradigm the Church and the State have been rivals since the very beginning, and the past two centuries have been all about the struggle between the old and the new dominating groups (Archer 1979), whereas according to another view certain social interest groups, leaning on the bureaucratic state for support, have got rid of the Churches in the first step in order to achieve civil rights (Polanyi 1944), and later they have gradually limited the role of the state as well (Molnar 1990).

The two views agree that the social role of the Churches has diminished significantly during the last century. One of the views regards the present time as the era when the power of the state is at its peak, as the final step in the two hundred-year process of 'nationalisation'. According to the other view public thinking has become pluralist, religion has become a private matter and the Churches have changed into voluntary social organizations. The state, having lost its role as a proprietor and a moral authority, functions only as a coordinator, a 'book-keeper' serving public security (Molnár 1993).

The essence of the Archerian theory, which is based on a historical statistical analysis, is the competition between different social interest groups – between the dominating ones and their challengers – for the control over the educational system. One of his two models is the Russian and French one based on a restrictive strategy; the other one is the English and Danish one exemplifying the substitutive strategy (Archer 1979). Regarding the position of denominational schools in Western European countries, the abovementioned EU publications reflect a flattening of fault-lines between the earlier historic models (Pusztai 2004). In this new casting, the state – instead of being a competitive player – appears everywhere as a coordinator. Its new role is defined by the constitutional principle of respecting human rights, namely the right to religious freedom and the right to education. These publications clearly show that at the millennium EU states understood providing and financing free and compulsory education as public tasks. In

European countries the freedom of education means, on the one hand, free founding, organizing and choosing a school by citizens and the existence of private schools, and on the other hand the growing number of private schools with state support (Eurydice 2000: 100). It was a clear basic principle, too, that while creating the frames for compulsory education modern European constitutional states regard pluralism and the freedom of belief as constitutional principles, and did not attempt to have power over the ethos and organization of education. They try, however, to provide for the fulfilment of curricular requirements set by law and they consider ensuring the right of citizens to education as their responsibility. As a consequence, the situation of non-state schools and the extent of state support from public funds are not defined by the ideology conveyed by the school or the identity of the maintainer but their relationship to the state curricula. In the education system, real clear-cut confines are not to be found between the public and private sectors but between supported schools fulfilling substantial requirements and those very different and as such self-financing schools. The dominant EU conception emphasizes both providing for the parents' right to choose non-state institutions and guaranteeing the right to establish private schools.

In the EU Member States private schools were mainly run by non-profit organizations at the millennium. Those are not interested in profit making and thus the adjective 'private' only refers to the fact that they are not owned by the state. In the European education systems the non-governmental sector is strongly proportioned according to its legal status. They can have two to four poles with the highest differentiation in the Italian system. In the various European states the private sector in the strict sense – the institutions of which are organized, financed and controlled exclusively by private persons or bodies – is small. Parallely, however, another sector was taking shape that is neither public nor fully private as considering both their financial sources and controlling they are closely related to the government – confessional education institutions can generally be classified into this group.

At the millennium the share of churches was varied in the private education sector of the EU countries. Their privileged position in many countries (Belgium, The Netherlands, Germany, Italy, Spain) can also be shown by the fact that confessional schools at founding – considering the value-preserving and community-creating roles of the churches – did not have to prove that 'their activity is of public interest'. Laws on education of the various Member States interpreted the relationship between the education government and the churches pursuing socially useful activities as partner and contractual relationships between two independent institutions. Churches are naturally present in the public sector through religious education, and in certain countries even beyond that – in Ireland e.g. all public schools are of religious nature and thus the field for religious education is not exclusively that of confessional schools (Hull 1995). In UK data confessional schools run by non-state actors but financed from the state budget were not even called private schools and were simply count to the public sector. In Ireland a special partnership emerged between the state and private maintainers to provide for education in poorly institutionalized regions. Thus the state-supported private sector essentially falls in with the public sector (Eurydice 2000).

In Europe state-supported private education is a natural complement to the public sector and provides for confessional or ideological alternatives. According to this principle, parents can freely choose them for their children. According to issuing certificates and organizing exams private schools usually enjoy the same rights as state schools. However, the state monopoly of examination still prevails in systems that have more centralized education traditions (France, Greece, Scotland). In this case, too, the relationship with the state curricula plays a decisive role in Italy and Austria. It means that schools following the state curriculum can enjoy the right to organize examinations. As for controlling the function of private schools the tendency is – according to the principle of subsidiarity – to strengthen local or social (school users', school communities') control and to weaken the influence of central (ministerial) bodies or bodies

subordinated to the centre (school inspectorate). The influence of central governmental bodies is still the strongest in France but efforts for decentralization have already appeared there, too. It strikes, however, the public sphere, as well.

Parallel to enforcing students' right to education, the streamline of European law-making on private education focuses on providing for the right to belief and religion¹. States consider confessional and other private schools as institutions that work on the basis of a curriculum identical to the state one and are able to provide a service that cannot be given by the state itself. This way they offer more educational options for parents that they can choose for their children. States support private schools to pull down barriers to citizens of less wealthy background and adhering to religious or other ideological education, and thus hinder discrimination that would evidently come up anyway. So states provide for the right of freely chosen education by financing otherwise fee-paying private schools. The abovementioned facts also support the basic principle of co-financing, namely to avoid double taxation of students going to non-state institutions. On the one hand, if the state subsidy covers the running expenses of a school and the salary of teachers, fees can only be gathered to a limited extent or no fees should be paid at all. On the other hand, it also affects the right of private-school students or their parents to support.

The basic principle of public financing of private education in Europe is task-oriented, which means that financing is provided on the basis of the number of students. The amount is defined in comparison to that of the public sector. Mainly a minimum amount is set that at most places must be equal to the sum given to state schools. It is only the French system that emphasizes an upper limit. Financing personnel expenditure and material expenditure are quite often not on an equal footing. The previous is usually taken over by the state in a greater extent – or even as a whole –, which aims to support employees in the private sector on the basis of the principle of same salary for the same job.

The status of private school teachers is usually not that of a public servant but in most cases compares to it in order to support legal certainty of employees. Relevant rules cover labour-time, salaries, career system and pension contribution. The Austrian situation can be taken as an exception where private school teachers are also public servants.

Since these basic principles and practices are becoming general, the most important tendencies are a new interpretation of the responsibility of the state towards education, 'acknowledgement and virtual assimilation of church-established institutions into the public sector' (Eurydice 1993:6), wide-scale support for the rights of parents and the school users' community. On this basis and because of the influence by the coordinating role of the state, the situation of non-state – i.e. mainly confessional – education institutions in the present Western-European education systems show more similarities than differences, however, some hints of the previous characteristics of the restrictive type can still be found e.g. in the French system. All of them are rather examples of the Archerian substitutive form that integrated into a national education system where parallel institution networks work with a support from the central budget while maintaining their individual image, embodying cultural and value pluralism and fulfilling their tasks set by law.

The analysis of the PISA (Program for International Student Assessment) data gave new impetus to European researches about the role of churches in education. The PISA report showed that in three quarters of the countries private schools produce higher results than public schools (Preuschoff & Weiss 2001). Thus studying these schools bears a promise of a strategy leading out of the crisis caused by the crushing results. Several research centres are now working on explaining the efficacy of confessional schools. This undertaking can be hallmarked with the

¹ In certain European countries it is not majority but minority confessions that run private schools (in Great Britain, Ireland, Denmark and protestant German *Länder*).

names of Róbert Péter and Rense Corten and others in EUI following Jaap Dronkers' initiative (Dronkers & Róbert 2004, Corten & Dronkers 2006), and Olaf Köller, Claudia Standfest and Annette Scheunpflug in Germany (Standfest et al. 2005). Although PISA surveys were not conducted to provide for sector comparison, these databases opened a new era in studying European confessional education as they also make it possible to reveal substantial characteristics of the sector that are independent from country boundaries. It is problematic, however, that in the PISA database there are a lot of sensitive indicators that are not associated with variables on particular confessional maintainers and thus it is only possible to compare state supported private schools, independent private and public schools. But as the first sector is almost made of confessional schools, we can surely base our arguments about the characteristics of confessional schools on this analogy.

Nevertheless, the bird's-eye perspective given by the international output surveys remains superficial as this approach is not sensitive to particular local meanings that are not only influenced by the differences of the historic and legal frameworks but also by the interpretations of roles in the social, cultural and education system that arise from the extent of the concerned school sectors, their heterogeneous or homogeneous confessional characteristics or their regional position. It was exactly a comparison between confessional schools in the Eastern and Western German Länder that drew attention to the fact that one must be very careful even if studying regions that speak the same language but look back on different (recent) history (Standfest 2005). And it is almost impossible to build as many control variables in the regression equations of the admirable statistical analyses as could reproduce this countrywide or even regional variability. Another barrier to utilize the results of these surveys is that – unlike in the majority of US surveys – there is no possibility to follow-up interviewed students and thus to provide for longitudinal observations or network approach analyses, although analyses of the social impacts of confessional education usually emphasize the importance of long-term impacts or spillover impacts that spread along networks of relationships.

Evidently, it would be necessary to follow the methodology applied by international organizations conducting comparisons, which means that first we have to elaborate indicators that are the most proper and characteristic to comparisons. Then with the help of these indicators we shall go on with the description of the school systems. We find it important, however, to emphasize that while studying religious education in the confessional schools of the region one should consider region-specific dimensions that are characteristic to this part of Europe. Just to mention some of them, such dimensions are e.g. the role played by confessional education in providing equal opportunities for minorities in education, differences in the traditional relationships between the state and the various churches, or territories that had been developing under different education policy models and got among common state boundaries because of the political changes of the 20th century as well as the some decades during the communist power. These characteristics must be explored by accurate case analyses that are capable of considering the respective historic and cultural traditions of the various countries, their different ethnic and religious or confessional compositions and the determination of the education systems by various education policies. In order to reveal local meanings we tried to find already in this issue researchers who have experience and special sensibility to examine the relationship between churches and education in the region. We asked them to interpret the question of the role of churches in education in the context of a particular country or region. We did not press a system of outer, strange criteria or our logical schemes on these cooperating researchers but learnt about the methodological means and theoretical constructions used by them to examine the topic as educational systems differ in the meaning that the people involved in educational politics give to the phenomena surrounding them. Accordingly local scientific disputes and narratives of researchers that are often out of international comparisons came to the surface. A mutual understanding of them can base a common future way of research thinking.

Members of this workshop try to interpret the role of churches in education by searching for its social function or common social utility. Most references are made to the function conveying values and helping social integration. In post communist countries it is a common denominator that the authority of state schools has sagged since they were mediator for the totalitarian ideology for decades. It is a particular paradox that societies in this region react with increased fretfulness and distrust schools in their value-conveying role, although wide social layers (e.g. the losers of market transformations, victims of family or professional harms) of societies that underwent political transformation are anomic. The consequences can be detected in the decline of civil participation, deviances in health conduct and the deformation of human relationships. It is common, too, that stability provided by ties to a church is interpreted a resources within the intractable political conflicts. As the civil society was forcefully disjointed by the totalitarian dictatorships and common trust sagged during the social transformations and as the commitment for common interests was misused for decades, it was the churches that could remain the most genuine elements of the civil sector. Local interpretations about the role of churches in education have common features: they emphasize the ambition to help social integration and to develop attitudes to mediation, tolerance and acceptance between different cultural groups in multicultural regions or to improve school chances of disadvantaged students.

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