Summary

The focus of this study is the investigation of the importance of religion in the context of a Europeanisation of education. Qualitative research methods are used to explore concepts of religion and education in key documents of the Council of Europe and the European Union and to contribute to the debate about the value of religion in education. This is a contested debate with contributions from different perspectives such as education science, religious education and the social sciences.

The background of the study reflects two general developments as underlying presumptions:

- Religion has gained a renewed interest in the context of Europe. Religion is valued as an important element of human experience, and religious communities are recognized by political institutions as a specific part of civil society. In this sense, religion is seen as a ‘cultural fact’.
- Developments towards Europeanisation have taken place in the field of education and have led to areas such as a European Education Space and a European Education Policy. The concept of Europeanisation reflects the complexity of processes, which include transnational flows and networks, ideas and practices across European boarders, direct effects of EU policy and the Council of Europe’s recommendations on domestic change together with the influences of international organisations and dynamics of globalisation on different levels of Europe.

The research is focused on documents in the Council of Europe and the European Union as the two important political organisations shaping the process of European integration in collaboration with its 47 (Council of Europe) and 27 member states (European Union). Both institutions are vehicles for implementing policies and disseminating norms and expectations.

Documents from both organisations are valued as meaning markers in an ongoing discourse and as contributions to a development of Europeanising education by influencing key domestic constituencies.

The Council of Europe with its 47 member states has the image of being the ‘conscience’ of Europe, by fostering international collaboration based on democracy, human rights and the rule of law. In this institution education has gained a significant place and value since its foundation in 1949. Some of the key activities of education include ‘Shared histories for a Europe without dividing lines’, teacher training and capacity building for teacher trainers, language policy, education for democratic citizenship and intercultural understanding.

The European Union is a key institution for the European integration that started as a project of peace and reconciliation after the Second World War. While education was not a priority when the first steps of the European Communities and later the European Union were made, education now receives a more incorporated role in the
European integration process. Quality and lifelong learning are at the heart of debate in the Community related to the issue of how education can contribute to a European strategy for ‘smart, sustainable and inclusive growth’ named ‘Europe 2020’. Education has become an area of European public policy supported by the establishment of ‘soft’ processes such as policy networks, action programmes, indicators and benchmarks, providing European solutions to European challenges in education, and encouraging more quality and efficiency of national education systems.

The concept of Europeanisation was used as an underlying theoretical perspective in relation to my research. This theory has been developed in political science but is increasingly used also in other disciplines such as the social sciences and education.

Based on the general aims of the study, the following research questions were formulated:

– Is religion an issue in the context of a Europeanisation of education?

– Which specific definitions, understandings, concepts, images, pictures and stereotypes of religion and education can be worked out in the context of the work of the Council of Europe and the European Union?

To answer these questions, three steps were taken. Firstly some theoretical reflections were undertaken and the status of current research on Europe, education, and religion was explored. Secondly selected documents mainly from the Council of Europe and the European Union were analysed using a mix of methodologies including qualitative content analysis, grounded theory and discourse analysis. Thirdly the findings were discussed and used as an empirical background to formulate recommendations for theory and practice. A special focus in this part of the study was given to a Protestant perspective for reflecting on the findings.

Basic theoretical Considerations about Europe – Education – Religion, and the State of Research (Chapter 2)

The first section on theoretical considerations and the status of current research introduces the history of the European integration with a special emphasis on the role and value of education. It is argued that education increasingly has gained importance through the stages of European integration. While at the beginning there was a clear accord that education was almost exclusively a matter of national concern and responsibility with no competence given to the European institutions, this has changed over the years. The Lisbon summit of 2000 especially marks a change of perspective due to the commitment to make Europe ‘become the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world’. Apart from setting specific objectives, such as an increased investment in human resources, the promotion of education mobility and the implementation of a European framework for lifelong learning measures, the newly promoted ‘open method of coordination’ (OMC) suggested a new style of policy based on a soft form of governance, using indicators and benchmarking as policy tools. Post Lisbon ‘lifelong learning’ and the implications of a ‘knowledge society’
Religion im Kontext einer Europäisierung von Bildung

were to become dominant discourses in the European Education Space and in European Education Policy.

In the next section the concept of religion and relations between religion and Europe are introduced. The discussion takes into account the manifold, often painful history that has shaped the encounter with religion in Europe since the Middle Ages: Reformation and Counter-Reformation, the Thirty Years’ War ending with the Peace of Westphalia, the period of Enlightenment with its secularisation processes and a diminution of institutionalised religion are important developments.

These provide a context for a current colourful religious landscape and the political concept of the separation of state and church. The principled separation of state and church has led to different models of state church relations in Europe due to a mix of factors in the different regions. In modern Europe the long-time dominant concept of secularization has lost its exclusive supremacy and is complemented by the concept of the transformation of religion and the resurgence of religion in a differentiated shape. It is also mentioned that any attempt to define religion depends on the context and the user’s epistemological perspective. Any discussion on religion is shaped by the manifold context of Europe with its multi-coloured religious landscape, the different models of state-church relationships and the different levels of impact of the secularisation process. This has to be taken into account when a “European perspective” comes into the picture. Churches and religious communities are seen as main actors in civil society in Europe. They are presented in this chapter as dialogue partners with the European institutions.

The main academic disciplines were investigated in relation to how far they contribute to the discourse and relationship of Europe, education and religion. The focus of political science is on European integration. The limited evidence of traditional theories such as integration theories, including approaches of neo-functionalism and intergovernmentalism, policy analysis and the debate about a European constitution has pioneered the development of the concept of Europeanisation. Although there is no common understanding of Europeanisation among scholars, they share the process-oriented character and the mutual influence of the different political levels from the local to the European and global level. As an influential example of a broad definition Johan P. Olsen’s approach can be used. He differentiates between the following processes of Europeanization:
1. Changes in external boundaries
2. Developing institutions at the European level
3. Central penetration of national systems of governance
4. Exporting forms of political organizations
5. A political unification project.

Educational science has long been focused on the national context and has been widened just recently to the European and international levels. Even though concepts such as lifelong learning and knowledge society have become important European issues, educational science needs to europeanise and globalise its view not only to de-
develop a more comparative perspective but to understand a European perspective as an increasingly important area for research and development.

Theological and religious education perspectives are needed for analysing correlations of education and religion. A European theological perspective appreciates the plurality of theological thinking due to the existing rich religious diversity in Europe. Theological discourse does not strive for any European harmonization. However theological reasoning can deal with the issue of common values in Europe and this can contribute to providing a framework for living together in a situation of increasing cultural and religious plurality. A special focus is on solidarity, human dignity, reconciliation and peace.

A number of comparative research projects have been launched during recent years, especially in religious education, covering issues such as the relevance of the subject, existing models of religious education in schools and their impact on general education, religious competence and religious diversity and education (such as REDCo, TRES, RaLP). While the value of religion in school is contested a more European oriented exchange takes place among scholars that provides space and opportunities for further European research projects.

My own particular research interest focuses on an analysis of selected documents of the Council of Europe and the European Union. A criterion of selection has been whether or not aspects of religion and education are implicitly or explicitly mentioned. In this framework a Europeanisation of education is valued as a discursive fact and is investigated diachronically and synchronically.

The main points of my analysis are the following:

- European integration is a project of peace and reconciliation that started with economic collaboration and developed toward a value based political Union.
- In the framework of European integration education increasingly gains relevance in relation to both the economic and the value perspective of Europe.
- The European Union and the Council of Europe are central actors of European integration. In both institutions education and vocational training have become important policy areas.
- Religion as a source, dimension and challenge to European values receives increasing recognition.
- Research on Europe in political science has changed in character and increasingly gives more attention to other sciences such as the social sciences and education.
- Educational science is discovering the importance of Europe and places it in the wider frame of globalisation.
- Theological perspectives foster human dignity, the common good and solidarity. These perspectives can contribute to European integration, making a value-based contribution.
- Initiatives in the field of religious education provide empirical data that gain prominence and influence in the European discourse.
The analytical perspective of ‘Europeanisation’ is promising because it can explain complex, interactive processes on different levels.

Reconstruction and Analysis of European Discourse (Chapter 3 and 4)

My analysis of the documents is based on the method of qualitative content analysis. This is central to the particular combination of research methods used in my thesis. Three steps were taken in analysing the pre-selected documents: Firstly, each document is summarized with its main points and arguments on religion and education, secondly, categories are formulated and interpreted, and thirdly, the findings are discussed.

Discourse analysis is used to as a means to viewing the European institutions and their impact as part of a wider picture. European institutions are seen as places where discourse is produced (loci of discourses). This has put the analysis of documents in a broader context that takes into account dynamics of the political field, including aspects of power.

Elements of Grounded Theory enriched the research process especially through a constant comparative analytical perspective, using the concept of theoretical sampling and the inductive development of basic categories from the documents.

In the context of the different institutions of the Council of Europe the recommendations of the Parliamentary Assembly and the recommendations and a White Paper from the Committee of Ministers play a crucial role. Also documents from activities of the Commissioner on Human rights are analysed as well as judgments of the European Court of Human Rights. The institutions of the Council of Europe have different mandates and perspectives. The Parliamentary Assembly in its recommendations deal with issues such as religious tolerance, democracy, education religion and human rights. Another area is the field of intercultural dialogue and intercultural education where the emphasis lies with the Committee of Ministers. The importance of documents for the study is linked to the fact that since the year 2002 a new recognition and acknowledgement about the religious dimension came into force in both fields.

For the perspective of the European Court of Human Rights ECHR the protection of human rights is at the centre of its mandate. This includes issues of freedom of thought, conscience and religion (Art. 9, European Convention for the protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms) and the right of parents to ensure such education and teaching in conformity with their own religious and philosophical convictions (Art. 2, first protocol of the Convention).

European Union documents include those primary legal documents where religion or an equivalent term is mentioned. The value and the wording of a religious basis for European integration was a contested issue in the debate, especially in the development of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union and also in the process of attempting to develop a European constitution.

The other area covered relates to European Education Policy. My work on this is shaped by basic documents in which instruments for quality in education are promoted, especially activities that foster initiatives for lifelong learning. Examples for this are
key competencies and the European Qualification Framework (EQF). Moreover the
issues of migration and mobility have been taken up by the European Union as one of
the burning issues in education in relation to social cohesion.

As a mirror to the selected documents from the European institutions, and as contribu­tions to a European dialogue, a number of documents from church networks such as
Conference of European Churches CEC and the Community of Protestant Churches in
Europe CPCE are included that specify a perspective concerning religion and education
as a contribution to a European discourse. They were included and investigated for two
reasons: Their aims show some consistency with the political documents concerning
aims and values of European integration and they provide a contrast in terms of ratio­
nale for the inclusion of a broader concept of religion.

Results of the study are clustered under perspectives of religion, state-church relation­ship, society and religion, education, religion, and religious education.

Proposals for Theory and Practice and Outlook (Chapter 5)

This chapter includes a systematised summary of the findings concerning elements and
concepts of religion and education in the selected documents. The focus is on the main
categories “religion” and “education”. Sub-categories of religion are: the concept of
religion, state-church relationship and society, democracy and religion. Sub-categories
of education are the concepts of education, knowledge society and lifelong learning,
and religious education.

In summarizing the findings the following should be mentioned:

– An initial finding is a distinction between the ways in which Council of Europe
documents and European Union documents handle the interrelatedness of reli­
gion and education, despite the close overlap of interests and policy in the two
institutions. In Council of Europe documents, the relationship is explicit, where­
as European Union documents tend to deal with the interrelationship of religion
and education implicitly or indirectly.

– The Council of Europe deals with religion in a sophisticated and differentiat­
ed manner in its different institutions. The main institutional bodies within the
Council of Europe dealing with religion and education are the Parliamentary
Assembly, the Committee of Ministers, the Commissioner of Human Rights and
the European Court of Human Rights. While in recommendations of the Council
of Europe religion is explicitly mentioned and discussed in relation to tolerance,
democracy and education, this is not the fact in documents of the European Union.

– Concerning education a general relation between education and religion can
be found in Council of Europe’s documents as well as criteria and demands of
teaching about religion and about concepts of religious education. A preference
of the Council of Europe is a knowledge based concept of “teaching/education
about religion” whereas other aspects of religious education such as learning from religion and learning religion are not dealt with extensively.

– In the documents of the Council of Europe three different perspectives of religion can be analysed: religion as a private matter (private religion), religion as collective and organised (organised religion) and religion as a cultural fact (cultural religion). From a diachronical perspective private religion is an established image while organised religion gains more sympathy and recognition in the history of the documents analysed between 1993 and 2011. This is explicitly expressed when in several documents a reference is made to the values of the religious communities providing a source of the values of the Council of Europe. The agreement on the fact that religion is, at least, a ‘cultural phenomenon’, has received prominence in current documents of the Council of Europe. It is based on the conviction that this concept establishes a basic definition of the nature of religion that allows the Council to begin to develop further the implications of religion for intercultural education.

– In the context of the European Union no explicit concept of religion is expressed in the documents, but the EU respects and does not prejudice the status under national law of churches and religious associations or communities in the Member States. In primary law an open, transparent and regular dialogue with churches and religious communities is included (Art. 17 TFEU).

– The relation of state and church is a central issue of the Council of Europe. Existing systems of strict separation (laïcité) are preferred although there has been some movement in relation to this issue. In this model religion is mainly a private matter and has no central value in the public sphere. In this perspective also the role of churches and religious communities in co-shaping a European society is limited due to the principle of laïcité. However, exchanges between different actors in the field of religions and beliefs, including religious bodies and representatives of religious communities, have been a feature of the Council of Europe’s work in recent years, indicating some easing from laïcité in its most strict understanding.

– The EU is not working towards a common European law on religion but respects the existing plurality in state-church relationship. Processes of Europeanisation increasingly influence the state-church relation on national level.

– The European institutions increasingly acknowledge the complexity of the relationship between society, democracy and religion. In the context of the Council of Europe some mistrust is expressed of certain documents concerning the democratic orientation of religious communities. The European Union appreciates the status of the religious communities and emphasizes them as specific actors in civil society.
In general a more differentiated perception of religion in European society emerges and the religious communities are valued as partners of the European institutions with a reliable potential to promote democratic developments in Europe.

In summarizing the findings concerning religion in the European context a twofold statement can be proposed:

On the one hand religious communities are increasingly seen as valid partners of politics in creating a democratic society, provided that they follow existing political conditions and frameworks. The danger of a functionalized perception of religion and religious communities has to be carefully recognized in this context.

On the other hand the relationship of religion, democracy and society is seen as manifold and complex. This can be documented in the following slightly antagonistic findings:

- Religion fades away, but receives increasing importance in society.
- Religion is a private matter, but becomes increasingly an issue within the public sphere
- Religion is a cultural fact, but for many, religion is more than this: it may be a way of life, an embodiment of revealed truth or linked to important ethical convictions.

The Council of Europe gives high value and a positive image to education as a problem solver for society. No further differentiated perspective on the concept of education can be found in the analyzed documents.

In the context of the EU, education becomes increasingly a European issue with a special role and value for matters of economics and growth. At the same time the competence of the member states concerning content and structure of education is recognized in line with increasing ‘soft’ mechanisms for collaboration and comparison. The main discourses are organized around the concept of a knowledge society and lifelong learning.

The knowledge society is used as background and argument to improve quality and efficiency of the national education systems. However, in spite of the central place of knowledge society as an idea, there is no content-oriented discourse about the underlying concepts of knowledge society as an idea, in the European institutions. It seems that stating the fact that processes of globalisation take place and that a knowledge society has come into existence are sufficient presuppositions to constitute an argument for the necessity of lifelong learning. Lifelong learning has become a guiding principle for the development of the European Union as an advanced knowledge society and for creating a sense of European citizenship based on understanding and respect for human rights and democracy, and encouraging tolerance and respect for other peoples and cultures.

The Council of Europe promotes a debate about concepts of religion and education. Its preference is with an approach that has its main focus on an impartial and respectful teaching about religions that takes into account the diversity and complexity of religious traditions. Uncritical confidence in the transmission of knowledge as a sole
instrument to combat intolerance, stereotypes can be stated along with the observation that the existing range of models of religious education in Europe is not recognized.

The relation of education and religion is not an explicit policy issue of the EU, although it is from time to time it is a subject in the dialogue with churches and religious communities.

The discussion of findings from a Protestant perspective I have articulated starts with three basic understandings that shape this religious tradition:

– Protestantism accepts secularization and plurality in society.
– Protestantism and education are closely related, education is seen as a ‘life form of faith’.
– Protestant churches contribute to justice and peace in Europe.

Against this background the findings of the study were discussed. A Protestant commitment for Europe and the processes of European integration is shaped by a ‘silver-tongued loyalty’ (Nikolaus Schneider) toward the political institutions that accept an active role especially when it comes to issues of values and ethical orientation. But it also includes a critical stance concerning human dignity, respect of human rights and orientation towards the common good.

From a Protestant perspective a privatization of religion and a marginalization of its role in the public sphere cannot be accepted. The plea for a more differentiated perception of religion provides space and encounters for churches and religious communities and allows collaborative actions between state and religion. Religion and politics are independent domains that can collaborate in solving problems of society. The domains do not merge but can act in a complementary way. This can also prevent an instrumentalization of religious communities for political interests.

From a Protestant perspective education means more than employability, flexibility and mobility. Oriented on a human scale a comprehensive, multi-dimensional concept of education (Bildung) including cultural and value based education is needed in order to complement the part of education that focuses on skills and knowledge and on employability for an increasingly global labour market. This perspective can serve as a critical statement in the discourse about lifelong learning and the concept of knowledge society that is dominant in the European institutions.

A final point from a Protestant perspective is the demand that the relation between religion and education should go beyond the knowledge aspect of teaching about religion. The transmission of knowledge should be complemented by exploring other aspects of religion to promote a concept of religious competence that is not limited to knowledge but includes also skills, attitudes and the volition to deal with one’s own religion as well as with the religion of the other in a manifold way. Recent recommendations and documents, especially of the Council of Europe, are not far from this line of thought.