

# Education Policy in Bosnia and Herzegovina

Education is a crucial issue for the future of Bosnia and Herzegovina is a high priority area for the International Community. It is essential for the future of BiH that schools become beacons for a peaceful future marked by tolerance and understanding. They are a long way from that now. Far too often, schools in BiH are still being used to spread ethnic hatred, intolerance and division. The quality of the schooling provided in Bosnia and Herzegovina today does not meet commonly accepted European norms and standards.

The Office of the High Representative is aware of these problems. Donors, in particular the European Union, have completed a massive programme to reconstruct schools after the end of the war. Most of the physical damage is repaired by now. A more difficult task however must now be undertaken: intellectual and psychological reconstruction.

The intellectual reconstruction of the school system is far more challenging than the mere reconstruction of buildings. The International Community cannot do this alone, but it also cannot allow politicians to take the children of this country hostage to a narrow, nationalistic agenda.

OHR is working with other International Organisations in particular, the Council of Europe, UNESCO, the European Union, the World Bank and OSCE and the national authorities to coordinate changes that must be achieved in the school systems of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

- The **textbook review** process has led to the removal of offensive materials from schoolbooks all over BiH. The Ministers of Education of both entities have committed themselves to this process while the International Community has performed spot-checks in schools to verify compliance with the relevant agreements. Textbooks that have Croatia and the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia as their country of reference will no longer be used.
- **Curriculum reform** will ensure respect for the identity of all children in Bosnia and Herzegovina: Based on the Swiss model, each constituent people will develop curricular modules with regards to culture, language and literature that will be integrated into the curricula of the other constituent peoples. Both alphabets and the linguistic/literary heritage of the three communities will be taught throughout BiH, in a balanced and meaningful way. Shared core elements will be introduced in all curricula, especially in the field of Human Rights and Civics education making use of existing excellent materials developed by the Council of Europe, UNESCO and Civitas International.
- **Freedom of movement in the education system** will be ensured: Pupil's school certificates and reports as well as the professional qualifications of teachers and teacher trainers will be mutually recognised throughout BiH. At the same time, teachers from other constituent peoples will be hired in order to teach subjects which will meet the rights and needs of all returnee children in BiH in terms of cultural and linguistic distinctiveness.
- **Universities** and other institutions of higher learning must become more efficient: Management structures have to be created, sector-wide funding, qualification and accreditation requirements have to be adopted. The Council for Higher Education has to be made operational to establish a basis for co-ordination and strategic development of the higher education sector.
- **Discrimination against minority groups**, that is Serbs, Croats and Bosniaks in parts of BiH where they are in a minority, and national minorities such as the Roma people will not be tolerated in any part of the educational system.

The children of Bosnia and Herzegovina are the future of Bosnia, and they must receive the best possible education. This means education which responds to the requirements of the present, education that will ensure employment, and education which will assist in creating a prosperous future for Bosnia and Herzegovina. Bosnia and Herzegovina needs education that is in accordance with European standards, and which instils in children a cosmopolitan and tolerant spirit and teaches them to think critically.

On May 10 2000, the Ministers of Education of the Federation and of Republika Srpska have signed a Declaration and an Agreement on Education in which they have endorsed the principles outlined above and in which they have agreed to solve some of the most pressing problems of the educational system in BiH. The Declaration and the Agreement will be the yardstick by which the willingness of the politicians to work for their own children will be measured.

**OHR Human Rights/ Rule of Law Department, May 2000**