

Agreement on School Textbook Review

The Office of the High Representative, UNESCO, and the Council of Europe are pleased that the Minister and the Deputy Minister of Education of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and the Minister of Education of the Republika Srpska, reached agreement in Banja Luka on the implementation of earlier agreements on the review of School textbooks last Friday, August 20th, 1999.

Following the Review of textbooks by independent international experts Minister Fahrudin Rizvanbegovic, Deputy Minister Simun Musa (Federation) and Minister Nenad Suzic (RS) agreed on which parts of literature, language, history, geography, art and music textbooks were offensive or objectionable, and how they were to be removed or qualified to ensure the accuracy of the contents.

Offensive and objectionable terminology will no longer be included in the textbooks, or it will be clearly marked. The actual work of removal or qualification is to be carried out by the schools themselves. Deletion of items is to be completed by the start of the new school year, September 6th, 1999. The addition of annotation is to be completed by September 20th, 1999.

Agreement to withdraw offensive and objectionable material from textbooks before the start of the 1999/2000 school year is one of the demands made on Bosnia and Herzegovina for entry into the Council of Europe, and represents a first step towards applying European education standards in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The Council of Europe, OHR and UNESCO will closely monitor the implementation of the agreement and may take further measures if necessary.

On a related but entirely separate matter, the High Representative considers remarks made last week following a meeting of Ministers of Education from cantons with a Croat majority, which proposed the establishment of separate education systems within the Federation, as a direct challenge to the Dayton Peace Agreement. Obstruction has also been evident from both the Bosniak and Serb sides throughout the process of the review of material for the 1999/2000 school year.

The High Representative is pleased, however, that on the question of textbooks the spirit of compromise prevailed.