

Delays in the Education Textbook Review

The Office of the High Representative is concerned that delays in the review of school textbooks for the school year 1999 – 2000 will have a detrimental effect on the quality of education received by school children in both the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Republika Srpska.

The removal of material judged to contribute to ethnic hatred, intolerance and discrimination from school textbooks is required both by the Madrid Declaration, and is a central condition for the accession of Bosnia and Herzegovina to the Council of Europe.

The Federation Minister and Deputy Minister of Education and the Minister of Education of the Republika Srpska agreed to review and remove from; history and geography, language and literature and arts and music textbooks all offensive material. This is an interim step in achieving an unbiased education system in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The exchange of textbooks and highlighting of offensive material has been completed. However, agreement on which items are to be removed and how they are to be removed has not been forthcoming despite promises that this issue would be resolved by July 28th, 1999.

The process of review, with the support of the International Community, has been ongoing since the summer of 1998. The Office of the High Representative notes with dismay recent statements made by the competent authorities abdicating their responsibility in reaching agreement on this issue, as well as publicising and implementing the necessary revisions. Once before, the High Representative was forced to warn the officials charged with dealing with the review and the respective Ministers and Deputy Minister for Education who appointed them, that further obstruction would result in their being removed from their positions. This warning is still in force.

If there is the political will, there is still time before the start of the new school year in September to make the necessary amendments. The Office of the High Representative feels that it is time that the Ministers of Education backed their promises with deeds. The real concern is that the children of Bosnia and Herzegovina will, for another year, be deprived of unbiased, quality materials. This will make them less able to compete with other children in Europe and will inevitably affect their future.