Symposium on School Curricula: Conclusions

UNESCO and OHR co-hosted a successful symposium on curriculum reform in BiH on 7 and 8 February 2000, Sarajevo. It was attended by the team of experts from the University of Heidelberg who produced the initial UNESCO-sponsored report on the curricula of the "national" subjects in BiH, experts from Switzerland, Norway, Greece, Ministry officials from the Federation, the Republika Srpska, the Cantons, university professors, teachers, teacher-trainers, civil society representatives, NGOs, members of students' councils and associations, and other international organizations such as the Council of Europe, the World Bank and the European Union.

In his key-note address Matei Hoffmann, Senior Deputy High Representative, reminded the audience that making progress in the area of education is a high priority for OHR, and that the present system of education "apartheid" in BiH would no longer be tolerated.

The main conclusions and recommendations of the symposium, as agreed by all participants, were as follows:

1.The curriculum model best suited to the needs of BiH is the Swiss model. That means parallel curricula with a high level of coordination between the authorities of the Entities.

2.Coordination mechanisms, such as a Standing Conference of Ministers of Education, need to be established by the three communities, with the involvement of the Ministries, pedagogical Institutes, OHR, UNESCO and the Council of Europe

3. There needs to be mutual exchanges of information on changes and developments in the respective systems.

4. Each constituent people should offer curricular modules to

be integrated in the curriculum of the others, especially in the areas of culture and language.

5. Certificates should be mutually recognised in order to facilitate cross-entity mobility. Legislation should be adopted that would permit the integration of children from other areas and groups, including minority groups, especially returnee children. One highly desirable possibility is the hiring of teachers from the other constituent peoples, in order to meet the needs and rights of the returnee children in terms of cultural and linguistic distinctiveness.

6. Both alphabets should be taught throughout the country, and the children should be exposed to the literary heritage of the other constituent peoples. They should also be made aware of the common and distinct features of the three linguistic variants present in BiH.

7. Textbooks imported from Croatia and the FRY will no longer be tolerated if the country of reference is not BiH; most textbooks should be produced and printed in BiH.

8.There should be some shared core elements in the curricula, such as a common Human Rights and Civics education To this end, high quality teaching and teacher-training materials have already been developed by the Council of Europe, UNESCO and CIVITAS. Other consensually developed and agreed upon units should be integrated into the curricula of the other constituent peoples.

OHR and its partner organisations will coordinate the timely implementation of the above measures with a view to desegregating the present education systems as soon as possible, facilitating mobility and returns, and meeting European standards and norms. New textbooks will also have to be prepared in a subsequent phase, and a major teacher-retraining scheme will have to be implemented.

The International Community as a whole is determined to

achieve positive results by the beginning of the coming school year.