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# SEGREGATED EDUCATION AND TEXTS: A CHALLENGE TO PEACE IN BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

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The article addresses the post-war education with special emphasis on history education in Bosnia and Herzegovina during the twelve years before 2007. The focus is on the efforts of the international community. While there have been numerous attempts to address the segregation of education and to change hatred-spreading history textbooks, the results have been modest. The inconvenient truth of post-war Bosnia and Herzegovina remains: segregation in education and history teaching have continued for a generation, causing many problems for the development of a multicultural society. The analysis utilizes previous research and debates on post-conflict education and develops recommendations for future post-conflict situations based on the Bosnia case.

## INTRODUCTION

The devastating Bosnian war (1992-95)<sup>1</sup> ended with the Dayton Peace Agreement (DPA). It has been considered unique in the history of international relations for, in addition to being a peace agreement in a classical sense, it also provided the instruction manual for the state of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The DPA included, for example, the *de facto* constitution of the state (at the time of the Dayton negotiations most of the Bosnian representatives seem not to have perceived one of the annexes as such but in later rhetoric the word constitution has become prevalent), regulations concerning the

composition of the national bank, the army, national heritage, the return of refugees and human rights. Later on, the DPA has aptly been referred to as a “peace process” rather than a “peace agreement,” reflecting its nature as a tool to construct a peaceful Bosnian state.

The administrative structures of Bosnia and Herzegovina were also created as part of Dayton Agreement based on the principle of a multicultural society with three constituent people (Serbs, Croats and Bosnians). The state was to include two entities, Serb Republic (RS) and Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (FBiH). FBiH was further divided into ten cantons. As an internationally backed organisation to facilitate the implementation of Dayton, Office of the High Representative (OHR) was established in 1995

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originally with a one-year mandate. The mandate has been extended several times. OHR has powers to dismiss officials and politically-elected Bosnian leaders which has created the protectorate notion within the Bosnian citizenry. The process of transforming OHR into an EU-run office of the European Special Representative started in 2007 but was not concluded.

This article focuses on the effect of the efforts of international community in the education sector in this Bosnian post-war context during the 12-year period starting from the end of the war year 1995 and coming up to 2007. Twelve years is precisely the period required to complete the primary and secondary education of a generation in Bosnia and Herzegovina. In other words, those who started their primary school in 1995 should have finished their secondary education by 2007. When constructing the arguments of the paper I have concentrated on two issues that I consider most problematic for the sustainable peace building as far as education is concerned: (1) the overall national segregation that divides children into three separate groups and (2) the teaching of national subjects, in particular history, which fosters enemy images and stereotypes of the other national groups.

I could as well have concentrated on the local national politics in the education sector or analyzed the education sector in general including

both local and international viewpoints and efforts (or lack of them).<sup>2</sup> That is not, however, my focus here but I have deliberately decided to review one generation of international efforts focusing on the general national segregation and teaching history as an example of national subjects.<sup>3</sup> The prevailing perspective of this paper is that of building sustainable peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina and beyond.

## **TWELVE YEARS AFTER THE WAR: WAR-LIKE EDUCATION SYSTEM AND ITS CONSEQUENCES**

As the war in Bosnia started in 1992, education fell victim to it. During the first year of the war, the schools were divided according to the military positions and frontlines so that the army in control of the area also regulated the curriculum used. In reality, Bosnian Serb-controlled areas started using Serbian curriculum, Bosnian Croat-controlled areas Croatian curriculum and areas under the control of the Bosnian state army quickly developed a new Bosnian curriculum. Of course, many schools were also closed and most of them functioned in most unusual conditions. It has also been suggested that as education was considered a powerful agent of Yugoslav state communism, the change of doctrine from one uncritically believed truth system (i.e. Communism) into another (i.e. Nationalism) was possible, even easy (Diegoli 2007, 64, Stabback 2004, 49, Bringa 1995, 75).

The Dayton Peace Agreement institutionalized the war-time educational division. Education was only mentioned as part of the Annex 6 of the DPA regulating human rights in which the Article 1 "Fundamental Rights and Freedoms" noted "the right to education." This left the political decision-making for the two entities. In the case of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina education was further left for ten cantons (Perry 2003, 2).<sup>4</sup>

The division according to the war-time frontlines meant that schooling became *de facto* divided into three different systems, curricula, textbooks and other. The war-time practice of using curricula and textbooks from Serbia and Croatia lasted until the year 2000 when a law was passed that forbid the import of textbooks from other countries to Bosnia and Herzegovina (Torsti 2003, 205). This law did not, however, change the essence of the problem for the new books published in Bosnian Croat and

Serb areas were merely copies of the books published in the neighboring countries but with new covers and Bosnian authors.<sup>5</sup>

In my other works I have analyzed history textbooks used in the last year of primary education in Bosnia and Herzegovina during the first post-war years in the late 1990s (Torsti 2003). A recent study has shown that not much change has occurred since and that similar characteristics were prevalent still in history textbooks used in the school year 2006-2007 (see endnote 4).

The most prominent finding of my research is the use of “us-them” terminology in textbooks, in which hostile stereotypes about other national groups of the country was typical. Another important conclusion of my analysis concerns the concept of historical consciousness which is seen to

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develop among people as “a complex connection of interpretations of the past, perceptions of the present and expectations of the future” (Angvik and von Borries 1997, A22, A36). Thus, historical consciousness links the past with present and future and influences the way people situate themselves in time. From the perspective of historical consciousness it is interesting to note that in the history textbooks historical continuity was present in the texts throughout. The Serb

book, for instance, stated how “the Serbian people were *again* forced to defend their honour and dignity with weapons” (Pejić, 1997, 7, italics mine) while the Bosnian version stated that “Serbian-chetnik genocide against Muslims *has* deep roots. On one side, it represents unreasonable religious hatred and intolerance, and on the other, the will of Serb ideology and politicians to create an ethnically clean territory at any cost” (Imamović et. al., 1994, 96, italics mine).

The above mentioned conclusions present just a couple of examples from the detailed textbook analysis which drew a picture of history textbooks full of propagandistic materials, stereotypes and nationalistic orientation (see more Torsti 2003).

The general national segregation and divided and divisive history

teaching in primary and secondary schools remained almost unchanged in Bosnia and Herzegovina at least for 12 years after the war ended. Education did not unite people but divided them. As a result, the educational practices were not fully in accordance with the constitution of the country and the country did not meet the requirements set for it by international treaties and agreements (for example, the membership in Council of Europe). From the local laws, the Open Society Institute has singled out four principles as the aims of education: (1) to strengthen the belonging to and affiliation with BiH, (2) to promote skills for life in a multicultural society, (3) to promote skills in human rights, and (4) to strengthen the critical thinking skills of students (Trbic 2007).

If we use the apt categorization of a UNICEF report on peacebuilding education for children, "Two Faces of Education in Ethnic Conflict," we can note that in the Bosnian case the negative face continued to prevail for at least one generation after the war. The UNICEF report lists seven characteristics of such "negative face" (Bush and Saltarelli (ed.), 2000) of which at least four are true for Bosnia and Herzegovina: manipulating history for political purposes, manipulating textbooks, self-worth and hating others, and segregated education as ensuring of inequality, lowered esteem and stereotyping. Perhaps it could even be suggested that some of the international efforts have in fact unintentionally strengthened these negative effects.

Of the eight positive characteristics listed by the UNICEF report, we can associate only two with the post-war Bosnian system and even those with caution for these characteristics have only limited effect: cultivating inclusive citizenship and education for peace programmes.

Thus, the situation after one generation of peace remains very war-like if we talk about education in BiH. This situation has come about not because there have not been efforts on the side of the international community. (As stated in the introduction in this article I have not reviewed the reform efforts—or lack of them—of local political system but concentrated on the efforts of international community in Bosnia and Herzegovina.) It is just that these efforts were not efficient in addressing the basic problem of segregation and hatred-spreading teaching materials.

Since 2002, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) has been in charge of the coordination of international efforts in

the education sector in Bosnia and Herzegovina. In light of this coordinating position, it is interesting that the OSCE Head of Mission's cabinet member, thus the representative of the OSCE Head of Mission in BiH, stated in late 2007 that "the international community failed to respond to war-time curricula that contained messages not in line with the Dayton Agreement. It failed to notice that from the early days of post-war reconstruction, schools began to pose a threat to the country's long-term peace and stability."<sup>6</sup> This seems to suggest that the failures of the international community started to become acknowledged among those supervising the policies and projects described. This echoes the situation in Afghanistan where hatred-spreading and divisive education continued unnoticed by the

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international community although much attention was given to the material reconstruction of schools (Spink 2005).

If we accept the widely held assumption that "efforts towards nation building in Yugoslavia were mainly carried out through the education system" (Diegoli, 2007, 49-50), the failure becomes all the more significant. I would suggest that it was a historical mistake to miss education in the Dayton Peace Agreement and that this most likely resulted from the inability of the international professionals to recognize the importance of such issues as nation-building and identity construction

through education for post-war recovery and reconstruction.

What, then, are the consequences of the unchanged segregated situation which prevailed in education in Bosnia and Herzegovina for at least 12 years? The divided and segregated education system poses many practical problems to a sustainable peace. On a general level it has allowed for the division that resulted from the war to continue. Thus segregated education has been a continuation of the war through other means. Also, one of the most important and measurable goals of the Dayton agreement, the return of refugees to their pre-war homes, has clearly suffered from the divided education system, as the families with children have not wanted to return

to areas where their children would have to go to a school that teaches negative stereotypes of their own national group. We do not know the numbers of families that have not returned because of the divided education system, but it is easy to believe that this is a major issue. It is more serious if we understand that multiculturalism in Bosnia and Herzegovina was historically both a practical necessity and a centuries-long tradition. There cannot be a sustainable peace without a viable multicultural society and without an education system that reflects such multiculturalism.

The consequences can also be looked at from the security perspective as OSCE also suggested in their statement. When reviewing all these consequences it is important to stress that too much time has passed without reforming the textbooks. Immediately after the OSCE assumed the responsibility of coordination of international efforts in education in 2002, there was plenty of optimism and hope (Perry 2003, 90, Robert Beecroft interview 2002), in particular for the school year 2003–2004 (Perry 2003, 90). Unfortunately, the OSCE report of late 2007 confirmed my conclusions: One generation of efforts had led to very little substantial change and reform.

### WHY NO EFFECT?

The challenge of teaching history is always present in societies emerging from violent conflicts—in particular civil conflicts—or major societal changes. Analyses of the changes in history education after the fall of the Berlin wall, and as part of the reconstruction processes in such places as Estonia, East Germany, Afghanistan, Iraq, or Rwanda, can all provide different perspectives to the discussion on post-conflict history education and efforts of the international outsider community and illustrate that easy solutions are never available. (See for example Ahonen 1992, Spink 2005, King 2008, Vongalis-Macrow 2006.) A good illustration of the importance recently given for history education in post-conflict settings is the work of the United States Institute of Peace (USIP), which among other things organized a three-day conference “United or Divide? The Challenges of Teaching History in Societies Emerging from Violent Conflict” in 2005 for politicians, scholars and teachers. It was followed by a seminar “Teaching History in Divided Societies.” Recently the importance of recognizing

education and particularly history education as part of efforts in the context of transitional justice has also been noted (Cole 2007).

Education was considered an important part of the identity politics of socialist Yugoslavia. It has even been suggested that efforts towards nation-building in Yugoslavia were *mainly* carried out through the education system and history education (Diegoli, 2007, 49-50, Wachtel 1998, 5, Höpken 1998, 82). Right after the war a respected anthropologist concluded that, "The education system was perhaps the most powerful agent of Yugoslav state communism" (Bringa 1995, 75).

Despite the central role of education in the Yugoslav project, in the Bosnian context the Dayton Peace Agreement did not include education as a special topic but education was only included as a basic human right. That

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left the implementation of educational reform for local levels and did not give the international community any special mandate to monitor or implement reforms in the education sector. This explains why the International Community has had only a limited effect on reforming the segregated educational system. When discussing the lack of reforms in education it has been noted that the material reconstruction of school infrastructure was also an obvious priority immediately after the war (Diegoli, 2007, 61).

The omission of education as a special item in the Dayton Peace Agreement unfortunately led to or at least allowed for a situation where "educational reform was actuated through a piecemeal approach and lacked firm coordination and comprehensive goals." This was true for the first five years after the war. The very first institutionally relevant improvement on the part of the international community was the initiation of the Enhanced Graz Process 1999-2000 (Diegoli, 2007, 62).

Some of the answers to the question why the international community had so little effect in addressing the segregated education system and history teaching relate to lack of coordination among internationals and also OSCE as a coordinating organization.



As mentioned previously and unlike what even some specialists on the subject seem to believe, the OSCE assumed the leadership in the sector of education among the international community in Bosnia and Herzegovina only in 2002, seven years after the war.<sup>7</sup> Before that, there was no international coordination or strategy in the sector, only individual attempts and projects.

But in 2002 OSCE received a mandate for the overall coordination of education reform on behalf of the international community in Bosnia and Herzegovina. An expert on the subject, Valery Perry, has concluded in her research an observation made by many: "OSCE was not a natural or obvious candidate to receive mandate to lead educational reform in BiH" (Perry, 2003, 81). The organization had its background in election monitoring and no significant previous expertise of education. Some have even claimed that the reason for the mandate lay in the fact that OSCE had prepared its organisation to monitor elections in Bosnia and Herzegovina much longer than proved needed and was therefore in the end left largely without a special task in BiH but with staff and material resources.

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In any case, from 2002 until the end of the research period 2007, the OSCE maintained the role of a coordinator and primary sponsor of the education reform process within the international community in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The criticism towards OSCE's education department has often emphasised the lack in monitoring and controlling the implementation of various initiatives and regulations agreed with local authorities. OSCE has been assigned the role of implementation for the Bosnian authorities without directly verifying their compliance with it (Diegoli, 2007, 62).

It has been noted that very often the international community has preferred to provide "quick fixes" rather than solutions aimed at longer-term strategy in their educational efforts in BiH (Diegoli, 2007, 74). One of such quick fixes was the support for the two schools under one roof system which probably on its part supported the institutionalisation of the division of schooling rather than exceeded the reform and integration. The

two schools under one roof meant that two different nationally-oriented schools with separate administrations operated on the same premise. Before the United World College started in Mostar Gymnasium, modern (and expensive) science laboratories were to be built as an instrument for integration without much consideration as to what is to be taught in those laboratories. Common core curriculum was prepared and trumpeted by the international community but was left unapplied (Diegoli, 2007, 62).

Textbook checks have also appeared as quick fixes. The example of 1999 textbooks check serves as an illustrating example of this. In July 1999, all the ministers of education signed "The Agreement on Removal of Objectionable Material from Textbooks to be used in Bosnia and Herzegovina in the 1999-2000 School Year." It was agreed that an international team of experts would identify the objectionable material. There were two categories for

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the identified materials: either they were to be removed or annotated. Material was removed by blackening the text, and then annotated with the following stamp: "the following passage contains material of which the truth has not been established, or that may be offensive or misleading; the material is currently under review." The Ministries of Education and the World

Bank covered the cost of the procedure, and "verifiers" from international organizations working in BiH monitored the process. The reports of the verifiers showed that there were many schools that had not undertaken the removal procedure by the end of the year. In some schools there had been a misunderstanding as to what to blacken and what to stamp. UNESCO staff reported about a school where unchanged pages had been exhibited on a bulletin board so that pupils could read them there (Low-Ber, 2001, 220-221).

In general, in terms of explaining the lack of results of the international community by focusing on OSCE I would suggest a list of pluses and minuses. On the minus side, the OSCE has the above-mentioned problem of the lack of tradition and expertise on education. In addition to that the changes in personnel in the Sarajevo Headquarters influenced their efficiency. While the Head of Mission who assumed the education

mandate in 2002 considered education as the top priority of OSCE, his successor changed the course in 2005 and started stressing the little progress in education. Similarly the OSCE education department in Sarajevo headquarters has also had continuously changing Heads of Departments until finally in 2006 a long-time deputy director with long experience in Bosnia's education sector assumed the position. On the plus side we can note the intensified coordination within the international community since 2002, OSCE-led education forums that at least brought different stakeholders together, and publicity and funding generated for education and related matters. This probably helped to improve the situation; numerous NGO efforts were finally somewhat coordinated.

Another important reason for the lack of effect of international efforts and continuing segregation is the lack of implementation tools. All agreements and recommendations reached even through political processes seem to stop at the pedagogical institutes and education ministries. This relates to the idea of education as a national subject which makes it very difficult for international "outsiders" to address (see e.g. Cole & Barsalou 2006, 2).

One reason for the lack of effect may also lie in the approach which has focused on education less as a development issue and more as a humanitarian-crisis issue. It has been recently suggested by OSCE that when the international community became more active in education in the late 1990s as part of efforts to solve the issue of refugee return, the impetus for the activity came from the refugee return issues. This led to many ad hoc measures, such as two schools under one roof and national groups of subjects which were not part of any longer-term strategy. "Ironically, this may also be the main reason why these measures have not succeeded. The yardstick for success was merely the number of returnee children attending pre-war schools rather than any change in the things they were learning or in the conditions under which they were being taught," the OSCE address concluded.<sup>8</sup>

The lack of results connected with the number of dispersed efforts of the international community in education can also be explained through

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the very critical perception among local stakeholders. In interviews with history teachers in 2002 it was clear that they considered the textbook checks ridiculous (Torsti 2002, three histories, three textbooks TV documentary). Others have noted the lack of interest that the teachers seem to have for the work of international institutions; it is often found to be imposed and meaningless (Diegoli, 2007, 111). Thus the “outsider” help has been perceived as having had very limited relevance.

Finally, as an explanatory factor for the continuing segregated and divided education system, we can also speculate about the role of the divided political system, which has not been challenged. There is no single state authority that monitors the implementation of even the few provisions

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made for education in Dayton (the right to education and commitment to non-discrimination). In all possible situations the Ministry of Civil Affairs is referred to by OSCE and other internationals as the state level body responsible. Yet the Ministry has no resources or mandate to follow up its tasks. On a more general level, the division has guaranteed very

high spending on educational administration at the expense of spending on the programmes and reforms (Diegoli, 2007, 61).

## RECOMMENDATIONS

To close, I will move to four recommendations based on the lessons learnt in Bosnia and Herzegovina in the scope of this article. These recommendations could be useful when planning international strategies and programmes in education in other post-conflict environments and in the future Bosnia and Herzegovina.

A useful starting point and the first recommendation would be to recognise education as a security issue as suggested by OSCE. This would stress the role of education as part of security considerations when drafting peace agreements and similar documents thereby giving education more political weight in such negotiations. Here the new discourse in the context of transitional justice (see Cole 2007) can also be significant.

The next important step and second recommendation is the recognition of education as a long-term development issue rather than a humanitarian crisis issue. This means that from the start and also in the middle of humanitarian efforts of reconstruction, the educational planning should be done with long-term focus on development and education rather than crisis management orientation and training. The long-term project and funding needs when dealing with education in post-conflict situations has been noted in other post-conflict cases too (Vongalis-Macrow 2006, Spink 2005, Cole & Barsalou 2006).

From this follows the third recommendation which stresses the importance of evaluation and analysis on different levels when planning the initiatives on the education sector. The evaluation and analysis would be required at least on the local political level, on the implementation level (who implements and how) and on the coordination level. These levels require different competencies and a multi-professional approach.

Finally we arrive at the fourth recommendation which states the obvious: there should be a common long-term goal and vision to which all international stakeholders sign onto. This would lead to a coherent strategy and more efficient use of funds as they would be targeted on a strategy that follows the shared vision. Through this we should be able to avoid ad hoc projects and continuous change of winds in terms of priorities and funding in the education sector.

The OSCE report in 2007 suggested two priorities that OSCE identified as means towards the goal of “better, fairer, and juster way of educating ... than now” in Bosnia and Herzegovina: establishment of a body that could both establish and enforce a common set of standards of educational knowledge and achievement throughout the country, and development of curriculum that is similar throughout the country. A new generation of history textbooks started emerging in 2007-2008.<sup>9</sup> I just wish these books and recommendations could have had been utilized by the International Community representatives 12 years—one generation—ago.

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OSI Education Coordinator Zdenana Trbic Interview 10 September 2007, Sarajevo.

OSCE Mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina Head of Mission Robert Beecroft interview September 2002. Tapes in the possession of the author.

### Notes

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1. The human and material destruction caused by the war was of such magnitude that it has continued to influence all parts of life in the society. Many of the figures have been subject to debate. For the purposes of this article it is enough to estimate (see Torsti, 2003) that the human destruction caused by the war meant over 100,000 dead, 1–2 million refugees and internally displaced people, 10,000–20,000 people missing, and tens of thousands of raped girls and women. In terms of materials destruction we can mention that of all households it is estimated that 60 per cent were badly damaged and quote Richard Crampton who has concluded that, “The economic costs of the fighting were beyond realistic calculation” (Crampton, 2002, 268).

2. Excellent review of the education reform process has been presented by Valery Perry in Perry 2003.

3. I have previously analysed the subject from various perspectives, including the national/local one.

4. See also Adela Pasalic-Kreso’s excellent analysis on the constitution, its vagueness in relation to education, and the abuse by authorities resulting from that vagueness (Open Society Fund Bosnia and Herzegovina: The Constitution and Education in BH. By Adila Pasalic-Kreso, Faculty of Philosophy, Sarajevo, Pedagogy Department).

5. *Obrazovanje u Bosni i Hercegovini: Cemu ucimo djecu? Analiza sadrzaja*

*udzbenika nacionalne grupe predmeta. Program podrške obrazovanju. Fond otvoreno društvo Bosni i Hercegovina 2007* [Education in Bosnia and Herzegovina: What do we teach the children? Analysis of the content of textbooks of the national group of subjects. Support programme for Education. Open Society Foundation Bosnia and Herzegovina 2007].

6. Education in Bosnia and Herzegovina: A Neglected Security Issue. Speech of Aida Premilovac, a member of the Cabinet of the Head of the OSCE Mission to BiH. OSCE annual Parliamentary Assembly meetings 29 September to 1 October 2007, in Portoroz, Slovenia. [www.oscebih.org](http://www.oscebih.org). 12 November 2007.

7. For example, Diegoli refers to “a reform of the education system [...] initiated by various local and international actors under the coordination of the OSCE [...] following the Bosnian war” (Diegoli, 2007, 57).

8. Education in Bosnia and Herzegovina: A Neglected Security Issue. Speech of Aida Premilovac, a member of the Cabinet of the Head of the OSCE Mission to BiH. OSCE annual Parliamentary Assembly meetings 29 September to 1 October 2007, in Portoroz, Slovenia. [www.oscebih.org](http://www.oscebih.org). 12 November 2007.

9. It should, however, be noted that the first analysis of those books concluded that most of the problems in terms of hate speech and monoperspective view have remained. Karge 2008.

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