

# A COMMON EDUCATION SYSTEM FOR BOSNIA-HERZEGOVINA

April 1998, St Anthony's Monastery, Sarajevo

*(with the support of the Congress of Bosniak Intellectuals, the Croat National Council, International Forum Bosnia, the Jewish Community of Bosnia-Herzegovina and the Serb Civic Council)*

*A Common Education System for Bosnia-Herzegovina* brought together the country's most prominent educationalists, academics and intellectuals to discuss the conditions for creating the conditions for an ethnically-integrated educational system for Bosnia-Herzegovina, despite the constraints of the Dayton Accord and the nationalist parties in power.

**Background**

**Participants**

**Programme**

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## BACKGROUND

From the published proceedings of the seminar:

*Question of Survival - A common education system for Bosnia-Herzegovina*, edited by Branka Magas, The Bosnian Institute, London, 1998

Introduction by Branka Magas

This volume contains the edited, condensed and translated proceedings of a seminar organized by The Bosnian Institute on a common education system for Bosnia-Herzegovina. This was held in April 1998 at St Anthony's monastery in Sarajevo, which also happens to be the oldest educational institution in the country. The discussion brought together people of quite diverse backgrounds - secondary-school heads, linguists, historians, theologians and politicians - as well as observers from some of the international bodies active in the country. Participants invited from the Serb entity were unfortunately prevented from attending by two grave incidents that chanced to coincide with the seminar; nor did the ministers responsible for education in the two entities make an appearance. Nevertheless, the seminar provided a remarkable insight into the problems faced by Bosnia-Herzegovina in the sphere of education and raised a number of issues of long-term relevance for the country's future. Underlying the entire debate was an awareness that education has a crucial role to play in the process of national reconciliation and creation of a democratic order. Affirmation of Bosnia-Herzegovina's identity through the common education of its citizens, moreover, necessarily forms an integral part of the consolidation of peace in the region.

The intention of the organizers was to examine, against a historical background, potential obstacles to a unified educational system deriving from the country's polymorphic formation - e.g. in such fields as religion, language and history - but also from the political and administrative divisions created during the war and retained in the Dayton peace settlement. The people attending the seminar share the view that Bosnia-Herzegovina must remain a single and undivided country, based on equality of its three constituent peoples; and that this can be achieved only through a common education system, including common curricula, textbooks and teaching plans. By contrast, education as it is organized and inspired today serves to deepen intra-national divisions and aims to create or consolidate ethnically pure territories. It thus continues the war against Bosnia-Herzegovina and its people, albeit with different means. In the areas controlled by the armies financed from Croatia and Serbia, children learn from textbooks published in Zagreb and Belgrade in which Bosnia-Herzegovina either does not appear at all or is reduced to a geographical concept. At the same time, the education system in the Federation has been further fragmented by the devolution of all responsibility in this domain to the cantons, which pursue their own educational policies independently from the central government, leading to a complete ethnicization of the nature and content of education, and in places even to physical separation of children in schools by ethnicity. The seminar participants were presented with a collective account of how this disastrous system works in practice, and how and why it came into being.

A basic unanimity concerning Bosnia's current problems - and the kind of education it needs to sustain its identity as a state and society - permitted the participants to address issues of a more fundamental nature. Some of these are common to all newly independent states, while some pertain to many countries whose independence was won through a fight against external aggression twinned with a domestic war. Others, however, reflect also the country's own individuality, and these are perhaps of the greatest interest. In the present-day reality of Bosnia-Herzegovina, as the discussion showed, it is not easy to separate these issues into neat categories. Yet this is precisely what the seminar endeavoured to do, producing an extremely significant - albeit at times only implicit - divergence of views. In other words, an underlying similarity of understanding generated a sophisticated and wide-ranging debate on the nature of Bosnia-Herzegovina's individuality as a state and society.

A common education system presumes a common understanding of the past and a common language of instruction. At the most general level, Bosnia-Herzegovina's history needs to be disentangled from those of the neighbouring states, in order to highlight the domestic community's own internal coherence. The difficulties involved here range from how to deal with possible contentious issues - whether to leave them out, minimize them or attack them frontally - to what particular kind of history is most appropriate here. Can Bosnia-Herzegovina's history be approached in the conventional way - as a history of nation-state formation, like 'French history' - or should one rather concentrate on the evolution of this unique culture and society, demystifying in the process the very notion of the nation? If Bosnia's history is to be treated as a differentiated whole, does this justify claims for children to be taught in common only the 'whole' (however this is defined), while studying the 'differentiated' elements separately? What should be the language of instruction, given the presence of three standard languages - Bosnian, Croat and Serb - which entail also three different (however defined) literary traditions? And given the close interconnection between national identity and confessional denomination, how should religion be taught - if at all - in schools? Should religious education be ecumenical in nature (delivered, for example, through study of the history of religions), or should it involve the transmission of individual religious doctrines?

This is an important debate, raising questions that are notoriously subject to dispute in many countries other than Bosnia-Herzegovina - though here they have their own specific weight, given the recent war. The vast majority of those present agreed, not surprisingly, that neither history, nor language, nor indeed religion, present any real obstacles to Bosnia-Herzegovina having a common education system. The country's three constituent national groups acquired their specific identities, after all, not by way of any separate development, but as the result of intermingling with each other through centuries. They are part of the specifically Bosnian paradigm of 'unity in diversity'. Without unity, their separate identities too are lost. This is vividly illustrated by the fact that Bosnian Serbs are being forced in the Serb entity today to give up their own language; or by the fact that the foremost contemporary Bosnian Croat writers do not figure at all in the textbooks published in Croatia now used in areas of Bosnia-Herzegovina where Zagreb's writ runs. The truth is that such problems as may indeed derive from diversity are presented as insurmountable only by those who wish to keep the population segregated along ethnic lines. Under the pretext of defending national interests, nationalist leaders in each of the three camps are today trying to create separate national institutions whose logic is to disintegrate the country. Such projects threaten further wars and the ultimate ruin of all the peoples of Bosnia-Herzegovina.

A newly independent country inevitably thinks of itself in a new way; but the need is all the greater in the case of Bosnia-Herzegovina with its recent experience of war. How are its people going to break the forces barring its integration, encamped within institutions created by the war

and which the 'peace process' has largely left intact? Bosnia-Herzegovina, the seminar was told, enjoys at present the protection of the United States; but this protection can only be temporary in nature. The country's salvation lies in the hands of its own people. If things are to change, a new way of thinking about itself must be produced, based upon a recognition of the failure on the part of Bosnia-Herzegovina's intellectual elite to predict the war and its horrors. Bosnia's future lies in capitalizing on the nature of its society: its ethnic and religious heterogeneity, which open its people to the experience of the other, to the modern world understood through its diversity. The necessary new start must also involve unmasking the role played by religious institutions that have lost their original purpose of guiding the individual towards God, and that have instead become servants of anti-Bosnian political options. Bosnia's education system must thus foster a sense of individual responsibility; a recognition of all humanity as unity in diversity; a feeling of belonging to this diversity; and a need for every individual to be true to their potential.

For its Bosnian participants this seminar can be only one episode in a seemingly never-ending process of self-examination; but it remains for outsiders to be impressed by the quality of understanding that they brought to their country's many problems, their readiness to confront the latter squarely, and their commitment to the struggle for a viable future. As this volume testifies, their approach to the subjects of history, nation, religion and language - but also to questions of faith and personal responsibility - is far in advance of anything witnessed elsewhere in the area of former Yugoslavia. This helps to explain perhaps why Bosnia-Herzegovina alone among the former Yugoslav republics has used the war to produce a world-class literature. The country's apparent weakness - its national and religious heterogeneity - turns out to be its very real strength. This is why Bosnia-Herzegovina has survived and why it will live. It is needed by the others.

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**April 1998**

**St Anthony's Monastery, Sarajevo**

## **PARTICIPANTS**

1. Lejla Aksamija, director, First Bosniak Gymnasium, Sarajevo
2. Ivo Banac, Department of History, Yale University; Central European University, Budapest
3. Josip Baotic, Language Department, Faculty of Philosophy, Sarajevo University
4. Kasim Begic, Faculty of Law, University of Sarajevo
5. Ljubomir Berberovic, Academy of Arts and Sciences, Sarajevo
6. (Miljenko Brkic), Faculty of Philosophy, University of Sarajevo, represented by Melita Sultanovic
7. Bojan Bujic, The Bosnian Institute, London; University of Oxford
8. Zlata Bukvic, director, Sarajevo First Gymnasium
9. Jakob Finci, Jewish Community of Bosnia-Herzegovina, Sarajevo
10. Gavriilo Grahovac, director Bosanska knjiga; adviser to successive education ministers
11. Senahid Halilovic, Language Department, Faculty of Philosophy, University of Sarajevo
12. Rešid Hafizovic, Faculty of Islamic Studies, Sarajevo
13. Quintin Hoare, director The Bosnian Institute, London
14. Attila Hoare, Department of History, Yale University
15. Mustafa Imamovic, Faculty of Law, University of Sarajevo
16. Lynne Jones, Cambridge University
17. Amira Kapetanovic, Cantonal Minister of Culture and Sport, Sarajevo
18. Enes Karic, Philosophy Department, Faculty of Philosophy, University of Sarajevo
19. Ivo Komsic, former member of B-H Presidency; Faculty of Philosophy, University of Sarajevo
20. Matko Kovacevic, Archives of Bosnia-Herzegovina, Sarajevo
21. Dubravko Lovrenovic, History Department, Faculty of Philosophy, University of Sarajevo
22. Rusmir Mahmutcehajic, International Forum Bosnia, Sarajevo
23. Luka Markesic, Monastery of St Anthony, Sarajevo
24. (Ivo Markovic), The Catholic Centre, Sarajevo, represented by Luka Markesic
25. Nikola Mihaljevic, Livno
26. (Pero Pranjic), The Catholic Centre, Sarajevo, represented by Elizabeta Cosic
27. Atif Purivatra, Congress of Bosniak Intellectuals, Sarajevo
28. Saba Risaluddin, World Conference on Religion and Peace, Sarajevo
29. Adnan Silajdzic, Faculty of Islamic Studies, Sarajevo
30. Nadzida Sukalo, Pedagogical Institute of the City of Sarajevo
31. Melita Sultanovic, Pedagogical Faculty, University of Sarajevo
32. Mela Telalbasic, The Bosnian Institute (Sarajevo Representative)

## **Observers from the Ad-Hoc Group on Education, Office of the High Representative**

1. Sacha Crijns, OHR regional office, Brcko
2. Arnold Horowitz, US Department of State, Sarajevo
3. Ilona Szemzo, World Bank, Sarajevo

## **Other invitees**

1. Enes Durakovic, Literature Department, Faculty of Philosophy, University of Sarajevo
2. Zdravko Grebo, Faculty of Law, University of Sarajevo

3. Dragoljub Krneta, director Pedagogical Institute of Republika Srpska, Banja Luka
4. Dana Krunic, Gymnasium Banja Luka
5. Zarko Papic, International Forum Bosnia, Sarajevo
6. Jakov Pehar, Deputy Minister of Education and Culture, Federation of Bosnia-Herzegovina
7. Mirko Pejanovic, former member of B-H Presidency; Pro-Rector Sarajevo University
8. Fahrudin Rizvanbegovic, Minister of Education and Culture, Federation of Bosnia-Herzegovina
9. Gajo Sekulic, Faculty of Political Science, University of Sarajevo
10. Nenad Suzic, Minister of Education and Science, Republika Srpska
11. Branko Todorovic, Helsinki Committee for Human Rights, Bijeljina
12. Miodrag Zivanovic, Faculty of Philosophy, Banja Luka

**Other invited observers**

1. Heike Alefsen, Council of Europe, Sarajevo
2. Andreas Herdlina, Head of Refugee and Humanitarian Affairs, OHR
3. Tina Kaidenow, Education Officer, Political Department, US Embassy, Sarajevo

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## PROGRAMME

### I. Historical Background and Today's Parameters

Chaired by Bojan Bujic

1. Miljenko Brkic *The pre-1990 experience*
2. Enes Karic *War and the 1993 programme*
3. Kasim Begic *The Dayton framework*
4. Discussion

### II. Schools in the Present Situation

Chaired by Atif Purivatra

1. Lejla Aksamija *The First Bosniak Gymnasium*
1. Zlata Bukvic *The Sarajevo First Gymnasium*
2. Pero Pranjić *The Catholic Centre, Sarajevo*
3. Discussion

### III. Problem Areas of the Curriculum

Chaired by Ljubomir Berberovic

1. Mustafa Imamovic *History and the School*
2. Dubravko Lovrenovic *Changing the Historical Paradigm*
3. Josip Baotic *Language Need Be No Barrier*
4. Senahid Halilovic *Language and the Nation*
5. Discussion

### IV. Obstacles to Common Education

Chaired by Ivo Banac

1. Rusmir Mahmutcehajic *How to Safeguard Bosnia-Herzegovina's Future*
2. Ivo Markovic *Faith and the State*