



(E)merging Religious Education

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In Bosnia-Herzegovina, religious determination is almost synonymous with ethnicity. After the war, religion in this multicultural society with people that have lived side by side for centuries has become a subject that makes everyone nervous, possessive and defensive. Religious education is, unfortunately perceived as a dividing point rather than an element of connection between cultures. Segregation in schools is believed to be deepened by this subject. This need not be so.

A common misconception is that religious education should be divided into polar opposites. On one side is the confessional religious education as the study and practice of a certain religion. On the other there is non-confessional religious education also known as the study about religions. The present policy on religious education divides the two types of religious education, for no valid reason. This also need not be so.

These two “opposites” should truly be incorporated into one single subject, for several reasons. There is a need for an introduction of confessional religious education in public schools in order for the state bodies and religious communities in Bosnia-Herzegovina to develop a fully comprehensive and politically correct school curriculum. This would also contribute toward the development of a adequate textbooks in other culture related textbooks, including history, literature and art. Finally, children in public schools should be given the opportunity to learn about their peers through the teaching about religions without feeling a threat to their own. This is the only way in which a multicultural society such as Bosnia-Herzegovina has a chance to build a culture of tolerance and understanding much needed in this region.

Regional religion

The model used in Bosnia-Herzegovina should draw insight and experience from its neighboring countries. The Balkans had been in turmoil for much of the 90s in the last century. The main difference between these countries and Bosnia-Herzegovina is that they have a monotheistic/ethnic majority. Other religions/ethnicities in these countries are minorities. Therefore, the issues in Croatia, Serbia and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia are rather different than they are in B&H. Bosnia-Herzegovina is quite unique in this regard. Bosnia-Herzegovina has three constitutive ethnic groups/religious communities, where all are regarded as equal. The issue here is to allow all to have the same freedom of religious belief or non-belief. However, the study *Religious education for religious tolerance - steps toward a truly democratic society* offers an overview of the situation in the whole region in order to choose the best possible solution in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

In the Republic Croatia, Catholic religious classes are offered as part of the country’s curriculum. Students choosing not to take classes on Catholicism may request that their religious instruction be offered through their faith community. Although many nongovernmental organizations have worked with students and teachers towards promoting “education towards peace”, the Croatian government has discouraged teachers from attending any similar training unless it sanctioned them. Accordingly, the government has organized little training in this regard, and not much progress has been made. In 2001, the Republic of Serbia introduced optional religious classes into their curriculum for the first years of both primary and secondary schools. Seven faiths were granted permission

Summary

The controversy of religious education in Bosnia-Herzegovina has taken the debate to a level at which the responsibility of educating children has taken a back seat to the subjective manipulations of politicians and media alike. The issue of religious education should be solely managed by the experts; namely by the religious institutions in collaboration with the government bodies authorized in this policy issue. Then and only then can an agreement be reached that would best suit those it is primarily designed for. Unfortunately, the Culture of Religions course in B&H has not fulfilled its primary goal of teaching all children in B&H about religions. However, it did teach us a valuable lesson: religious education should not be taken lightly, whether it is confessional or non-confessional. It is the local stakeholders that must „put their noses to the grind” and truly find the tailor-made model that would best suit the present environment in B&H.

to offer religious classes in schools. For those students opting not to take religious classes, a course titled "Civic Education" was created. This drew criticism from religious authorities who argued that the name of the alternative course implied that civic values were not learned in religious classes.

The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia adopted a different approach. In 2000, a culture of religions class was planned but its implementation was found questionably illegal. As a result, all religious education in public schools was ultimately abolished by a Constitutional Court decision. Since then, the Macedonian government has had additional discussions about the course with the Macedonian Orthodox Church, but to date, no compromise has been reached. Many Macedonians, as chronicled by the Kotor Network, have been advocating for a course similar in content to that of Culture of Religions, in order to better reflect the multi-religious character of Macedonia.

Three very different approaches in three countries and all are under scrutiny and still a matter of debate. From this overview it is evident that these countries are all experimenting with the issue of religious education and are on unfamiliar ground. Croatia has taken the solely monotheistic approach to religious education, and has disregarded non-confessional religious education entirely. Serbia has attempted at involving all religions in confessional religious education and combining it with culture of religions as an optional course. This has caused more scrutiny from the religious communities. Macedonia, on the other hand, has completely abolished religious education and is "back to square one", trying to find a way to include religion in the education curricula of public schools. The models of these countries all prove that religious education is a very delicate and complicated issue that must be tackled with great care and much monitoring and evaluation in order to find the exact match that would prove to be successful.

What to do, by God?

The first option would be to remain status quo, that is to choose not to change the current policy but to implement it further and try to improve on it through monitoring and evaluation. The OSCE supported pilot project of the Culture of Religions course was sufficiently presented in the previous section. The problem with this approach is, once again that religions differ from one school to the next, no textbooks or standardized course materials exist, seminars for current and future Culture of Religions teachers are limited in number, the government provides little to no oversight and guidance to teaching of the course, schools to introduce Culture of Religions face already demanding curriculums. These issues make it difficult for the subject of Culture of Religions to be taken seriously, whether by students or the school administration. It has proven to be quite costly, with the teacher trainings, implementation strategies, the Ministries of Education in each Canton, each entity going through the motions of implementing this project. In addition to this, it will take a long time to implement this course in every single school in Bosnia-Herzegovina, and for it to be properly monitored and evaluated. In fact, with the current state the government bodies are in, it is unlikely that any type of monitoring can be conducted, not to mention the evaluation of this project. It would prove to be a magnanimous task to say the least. Furthermore, in the case of Culture of Religions, there is evidence that the religious institutions are opposed to this type of religious education; on the other hand, there is limited involvement of the state in the implementation of this course.

The second option would be a radical course of action, that is to abolish religious education in public schools completely, much like in the case of the Former Republic of Macedonia, as mentioned previously. In this case all responsibility for the education of children in religion and belief would be left in the absolute control of the religious institutions, without any type of involvement on the part of the state institutions. In this case the state would have no insight into the curricula, nor would it have any say in any

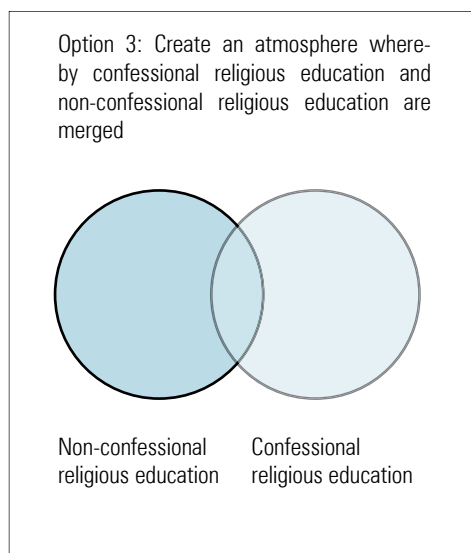


matter of religious education. This option would not allow the presence of non-confessional education, and therefore the idea of promoting religious tolerance, mutual understanding and coexistence would most probably be lost. This is not to say that the religious institutions themselves would not take part in the development of a multicultural society, but they would have limited resources because the focus of their teaching would be on the confessional teachings of religion. This would furthermore allow for the deepening of religious exclusion of majority groups within Bosnia-Herzegovina and would not create an environment of tolerance and understanding. In addition to this, the Law on Primary and Secondary Education in BH clearly states in Article 9 of the aforementioned Law whereby *religious education is an elective and regular subject in elementary and high school education*¹, which means that this course of action would be unconstitutional and therefore illegal.

The final option would be to attempt to create a symbiosis of confessional and non-confessional religious education, whereby, confessional religious education would be refreshed with non-confessional lectures and workshops. This type of education would not include additional classes in primary and secondary schools but would rather take "Culture of Religions" into the setting of confessional religious education classes. The teachers who would teach these classes would already be trained in their own right: they would be imams or priests who teach their confessional religious classes; they would be teachers who would transfer their knowledge of their own religion to members of other religious groups. These would be so-called "travelling priests" designated to a number of schools that they would be responsible for. In this case, the religious institutions would send their own "employees" into other religious classes, with clear instructions of what to say and how to teach. This would of course, not be deductive teaching about the belief of the pupils, but rather infor-

mative of their own religious customs and convictions, in order to present this religion in the best possible light.

A very important aspect of this approach is that the religious institutions would not be threatened by the introduction of this type of teaching about religions through their own religious instructors, which is not the case with the Culture of Religions course, whereby the religious institutions, especially the Catholic Church find it very objectionable. This option would allow them to have a say in non-confessional religious education, in the curricula, the manner their respective religions are presented and their staff who would be engaged in this process.



Simply merge

This option would offer the following:

- The tutors would be instructed and tutored according to the Toledo Guiding Principles on Teaching About Religions and Beliefs in Public Schools.
- Classes would not include textbooks for children, but would rather include presentation slides and handouts.
- Religious institutions would provide their recommendations on the methodology of this type of religious education.
- State institutions would have an opportunity to monitor and supervise these classes in order to maintain a level of quality and tolerance.

¹ Government of BH (2003) Framework Law on Primary and Secondary Education in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Official Gazette of Bosnia-Herzegovina, No. 18/03



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was born in Gračanica on 1st November 1979. For fifteen years she lived in Chicago, Zagreb and Kuala Lumpur respectively, where she received her formal education. She then proceeded to acquire her University diploma at the Anglistics department at the Faculty of Philosophy of the University of Sarajevo. She worked as an English teacher for two years at the First Bosniak High School, and simultaneously worked as a freelance interpreter. In 2005, she started working in the Economic Policy Planning Unit, a World Bank financed project that monitored the implementation of the Medium-Term Development Strategy. In 2007, she started working in the Directorate for Economic Planning of the Council of Ministers, in the Sector for the Analysis of Social Inclusion, where she is employed to this day. She is married and has one child.

- Evaluation would be made by non-partisan agency which would offer insight into other limitations. These limitations would be overcome with the joint effort of the state and religious institutions.

Three priests from each religion respectively (Catholicism, Islam and Orthodox Christianity) would be selected to travel from one place to another and offer lectures and workshops teaching about their religions. Each class would subsequently have a structured discussion where students would be allowed to ask questions and offer a comparative view with the religion being discussed and their own religion. The institutions that would directly take part in this policy option would be the state institutions and the religious communities respectively. The state institutions involved would be the Ministry of Civil Affairs of Bosnia-Herzegovina (as a part of the legislative framework), the entity ministries of education (as the executive branch that would take control of the implementation of the pilot) as well as the cantonal and municipal educational organizations. The municipal level bodies would conduct the monitoring of the efficiency of the pilot and report to the entity ministries.

The most important impact that this policy option could have is creating more open minds among the pupils of the selected high schools, for them to be able to witness the various similarities and differences between the religions, and for them to see that they are no different from their peers of different backgrounds. It would create a platform of understanding and tolerance, which was the original aim of these pilots in the first place.

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