



# Different Religions under One Roof: Towards Inclusionary Religious Education in Bosnia and Herzegovina

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## Executive Summary

The controversial role of religion in public schools reaches new dimensions in a post-conflict, transitional society, with complex power-sharing mechanisms partially based on ethno-religious divisions, such as Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH). With a small population of approximately four million citizens, BiH is one of the most diverse, as well as politically divided European countries. The existing education system in many ways reflects the internal divisions of the country, and this, to some extent, is also the case with religious education. This creates specific and complex challenges for policymakers, making policy studies and possible alternative solutions necessary.

Despite the fact that religious education in BiH is based on the Constitution guaranteed rights, there is a recognized need for a review of the existing BiH approaches to defining the relationship between religion and schooling. This policy proposal aims to do so, by examining an alternative approach, which contributes to social, religious and political tolerance and informed understanding, and serves as a tool in overcoming the divisions in the education system, as well as society at large.

The following Study examines the problems stemming from the current BiH education system and provides recommendations for desirable policy improvements. More specifically, the Study places BiH in a European context, with a democratic, secular and pluralistic prefix, however having in mind the BiH political, social, cultural context and constitutional arrangement which guarantees the right to religious education.

After reviewing the current situation and the problems stemming from the diversity of existing approaches to religious education in BiH, the study evaluates the experience and the impact of a pilot project put forth by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and Goethe Institute, of introducing the *Culture of Religions* course in a small number of BiH high schools (21), which serves as a foundation for the future educational policy proposal.<sup>1</sup> Secondly, the approach of the BiH education system to defining the relationship between religion and schooling is compared to European experiences, with a look at the Austrian model, which is realistic and appropriate for the political and constitutional context of BiH, as it provides education on *Culture of Religions*, along with non-mandatory confessional religious education. Finally, based on the analysis of the experiences of introducing the *Culture of Religions* course in BiH, and an examination of the comparable Austrian model, the Study provides policy options and recommendations for the implementation of the *Culture of Religions* course, as *complementary* to the existing system of confessional religious education, ensuring a freedom of choice.

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<sup>1</sup> A Status Report on this project exists; it is however short and not comprehensive. The study will build on the Report findings and provide further recommendations.

## Introduction

Inter-religious intolerance and prejudices continue to be a significant, if not major obstacle to reconciliation in post-war Bosnia and Herzegovina. Considering that language and religion are commonly seen as the main dividing factors in BiH, the education system reflects these views with the internal divisions along language and religious lines.

The education system in BiH is the result of a process of decentralization and subdivision of the country into two entities, in compliance with the Dayton Peace Accords: the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (FBiH) and Republic of Srpska (RS). The Federation of Bosnia and Her-



zegovina is subdivided into ten cantons (five of which have a majority Muslim population, three with a majority Croatian population and two without a clear majority population), whereas the Republic of Srpska is subdivided into six regions.

Stemming from the political decentralization process, education is primarily regulated on the level of entities, and further decentralized based on the subunits of each entity. The state has little control and competence in the area of education. It is important to point out that there is no Ministry of Education at the state level regulating the education system, the need for which has been repeatedly recognized by domestic actors as well as international organizations and the donor community engaged in the education reform.

In the Republic of Srpska, the political powers and competences of the Ministry of Education are centralized. At the level of Federation of BiH, there is also a Ministry of Education and Science. However, the primary responsibility for regulating education policies in the Federation of BiH remains at the cantonal level, where each canton has its own law on education, based on which educational practices can vary significantly from canton to canton. Thus the Federation of BiH has 11 ministries of education (one for each of the 10 cantons, and the Federal Ministry of Education). This type of decentralization further complicates the legal framework for education institutions, and does not allow policy creation at the national level. This is why education system policy proposals have to address the various competences at local levels.

It is argued that the current system of religious teaching is based on the principles of a respect for human rights, and that it presents a positive development from the communist system, which did not allow for religious education to be organized in schools. This view is correct, to a large extent. According to Article 28 of the Constitution of the Republic of Srpska, Religious Communities "may establish religious schools and perform religious education in all schools at all levels of education." At the same time religious education in the Republic of Srpska's elementary schools is compulsory and confessional. In the Federation of BiH, religious education is not compulsory, but the choice of religious education tends to be limited, favoring the dominant, majority religious group.

The State Law on Religious Freedom guarantees the right of every citizen to religious education. The law provides for an official representative of the various religious communities to be responsible for teaching religious studies in all public and private preschools, primary schools, and universities throughout BiH. The municipalities are responsible for employing teachers, while it is the religious body that governs the curriculum. However, according to the US State Department's 2007 International Religious Freedom Report, in Bosnia and Herzegovina "the law was not always fully implemented, particularly in segregated school systems or where there was political resistance from nationalist party officials at the municipal level... Religious communities tended to receive the most funding in areas where their adherents were in the majority."<sup>2</sup>

There are recorded instances in both Federation of BiH and the Republic of Srpska where students are required to attend confessional religious education classes of the dominant, majority religion, without the freedom of choice, raising the issue of violation of student and parent rights.

By law, parents and students may choose not to attend the classes. At the same time the report underlines that "students of the majority religion, and sometimes also of minority religious groups, faced pressure from teachers and peers to attend religious instruction, and most did

<sup>2</sup> International Religious Freedom Report 2007, Bosnia and Herzegovina. US Department of State. Available from: <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2007/90167.htm>

so. Children who are reluctant to be singled out as different from their classmates often attend instruction of the majority religion, even if it is not the religion they practice at home.”<sup>3</sup> The existing law attempts to rectify this, by introducing measures guaranteeing minority groups the right to religious education. If a sufficient number of students of a minority religious group(s) attend a particular school (20 in the RS, 15 in the Federation), the school must organize religion classes on their behalf. However, in rural areas, there are usually no qualified religious representatives available to teach religious studies to a small number of minority students.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

It can therefore be concluded that, in most of BiH, religious education is organized only for the students of the majority religion, and students who choose (or are required) to attend currently offered religious classes learn primarily, if not exclusively, about their own confessions. There are however exceptions to this practice, in the form of mandatory non-confessional education about religions (or religious studies) throughout Bosnia and Herzegovina, and the Study examines those, as a basis for a potential policy micro model.

Another very important aspect of the problem is the somewhat artificial politicization and finger pointing in public discourse on the subject of religion and schooling. More specifically, the responsibility for the lack of tolerance towards non-confessional education about religion is generally attributed to religious communities, which are seen as insisting on exclusively religious education. The study examines this assumption by consulting religious authorities in BiH, and looking more specifically at two best practice examples, Katolički školski centar (Catholic School Center) and Prva bosnjačka gimnazija (First Bosniak Grammar School), two high-schools which are associated with two major religious groups and their authorities in BiH, both of which offer a mandatory, non-confessional History of Religions/*Culture of Religions* course. In this way, we can explore both the potentially successful interaction between confessional and non-confessional religious education within those institutions, and the religious authorities' interpretation of this model.

The Study therefore explores the possibility of a complementary system of education about religions, which does not challenge and/or affect the existing practice/right to confessional religious education, but introduces the freedom of choice between, or as a supplement to, confessional religious education in a form of *Culture of Religions* course, which would provide BiH students with an understanding of the role that religion plays not only in a pluralistic society such as BiH, but in the world as well.

## Research Objectives and Methods

The hypothesis of the Study is that the introduction of the *Culture of Religions* course in high-schools, as complementary to the existing confessional religious education in BiH, would positively contribute to solving the problems stemming from the lack of freedom to choose religious education methods present in the current BiH education system, as well as contribute to religious tolerance in society as a whole.



This policy research addresses the following questions:

- What are the problems stemming from the current approach to religious education in the BiH education system?
- What are the needs and capacities for inclusionary education about the world's major religions in BiH high schools?
- How feasible is the introduction of the *Culture of Religions* high school course in BiH?
- What is the appropriate model for education about religions in BiH high schools?

In doing so, the Study includes an analysis of the existing constitutional arrangement and laws regulating religious education, while consulting the relevant stakeholders (entity and cantonal ministries for education, the sample of schools which have implemented the *Culture of Religions* course as part of the pilot project, and religious community representatives). Desktop research is employed for reviewing existing reports on religious education in BiH and analyzing European models of defining the role of religion in schools, with an emphasis on the Austrian model.

The Study therefore provides a comprehensive evaluation of the existing system of religious education in BiH; explores the possibility of merging two, often seen as mutually exclusive, approaches to introducing religious education i.e. confessional religious education and education about religions based on the Austrian model; as well as evaluates the pilot *Culture of Religions* project and gives guidelines for the introduction of a complementary *Culture of Religions* course.

## **Culture of Religions Initiative**

The *Culture of Religions* initiative in Bosnia and Herzegovina designed a school subject that teaches students about the four major religions practiced in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Different than the traditional, confessional religion classes which provide the doctrinal point of view, the *Culture of Religions* course teaches all students to explore the four religions with an emphasis on history, culture and society.

As pointed out by the proponents of the project, the course is not intended to supplant the right to religious education. It rather builds onto the body of knowledge obtained in confessional religious classes provided in schools and/or religious communities.

The Project was initiated in 2000, when a decision was made at the Conference for the Ministries of Education for an educational reform to be implemented with the aim of eliminating segregation in BiH schools. More specifically, representatives at the Conference agreed to implement a way to teach about the four dominant religions practiced in Bosnia and Herzegovina. This pilot and donor community driven initiative, support for which was provided by the OSCE, Goethe Institute and the Sarajevo Open Center (NGO), was initially introduced in 21 schools in both BiH entities. Its comprehensive evaluation can serve as a foundation for a curriculum which would be adopted at entity level (and with the further centralization of BiH education system, at the national level.)

According to the Toledo Guiding Principles, "This approach is inclusive and serves as a confidence-building measure that seeks to advance inter-religious tolerance and understanding. Its aim is to reduce potential misunderstandings and conflicts arising from a lack of knowledge of other peoples' faiths and cultures, by providing the next generation with a basic knowledge of the culture and history of the religions of others." Furthermore, although a deeper understanding of the world's major religions does not guarantee greater tolerance and respect, "ignorance increases the likelihood of misunderstanding, stereotyping, and conflict."<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Toledo Guiding Principles on Teaching about Religions and Beliefs in Public Schools, Prepared by the ODIHR Advisory Council of Experts on Freedom of Religion or Belief. Published by the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), 2007. Available at: <http://www.oscebih.org/documents/12567-eng.pdf>

The Goethe-Institute, a partner in the project, claims that this school course places a special emphasis on the development and encouragement of a tolerant coexistence of all people in BiH, pointing out the similarities among the four main religions in Bosnia and Herzegovina. However, it is this aspect that was met with the resistance of the religious communities, which assumed that the course will generalize the religious truths of individual religions, with its neutral, scientific approach. At the same time, the Goethe-Institute has repeatedly argued that the *Culture of Religions* is actually complementary to the confessional religious classes.

Currently, the *Culture of Religions* course is being implemented in high schools (during the junior and senior years) in Goražde, the Zenica-Doboj Canton, and Sarajevo Canton, and will be introduced in the Republic of Srpska high schools starting February 2009.

One of the primary problems with the Project however is the lack of state, local or even school-level ownership. As the Project was seen as primarily donor-driven, and on a trial basis, "there is currently no domestic "go to" source of information about its current or future implementation. Even the country's education officials appear to have little information of how successful *Culture of Religions* has been within their areas of responsibility."<sup>6</sup> Nonetheless, during interviews with the Goethe-Institute's *Culture of Religions* Project Coordinator, Andreja Dugandžić, it has been pointed out that the cooperation with the Republic of Srpska's Ministry of Education, more specifically with the Minister, Mr. Anton Kasipović and his associates, Danica Krunić and Slavica Kuprešanović, has been a positive and productive one.

<sup>6</sup> Towards Inter-Religious Understanding in Bosnia and Herzegovina: A Status Report on the Pilot Course *Culture of Religions*. OSCE Mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina Education Department. September 2007. Available from: <http://www.oscebih.org/documents/12567-eng.pdf>

As a result, the Ministry will oversee the implementation of this pilot project, which will last from February till the end of the school year in July 2009, in all of 87 RS high schools. The course will be taught by teachers of philosophy, sociology and history, who have completed specialized training for teaching *Culture of Religions*. It should however be emphasized that the project is not considered to be permanent, but rather experimental. There will be a total of 18 mandatory sessions (one session per week) and the students' grades in the course will not be calculated into their grade point average.

Sociologist Ivan Šiljaković expects positive results from this experimental phase of the project, while at the same time emphasizing that the final results will depend on the teachers and their approach to teaching this course. He adds that it is very important that no religion is given privileged status during the teaching process and that there be no theological discussions, but a familiarization with different religions and their meaning.

The issue of the teaching material proved to be a controversial and problematic one. The Goethe Institute and OSCE have contracted two authors, Dino Abazović, Professor of Sociology at the University of Sarajevo's Faculty of Political Science, Zilka Spahić-Šiljak, coordinator of the Religious Studies graduate program at the Center for Interdisciplinary Postgraduate Studies of the University of Sarajevo, as well as five consulting editors, to create a *Culture of Religions*



textbook. Upon completion, the material was presented to the Commission for Textbooks in the Republic of Srpska. The Commission responded with its criticism of the material and has subsequently rejected the improved version entirely. As a result, the pilot project in RS will use the textbook that has been written by authors appointed by the RS Pedagogical Institute and will be available in February 2009. The Goethe Institute plans to make the new and improved version of the *Culture of Religions* textbook available in RS as well, in a form of supplementary material.

The implementation of the Project will be overseen by a specially formed commission, consisted of representatives from the RS Pedagogical Institute, the Ministry of Education, and OSCE. Mirko Banjac, director of the RS Pedagogical Institute, says that advisors will attend the classes, survey the teachers, students and parents, and if the experimental course shows positive results, "there is no reason for *Culture of Religions* not to become a regular mandatory school subject starting next school year."

At the same time, the experience with the Federal Ministry of Education has been a different one. Although the Project has been formally presented to the Ministry, there has been no official response, nor recommendation for its implementation. This does not mean that the *Culture of Religions* is not being taught in the Federation of BiH. It has, for example, been officially introduced in the Sarajevo Canton (whose educational policies are being regulated by the Sarajevo Canton Ministry of Education) independently of the pilot project and, according to the Goethe Institute, very successfully in the Zenica-Doboj Canton as well. However, according to Dugandžić, there is no official data on how the course is organized and implemented in practice.

Based on unofficial data received by the Goethe Institute, the response of teachers, parents and students has been a positive one. For example, the students attending this course in the Sarajevo's Third Grammar School have organized a play, in which they demonstrated different religious marriage ceremonies, in the preparation of which they consulted religious authorities. The video of the play has in a way been used as promotional material for the course. Students of the Srednja ekonomska škola (The Economics High-School in Sarajevo) have created an award-winning web-site with materials for the *Culture of Religions* course. Recognition and oversight by the Federal and Cantonal ministries would allow for a formalization of this teaching process, and a control of the course materials and methodology. Most importantly, the institutionalization of this course would ensure its durability and sustainability. The following chart provides a brief, unofficial overview of the current stage of *Culture of Religions* implementation in the Federation of BiH partially based on the OSCE Status Report:

Canton	Number of Schools Introduced	Current Status
Una-Sana	0	Not taught
Posavina	0	Not taught
Tuzla	All	
Zenica-Doboj	All	
Bosnian Podrinje Goražde	0	Not taught
Central Bosnia	0	Not taught
Herzegovina-Neretva	0	Not taught
West Herzegovina	0	Not approved by the Ministry of Education
Sarajevo	All	Mandatory in 4th year of all secondary schools, third year of secondary teaching schools and in the 8th grade of all primary schools.
Canton 10	0	Not taught

In the Brčko District, the course is currently being taught in only one high school, Gimnazija Brčko (Brčko Grammar School), as a result of individual effort by the course instructor, Mira Djurovic.

For now, OSCE, the Goethe Institute and the Sarajevo Open Center have the capacity and willingness to provide the “full package” of support services for interested high-schools. However, for the school teachers and representatives to attend the trainings, they need a formal approval from the school authorities, which in turn seek formal recommendation from the relevant ministries. There are currently two trainers, professor of Philosophy and Sociology, Zuhra Kalauzović, and professor of Pedagogical Studies and Psychology, Ranka Katalinska who conducting trainings for high school teachers responsible for teaching, or expecting to start teaching the *Culture of Religions* course. Trainings for additional trainers have been scheduled in 2009.

Trainings for RS teachers who will be teaching *Culture of Religions* were organized throughout 2008. In addition to the representatives of the Sarajevo Open Centre, the Goethe Institute and the OSCE Mission, the organizers of the training and partners in the project, the first seminars were also attended by representatives of the RS Ministry of Education, which coordinates the implementation of the subject. Ministry representatives addressed the teachers at the opening of the three seminars. Professor Zoran Avramović from the University in East Sarajevo and Professor Lazo Ristić from Banja Luka University also attended two of the seminars to discuss a possibility for cooperation as trainers. The RS Pedagogical Institute sent their advisor for religious education, Mr. Krstan Dubravac, as an observer, “who took a rather critical view of the training for its methodological focus to the detriment, in his view, of the focus on the actual content of the subject.”<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Report on *Culture of Religions* teachers’ seminars in Republika Srpska, Sarajevo Open Center. 2008.

The Goethe Institute emphasizes the importance of institutional support for the Project, as seminar participants have repeatedly demanded that they be addressed, supported and guided by the relevant state authorities. It is illustrative that the Report on the second cycle of trainings starts with the observations that “the teacher training... was off to a bad start as soon as it was realized that Ministry of Education representatives would not be present at the opening to address the gathered teachers, and inform them about the decision of the Ministry regarding the postponement of the introduction of the subject until the second half of the year. The news that was delivered by the trainers disheartened the teachers and derailed the first day of the training.” It is therefore not surprising that the first recommendation issued by the Sarajevo Open Center’s Report was that the “educational authorities of the Republic of Srpska (the Ministry of Education and Pedagogical Institute) should visibly demonstrate their support for the subject, and get involved in the training.”<sup>8</sup> Participating teachers’ recommendations even more explicitly demanded the participation and oversight of relevant state authorities. As a part of the seminars’ evaluation, the teachers expressed that:

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

- Ministry of Education (MoE) representatives should come to the opening seminars to inform teachers about the official decisions that concern them most immediately, to take questions, to demonstrate official support for the training and the project, and to display accord with the activities of the OSCE and the Goethe Institute;
- MoE should provide an official RS curriculum, textbook and teacher manual for teaching *Culture of Religions*;
- MoE should clearly determine the status of the subject and its future; and a demonstration, on behalf of authorities, of serious commitment and good planning in the implementation of the subject;





- MoE should communicate official decisions and information regarding the *Culture of Religions* to schools and teachers in a timely manner.<sup>9</sup>

According to the OSCE's *Status Report on the Pilot Course Culture of Religions*, six major problem areas associated with the implementation of the Course were identified: curricula for *Culture of 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 for teaching the course; the schools set to introduce *Culture of Religions* face an already demanding curriculum; and religious communities, most specifically the Catholic Church, oppose the course.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

Unfortunately, this extremely short report (less than 15 pages, including numerous list charts with the names of schools and individual participants) does not provide a qualitative assessment of the project's implementation, or detailed recommendations and/or suggestions for a future course of action.

The Study analyzes the implementation of this pilot project, with an emphasis on the qualitative measures of its success, attempts to examine the possibility of overcoming the identified obstacles, and provides a comprehensive recommendation for a successful implementation of a high school course, which would embody the values of inclusionary education. Also, it examines the feasibility of institutionalizing the *Culture of Religions* initiative, from a donor-driven status to the state organs.

When it comes to the above identified obstacles, certain steps were taken in 2008 that were intended to improve the overall implementation of *Culture of Religions* course. In the case of the Republic of Srpska, the curricula for *Culture of Religions* will to a large extent be uniform; the textbook which has yet to be evaluated will be introduced starting February 2009; and seminars for current and future *Culture of Religions* teachers, which in 2007 were seen as limited in number, were organized in 2008 with positive results. Furthermore, the RS government now provides a certain level of oversight and guidance for teaching the course, through its Ministry of Education and Pedagogical Institute. Policy recommendations should therefore address the capacity for the transition of this pilot and experimental project in RS, and highly decentralized implementation with no government oversight in the Federation of BiH, to full institutionalization, which would ensure its sustainability. Considering that significant progress and improvements have been made in the development of teaching materials and methodology, the emphasis should really be on involving the state authorities in the process of support and control of the *Culture of Religions* teaching process.

### **Inclusionary Education Beyond Culture of Religions: Katolički školski centar (Catholic School Center) and Prva bošnjačka gimnazija (First Bosniak Grammar School) Best Practice Case Studies**

The Catholic School Center (CSC) is as a multi-confessional and multiethnic school, established in Sarajevo in 1994 by the Catholic Church authority (the Vrhbosna Archdiocese). Its branches were subsequently established in Tuzla, Zenica, Konjic, Travnik and Žepče. CSC currently has 1168 students, approximately 60% of which are Catholic, 25% Bosniak, 8% Serb, several Jew-

ish students, and about 25 students who are children of foreign diplomats residing in Sarajevo. This institution is not officially a religious school - it does not organize a prayer, there are no religious symbols in the classrooms, and confessional religious education is offered as a non-mandatory course. However, several teachers are priests (including the school principal), there are seven nuns trained to be professional teachers, and the school is generally associated to the Catholic Church authorities in BiH.

As a part of its curriculum, CSC has a mandatory History of Religions course during the first and second years of high school, both in the Center's Grammar School and Medical High School. According to Reverend Mario Ćosić, who is currently teaching History of Religions at the CSC Grammar School, the experience of teaching this particular course has been overwhelmingly positive, and has even attracted international attention. Reverend Ćosić points out that students of all confessions, as well as students who declare themselves as atheists, express above average interest in this course, where they are encouraged to explore the religions of their peers. Most importantly, he emphasized that the interaction between this course and confessional religious education can only be a positive one, as the knowledge gained in the History of Religions course "builds onto the knowledge that students gain in their confessional religious classes organized in schools or outside them."

CSC's alumni express similar sentiments regarding their educational experience with this particular course. Former CSC student Gorana Zagovec, who is currently doing her postgraduate studies in Public International Law at the University of Oslo, says that, as a child from an atheist and mixed marriage, she was initially skeptical regarding the History of Religion course. "In the light of daily political discourse in BiH... CSC's approach to education about religions can only be seen as positive. I now realize that, in an environment such as BiH, where we aim to preserve a multicultural oasis with as many nationalities and ethnicities, it is important to offer such a neutral approach, where students are introduced to the traditions and customs of all religions, and religiosity is seen as an individual's personal and intimate belief."

A Comparable approach and methodology to CSC's is found at the First Bosniak Grammar School (FBG), established by the Rijaset of Islamic Community in 1995 in Sarajevo. Although formally a secular high school, with its large majority Muslim student body the Grammar School is generally associated to the Islamic community. The school has 530 students, 160 of which attend the Cambridge International Center.

The *Culture of Religions* course was first introduced as an integral part of FBG's Curriculum in 1995. It should be pointed out that, at the time, FBG was the first school in BiH to offer the course under this name. A team of Islamic theologians and theologian comparative scientist spent more than a year developing a *Culture of Religions* curriculum for FBG. Three teachers were employed, one of whom had a PhD, and another with an MA in Islamic studies. The manual for teachers, and a list of reference books that the teachers used for the preparation of their lessons, were provided to the students.

During an interview and consultations with Nermina Baljević, who has been a course instructor of *Culture of Religions* in FBG for the past 13 years, she emphasized the inclusionary character and approach of this course, which is in no recognizable way compromised by her background in religious studies (upon parallel completion of both First Classical Grammar School and High School of Islamic studies, Ms. Baljević graduated in the first class of theologians from the Fac-



ulty of Islamic Studies in Sarajevo. Prior to becoming a high school teacher, she worked as a special advisor for the Islamic Community Association in Sarajevo.)

Baljević points out that the School had to meet the expectations of both the students and their parents, as a number of them chose this school over some other schools, because it offered the *Culture of Religions* course. “Of course, there were disappointments on their side as well, because some of them expected the subject to be Islamic teaching, or that religions would be observed from an Islamic point of view. We found ourselves in situations which required detailed explanations to students and parents regarding the purpose and concept of the subject.” Nonetheless, “there was far more satisfaction with the contents provided, and as well as a great deal the student curiosity and willingness to research independently, and in that way improve their knowledge.”

In the beginning, the Curriculum included one lesson per week during the first two years, and two lessons per week over the final two years of high school. In 2002, the Curriculum was somewhat reduced. Students now have the subject for three years with total of four lessons. During the first and second year, the course is taught once a week, and twice a week during the fourth year of high school. Nonetheless, FBG remains the school with the largest number of lessons offered in this subject. According to Baljević, “In essence, the (course) content promotes universal religious values, aiming to accentuate, through learning about others and those different that us, the common grounds of religions, while putting less focus on the differences.”

More specifically, the curriculum for the first year contains the following subject areas: notional understanding of faith and religion; God’s Messengers – the bearers of God’s message; God’s revelations and Holy texts of monotheistic religions; the notion of sin and sinfulness in monotheistic religions; the notion of sacrifice in religions.

During the second year, with one lesson per week, the emphasis is on monotheistic religions: Islam; Christianity with its directions: Catholicism, Orthodoxy and Protestantism; and Judaism. Introductory lessons are: the peoples of the Book, the relationship between the Bible, Koran and Torah; the relationship between Mohammad a.s., Jesus and Moses.

The Curriculum allocates a certain number of weeks for the study of different religions. Five lessons are devoted to Judaism: the terms that closely determine Judaism, history, people, union and law, prayer, education, rituals, festivals, holidays, and branches of Judaism. Six lessons are devoted to Christianity: who was Jesus Christ, and what was his preaching, the social and historical circumstances of his life and activities, the Church, Christian beliefs, dogmas and sacraments, holidays, and major Christian churches: Catholicism, Orthodoxy and Protestantism. Six lessons are devoted to Islam: the meaning and interpretations of Islam, Islamic norms and ground learning, spreading Islam as a religion (historical perspective), the categorization of people according to the Koran, Islamic ethics, holidays, Muslim peoples and Shiesm.

The themes discussed in fourth year, with two lessons per week, are: religions in Bosnia and Herzegovina (ancient beliefs, the Church of Bosnia, Maniheism, Bogumils, Christianity, Judaism and Islam); secularism; the cultural dimensions of religions; Asian religions (Shamanism, Zoroastrism, Shinto as well as Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism and Taoism); tolerance as ground religious value; the role and significance of prayer in religions; art in religions; morals

and religion; the phenomenon of religiousness; family in a man's life; ecology and religion; human rights and religion; economy and religions (the principles of market economy in different religions, Islam and the economy, some of the theories on economy and interest in Islamic learning); law, legal science and legal norms and religions; the application of religious norms; and new religious movements.

The Course encourages students' independent work and research. Some of the topics research and presented by groups of students were on: the cultural, historical and religious heritage of the peoples of BiH, from ancient history until today; the ethical picture of the world presented through drama; religious tourism; women in monotheistic religions; economy and banking in monotheistic religions; the attitude of monotheistic religions regarding globalization; and many others, wherein a comparative approach is employed.

In addition to the above described classes, Baljević has been teaching the same course in English, at the Cambridge International Center (CIC), located in and administered by the First Bosniak Grammar School. The Curriculum for this course, where the emphasis is on ethics, is developed at CIC headquarters in England. According to her own words, Baljević has benefited greatly from it. In other words, all of her students, not only those in the Cambridge International Center, have been exposed to teaching methods and regularly updated teaching materials provided by the CIC.

Each semester, Professor Baljević conducts a student evaluation of the course. The survey is anonymous, and allows students to give their opinion and input regarding the course content and organization.

The number of students who took this particular survey was 75. Of those students, 71 declared their nationality as Bosniaks, and 4 as Bosnians. When asked to identify their religious orientation, 72 declared themselves Muslims, and three students expressed no clear religious orientation. To the question, "Do you find that learning about and knowing about culture and religion of the others and different ones is important for your education?", 72 students answered "Yes", two students answered "I cannot estimate at this moment", one student answered "I could live without it" and no students choose "No" as their answer.

In response to "Does the subject *Culture of Religions* that you take provide you with adequate information about the other and the different?", 71 student answered "Yes", three students answered, "I cannot estimate", one student answered, "We should be provided with a lot more information", and no students choose "No" as their answer.

When asked, "What do you highlight as a special value that you have gained/learned/acquired by taking *Culture of Religions* as a subject?" according to Baljevic, "Most of the answers the students have provided referred to more knowledge and information about themselves and the others, that they feel to be more educated, wealthier, that they understand the world around them better, that they can hear a lot of information they otherwise would have missed and so on." Finally, asked "What do you highlight as particularly bad, you have heard/noticed/experienced by taking *Culture of Religions* as a subject?" the students did not provide a single answer.

As a result of these efforts, upon being presented at the International Conference on School Education in Relation to Freedom of Religion, held in Istanbul in 2005, Baljević's research entitled *Teaching Culture of Religions in Sarajevo*, was published in *Teaching for Tolerance in*



*Muslim Majority Societies*, a book published by the Centre for Values Education and the Oslo Coalition on Freedom of Religion or Belief.

In conclusion, Baljević states, “I believe that the subject has fully justified the place it has been given in the system of education in BiH, and that it can contribute greatly to a better understanding of other people, especially the ones who find religion important part of their life and identity.”

Asked to provide her opinion on the somewhat negative interaction between the religious authorities and the *Culture of Religions* initiative in BiH, Baljević argues that the hesitation on the part of the authorities is to some extent justified and understandable, primarily because of the serious lack of qualified teachers in BiH. Both the state authorities and international donor community somewhat unrealistically expect that the teachers of subjects such as Sociology, Psychology, Language, History, and previously Marxism, or those whose teaching norm has already been filled, could be trained to teach the *Culture of Religions* course in a relatively short amount of time (during weekend seminars). According to Baljević, this is not the case unfortunately. Both the state and the donor community need to insist of providing students with a highly qualified and distinctively educated teaching staff. This can be done through cooperation with the existing departments of theology at BiH universities, who can undergo additional, specialized training for the methodology of teaching the *Culture of Religions* course, but who already possess the necessary subject matter knowledge gained at the university. The cooperation can then be established at the institutional and school level, where, as is the case in FBG, many guest lectures are given by representatives of different religious communities and authorities.

Former Bosniak Grammar School student Amila Karačić, who was subsequently a top student of Information Systems and Political Science at the Sarajevo School of Science and Technology, and is currently working at the State Ministry of Civil Affairs, believes that the *Culture of Religions* course has been of exceptional educational value for her and her peers. “In addition to the four major religions in our country, *Culture of Religions* has also taught us about the world beyond BiH, the Balkans and even Europe, by introducing us to the religions of the world. It has broadened my horizons and made me more aware of diversity in a global context.”

It is unfortunate that the experience, resources and enthusiasm of teachers such as Nermina Baljević and Reverend Mario Ćosić have not been utilized by the relevant ministries, institutes, as well as donor community. Both Ćosić and Baljević have expressed willingness to be engaged in a promotion of inclusionary education about religions of this type.

## European Experience

In developing an appropriate approach to defining the role of religion in schools, BiH finds itself in a diverse European context, which is why it is necessary to examine European models, with an emphasis on those which are comparable to BiH. Despite the obvious diversity, there are some shared characteristics and trends across Europe when it comes to religious education. First, most countries have some form of religious education (ranging from compulsory to non-compulsory), while, at the same time, religious and cultural plurality is on the rise. Therefore, the dilemmas and challenges that BiH policymakers are facing are to a large extent shared by

many European countries. This is why the European context and experience can and should serve as a guiding tool in devising suitable BiH model. This chapter examines the interaction of confessional religious education and education about religions (*Culture of Religions*) in Austria, and assesses whether this model can be applied in BiH.

According to Peter Schreiner, European approaches to religion and schooling can be divided into: education into religion; education about religion; and education from religion. Where emphasis is on education into religion, students are introduced into one specific faith tradition, whereas education about religion refers to religious knowledge and religious studies. Education from religion embodies the inclusionary principles, where students are encouraged to consider different approaches and answers to religious and moral issues.<sup>10</sup> The models can however overlap within a single country. This is important to consider in the case of BiH, where the emphasis should be on the freedom to choose the most appropriate model, and/or adopt both as opposed to negating one, or favoring it above the other.

More specifically, responsibilities for providing religious education and education about religions in Europe can be divided into confessional religious education (where religious communities are responsible for religious education in cooperation with the state), non-confessional education about religions (a sole responsibility of the state), a combination of the two, and no religious education/education about religions whatsoever (which is the case in France and Slovenia, where such education is explicitly forbidden in public schools). However, "this formal distinction has clearly its limits, because terms like 'confessional' or 'non-confessional' have different meanings in different languages and contexts due to historical developments."<sup>11</sup>

In Austria, Switzerland, Belgium and Germany where there are various options for confessional religious education, there is an opportunity to choose additional or alternative subjects, such as ethics or philosophy, on an equal basis. At the same time, in countries such as Denmark, Sweden, Norway, Scotland, education about religions is strictly non-confessional, and religious studies are under the sole authority of the state. These two models tend to be seen as mutually exclusive, but are not necessarily such. There can be, and in some cases, there is successful cooperation between the state and religious communities. Under the label of *Cooperative models* between religious communities and state agencies e.g. in matters of content, teacher training, curriculum etc. we find confessional (e.g. Germany, Italy, Austria) models and non-confessional models (e.g. England and Wales, Scotland.)<sup>12</sup>

The country which is suitable to serve as an example in inclusionary practice is Austria, because it successfully encompasses the above discussed approaches: compulsory confessional religious education for various state-recognized religious communities in both elementary and secondary schools, as well as an inclusionary education on *Culture of Religions*. "In Austria, students can't complain of a lack of choice, with Catholic, Protestant, Orthodox, New Apostolic, Jewish, Islam and Buddhist classes available."<sup>13</sup> Religion is a compulsory subject in schools, while an alternative, non-confessional education about religions has been also available since 1997. Although more monotheistic than BiH<sup>14</sup>, Austria provides protection of legally recognized religious institutions, foundations, funds against secularization, as well as of the right to found confessional private schools and the entitlement to religious instructions in public schools. According to the Austrian "Law on the Religious Education of Children", every young person over the age of fourteen can freely choose his or her religion. Religious education in Austrian schools is not restricted to the Roman Catholic confession. Students belonging to smaller churches and

<sup>10</sup> Schreiner, Peter. *Models of Religious Education in schools in Europe, How Can Existing Models contribute to tolerance and non-discrimination with regard to freedom of religion and belief?* Statement for the Strategy Development Seminar of the Oslo Coalition on Freedom of Religion or Belief Oslo, 7 – 9 December 2002.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Teaching Religion the European Way, Deutsche Welle. Available from: <http://www.dw-world.de/dw/article/0,1564,1552191,00.html>.

<sup>14</sup> According to the census of 2001 73.6% of the population is Roman Catholic, a further 4.7% Protestant (mainly Augsburg Confession). The number of Muslims has increased to 4.2%, due to immigration in the past decade. Some 3.5% of the population belong to another faith, 12 % are non-denominational, and 3.5% provided no information. Data provided by the Austrian Foreign Ministry.



religious communities receive religious education in their own confession, and their teachers are overseen and paid by the State.<sup>15</sup> In addition, public schools offer education on *Culture of Religions*.

Religious content in Austrian schools are organized in different ways: through a separate subject entitled "Religion", as part of some other subjects (mother tongue, history and social policy) and as a part of a separate subject about different religions. In the subject "Religious Education", various methods of teaching are employed: case studies, problem solving and decision making exercises, games, role play, the presentation and interpretation of information, self-assessment, discussion, group work, and activity based learning. The stress is on integrated learning.<sup>16</sup>

"The subject contributes to preparing students for life, to developing their identity in the pluralist culture they live in...and to understanding and developing tolerance towards people with different world views."<sup>17</sup> The objectives of "Religion" are divided in two groups: as the objectives of the subject Religion, regardless of the confessional variant, and as the objectives of the religion-specific variant of the subject. General objectives of the subject are: "To provide holistic education (cognitive, affective, action-oriented) through confrontation with different world views; to sensitize students to religious experience, open their eyes to the deep secret of human existence and to practice the visual language of religion; to enable them to make responsible decisions and to develop their sensitivity and respect towards people with different views..."<sup>18</sup>

Similarly to Austria, BiH has a diversity of strong religious communities which enjoy public support and trust. The right of Austrian religious communities to organize religious education in and outside of schools is not considered threatened by efforts to educate students about different religions through specialized courses, or as a part of Philosophy and Ethics. It is recognized that "the broad aims of religious education in multicultural society should be the requirement that all pupils, no matter what are their religious backgrounds, are brought together in religious education. When pupils from different backgrounds are brought together in religious education lessons, then there is also the possibility for open discussion, dialogues and understanding."<sup>19</sup>

As the Austrian model demonstrates, there is no reason why confessional and non-confessional religious education cannot co-exist within an education system which recognizes both the rights of religious communities and the need for educating citizens of the world.

## Policy Options

The relationship between religion and schooling in Bosnia and Herzegovina remains controversial, to a large extent decentralized and, particularly in the case of Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, almost beyond the scope and control of relevant government bodies. There are several approaches to defining the relationship between religion and schooling, varying from complete secularization of the education system based on the separation of "Church and State" on one side of the spectrum, to mandatory introduction of confessional religious education at all levels of the education system, on the other. A somewhat ambiguous status quo finds itself in the middle. We can therefore examine various policy options, based on the criteria of political will, feasibility, sustainability and human rights.

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<sup>15</sup> Austrian Federal Press Service

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<sup>16</sup> Bobinac, Ankima Marinkovic, Comparative Analysis of Curricula for Religious Education: Examples of Four Catholic Countries. *Metodika* 15 (2007), 425-443.

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

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<sup>19</sup> Kallioniemi, Arto. European Solutions for Religious Education. Available from: <http://www.ortoweb.fi/tartokallioniemi.htm>

An exclusion of confessional religious classes from BiH's primary and secondary schools would require considerable constitutional changes for which, at least in this particular area, there is very little to almost no political will. Availability of religious education itself meets little opposition from the general public, but the lack of choice and discriminatory practices are recognized as a problem which needs to be addressed. The feasibility of such measure is highly questionable, considering the status of religious authorities in BiH and the public support that they enjoy. The freedom of organizing religious education in public schools is considered to be a constitutionally guaranteed human right, seen as a positive and democratic development from the communist system, which drew an impenetrable line between religion and state.

When it comes to the status quo, it is evident that the NGO and donor community driven initiatives are limited in scope and durability. The highly decentralized government system, particularly in the Federation of BiH, allows for an individualized approach to establishing a relationship between religion and schooling which, in some instances, produces cases of exceptional success, such as the above discussed Catholic School Center, First Bosniak Grammar School, as well schools such as Third Grammar School and Economics High School in Sarajevo. At the same time, more than half of the Federation's cantons have either actively or passively rejected the *Culture of Religions* course, citing the lack of formal recommendations or instructions from the relevant government bodies. The Federal Ministry has expressed a vague interest in the course, but has failed to follow up with any identifiable measure. The Republic of Srpska will start with the implementation of the *Culture of Religions* course as an experimental, seven-month project, from which it will depend on further institutionalization. This means that, based on the status quo conditions, we can conclude that there is considerable political will and interest for the *Culture of Religions* course in BiH as whole. The primary question therefore is how to successfully institutionalize this process and ensure its sustainability, which is addressed in the following Policy Recommendations.

### **Recommendations and Conclusion**

Having in mind the current status of the *Culture of Religions* course in Bosnia and Herzegovina, it is clear that the existing approach is to a large extent ambiguous and, as such, unsustainable. As significant efforts have been made towards the implementation of the *Culture of Religions* course, in the creation of the textbook, supplementary materials, the training of the trainers and high school teachers, the primary concern should be on how to involve the relevant authorities and centralize the system of teaching *Culture of Religions* in BiH. The responsibility cannot be placed on the Federal Ministry of Education alone, as, even in the case that it fully supports the Project, and issues the recommendation for the implementation of the course, the competence remains at the cantonal level, where educational policies are being adopted. This means that efforts need to be made towards both levels of ministries.

Furthermore, the existing capacities can be used for the promotion of a positive interaction between confessional and non-confessional religious education. For example, in the West Herzegovina Canton, which fully rejected the cooperation on the *Culture of Religions* project, the Commission for Textbooks has reported by that the materials used for the mandatory confessional religious classes in this Canton meet, and even exceed the standards of education about other religions. This is similar to the Austrian model, where, as evident from the above presented Curriculum, even confessional religious courses offer elements of non-confessional education about other religions. More specifically, the following measures need to be taken:





- Establishing cooperation with religious authorities based on the already opened channels of communication, and convincing arguments offered by some of the representatives of the religious authorities that the interaction between confessional and non-confessional religious education can only be a positive one. This should be a primary tool of cooperation with Federal Cantons, and those actors who have rejected the Culture of Religions course on the ground of existing mandatory confessional religious classes. Although the Inter-Religious Council has had somewhat of a negative attitude towards the Culture of Religions initiative, based on the above presented research and interviews, it can be reasonably argued that there is enough support within the three dominant religious groups for supplementary non-confessional religious education.
- The relevant ministries should be made aware that various forms of the *Culture of Religions* course already exist within their domains, that the political will for it is evident, and that the capacities for teaching this course have been and/or can be developed within the existing members of schools and faculties.
- The momentum of international support should be utilized and maximized by the Ministries of Education, recognizing that now is the time for establishing a lasting foundation for the development and implementation of the course.
- The education of new *Culture of Religions* teachers should be organized under state authority, and in cooperation with the existing BiH universities and teachers of *Culture of Religions* course who have undergone formal and specialized trainings. The Ministries of Education should be responsible for organizing training and certifying teachers of *Culture of Religions*, which will be implemented at entity level.
- The establishment of a Support Network for the *Culture of Religions* course, consisted of senior *Culture of Religions* course instructors, representatives of religious communities, the international community and entity and cantonal Ministries of Education.
- A harmonization of the teaching materials and methodology of the *Culture of Religions* course.
- The new and improved *Culture of Religions* textbook should be promoted as complementary to the existing religious education teaching materials in both RS and the Federation.
- A public relations campaign should be launched, which would inform the public, parents, students, as well as the religious communities of the positive interaction between confessional religious education and *Culture of Religions*, based on the best practice examples domestically and abroad.

Therefore, the Sustainability of the *Culture of Religions* course will be achieved through local ownership and the support and commitment of educational ministries.

### **Interviewed and Consulted Individuals**

Andreja Dugandžić – Goethe Institute Culture of Religions Project Coordinator  
 Reverend Mario Ćosić – History of Religions Professor, Catholic School Center, Sarajevo  
 Nermina Baljević – Culture of Religions Professor, First Bosniak Grammar School  
 Amila Karačić – Former student of the First Bosniak Grammar School, Sarajevo  
 Gorana Zagovec - Former student of the Catholic School Center, Sarajevo

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