



“Small” religious minorities in BiH religious education system: between invisibility and negative stereotyping

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1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This policy study aims to address the problem of the religious communities that do not belong to the dominant three, and that are in different areas marginalized, discriminated and kept invisible in BiH society. Their unprivileged position is confirmed by the current religious educational policy in public schools, which is conceptualized in order to meet the needs of the three dominant religious communities- the Islamic Community in BiH, Serbian Orthodox Church and Catholic Church. The individuals belonging to minor confessions are in different ways excluded and left outside the religious educational system in public schools. The representatives of the "small" religious minorities were not included in the process of the conceptualization of the religious education and its practicing, the children belonging to these religions are deprived of the chance to gain knowledge of their as well as other religions during school classes. What is more, these minorities are exposed to different kinds of stereotyping in the textbooks of the three dominant confessions in BiH and this exclusion tends to expand to other spheres of life. The qualitative research of their exclusion, conducted for the purposes of this policy study, has also confirmed these facts. Without the inclusion of the smaller communities into the religious educational system, Bosnia and Herzegovina will remain restricted and three-confessional, instead of being an open and pluralistic society.

In order to provide the solution for the current, inappropriate, religious educational policy, three alternatives have been outlined and elaborated. The first one remains within the current policy and, as it will be discussed in the *Problem Description* section, it fails to respond to the needs of the smaller religious communities. The second one is based on the following principles: the religious education in public schools should be framed within the human rights concept, it should be bias-free, objective, interdisciplinary and reflective. This approach is applied in the OSCE *Culture of religions* project and is being piloted in several secondary schools. However, considering the fact that the smaller religious communities did not participate in this project, in which the problems of religious education in primary school are also put aside, this option is actually not a proper solution for the problem that is the focus of this policy study. The third option- State Funding for the Religious Education of Minorities in their Communities- is based on the principles of positive discrimination and the recognized need to treat the marginalized minorities differently, in order to encourage their inclusion and participation in the democratic society. This option is based on certain practices already implemented in a number of countries in which religious minorities are provided with special aid, supported in the nourishment of their religious culture, officially recognized as an integral part of the society and encouraged to communicate with others. Accepting this approach within our religious educational system- that is to say, helping the smaller communities to organize religious instruction in their communities, and recognizing this officially as an integral part of the official religious educational policy, the state will demonstrate the minimum of fairness, foster these smaller communities' inclusion into the society, and contribute to social trust between these minor and major confessions. This alternative is feasible within a short period, it encourages and provides the inclusion of the unprivileged religious groups into the educational system, does not require additional resources nor change of legislation, and the institutional capacities for its implementation are already there.



2. INTRODUCTION

From the moment it was introduced into the public schools of Bosnia and Herzegovina, religious education has become the source of numerous controversies, heated debates, and the one raising a multitude of questions. However, since the introduction was hasty and took place during the war (Popov& Ofstadt, 2006: 74), many of the important issues were overlooked or put aside, and religious education was predominantly organized in order to meet the needs of the dominant national and/or confessional group in different parts of the country. In such a constellation, religious education as a politicized issue became the source of violation of human and children's rights, which made the citizens belonging to minor confessions additionally vulnerable. A small number of adherents of minor confessions in BIH (e.g., different Protestant denominations, Jewish community) make these violations harder to be seen, thus additionally hardening and perpetuating them.

2.1. Context of the Problem- Religion/s and Religious Education in BIH

In order to be able to understand the problems these "small" religious minorities face within the BIH religious education system, a short reference to the status of religion in the contemporary society and education system of BIH should also be given. BIH was torn by armed conflict during the 1990s, and this conflict also had significant religious dimensions. As many authors had already pointed out, the war in former Yugoslavia was not inherently a religious one, for it had not involved the elements of proselytism; however, religion was its context and pretext (Cvitković, 2004: 73). As Milan Vukomanović, a sociologist of religion, notes, religion had a supportive role, since it was easier, with the usage of religion, to articulate deeper and more complex causes for hatred and intolerance (Vukomanović, 2001: 97). Religion/s also played an important part in the process of building up the nation and the state, being the main marker that distinguishes ethnically and linguistically similar groups (the Bosniacs, Serbs and Croats). In that way, religion/s (re)gained an important role in the public sphere, which is also confirmed through the confessional religious instruction. In all the successor states to the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, in which religious education was introduced, it was of the confessional type, except in Slovenia. Namely, due to the strict separation of church and state in the Slovenian Constitution, the confessional religious education cannot be performed. Alternative subjects are offered in Serbia (Civic Education) and in Croatia in secondary schools (Ethics). In Bosnia and Herzegovina, no alternative is offered. According to the BIH laws, religious communities are in charge of the subject of Religious Education; they define the aims and goals of the religious education, develop methods and teaching units, publish textbooks and appoint religious teachers. Being the confessional and catechetical in its very character, religious education system in BIH tends to "teach religion" and "teach for religion", to "impart religious belief, identity, and ritual participation skills from the believing insider's viewpoint" (Kuburić & Moe, 2005: 4).

Such confessional approach was justified by the fact that the previous system was discriminatory in not letting religion exist as a school subject, and also by certain parts of human rights declarations and conventions highlighting the freedom of religions, freedom to manifest religion, and freedom to teach and to be taught about religion. It was also pointed out that many democratic countries practice the confessional religious education in public schools, driven by the somewhat naïve belief that religious education would help in the prevention and healing of the social illnesses (such as alcoholism, drug addiction, juvenile crime etc.). Different social

actors pressed for the introduction of confessional religious education, with the church representatives playing the leading part, which finally resulted in its introduction in public schools in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The overall rhetoric favoring confessional religious education was based on the so-called cultural arguments. A recurring theme in this rhetoric was that children would be deprived of their cultural heritage and that it would be impossible for them to develop their own cultural identity, which is deeply rooted in their religious tradition.

On the other hand, some other points of views regarding religious education were systematically neglected and overlooked, and little attention was paid to the possible problems, failures and controversies that could emerge within the strictly defined religious curricula in public schools. As many other authors had pointed out¹, the introduction of the new subjects was hasty: it was not accompanied by adequate public debate, the non-theological experts' opinions were not taken into account, the teachers were not adequately trained (and especially not acquainted with the modern didactic and pedagogical teaching methodologies, etc.), and the problems such as the segregation between the students of different religious adherence were put aside. The pressure for confessional religious education in the name of the protection of human rights was to some point misconstrued, since the human rights declarations proclaiming the freedom of teaching religion do not say anything about the obligations and/or the right to teach religion in public schools. Laying stress on the examples of the European countries where confessional religious education exists was biased, since some other practices in European countries were not mentioned. What was also neglected was the fact that many of these countries challenge the confessional religious education and try to adjust it to the modern needs of the pluralism of beliefs, values and way of life (Kodelja & Bassler, 2007: 25). Facing different challenges, such as the resurgence of religion and religiosity in the contemporary world, the ever-growing plurality of beliefs and disbeliefs, the threats of the possible conflicts on religious basis, it was realized that teaching religion needs to go beyond the narrow confessional boundaries. Therefore, many international bodies (OSCE, UNHCR) deal more and more with the promotion of such kind of religious education that will provide social inclusion, and meet the world human rights standards². Since Bosnia and Herzegovina ratified all the human rights conventions, it is also its international obligation to meet these standards and to move from the "three-confessional state" into a "religiously plural society".

2.2. Definition of the Problem- Exclusion of "Small" Religious Minorities in the Religious Education System in Public Schools

Within the above-described confessional character of the current religious educational system in public schools, the citizens belonging to the so-called minor religious groups are in different ways marginalized and discriminated. Some authors even claim that the source of discrimination derives from the Constitution itself, which incorporates the European Convention on Human Rights as its integral part, but does not provide the mechanisms for the protection of the minority rights³. As for religious rights and freedoms, the Law on the Freedom of Religion and the Legal Position of the Churches and Religious Communities reads that there are four historically based religious communities (the Islamic community, Roman-Catholic, Serbian Orthodox and the Jewish one) and the others that must obtain recognition from the state. According to Ivan Cvitković, a BIH sociologist of religion, the first ones are under the specific protection by the State, since they receive financial support (salaries for the religious teachers, insurance), while the remaining ones must provide their own means (Cvitković, 2006: 59). The report of the American State Department on religious freedoms also reads that there is discrimination

¹ Kuburic & Moe, 2006; Grupa autora, 2007; Cvitković, 2004.

² For example, OSCE is at the present promoting the Toledo Guiding Principles on teaching about religions and beliefs in public schools.

³ That is, of those not belonging to the three constituent people, and who are officially named "the others".



against others and sympathizers of certain faiths who do not fit neatly into the three dominant groups. This discrimination of “others” is also confirmed within the current religious education system in BIH public schools, as well as in other areas of religious manifestation in public. For example, as the Protestant pastors I had interviewed during my policy research stated, these communities are not members of the Inter-religious Council in Bosnia; they encounter different problems in the process of registration and returning of the church property nationalized during the SFRY. As for the religious education system in public schools, their discrimination could be seen on different levels. The representatives of the “small” religious minorities were not included in the process of the conceptualization of religious education and its practicing (Grupa autora, 2007, 146), and the children belonging to these religions are deprived of the chance to gain knowledge of their as well as other religions during school classes (Kuburić and Moe, 2006, 162); they are exposed to different kinds of stereotyping in the textbooks of the three dominant confessions in BIH (Grupa autora, 2007), and this exclusion tends to expand to other spheres of life.

Therefore, the purpose of this study is to address the basic issues related to the exclusion of the “small” religious minorities in the current educational system, and to present a possible policy alternative that would approach the religious minorities’ issues in the fair and proactive way.

2.3. Methodology and Limitations of the Study

In order to demonstrate that this study is based on good practice, first its methodology will be briefly outlined. And since every study has to have its own limitations, for the sake of objectiveness, they also have to be mentioned at the very beginning of the study. The methodology used in this study is a qualitative one since it enables the researcher to gain deeper insight into the problem. The indicators of this research belong more or less to the “soft” (less easily quantifiable) type (Grix, 2001: 63). The methodology is based on the two types of qualitative techniques for gathering reliable data: interviews and content analysis. In order to develop in-depth understanding of the current policy problem, the stress was laid on a number of case studies, given that the case studies are recommendable as an organizational strategy when the phenomenon under study is not readily distinguishable from its context, as this is the case with the “small” religious minorities in BIH whose position must be investigated within the broader context of BIH religious education which is set by the three dominant confessions. The analyses of the case studies also build on actual practices and experiences and their insights contribute to changing practice (Blaxter, Hughes & Tight, 2003: 173), as is the case with the policy research in general. Within this research, the focus was on the exclusion of the Protestant communities, for they have a small number of adherents and are exposed to different stereotypical portrayals by the three dominant confessions.

The interviews were conducted the Adventist Church in Sarajevo and Baptist Church in Sarajevo. First, the pastors from these communities were interviewed because of the position they hold in their communities, the easiness to articulate their own views and feelings, for they are much more informed and aware of the religious situation in the country and current religious policy, and the fact that in that way, other believers will have more trust and will to be involved in the interview process. The following persons were interviewed: Pastor Želimir Stanić from the Adventist Church and Pastor Tomislav Dobutović from the Baptist Church, as well as the parents of students who attend or attended public schools and belong to these religious communities⁴,

⁴ Four persons-parents were interviewed in the Baptist church and five in the Adventist Church.

and who preferred to remain anonymous. The interviews were held in January 2009. The list of questions posed to them is presented in the *Appendix* of this policy study. The questions were defined and posed in order to find out how these communities experience current religious education system, in what aspects their human rights are violated, what the consequences of the current religious education's barriers and deficiencies in their social status and personal dignity are, and what possible changes they recommend as regards to the existing policy. Taking into account that general conclusions could not be drawn from this small sample, we also contacted some other communities by email and phone in order to get more data about their position in the society and religious education system. Although the so-called online interviewing is not a direct substitute for the more traditional methodologies, it is a supporting partner of research, helpful in overcoming time and geographical boundaries (Coombes, 2001: 121-122). The following Protestant communities provided the relevant information: the Pentecostal Church from Zenica, where Pastor Dario Kapin was contacted, and the Baptist Church from Novi Travnik, where Pastor Aleksandar Trajkovski was contacted. It must also be added that pastors and believers from these communities are also informed about the situation in different parts of the country, for they are small groups, well informed about each other and often in contact and mutual visits. During their "careers", pastors from these communities usually spend a few years in a local church and then proceed to other towns to do service, and are, thus, well informed about the specific situation of almost every local church in Bosnia and Herzegovina. For these reasons, to focus on a small number of case studies makes sense and does not bring the validity of data in question.

2.4. Road Map of the Paper

This policy study is framed in accordance with the following document: *A Guide for Policy Advisers in Central and Eastern Europe*, written by Eoin Young and Lisa Quinn (Young & Quinn, 2003). The study aims to prove that, within the current religious educational policy in BiH, different problems regarding the religious minorities' issue have occurred, and that the urgent need for action has emerged. In order to provide a convincing problem description, empirical research was conducted, and different international documents and recommendations were analyzed, as well as different praxes in religious educational policy. The possible alternatives for the problem of the exclusion of small religious minorities were identified during the research, taking into account the attitudes and interests expressed by the population in question, together with the analysis of other relevant research and religious educational praxes.

3. PROBLEM DESCRIPTION

3.1. Background of the Problem- Bosnia and Herzegovina as a Restricted Multicultural/ Multi-religious State

Bosnia and Herzegovina is beyond any doubt a multicultural society. Its multiculturalism derives mostly from religious differences, since religions had played the main role in the shaping and reshaping of different group identities. One of the most important roles of the state is to help maintain and reproduce the communal identities and value systems of distinct groups. However, as Kuburić and Moe notice, it is a restricted multiculturalism, for the system tries to inculcate religious beliefs and norms defined by religious hierarchies, but does not support each and every religious tradition. Pride of place is given to the dominant religions as carriers of national identity, values and solidarity (Kuburić and Moe, 2006: 166).



This is achieved mostly through educational system, but also through other spheres religions can influence from within (media, culture, art etc.). It is interesting to note that many civic associations and foundations dealing with the promotion of religious tolerance and dialogue adopt this restricted approach. As the Pastor Želimir Stanić from Adventist Church in Sarajevo told me during the interview, the Adventist Church, which is by the way the largest Protestant community in BiH, had not been invited to participate in many activities organized in the name of the promotion of religious dialogue. For example, the German Foundation Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, which organizes the encounters of young theologians from BiH, did not invite Protestant theologians to partake these encounters. According to the same pastor, the media in BiH- both electronic and printed, rarely report about the activities of these communities, but when they do, they do it superficially and unprofessionally, often pulling the statements of the Protestant preachers out of the context. He advised me to have a look for the article published in the *Nezavisne novine* newspaper, named "They do not respect the saints, and prey to God directly"⁵, which I had found after the interview on the Internet. The very title of the article seems to demonstrate the intention to focus on some practices of the Protestant communities which seem "strange" from the perspective of the two dominant Christian confessions in BiH (namely the Catholics and the Orthodox), without giving any further theological, philosophical, sociological etc. explanation why these communities do so. After I had read the entire article, my first presumption was confirmed, for here and there short statements from different communities are given in the form of very brief sentences, without any further explanation and they are pulled out of the context.

⁵ Taušan, Marija (03.01.2009)., Ne poštuju svece, obraćaju se direktno Bogu, *Nezavisne novine*, Retrieved on January 8, 2009, from www.nezavisne.com/nedjeljnje/vijesti/35089/Ne-postuju-svece-obracaju-se-direktno-Bogu.html

All that was mentioned above confirms the existence of Bosnia and Herzegovina as a restricted multicultural society. Many international recommendations point out the negative aspects of such restrictedly defined multiculturalism. According to the Council of Europe's White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue "Living Together as Equals in Dignity", multiculturalism evokes a schematic conception of the society set in opposition to the majority and minority, communal segregation and mutual incomprehension, and contributes to the undermining of the rights of the individual within different communities (Council of Europe, 2008: 10). It is also very often incapable to give place to those not belonging to the most numerous and the most distinct groups and identities. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, the negative consequences of the restricted multiculturalism in the strict sense can be perceived everywhere. In the public education system, it is most obviously manifested by the phenomena such as the "two-schools under one roof", three official educational curricula, many schools existing as the ethnic "enclaves", fragmentations of the educational systems with thirteen ministries of education, problematic concepts and contents of the so-called national group of school-subjects (OSCE, 2006) etc. Religious subjects also belong to the national group of subjects since the nationalities in BiH are distinguished and defined by different religious affiliations and the national and the "sacred" are presented in the textbooks of dominant religions as connected and intermingled (Popov- Momčinović, 2007). The conflict and genocide in former Yugoslavia have stimulated a perception of identities that equate stereotypical representation of religion and ethnicity (Jackson, 2006: 52). For the variety of reasons, the current religious education system contributes to the preservation of the *status quo* in the society, furthers the differences and barriers between different groups, which results in making the social inclusion and cohesion difficult to achieve. The curricula of the three dominant confessions emphasize their superiority and purity in comparison to others, but also, paradoxically, pay little attention to others they are allegedly superior to. "Small" religious minorities are especially vulnerable and exposed to different forms of stereotypes, since they are the least equipped to claim their rights and to

present themselves to the others. Therefore, these groups need different treatment in order to correct the inequality, which factually amounts to their discrimination. In order to build the BiH society as a democratic and inclusive one, no one should be marginalized and defined as the outsider. This is, however, the case at the moment with the “small” religious minorities in our education system.

3.2. Exclusion of Small Religious Minorities within the Current Religious Educational Policy

As it was mentioned in the *Introduction*, the exclusion of small religious minorities in BiH can be observed on different levels. For the purposes of this study, the exclusion of these minorities was researched and examined in the field of religious education system in public schools. Here, this exclusion was examined by the following indicators. First of all, by the in/accessibility of religious classes for small religious communities in public schools; second, their personal feeling of exclusion and deprivation; third, the amount of attention paid to the small religious minorities and the way their images are defined and promoted within the curricula of the dominant religions; and finally, by the space given to the importance of religious pluralism, diversity and promotion of religious tolerance within the three dominant curricula. All these indicators of exclusion and discrimination can be analyzed well within the current religious education system policy, which gives privilege and tolerates only the constitutional majorities. As it can be seen, the focus of this study is not only the position of small religious minorities in itself, but also the general social climate that is most directly shaped and influenced by the three dominant confessions. Considering the overspread hyper-religiosity and identification with one’s religious community among the Bosniacs, Serbs and Croats all over the country (Vrcan, 2001), as well as the high level of attendance of confessional religious education (Krneta, 2005), there is also the need to demonstrate the way these communities treat religious plurality, freedoms and tolerance in public schools. Namely, they have rather powerful positions in the society and education system, and can both directly and indirectly influence the way the “other” communities and individuals are treated.

Before presenting the analysis of the exclusion in detail, we should first refer to the international standards and recommendations considering religious freedom, religious education system and religious minority issues. Although it is not quite clear from the international human rights conventions and treaties what kind of religious education is desirable and what the most suitable tool for the protection of human rights is, all these documents lay stress on the duty to nurture tolerance and non-discrimination (Moe, 2005). In that way, the states enjoy a certain level of discretion in matters of religion and religious education, but as it is explicitly stated in many documents, regardless of the religious education that prevails, religious and educational diversity should be taken into account. Every form of intolerance in public sphere should be ruled out. Special attention is paid to the intolerance toward different minorities, since they are often exposed to different forms of stereotypical perception, stigmatizations and are often used as scapegoats (Council of Europe, 2008: par. 132). Such expressions toward minorities may inflict not only unconscionable indignity on members of minority communities, but also expose them to intimidation and threat (Council of Europe, 2008: par. 82). Many documents also strictly prohibit any form of discrimination. For example, the Declaration on the Elimination of all Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion and Beliefs states that the child shall be protected from any form of discrimination on the ground of religion and belief. He shall be brought up in the spirit of understanding, tolerance, and friendship among peoples, peace



and universal brotherhood, respect for freedom of religion or beliefs of others. According to the concluding document from the OSCE meeting in Vienna in 1989, the states are obliged to prevent and eliminate discrimination against individuals or communities on the ground of religion, to foster a climate of tolerance and mutual respect, to respect the right of everyone to give or receive religious education individually or in association with others (OSCE/ODIHR, 2007: 29). The human rights instruments make it also clear that the restrictions on manifestation of religion are only permitted if they are strictly necessary- and not merely convenient- for the protection of democratic society. Limitations must be subject to a narrow interpretation, in accordance with the principle of an extensive interpretation of human rights (OSCE/ODIHR, 2007: 31).

In order to determine whether our society fosters these non-discriminatory standards within its religious education policy, we have analyzed the following indicators that most directly reflect and measure the position of religious minorities.

3.2.1. Accessibility of Religious Classes in Public School for “Small” Religious Minorities

Accessibility is an important goal and standard for every education system. It is claimed that the educational system is just and fair only if accessible to everybody. Accessibility in education is understood as something that is non-discriminatory and physically accessible to everybody (OSCE, 2006: 2). Although introduced, at least on the level of declaration, for the purpose of protection of religious rights and freedoms, religious education system in BiH does not fulfill the standard of accessibility. It is, namely, organized only for the three dominant confessions in BiH, which means that the freedom of religious expression and teaching are defined restrictively, without reasonable arguments. Although well embedded by the protection of the state and the support of the majority of political parties, the three dominant confessions experience difficulties when they try to establish religious classes in certain regions where they have the minority status. According to the 2006 reports of the USA Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, the schools organize religion classes on behalf of the minorities only if a sufficient number of students of minority religion/s attend a particular school- 15 in Federation and 20 in RS (Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, 2006). In rural parts of the country, the situation is more complicated, for there is usually no qualified religious representative available to teach religions to smaller groups (Popov & Ofstadt, 2006: 79). However, since the members of three dominant confessions enjoy a privileged position within the BiH political framework, their exposure to different forms of discrimination attracts public attention. These three major religious groups have firm foothold in the society and state institutions, and are, therefore, well equipped to claim their rights in the case of violation.

As for the “small” religious minorities, they are placed outside the religious education system in public schools, and therefore their deprivation rarely draws the attention of the governing officials, and even of the academic community and NGO sector. As an activist of NGO who participates in the OSCE *Culture of religions* project said⁶, the relations between the religious communities in Bosnia are too complicated, and they would become even more complicated if we include the Protestant and other smaller groups into the dialogue on religious education. At the first glance, such rhetoric seems to be rational since it tends to solve the root of the problem- that is to say, to improve the relations between the three dominant confessions,

⁶ Here it must be pointed out that this was stated during an unofficial talk, and is not the official view of that particular organization (Sarajevo Open Center) on the issue of religious minorities. But as it is often pointed out in the social sciences, the unofficial statements can be much more useful than the statements revealed during the official interviews, for respondents sometimes wish to conceal the real attitudes and relations toward certain phenomena.

which were marked with conflicts, mutual suspicions, tensions and anxiety, and then to move on further from there. But going deeper into the issue, the problem actually stems from such a restricted, three-confessional approach, and therefore cannot be resolved within such an approach. But as long as such rhetoric keeps persisting as dominant, our society will not be able to step forward and become intrinsically democratic, open and inclusive.

3.2.2. Self-Image of “Small” Religious Minorities

The democratic society is based on the active participation of all citizens in the public sphere. The education system is one of the most important channels for social promotion, mobility and the building of the active citizenship. All those who are up to some point excluded from the educational system are also deprived of the chance to fully and actively participate in the democratic citizenship. This exclusion influences the way these groups are defined and perceived by others, as well as the way they construct their self-image.

The process of creating one’s self-image is well developed and studied in psychology. It is a rather complex phenomenon, the discussion of which goes beyond this study, but it is important to note its importance for the development of positive (or negative) self-attitudes⁷. Different research in the world and domestically has revealed that the Protestant families and their children are perfectionists, and impose the system of values and behavior highlighting the ethics of work, order and responsibility. They have a more developed superego and more strict moral standards (Kuburić, 1998: 479). However, in the areas where they are in the position of a minority and especially in the social surroundings in which they feel rejection by others, the hindering of certain aspects of their self-evaluation can ensue. For example, they can create different communication gaps and destabilize the structure of self-concept (Kuburić, 2006: 99). During the research that was done for the purposes of this policy study, I had found out that the Protestant believers feel rejected by our society all the time. As Pastor Aleksandar Trajkovski from the Baptist Church in Novi Travnik told me, this is felt by both children and their parents. He also said: “This is something we must accept and live with... for Jesus did to other people only good and yet was prosecuted and crucified”. The pastor from the Adventist Church said politely and modestly: “We’ve got used to that”. Such kind of conformity with the unrighteous reality can lead to more isolation of these communities from the society and further expansions of exclusion and prejudices toward these groups. On the other hand, some Protestant communities want to be more included into our society and to contribute to its post-war reconstruction and democratic consolidation. As it says on the web-site of the Christian Adventist Church in BIH, the protestant communities are often perceived as social byproducts, but they strive to be a recognizable part of our society and to contribute to its development, as many distinguished members of this community had done and still do⁸.

One of the mechanisms for breaking this vicious circle of their “invisibility” and isolationism is the educational system, considering the indispensable role it has in modern societies and also the great amount of public attention paid to the religious instruction in public schools by a variety of stakeholders both in our society and the international community.

3.2.3. The Images of “Small” Religious Communities within the Curricula of Dominant Confessions

The way the others see us and define us influences the way we see ourselves and it often determines, whether we wanted it or not, our courses of action. This is especially the case if

⁷ They are usually measured on the 11 scale, with a bipolar dimension.

⁸ Kostadinović, R. (March 26, 2008), *Molitveni međuvjerski dijalog u Adventističkoj crkvi Sarajevo*, Retrieved on December 2008, from <http://adventisti-bih.com>



the others are “significant” , because they are the model for our behavior or simply have more power than we do. Taking into account that the three dominant confessions in BiH are in a powerful position for many reasons- the number of adherents, support of the state, historical position, political influence- their view of “small” religious communities should also be given. This serves the purpose of supporting our argument that the current educational policy can be seen as failing and inappropriate when it comes to the minorities’ issue. Based on the qualitative analyses of the textbooks for the religious instructions of the three dominant confessions, we came to the following findings.

The textbooks for Islamic religious education are purely confessional in content. This conclusion is based on the careful analysis of the Islamic textbooks from 1st to 9th grade in primary schools. They are written from the position of holding the ultimate truth, with the goal to create the “faithful and practical followers of Mohammed a.s.” (Omerdić & Haljdzsilahović, 2004: 5). Islam is described as the perfect religion, and Jewish and Christian prophets have only prepared the coming of Mohammed, the last and the most perfect prophet. A child is presented as situated in a homogeneous Muslim environment. In the textbook for the sixth grade it is even claimed that every child is born in the nature of Islam, yet his parents make of him a Jew or a Christian (Ćatović, 2004: 22). What the others, to whom the Muslims are superior, believe, is not, however, mentioned anywhere. Since “larger” communities could not find a place in the textbooks for Islamic education, it logically follows that the minor confessions remain invisible as well.

The textbooks for Orthodox religious education are also purely confessional, which is based on the analysis of the textbook from 1st to 9th grade of the elementary school. They are written in the frame of perception that the Orthodox Church is the only Christian church that has maintained the purity of apostles’ faith, whereas, for example, the Catholic Church organizes the church on the basis of their wishful thinking (Mojsilović, 2004: 21). The basis of Orthodox Christianity is presented in the light of the Serbian national history with various struggles for national freedom. This community is perceived as having been constantly oppressed during history. There is almost no information about other religions, yet certain “other groups” sparked the attention of the authors of the textbook for the 8th and 9th grade which is shown in the chapter about the “sects” (where belong the Satanists, Adventists, Pentecostals, Jehovah’s Witnesses). It is claimed that the goal of the sects is to destroy the personality, the family and the whole society. The sectarians are false teachers and their teachings are directed against Jesus as the Savior (Stojanović, 2006: 42- 45). Their heretic books should not be read, and their members should not be contacted. In the textbook for the 5th grade, where the issue of ecumenism was dealt with, the communion of the Orthodox with the Catholics and Protestant is refused because they do not share the same religion- namely, “the latter with their erroneous thinking have spoiled it” (Mojsilović, 2001: 55). For these reasons, we may conclude that the Orthodox textbooks directly encourage the stereotypes toward different minor religious communities, putting them into the same context with the Satanists and various cults. Catholic textbooks for all grades of elementary school have also been analyzed. They are also mainly confessional, but written in the more broadminded frame and style. Some religious issues are placed in the human rights frame, and students are given some basic information about other religions as well, starting as early as the first grade of primary school (Jakšić & Mićanović, 2004: 2, 11). Different religious traditions are presented with factual information in descriptive and neutral manner. However, the information about other religions is put in the too broad a context, with almost no specific details about their presence in this region.

Considering that the Catholic community is presented as the one being constantly oppressed and endangered throughout history up to the present time, especially in the textbook for the 8th grade which deals with the history of the Catholicism of the Croats, it is questionable whether the other religions can be treated bias-free and fairly, although it seems, at first glance, that this was aimed at.

3.2.4. Tolerance and Plurality in the Perspective of the Dominant Confessions

The Islamic and Orthodox textbooks only occasionally state their orientation towards religious tolerance; however, the style they were written in and various statements demonstrate that the acceptance of tolerance mostly remains at the level of declaration. One's own religion is treated as an all-encompassing system and as the perfect one, which implicitly treats the religious others as less dignified. Such concepts do not foster respect and understanding between different confessions, and they hinder social cohesion. Furthermore, both curricula demonstrate strong intolerance towards the atheists. Namely, the atheists are depicted as disoriented, unstable and sinful people, with no meaning of life (Čatović, 2005: 95; Vrhovac, 2004). Therefore, the Islamic and Orthodox textbooks do not contribute to the development of our society as a plural and tolerant one; they tend to over-simplify complex issues and present social problems and religious relations in black and white.

The Catholic textbooks emphasize the need for dialogue between different people, for all people are connected and every person is important for human kind. They also mention the importance of reconciliation between the different branches of the Christianity, and common heritage and mutual respect between the Jews and Christians (Periš, 2004: 62). Whereas the Islamic and Orthodox textbooks only here and there briefly state a general principle of religious tolerance⁹, in Catholic textbooks the principle of tolerance is more discussed, elaborated and put in the real life context and personal experience of every student. Tolerance is defined as a religious value and norm, and therefore can be more easily impressed on students. The Catholic textbooks also criticize some periods of history of the Catholic Church and its praxis of holy wars, crusades, simony, abuse of power etc. (Periš, 2004: 107-109) which enables the pupils to develop an undogmatic approach toward their tradition and therefore to be more open and bias-free to others. They give interesting citations not only from the Holy Testimony, but from the other Holy Books as well. In that way, the students are more prepared for the entrance into a pluralistic society. However, there is no tolerance toward those who do not believe in God. The atheists are the people who have forgotten ethical and moral principles. Here it should be stressed that the plurality of beliefs equals the plurality of disbeliefs, and that the freedom of religion is indissociable from the freedom from religion.

Considering that religious education can have valuable potential in terms of encouraging respect for others and reducing conflicts, only the Catholic textbooks have partially used this potential. The CRE textbooks denounce religious discrimination, anti-Semitism, and open the door for inter-religious dialogue¹⁰. They also mention some critical instances from the Catholic Church history, while the Orthodox and Islamic textbooks do not. Learning about other religions and the respect towards the religious others is one of the aims and goals of CRE, as it is defined in the Plan and Program of Catholic Religious Education (Biskupska konferencija BiH, 2003: 10-11), which is not the case with the other two dominant confessions. The most attention to religious others is given in the CRE textbooks, in terms of quantity and diversity (Smajić, 2008: 118). On the other hand, the Catholic Church also proclaims to be the holder of the

⁹ For example, in the textbook for the 6th grade of Orthodox Religious Education it is briefly said that the Serbs must teach their children to be faithful to their religion and tradition, but also to respect the others (Pajić, 2004: 46). In the Islamic textbooks, it is stated in the form of a poem that all Muslims are brothers, but Islam does not proscribe hatred toward others (Čatić & Stulanović, 2004: 101).

¹⁰ For example, in the textbook for the 5th grade it says that "the Catholic Church rejects nothing that is true and holy in other religions. It regards with sincere reverence those ways of conduct and life, those precepts and teachings that although different in many aspects from its own, nonetheless often reflect a ray of that Truth which enlightens all men" (Razum, 2007: 33).



ultimate truth, and some negative portrayals of religious others, however, only in the context of historical events, can be found¹¹. On the basis of our qualitative analysis of the textbooks of the three dominant confessions, where we also recognized their underlying assumptions and demonstrated both the stated and the unstated conclusions, we may conclude that the general social and religious climate is not favorable for those belonging to the smaller confessions and their inclusion into the society.

4. POLICY ALTERNATIVES

4.1. Framework of Analysis

The problem which is addressed and attempted to be solved in this policy study is described on the basis of various important studies in the field of religious education system, taking into account not only the researchers' findings considering our society and region, but also the broader perspective. This aspect also needs to be included, for religion has both global and local dimensions, and human rights should be considered as a universal issue. The positions and attitudes of those who are directly discriminated by the current religious educational policy are fully integrated in the process of problem description as well as in the evaluation of the possible policy alternatives. This is achieved based on the qualitative analysis applied in this study- content analysis and interviewing, as is shown in the problem description part.

In the following part, three different alternatives in the religious educational system in public schools are outlined and discussed. The presentation and evaluation of these alternatives is based on the results of my policy research, as well as on other significant research conducted in this field and the policy practices existing in different countries, on their advantages and shortcomings. The main focus is on the inclusion of the marginalized religious minorities in BIH religious educational system, raising their self-esteem and encouraging them to fully participate and enjoy BIH citizenship. Together with the inclusion, the following criteria were used as the evaluation tool for the proposed alternatives: pedagogical/didactical constraints, human rights protection, political feasibility, institutional capacity for added service, time of implementation, public approval, and additional costs.

4.1. Maintaining of Current Religious Educational Policy

The first alternative is to maintain the *status quo* in religious educational policy in BIH. Since many important and powerful stakeholders support current, strictly confessional approach, it also must be considered as one of the alternatives and compared to the other approaches. Although criticized by many international bodies, civic organizations and scientists as the approach that encourages violation of human rights, segregation and the lack of tolerance and broadmindedness toward different religious groups, it is, to some extent, based on the human rights rhetoric. Namely, it is stressed that many international conventions on human rights read that parents have rights to ensure education for their children in conformity to their own beliefs and convictions¹². However, in Bosnia and Herzegovina this stands only for the parents belonging to the three dominant confessions. Since members of minor communities live scattered across BIH, the organizing of separate classes for this group of students in public schools would be faced with different institutional constraints: the lack of qualified teachers, lack of space in schools, insufficient number of students attending these classes etc.

¹¹ This is especially highlighted in the relation toward Muslim-Turks (Periš, 2004: 97), but can be perceived in the relation toward other religions as well. For example, the Jews are depicted as "our brothers" with whom common values are shared, but at the same time there is a negative portrayal of Jesus' Jewish contemporaries. There is also a neutral and objective description of the basic characteristics of Protestantism, while, on the other hand, Martin Luther is described as "too radical and inflexible" in his views on reformation, which led him to separate from the Catholic Church (Periš et al., 2005: 130).

¹² For example, Article 18 (4) of the ICCPR (International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights).

The second strand of arguments favoring confessional religious education is that any approach to religious education holds an implicit position about the truth of the religious claims, and that confessional religious education has a clear epistemological and didactical framework (Popov & Ofstadt, 2006: 99). The non-confessional religious subject is claimed to be built on a contradiction: it appears that it is impossible to teach without having a view on what is being thought. Despite the official claims to be non-confessional, RE, as presently configured, either proceeds on the basis of disguised confessions or leads to radical pluralism, which can offer no means of resolution (Thompson, 2004: 66).

However, some other researchers claim that large part of this argumentation cannot hold true. For example, it is not clear why it should be impossible to teach religion openly and neutrally, with no intention of persuasion for particular beliefs. This approach also raises serious ethical and political questions, such as the rights of the children and young people, their personal autonomy, and it ignores the dynamic relationship between the individual and group-based faith etc (Jackson, 2006: 38). And what is most important for the problem we are trying to tackle, the upholding of the current strictly confessional approach, where only three major confessions can enter into public school, is unacceptable. The small religious minorities will continue to be excluded and invisible for the system.

4.2. Introduction of non-confessional religious subject in public schools

In many European countries religion in public schools is taught from the non-confessional perspective. For the proponents of this approach this is the only way to guarantee the principle of separation between state and church. This approach also reflects the needs and trends of the modern societies, which are faced more and more with the ever-growing plurality of beliefs and disbeliefs. It will prepare pupils for a constructive entrance into the pluralistic society and enable them to be critical of the negative phenomena that may emanate from religion (Smrke & Rakar, 2006: 26). This subject is framed within the context of human rights, combating different stereotypical representations of different confessions, it is inclusive both in the process of its creation and its content, it is professional, reflexive and evaluation rich, and it demonstrates the diversity within religious and nonreligious belief systems, enabling young children to express and formulate their own position. The main objection of the proponents of confessional education is that this approach promotes indifferentism and agnosticism (Jackson, 2006: 38). However, this depends not on the approach itself, but on the way this subject is taught, on the teachers' capabilities to motivate children, their pedagogical insight into how to communicate with students, and how to make learning about religions interesting and relevant for students (OSCE/ ODIHR 2007: 58). One of the important problems this subject raises derives from the liberal perspective- that is to say, how to balance an empathetic treatment with a critical one that reflects modern liberal values (Kuburić & Moe, 2006: 5).

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, the OSCE started the *Culture of religions* project in 2000, in order to introduce the non-confessional religious education in secondary schools. The subject was not intended as an alternative to confessional religious education, but as an additional module to the common curriculum (Popov & Ofstadt, 2006: 97). The church authorities in our countries were rather skeptical about the whole issue, with Catholic representatives playing the leading part¹³, although some of them admitted that the new subject could improve respect for other religions and develop a better understanding among them (Isanović, 2001: 7). At the regional conference organized in Sarajevo in October 2008 by OSCE, which I attended, many representatives of

¹³ According to the OSCE report, the Catholic church intervened to halt the involvement of the Croat Minister of Education in the *Culture of religions* efforts (OSCE, 2007: 5).



religious communities criticized the new subject. Their main argumentation was that religion is already very present in the BIH curricula (first of all as a confessional subject, but is also taught during the history classes, literature, art etc.), and that children may lose their interest in religion. Some participants at the conference rejected the subject because of the religious relativism and syncretism, and because it leads to the trivialization of faith. Although many religious representatives, who are in fact the most powerful stakeholders in the issue of religious education in public schools, seem to oppose the new subject, it is planned to be introduced in the BIH secondary schools from this year on. It is at the moment being introduced as an experimental subject in the secondary schools in Republic of Srpska, and in some cantons in the Federation, but not in the predominantly Croat cantons. The textbooks were recently printed and the teachers of the new subjects have passed different training and attended various conferences.

From the position of small religious minorities in BIH and their exclusion from the religious education system in public schools, at first glance it seems that this new subject will provide their inclusion. The subject was framed within the Toledo Guiding Principles where it is stated that "it is important to give voice to a wide range of religious beliefs and disbeliefs and to treat them with respect... It needs to be remembered that most well-established faiths in today's world started as small and unconventional and were rejected by the society at large" (OSCE/ODIHR, 2007: 51). However, several problems arise considering the problem of the exclusion of small religious communities. Although these principles should enable the religious minorities to express themselves as well, the representatives of the Protestant communities that I had interviewed claimed that they were not invited to participate in the *Culture of religions* project. Therefore, it is questionable whether they will gain the opportunity to present themselves to others. Tomislav Dobutović, the pastor from the Baptist Church in Sarajevo, was rather skeptical about the whole subject in general, claiming it to be the part of the political abuse of religion in BIH society. As for the other possible controversies, the subject is going to be introduced into the secondary schools, but the question remains whether this new subject can remove all the damage already present in the primary school education and its failures. Considering that the majority of children had already been exposed to a subtle form of religious indoctrination in the primary schools, it is questionable how they are going to respond to the new subject. If we try to consider this approach in a broader sense, or to be exact, to advocate for the introduction of the non-confessional subject in elementary schools as well, this will face different obstacles, such as public disapproval, large additional costs and several institutional constraints. However, remaining within the current OSCE policy alternative seems not to be sufficient for the inclusion of the small religious communities and the meeting of their needs. Their position should be treated and improved from the position of affirmative action: they must be treated differently than others for the benefits of fairness, justice and the enhancement of their participation in the society.

4.3. Affirmative Action: State Funding for the Religious Education of Minorities in Their Communities

The third alternative that is going to be analyzed in this study is based on the theory and praxis of affirmative action (or positive discrimination). The basic idea is that those who are in the minority position, discriminated and unprivileged for different reasons, should be helped and supported, that is, treated differently but positively. In our case we are dealing with the so-called weak positive discrimination, because the favoring of the minorities does not lead to the disadvantage of the majorities.

In many countries different policies based on the principles of affirmative action are being introduced in order to address the needs of the minority populations and to include them into the society. For example, in Great Britain in 1997, the state started to fund the schools of religious minorities. The main aim of this new policy was to achieve fairness, good community relations and inclusion of these groups into the society (Jackson, 2006: 41). Thus, several schools associated with religious minorities received state funding; this was the case with the Muslim schools, the Sikh primary and secondary school, the Seventh Day Adventist School, Greek Orthodox School etc. Although several controversies emerged, such as why the democratic state should fund overtly religious schools and whether this would increase religious, racial and cultural divisiveness, it was realized that with this policy, the integration of the different minorities into the British society would be achieved and their participation in the democratic institutions and practices encouraged (Jackson, 2006: 50). Accepting this approach within our religious educational system, i.e. helping the smaller communities to organize religious instruction in their communities and recognizing this officially as an integral part of the official religious educational policy, the state will show the minimum of fairness and foster their inclusion into the society, and contribute to the social trust between these and major confessions. A similar approach is also being implemented in Croatia, our neighboring country, where students who are not Catholics may request that their religious instruction be offered through their community (OSCE, 2007: 4).

Taking into account the other evaluation criteria presented in the framework of analysis, this approach is a favorable one. It is feasible within a short period, it encourages and provides the inclusion of the unprivileged religious groups into the educational system, it does not require the additional resources nor change in the legislation, and institutional capacities for its implementation are already there. The additional costs of this policy are very low, because the state will be obliged to provide salaries for a small number of new teachers (due to the small number of believers and children from these communities), and help with the provision of textbooks. This approach would not face public disapproval either, since the three major confessions will still continue to organize their religious instruction in public schools. It is also in accordance with the attitudes of many Protestant believers and representatives who demand thorough and strict separation of state and church, for they will teach this subject within their facilities. Some of them also claim that religion should be taught and experienced not in school, but in the family and religious community (this was especially highlighted by the Pastor Tomislav Dobutović from the Baptist Church in Sarajevo¹⁴ and believers interviewed in this Church, and Dario Kapin from the Pentecostal Church in Zenica). This policy is, therefore, in accordance with their beliefs and attitudes, and will, furthermore, enable them to teach their religious and moral values and take them out into the society that will start to recognize and respect them. Being institutionally recognized, they will also be equipped to take a more prominent part in the public debates about religion and plurality, to contribute to the social cohesion through dialogue and communication.

¹⁴ Here it is interesting to note that, although being from the same church as pastor Dobutović, Aleksandar Trajkovski, the Baptist preacher from Novi Travnik, had not expressed such radical opposition to teaching religion in schools. This is the consequence of the fact that many Protestant communities do not have the official viewpoint as regards to this issue, and the fact that many of them, especially the Baptists, enjoy a large level of autonomy of their local churches.

5. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The major findings of this policy study have proved the routine of the exclusion and marginalization of the small religious minorities in the BiH society, which is also confirmed and strengthened within the current religious educational policy. The inaccessibility of religious education in public schools for these communities, their exposure to different forms of stereotypes and



negative portrayal, and their unjust and biased treatment, all prove the urgent need for action and implementation of the policy alternative that will address this issue most adequately. In the *Policy Alternatives* section three religious educational alternatives were elaborated, and the third was evaluated as the preferred one. It is based on the principles of affirmative action, where the marginalized groups are treated differently in order to eliminate the exclusion. This option does not require any significant additional resources for the capacities, since its implementation is already present in these very communities; it faces no public disapproval, because it does not question the confessional model of religious education preferred by the three major, dominant confessions.

Choosing this option does not face any significant constraints, but it is necessary for the educational authorities to accept this option, and include school authorities in its implementation. This option does not require any change in the legislation, because, according to the laws, churches and religious communities are in charge of carrying out religious instruction. It only requires “tuning” in its implementation, in order to meet the needs of the minor confessions and to have a more flexible and responsive education system. It is also important to define the responsibilities of all institutions included in this policy in order to avoid the ambiguity and confusion. Religious communities will provide religious teachers, and set the curricula. The ministries of education will cooperate in publishing textbooks and providing salaries for teachers. Schools will be obliged to accept the written reports from these communities and include them into their own records. In that way, pupils from these communities will have the equal treatment as pupils from three dominant confessions who attend religious classes at their schools. This will encourage them to actively participate in the school system which will start to recognize them, and encourage them to communicate and exchange their religious experience with others. The teachers from these communities will be encouraged to communicate with their colleagues from other communities, to share their knowledge and be engaged in religious dialogue. In that way, they will become more equipped to present themselves to others and challenge the vicious circle of stereotypes and exclusion of small confessions in our society.

Among the possible constraints of this approach, it should be noted that it is not quite clear whether all Protestant communities in BiH will agree to take the active part in the implementation of this alternative. This is the consequence of the significant level of autonomy that many of the Protestant local churches enjoy, and the controversial question to what extent is the exclusion of these communities, which is recognized in this study, determined by their social exclusion. As Christian Moe notices, some of the small Protestant communities facing social exclusion are themselves highly exclusivist, raising the question to which extent they are marginal by choice (Moe, 2008: 13). The answer to that question goes beyond the scope of this study, but the possible solution of this controversy is to apply the alternative in phases. That is to say, to apply this alternative in the communities that more directly and openly opt for it- in this case in the Adventist Church which, by the way, has much more believers, children and local churches than other communities, and then to try to implement it in the second phase in other communities.

6. APPENDICES

The interviews were organized around the following questions below: however, the questions posed to the parents were reformulated to address their own attitudes, their own and their children's personal experiences, whereas questions posed to the pastors were of a more general nature, without neglecting their personal experiences.

1. How do you define the position of your religious community in the BIH society?
2. What do you think about the religious tolerance of the BIH society?
3. Are religious freedoms and freedom standards in BIH respected?
4. Have the members of your religious community been exposed to some forms of discrimination and intolerance?
5. If so, to what kind of discrimination and intolerance?
6. Does your religious community have access to the religious education in public schools in BIH?
7. If yes, explain how.
8. If no, explain why.
9. How many children from your community attend public schools in BIH?
10. Do they feel excluded from the environment because of the different religious adherence?
11. In what way do the children from your community learn about their faith?
12. Do you know whether your religious community is presented in the curricula for the religious instruction of three dominant confessions?
13. If yes, do you know how and in what way?
14. Have the members from your community been invited to participate in the public debates about religious instruction in public schools?
15. Does your community cooperate in the OSCE *Culture of religions* project? What is your opinion about the entire project?
16. Have you participated in the religious dialogue processes organized by NGOs and/or state institutions?
17. Do you think that current model of religious education in BIH public schools should be changed? Why do you think so?
18. If yes, what alternative is, in your opinion the best?
19. Additional comments.

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