



Towards a Resilient Civic Culture of Public Accountability in Bosnia and Herzegovina:

Chance for Religious Education in Public Schools¹

Aid Smajić

Attempts to fight corruption through promoting public accountability as a core value of good governance so far have miserably failed in BH. Recent studies have shown that the Bosnian government is the least accountable one in the region, with only Kosovo's administration ranking lower in this regard (World Bank, 2009). The prevailing attitude of tolerance of BH citizens towards corruption in the public sector is one of the main factors blamed for the serious accountability deficiency of BH authorities (European Stability Initiative, 2004). Available information show that BH citizens believe that corruption is so deeply rooted in the government and society that no reaction of civil sector can eliminate it (Datzer, 2009). BH citizens do not seem decisive in insisting on accountability of public servants and thus support the fight against corruption. Their civic culture of public accountability is deficient. And no public authorities in the world will show accountability unless pressured by ordinary citizens to do so.

In response to the issue, Transparency International has called for a preventive and comprehensive anti-corruption approach, whereby *all* social institutions in accordance with their capacities would engage in raising the awareness of citizens about the meaning of public accountability and their role in this regard (Blagovčanin, 2009). The call inevitably included educational and religious institutions and meant explicit civic education (ECE) for the youngest students in public schools. However, respective anti-corruption strategies never managed to recognize strong support for principles of good governance and active citizenship in Islam and Christianity and accordingly envisage a space for CRE in public schools in their

nourishing. The possibility of such cooperation between state and religious representatives so far has not been explored whatsoever. Similarly, ECE is on the edge of removal in the Federation. Both of these factors slow down the ongoing process of civic enculturation in BH that should prepare youth to actively demand accountability from their authorities in days to come.

In line with practices of civic and religious education in developed democracies as well as their current nature and stature in BH primary schools, three options for teaching youth about values and principles of public accountability seem to be available. *A Transitional Approach to Civic and Religious Education* is the status quo policy whereby current educational policies are inconsistent in regard to explicit or implicit teaching about principles of democracy and responsible governance, while in both cases CRE is excluded from the process. *The Religious Studies Approach Combined with Explicit Civic Education* is the second policy option which demands a radical change and departure from the current practice. It proposes introducing a new non-denominational course on religions that would relate principles of democracy and active citizenship to the respective religious teachings, while also insisting on implementation of an explicit approach to civic education in primary schools. *Advanced Confessional Religious and Explicit Civic Education* in public schools is the third and preferred option that envisages the appropriate fine tuning of current CRE curricula and textbooks in order to offer religious understanding of public accountability and its underlying principles in Islam, Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy, while insisting on a model of ECE in the schools.

Summary

Public authorities in BH will not practice accountability unless pressured by ordinary citizens to do so. The current attitude of BH citizens towards corruption in the public sector, however, is characterized by serious deficiencies. Engaging all actors of socialization in the process of civic education at the earliest period of development is an inevitable measure. Given support of Islam, Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy for public and social accountability, confessional religious education (CRE) in public schools seems to be an avoidable ally for grounding values of good governance and active citizenship in the minds and hearts of the youngest believers and BH citizens. Radical change of the policies is rather needless. Implementing a model of explicit civic education in public schools and fine-tuning of the current content of CRE would be optimal option.

¹ This policy brief is based on a policy paper "Bosnia and Herzegovina in a Search for Civic Culture of Public Accountability: Role of Religious Education in Public Schools" written by the author and supported by the Open Society Fund's Policy Development Fellowship Program 2010. The complete study is available at www.soros.org.ba.

Less Promising and Feasible Options

The current, **transitional approach** and policy in regard to teaching about principles of accountable governance and participative democracy and the role of religious education in this process are characterized by inconsistencies, and therefore do not adequately address the issue at hand.

Our analysis has demonstrated that values underlying principles of public and social accountability have strong support in Islamic notions of *hilāfa* (vicegerency) and *shūrā* (consultation), as well as in Catholic social doctrine and Eastern Orthodoxy teachings of caterer (ekonom) and martyrdom (mučeništvo), for instance. But to no avail. According to our findings, none of the CRE textbooks of three religious communities explicitly relate these concepts to the issue of good governance and active citizenship. One of the basic educational principles says that pupils learn things they are taught about and they cannot learn things they are not explicitly taught. Accordingly, in perception of CRE pupils demanding accountability from authorities hardly has anything to do with their religious identity. And no anti-corruption strategy, including the one of 2009 by the state Agency for Preventing Corruption, invited religious communities to possibly revise their attitude in this regard.

Similarly, since 2006 the model of implicit civic education has been implemented in the Federation primary schools. Two years later authorities in Republika Srpska opted for explicit teaching about democracy and citizenship. Consequently, the proven effectiveness of ECE has not been fully utilized in nourishing a civic culture of public and social accountability among the youngest BH citizens. And while such decision of the Federation Ministry has been strongly opposed by CIVITAS BH, other NGOs, pupils and their parents have joined in a call for CRE in public schools that would prepare students for "here and now", including life in a society based on participative democracy and rule of law (Trbić, 2007).

Altogether, it seems justifiable to look for ways to rectify the above mentioned deficiencies present in the current model of civic education

in primary schools as well as in the way CRE presents religious understanding of public and social accountability.

Religious Studies Approach Combined with Explicit Civic Education is a radical step suggested for amelioration of the above shortcomings in current civic and religious education in primary schools. The strongest contender for this option is in the proven effectiveness of ECE in transmitting knowledge and values of participative democracy to the youngest generation (Šalaj, 2002). Similarly, introducing a new non-denominational course on religions would grant public and social accountability spiritual dimension and effectively ground them in religious identity of the youngest generation.

However, while implementing the principle of ECE seems entirely justifiable, introducing a new subject on religious education in addition to existing CRE for all pupils in primary schools is not feasible for several reasons and seems rather needless for accomplishing the targeted aim. Most importantly, it would burden pupils with an extra course at the moment when their curriculum is already overcrowded. In addition, staff required for teaching such a course is hardly available, while their certification would require significant extra costs and a prolonged period of time.

Given that the radical solution for deficiencies in the way religious education in public schools deals with the issue of public and social accountability in respective religious traditions does not seem feasible, the logical and simple way forward would be in the incremental change and fine-tuning of the existing content of CRE in public schools.

Logical and Simple Way Forward

As showed, the status quo is unsatisfactory and implementing entirely a radical solution is not plausible and is unnecessary. The logical and simple way forward seems to be in incremental change and the fine-tuning of the existing model, which would include *improved CRE and preserving the model of ECE in primary schools*. CRE



would be improved through revision of its curricula and textbooks to include explicit teaching about values of public and social accountability as understood in respective religious traditions, additional training of CRE teachers, upgraded pedagogies, and closer cooperation between education authorities and religious communities. Here we mention some reasons that make a strong argument for this position.

First, irrespective of frequent critics against religious organizations, recent studies show that religious communities in BH enjoy the highest level of social trust. People only believe their nearest relatives more (Šalaj, 2009) and they listen carefully to the advice of their religious leaders. Similarly, religion has always remained an inexhaustible source of positive inspiration and motivation for many throughout BH. According to available statistics, more than 70% youth in BH declare themselves as religious (Dušanić, 2007) and the percentage of children attending CRE in public schools is extremely high. During 2006/2007 academic year, for example, 96.24 % out of all Muslims pupils attended CRE in primary schools. The comparative statistics for Catholic education are even higher (Alibašić, 2009). Then, why not use a religiously inspired message to convince BH citizens of different ages to be socially responsible citizens insisting on accountability of their superiors or to be accountable themselves once assuming public and other positions? On the contrary, religion is too powerful medicine to be ignored and not consulted for the benefit of broader society. Its cultural capital and societal influence have been recognized and recommended for creating a robust civic culture in new democracies by leading experts in the social theory of religion.

Second, too much energy has been spent in questioning the status of CRE in public schools, which happens to be an inalienable legal right that religious communities and parents are hardly going to give up. This and similar policies might redirect public attention towards the crucial question surrounding the issue of CRE: how to make CRE in public schools work for the good of broader society and BH people. The up-bringing of future generations of citizens who will deci-

sively resist abuse of public positions represents common ground and opportunity for educational and religious authorities to cooperate through CRE. As our analysis has shown, transparency, integrity, efficiency, accessibility to citizens and sensibility for their needs on the part of state officials as well as the duty of citizens in demanding such behavior from their authorities are values firmly grounded in the social doctrines of Islam, Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy (for a detailed elaboration see original study). It is the religious duty of a Muslim or Christian to show sincere and active respect for values of good governance and active citizenship. In addition, engaging CRE in promoting civic values compatible with respective religious worldviews is fully in line with BH laws regulating state-religion relations as well as with the most recent educational policies and practices in developed democracies.

Third, policies aiming to improve the content of CRE in public schools in order to prepare pupils for life in a society based on principles of participative democracy and rule of law enjoy significant social support, including from religious communities. Broader society expects that pupils in schools also learn their rights and responsibilities in relation to their authorities as future active citizens. NGOs together with many pupils and parents, for instance, have called for more constructive engagement of so called "national group courses", including CRE in preparing pupils for life in accordance with values of active citizenship (Trbić, 2007). Similarly, in defending the status of CRE in public schools representatives of religious communities have regularly pointed out its contribution and their devotion to the moral development of the children. To a large extent they also accepted suggestions of earlier analysis to improve the way religious others are presented in CRE textbooks (Alibašić, 2009). This, altogether, confirms the willingness of religious representatives to cooperate in making the content of CRE more sensible for the needs of here and now.

Finally, this option is very feasible in terms of human resources and costs, as it only requires revision of existing CRE textbooks and additional training of teachers of CRE.



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Aid Smajić, PhD, is an assistant professor at the Faculty of Islamic Studies in Sarajevo teaching psychology and the associate of the Center of Advanced Studies in Sarajevo. In 2008 he was awarded Fulbright scholarship by the US State Department for one year research visit to the University of Tennessee (USA). He has published works and translations dealing with education philosophy in Islam, textbooks of religious education in BH public schools, religion and inter-civilization dialogue, Islam and Muslims in BH, as well as articles and translations in the area of history of psychology and psychotherapy, Islamic civilization and psychology and Islamic studies.

As for implementing the model of ECE in public schools on the entire territory of BH, the argument is pretty straightforward. In developed democracies it proved more effective than the implicit approach. Furthermore, its potential abandonment in the Federation will disharmonize BH educational policy in this regard, as Republika Srpska authorities in 2008 adopted model of ECE.

In conclusion, religion is too powerful medicine and source of positive inspiration not to be attended to and be used in a manner useful for broader society. Instead of spending energy in debates about the status of CRE in public schools, attention should be directed towards its prospective role in nourishing the culture of the youngest BH citizens. Teaching youth to appreciate the values of public and social accountability in the name of their religion is one such possibility and opportunity for cooperation between religious and educational authorities that in developed democracies has not been missed. The same goes for the principle of ECE. Otherwise, the quality and pace of creating a culture of intolerance towards corruption in the public sector in BH society might suffer in the long run.

Key Recommendations: Religion Could Be Misused but Used as Well

(a) Government

- Insist with the respective education ministries and anti-corruption agencies on the implementation of ECE in BH public schools.
- Strengthen cooperation and partnership with religious communities in the areas of curriculum and textbook development and teacher training.
- In cooperation with religious communities, initiate evaluation of CRE curriculum and textbooks with the view of their revision in order to promote religious understanding of good governance and active citizenship.
- In cooperation with religious communities, organize seminars and on-the-job trainings that would familiarize teachers of CRE with an understanding of public and social accountability in their religions and make sure they have the skills and knowledge required for teaching about principles of good governance and active citizenship.

(b) Religious Communities

- Strengthen cooperation and partnership with public authorities, international organizations and local NGOs in regard to raising social awareness about the importance of public accountability and active citizenship.
- Assist education authorities in providing a religious understanding of good governance and active citizenship and consequently, revising the curriculum and textbooks of CRE in public schools.

(c) International and Domestic Organizations

- Shift the focus from the negative aspects of CRE and consider the means to engage a religious message in promoting active citizenship and public accountability for the satisfaction of all involved parties.
- Assist religious communities and education authorities in introducing recommended modifications into CRE and consequent teachers training.
- Provide support for an empirical study aiming to assess the impact of CRE in promoting values of good governance and active citizenship among the pupils.

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