

“Two schools under one roof”. The role of education in the reconciliation process in Bosnia and Herzegovina

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Abstract

This paper will take into consideration scientific literature as well as institutional documents in order to outline the present situation of the educational system in Bosnia and Herzegovina. A particular focus will be put on the Interface between politics and religion, as authorities of the latter hold many interests in controlling the education sector.

The centuries-old tradition of cultural and religious coexistence in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) has been disappearing rapidly since the beginning of the Yugoslav war in 1992. As a matter of fact, the war destroyed multicultural acceptance.

In the case of BiH, ‘ethnicities’ have been forged in order to justify political-economic interests, despite a cultural common background. It is for this reason that it would be more appropriate to use the term “entities” rather than “ethnicities”, as historically speaking the three groups share common roots.

The case study of the “two schools under one roof” constitutes the worst example of discrimination within the educational environment of BiH. This system sees some school buildings of BiH providing different spaces and curricula for students belonging to different entities. Even though the project was meant to be temporary (OSCE formulated the project in 2000 in order to cope with the highly problematic situation at stake in some areas of the country), it seems that this strategy will persist, for authorities and parents alike have shown no intention to abandon it. It should also be said that the segregated system affects not only students, but teachers as well, as their appointment keeps been carried out on ethnic criteria.

Keywords: ethnicity, religions, coexistence, former Yugoslavia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, education and school

Introduction

The dissolution of Yugoslavia and the wars which lasted almost the entire decade of the 1990s destroyed the multicultural acceptance in the territories involved. Due to its central geographical location, Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) emerged from the Yugoslav Wars as a partitioned state along ethnic and religious lines.

Today, the war is over, but ethnic conflicts are still running (even if, in this case, it would be more appropriate to talk about “entities” rather than “ethnicities”, see Eriksen 2001), and they are using the school as a battlefield. In this scenario, schooling is very likely to promote intolerance and foster animosity between nationalist groups. As a matter of fact, even now, almost twenty years after the ending of the Wars signed with the Dayton Peace Accords (1995), Bosnia and Herzegovina school and educational system are still areas of conflict for nationalist entities. Such phenomenon has found marked disapproval within the human rights discourse (cf. Abouharb & Cingranelli, 2007), but the confusion permeating the educational system in BiH does not help to cope with this situation. As a matter of fact:

the legal status of education in BiH is complicated by the confusing interrelationships between at least six legal systems. More specifically, educators and policymakers must deal with the legal and constitutional systems of BiH, the entity level system in Federation of BiH, the entity system of the Republic of Srpska, the system of the former Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the system of the former Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, and the system of the Croatian Republic of Herzeg-Bosnia. At the same time, the legal systems of both the Republic of Croatia and the Republic of Serbia exert considerable influence in various parts of BiH. (Russo, 2000, p. 957)

This situation is clearly exemplified by the educational segregation of the so-called “two schools under one roof”, a practice taking place in some schools of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina where Bosniak and Croat students attend “ethnically” separated classes located in the same building.

Theoretical framework

The topic of School and Education in Bosnia and Herzegovina after the Yugoslav Wars of the 1990s has been largely debated within the current scientific literature¹, and this case study provides many interesting research focuses.

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From a pedagogical point of view, one of the most interesting considerations emerging from the discussion is the possibility – in environments where ethnic conflict is present – of giving educative answers driven by a “diversity management” perspective (cf. Sheying, 2011). As a matter of fact, education is the environment where relational capabilities and empathy skills may be developed by the future citizens. It is the fundamental bond of the civil coexistence between people belonging to different backgrounds yet living inside the same community. Historically speaking, educating a nation is not at all a neutral assignment, especially when such new national entity originates from a brutal war which still echoes in the current society. Moreover, reflecting Michel Foucault’s thought (cf. Deleuze, 1988), mass education is a “power device”, an instrument of modern states.

From a “constructivist” perspective, the theories of nationalism offer a valuable insight into the role of state education in forging national identities. The basic assumption of the constructivist approach is that nationalism is a “cultural artefact” and that it is historically generated, “collectively engineered, routinely transmitted and deliberately taken on by individuals and social groups” (Sicurella, 2008, p. 4).

According to the constructivist approach to nationalism, mass education systems not only constitute a key marker of modern stateness, but also perform a crucial function within the nation-building process itself. Namely, state education is the apparatus through which a state’s societal culture is inculcated into the new generations of citizens.

An eloquent illustration is that of the ‘new’ countries emerged from the dissolution of the Yugoslav Federation. Here, the willingness to do away with the socialist legacy, and the need to construct ‘new’ national memories to uphold each country’s engagement in the nation-building process, have resulted in deep changes in the content of education. (Sicurella, 2008, p. 5)

For instance, in the countries born from the collapse of the Yugoslavian Federation,

the contents of history teaching – that is, what is written in the textbooks – have been rearranged according to markedly ethno-centric perspectives, through both the retrieval and re-formulation of past events in a new national narrative and the endorsement of stereotyping. (Sicurella, 2008, p. 7)

From an intercultural perspective, education can be turned into a tool to achieve reconciliation and international peace. School should be the environment

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where students belonging to distinct entities start to develop the sense of difference seen as an opportunity and not as a danger. For this reason, teachers and other educational professionals should be supported in their efforts to build a new model of school for future BiH citizens which is able to promote positive coexistence, without fanning the fire of ethnic hate and suspicion.

International documents articulating the right to education assign to the educational enterprise the fundamental task of promoting tolerance and mutual understanding among peoples and nations. Drawing on this principle, in recent years, the international community has carried out a number of initiatives aiming at reforming education in the region of South Eastern Europe; however, in many cases, such efforts seem not to have left any impact on the actual situation.

The case study of “two schools under one roof” is a specific example of the scenario we are currently facing in BiH. In this paper, the discussion on the ‘two schools under one roof’ topic will be oriented towards addressing a set of theoretical questions. To be specific, is school a ground of discrimination? Have political and religious authorities the right to intervene in the education policies? What role does education hold within the ethnic conflicts? The paper will consider scientific literature as well as institutional documents, defining the present situation of BiH educational system. The data will then be analysed in order to contribute in outlining a pedagogical approach which could be usefully applied in the reconciliation process among the different entities of BiH.

Political framework

The collapse of Yugoslavia took place in a period of time that lasted about eight years; its bloody wars were filled with atrocities, among which there were many cases of ethnic cleansing. For a long time, even in the recent history of the country and until the Yugoslav Wars erupted, people living in this territory shared the same schools, offices, spaces and living conditions. Then, the fall of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia opened the Pandora’s box, quickly turning the situation and giving way to the fear of “the others”. Nowadays, even though the hostilities stopped almost twenty years ago, memories of the war are still fresh in the minds of Bosnians and political divisions still exist in the Balkan country. The present situation is that the Bosnia and Herzegovina of today is more divided than it has ever been before, and nationalist rhetoric permeates all levels of government and society (cf. Whitt & Wilson, 2007).

The Bosnian War officially ended in November 1995, when the Dayton Agreement was signed. However, the public opinion in BiH sees the document as

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not representing a sustainable, long-term solution, perceiving it, instead, as a cease-fire agreement (Hoare & Malcolm, Eds., 1999). According to the Dayton Agreement, in the present geo-political situation, Bosnia and Herzegovina consists of two “states”: the Bosniak-Bosnian Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (FBiH) (where “Bosniak” is the name used to replace “Muslim Bosnian” as an ethnic term, even if a national entity is not so easy to be defined and some Bosnians refuse the definition of “Bosniak”) and the Bosnian Serb Republika Srpska (RS). The FBiH is further divided into ten cantons – five of which have a Muslim majority, three with a Catholic majority, and two cantons without an ethnic majority (there is a Serbian presence in all cantons) – while the RS is divided into seven regions. The FBiH covers 51% of the territory, while the RS covers the remaining 49%. Each organism has its own political structure and administration. Moreover, in addition to these two “states”, the Brcko District was established as a separate administrative unit after the arbitration process undertaken in 1996. Finally, it should also be said that the borders of the FBiH and the RS were determined following the position of the frontlines at the time when the war ended, resulting in the creation of ethnic enclaves.

Although acquiring census information has been problematic since the start of the wars, according to a census carried out in 1991, the population of BiH was 4,354,911 inhabitants and, by the end of the war in 1995, over two million people had either fled abroad or were internally displaced around the country (Whitt & Wilson, 2007). Even if the data of the census of 2013 are not fully available yet – being the first census after the war, while the previous one dates back to 1991 –, some observers already talk about a “demographic catastrophe”, since the population seems to have further decreased down to 3,791,622 inhabitants.² When analysing the composition of the actual population, it has to be noted that the three main ethnic groups (entities) forming the population of BiH are defined on religious lines. According to the census taken in April 1991, 43.6 percent of BiH’s inhabitants declared themselves Muslims, 31.3 percent identified themselves as Serbs (Orthodox), 17.3 percent as Croats (Catholics), 5.2 percent claimed to be Yugoslavs who are children of mixed marriages; the remaining population was composed of Jews and others (Bennet, 1997).

In the present political situation, the three dominant ethnic groups – Bosniaks, Serbs, and Croats – have to be represented in all levels of government, thus creating an excess of personnel and slow reforms. The country has three presidents, one from each group, and a Parliament in which Croats, Serbs and Bosniaks each occupy a third of the seats. Many politicians gain votes in elections through nationalist campaigns, calling on their own ethnic and religious groups. Regarding the possible inclusion of BiH in the European Union, one of the obstacles is the

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law which forbids those citizens of BiH who refuse to identify themselves according to their ethnicity (i.e., the ones who declared themselves in the census as “others”, thus being labelled neither as Catholic, Orthodox, or Muslim) to be elected at the national Parliament. They can vote, but they cannot be voted into Parliament, and the European Union does not accept such discrimination. These governmental structures report to the Office of the High Representative (OHR), appointed by the international community. This body will supervise BiH for an undetermined period of time.

Concerning the management of the educational system, while education in RS is largely centralized, the administration of the educational system in FBiH operates on several levels, including Federation, cantons, municipalities, and the individual schools themselves. The constitution of FBiH states that the “cantons are solely responsible for developing educational policies, including declarations for education, ensuring education, as well as developing and implementing cultural policies” (Pasalic-Kreso, 2008). However, in BiH the three main entities which opposed each other during the war twenty years ago are still struggling today through a condition of fragile coexistence, thus children grow up in a fragmented state, with segregated schools. Moreover, due to the strong connection between religion and ethnicity, it is not surprising that religion became an important tool of identification during and after the wars, and school became a battlefield (Perica, 2002). The examination of the current primary and secondary school systems provides an alarming insight into the current situation in the country, with political inefficiencies, prevalent ethnic discrimination, and an unpromising future ahead.

The year 2012 was the twentieth anniversary of the beginning of the war which, of course, was the breakpoint in the multi-ethnic and multi-religious coexistence. After two decades, the scenario does not seem to have moved towards concrete reconciliation. Examples of positive interactions still take place thanks to family ties created by mixed marriages, economic interdependence and old, enduring friendships. However, despite that, the efforts of many high-rank nationalistic politicians as well as religious leaders seem to be driving society in the opposite direction. As a matter of fact, religious leaders often meddle in politics and pursue their own separate religious and political interests (Burg & Shoup, 2000).

A clear example of the ongoing condition of ethnic discrimination is the program “Two schools under one roof”. Inside the same school building, different spaces and curricula are assigned to students belonging to different entities. The project was conceived in the past years as a temporary solution, but it still persists today. In many such schools, Bosniak, Bosnian Croat and Bosnian Serb children, as well as their respective teachers, have no mutual contact. Students often arrive at school via different entrances, they take separate breaks, and the teachers have

separate common rooms. In some more “reformed” schools, the classes are multi-ethnic, but when time comes for national subjects such as geography, history, and language, the classroom is split up into entity-specific groups. It should also be underlined that this segregation system deeply affects not only students, but also teachers, as they are still appointed through ethnic criteria.

International organizations operating in BiH suffer from the same weaknesses that the international community showed during the last war in the Balkans: no institutional memory, no coordination, nor any vision for the future. Goals set and agreements achieved on a high level do not reach the population and have no effect on their everyday lives. Despite so many years of sporadic efforts, in the Bosnia and Herzegovina of today religion is more of a barrier than a help in promoting peaceful coexistence. Polarization and extremism make religions other than one’s own perceived as even more distant, strange and threatening. Moreover, the physical interaction between inhabitants of different entities which existed up until the start of the last war is now almost completely lost because of political division (Stuebner, 2009). In this situation, education can play a very important and supportive role only if policy makers and opinion leaders decide to leave the school ground far from nationalistic issues and religious divisions.

Education in BiH from the past to the present

Josip Broz Tito was the hero of the war against Fascism and Nazism which ended with the victory of the ‘Partizan’ army, an army that put together soldiers belonging to all the different ethnic groups of BiH. Tito led the nation from 1945 to the year of his death, in 1980. Since he considered education “to be one of the most important activities for the reconstruction and development of the country” (Russo, 2000), he identified it as a key priority in the post-war period. After World War II, the young Federation of Yugoslavia had many needs to address, not the least of which was the serious depletion of its human and financial resources. However, a particular emphasis was given to primary education in order to provide basic education to a population which was for the large majority poor and living in the countryside (Burg & Shoup, 2000).

During the time when Socialism ruled in Yugoslavia, Roman Catholic Croats, Orthodox Christian Serbs, and Muslim Bosniaks coexisted peacefully for decades. As a matter of fact, Bosnia is called the “microcosm of the Balkans,” as it is a “human mosaic” representing years of foreign dominations and a geographic location central to the East versus West tension throughout the course of history (Glenny, 2000). It is not easy to understand how people belonging to different en-

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tities which used to live happily as neighbours, marry one another, work side by side and go to school together, in a few years' time gave rise to the most horrific war on European ground after 1945. It has to be said that, during Tito's era, all people spoke the same language and religion had little importance under a Communist government; however, keeping together such a complex population was a big challenge at that time, too. One of the strategies adopted by the government was the unified school system. Throughout Yugoslavia, all schools taught the same unified curriculum, which was dictated by the State.

Although imperfect, the nationwide system of free compulsory education helped to serve as a mortar that bound the multi-ethnic Yugoslav Republic together with a communist-socialist ideology, as the schools were open to all children regardless of their religious, ethnic, or social background. Between 1945 and 1990, public education in Bosnia did not differ significantly from the rest of the former Yugoslavia in terms of its socialist and atheistic ideology, structure, curriculum, and teacher qualifications. Unfortunately, Bosnia did lag behind in the number and quality of buildings as well as in the number of qualified teachers. (...)

The focus on primary school education culminated in 1958 with the passage of the General Law on Primary Education which mandated an eight-year primary education for children aged eight to fifteen. In 1979, innovations were introduced and in 1987 the first common "all-Yugoslav" core curriculum was introduced. By the early 1980s, virtually all children in Yugoslavia attended primary schools with about seventy percent of the children continuing on to secondary education. (Russo, 2000, pp. 950-951)

Tito's death was a blow for the nation and, in the following years, political leaders had to face a time of political and economic instability (cf. Allcock, 2000). Since in former Yugoslavia education ensured social and cultural coexistence, immediately after the fall of the Federation the school system was quickly dismantled, reorienting it towards nationalistic aims. Then, the education system entered a decade of stagnation and, in each State of the Federation, reforms were introduced aimed at abandoning the model given by the previous, strictly centralized system and carrying changes to the curriculum.

After the Yugoslav wars, starting from 1996, two different school systems took form in BiH. Consistent with its attachment to the legacy of the Socialist Tito's era, RS decided to maintain centralized control over education through the constitution of its Ministry of Education. On the contrary, in FBiH, it was established that the government of the "state" would not play a key role in guiding the educational policy, and that the ten largely decentralized administrative units and can-

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tons forming the Republic were each responsible for the educational organization on their territory (Whitt & Wilson, 2007). It should be noted that the cantons of FBiH are further divided into municipalities, thereby creating a system with local levels of control. In this scenario, the policy of the two separated school systems under one roof was adopted in order to help ensure that children displaced from their original villages or belonging to minorities were not to be deprived of their right to an education. At the moment, possible reforms to the school system and the educational laws in BiH are very unlikely to take place, as there is a deep lack of unification among entities. In practice, decentralization in FBiH translates into four frequently fragmented levels of educational management: Federation, Canton, Municipality, and School.

In both FBiH and RS, nationalistic interests are seeking to create educational systems and curricula that pander to their religious, ethnic, and political wishes. On the paper, the Constitutions of FBiH and RS explicitly guarantee religious freedom while implicitly referring to a separation of Church and State. However, even if theoretically discrimination is not tolerated, in practice the political scenario is still dominated by Nationalist groups and the separation of pupils based on their ethnic origin (which means that, ultimately, they are divided on the basis of their parents' religion) keeps the educational system of BiH far from achieving international standards (Stuebner, 2009).

A problem arose on January 22, 1997, when BiH's Ministry of Education sought to introduce a policy of forced ethnic segregation in the schools, not unlike the pernicious "separate but equal," doctrine of *Plessy v. Ferguson*, the long-time blight on the American legal and cultural landscape. However, in the face of mounting international criticism, the Ministry repudiated this ill-conceived policy on November 10, 1997.

Even after the Federation revoked its ill-conceived policy of ethnic segregation, nationalist tendencies continue to surface in debates in both FBiH and RS over such questions as the role of so-called "national" subjects (such as history, geography, music, language, and art) in the curriculum, and whether children should receive instruction in the language of their ethnic group or in a common tongue (what used to be called Serbo-Croatian is now referred to as Bosnian, Croatian, and Serbian) and alphabet. (Russo, 2000, p. 962)

We can affirm that the educational and school environment – together with media and religion – was one of the first battlefields in which opposing nationalist forces started to fight for controlling and manipulating the public opinion, and to give shape to a feeling of "fear of the others". The situation has further exacer-

bated since the bleak economic picture, accompanied by rampant corruption, high unemployment, and grey (or black) market, has started to deprive the government of needed revenues. Since the economic infrastructure which is necessary to fund education and other social programs is absent (a topic beyond the scope of this article), reforms-oriented efforts are unlikely to progress rapidly (European Commission, 2012). The combination of religious and nationalist agendas obstructs any attempt at reforming BiH education. Having said that, hopefully, the entrance of Croatia and, subsequently, of Serbia into the European Union as Member States will provide – beyond various benefits for these states themselves – a big help to the reform process of BiH.

Two Schools Under One Roof

During Tito's era, religions did not hold a strong influence on society and people used to live under the amorphous "popular religion" of Socialism. Immediately before, during and after the war, however, while the process of formation of the different ethnicities was taking place in the Southern Balkans area, language and religion had been used by political leaderships to set up borderlines between groups.

Today, language differences are still very small and, linguistically speaking, we can affirm that the territory of BiH presents a common language. Nonetheless, although everyone can understand everyone, three languages officially exist in the state (Serbian, Croatian and Bosnian). Moreover, it can be noticed that year after year a great effort has been put into progressive diversification of the three idioms, thus introducing new words. Beside the linguistic aspect, the three groups have a different view on history – in this field also, the efforts to promote a different interpretation of history to be transferred to pupils through textbooks are abounding. Finally, the main marker distinguishing the three groups is religion.

There has been an evident process of return of religion in the last two decades, in BiH. From the "invisible" private sphere into the "visible" public sphere. In other words, this de-privatization of religion, and at the same time revitalization of religion, is present in BiH first of all as a "de-secularization" of public space and public life. All relevant signs demonstrate a significant flourishing of the role and place that religion has in Bosnian and Herzegovinian society. There has been increasing participation in religious activities and the accent is put on religious belonging. Religious communities are present in both political and public life as well

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as in the media. Last but not least, the religious communities play a great role in the educational system. (Marusic, 2011, p. 65)

Religion was not always a battleground in this region. When the area was under the domination of the Turkish Empire, in the year 1463 the Sultan Mehmet II “El Faith” promulgated the so-called “Edict of Blagaj”, from the name of a town close to Mostar.³ With this law, even if Islam was the official religion of the Kingdom, the Sultan certificated the freedom to practice the Christian faith for the inhabitants of the territories and the defence of the Franciscan monks living in the region of Herzegovina. In the same period in Spain, the Christian King of Spain led the war against all infidels, namely Muslims and Jews, and many Sephardic Jews flew from Spain to settle in Sarajevo, where they were free to practice their faith.

In the present situation, when looking at the religious textbooks in use by the teachers in BiH, it is easy to perceive that the religious communities support divisions along ethnic lines, using the tool of religious education. National identification is the main topic in religious classes and, in this way, children are victims of nationalistic indoctrination.

This kind of segregation confirms the statement of Besim Spahic, the professor of Faculty of political science in Sarajevo. According to him, “we already have enough segregation in the schools because of religious teaching. We are already preparing the children for the breakup of this country, namely a breakup because of conflict on religious basis”. (Marusic, 2011, p. 69)

Opposing nationalist ideologies (embodied by the nationalist parties of HDZ for Croats and SNSD for Serbs) push Bosnian Croats and Bosnian Serbs to turn towards what they consider as their respectively own mother countries, and children to learn to consider Zagreb and Banja Luka (if not even Belgrade) as the capital of their State, instead of Sarajevo. Nonetheless, it is important to underline that the majority of the population is beginning to abandon an extreme nationalist position, as the results of the last elections (2010) show, a consideration which is based on the high number of voters who refused to vote.

When analysing the Bosniak side of the issue, the situation is even more complicated. We can consider Bosniaks as the third entity on the field, yet not all Bosniaks consider themselves as Muslim Bosniaks. It is important to underline again that many Bosnians (inhabitants of the State of Bosnia and Herzegovina) do not recognize themselves as Muslims and that they refuse the categorization based on religious lines. It should also be said that during and after the war the number of people who went back to their Islamic religious roots has increased. In this situa-

tion, Bosnians in general consider Bosnia and Herzegovina as their home country, but it is the Muslim Bosniak ideology (embodied by the majority political party SDA) that tries to push all of them towards gathering in one single community, as a unique Muslim nation, thus giving shape to this public perception. In this view, all Muslims of the world constitute a brotherhood based on their faith called *ummah*, and Bosniak Muslims should feel they have more in common with, for instance, Muslims from Indonesia or Turkey, than with their Christian neighbours. To sum up, we can affirm that despite the picture that political leaderships attempt to present – providing a homogenous coincidence between nationality and religion belonging, the majority of the inhabitants of BiH do not recognize themselves in this view, even if the aforesaid leaders are those who are driving the country.

The return of religion into the schools through religious education marked the return of the Church, as an institution, into the schools, which is not allowed in secular countries. In her book *Defining democracy*, sociologist Marijana Radulovic⁴ believes that this approach can lead to dangerous categorization along confessional and national lines, and thus to discrimination. In the present scenario of BiH, a clear separation of Church and State is impossible to establish and religion is used as one of the main distinguishing features of ethnicity in BiH. Consequently, religion has become a specific and sensitive issue in education because through religious education it becomes possible to foster and cement a deeply rooted ethnic division.

In the case of Bosnia, “political parties” are synonym with “religious parties”. It is evident that each side aims to create their own nation, and religion is what separates them. The education system, reflecting these political and ethnic divisions, is a hotbed of nationalism. In the words of the Bosnian division of the Operation of Security and Co-operation in Europe: “In many post-war societies, schools serve as an ideological battleground, providing an opportunity to spread the values of division, intolerance and fear of the other.” Small differences that previously did not matter in multi-ethnic Yugoslavia are used to distinguish “the other” in post-war Bosnia and each ethno-religious groups considers themselves superior. (Russo, 2000, p. 965)

Old animosities already exploited to justify the war and then further intensified during the period of armed conflicts are now forming the bases for the nationalistic ideologies taught in the schools of the country. The answer which was conceived in the past years for coping with this situation was to give birth to ethnically homogenous schools. However, as a result, in the present situation young children who were not even alive during the war are now starting to learn ethnic hate at

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school. Textbooks contain both subtle and blatant hate speech, and schools display religious symbols belonging to the religious majority which is prevalent in the area where the school is located.⁵ After the war, in RS, when Bosniak children went back to their native villages (that in the meantime were ethnically cleansed during the conflicts), they found schools organized to serve the needs of the students belonging to the majority group, with an atmosphere often hostile towards their own ethnic group (Pasalic-Kreso, 2008).

In these communities, education policies primarily reflect the domination of the Serbian majority group over minorities. The Serbian curriculum has a Serbian world perspective and is taught in the Serbian language and the Cyrillic alphabet. Students learn of the symbols, struggles and sacrifices of the Serbian people neglecting to explain the other perspectives in Bosnia. For example, in music class students learn patriotic Serbian songs, and in religion class only Orthodox Christianity is considered. Vague references to “our country” implicitly refer to Serbia and not to Bosnia and Herzegovina. (Low-Beer, 2001, p. 23)

A climate of particular strong tension permeates the relationship between Bosniaks and Croats. Some of the worst cases of segregation in schools take place in the two cantons of FBiH where these groups are mixed: the Canton of Central Bosnia and the Canton of Herzegovina-Neretva. Here, Bosniak and Croat students attend classes in the same building, but they are physically separated and are taught separate curricula. This system is referred to as “two schools under one roof”. The “two schools under one roof” approach not only results in separated and diversified personnel and school programs due to different ethnic belonging; it also provides a school organization where children from one ethnic group enter the school building through one specific door while children from the other ethnic group use another one, or Croatian students attend classes in the morning while Bosniaks in the afternoon.

The Bosniak textbooks state that ‘unlike others’, Muslims do not destroy sacred objects and the Croatian students learn that Muslims are only an ethnic group and not a religion. Sometimes the Croat administration turns the heat off for the second shift of students, and the Bosniak students need to wait outside the building even in the rain, until their designated time in the school begins. (Stuebner, 2009, p. 21)

This form of ethnic segregation of students began after the Croat-Bosniak war took place in the territories (1992-1994). The war ended officially with the signa-

ture of the Washington Agreement between the Republic of Croatia and the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina. From 1992 to 1994, the Croat Defence Council (HVO) fighting against the Bosniak Army won control over a part of Bosnia and Herzegovina and founded the Herzeg-Bosnia territory. The Bosniak population was expelled from this area, with the aim of constituting an ethnically homogenous Croat territory. On March 1994, the peace agreement between Herzeg-Bosnia and Bosnia put an end to the existence of Herzeg-Bosnia and established the existence of the FBiH, in which the territories held by Herzeg-Bosnia and Bosnia were then divided into ten autonomous cantons (Slack & Doyon, 2001).

Despite the establishment of the FBiH, which should officially provide a unified education system, in three cantons of FBiH a total of 57 schools are still posing issues regarding the internal division along ethnic lines. Immediately after the war, the temporary solution of the “two schools under one roof” was adopted, but it was tolerated by the international community as a compromise until the adoption of a national curriculum was to be established. From the signature of the Washington Agreement in 1994 to the year 2012, different international authorities, such as OSCE, underlined the unacceptable situation posed by the system; moreover, the OHR itself urged the Cantonal authorities to implement unification. In contrast with that, instead, the HDZ (Croatian Democratic Union, nationalist party, once led by Franjo Tuđman) halted the implementation of the unification laws in all the cantons where it held significant influence (cf. Kabil & Kunugi, 2009). In 2005, the OHR removed the HDZ Minister of Education Nikola Lovrinović from his charge in the Canton of Central Bosnia, but this step did not result in any progress related to the termination of segregation in the local schools. Minister Greta Kuna took the place of Lovrinović, yet the obstruction to unification laws continued. As a matter of fact, in 2007, Minister Kuna stated that: “the ‘two schools under one roof’ project will not be suspended because you can’t mix apples and pears. Apples with apples and pears with pears”.⁶ On 16th February 2010, the Parliament of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina adopted a resolution establishing the constitution of multi-ethnic school departments in the 57 schools located in the southern and central parts of Bosnia and Herzegovina.⁷ Despite this ruling, the “two schools under one roof” realities are still existent.

Herzegovina is one of the areas of the country where the contradictions at stake in this paper are the most evident. Mostar and Stolac are two Herzegovinian towns in which war dramatically stopped the ancient coexistence between Bosniaks and Croats. Both of the towns were extensively destroyed during the war, and nowadays an invisible wall splits the Croat from the Bosniak part of these towns. What we encounter here are two Nations under one State, two communities under one town community, two schools under one roof. In the specific case of Mostar,

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during the armed conflicts, the main boulevard of the town served as the frontline; thus, it represents today the invisible wall splitting the town in two. It is right on this boulevard that today we find the Mostar Gymnasium, one of the few integrated high schools in FBiH and the only mixed public school of the town.⁸ Despite the claims of the school itself, integration in the building is only limited. Only a few classes, such as technology, are unified, while the third floor of the building is occupied by an international private school. This school, called the United World College High School, accepts students from all ethnicities; however, its tuition fees are unrealistic for most families in Mostar.⁹

At present, the international organizations operating in BiH are still working laboriously to promote the reform of the education system, but the goal of attaining legislative changes which would develop an holistic education system to be inclusive and accessible for all students, regardless of their ethnicity or religion, as well as a factual application of all childhood rights, is far from being achieved.

Conclusion

The Progress Reports of the Commission for the years 2011 and 2012 underlined that the separation of children within the school facilities along ethnic lines and the existence of “two schools under one roof” realities constitute a *de facto* ethnic-based separation and that discrimination in public schools remain a serious issue of concern. From the perspective of the respect of human rights, these circumstances continue to hamper access to quality education and do not foster the development of an inclusive, multi-cultural, and tolerant society. Moreover, in general, reforms are slow to take place, as politicians and school administrators from different ethnicities struggle themselves to attain compromises.

A recent ruling issued on 27th April 2012 by the Municipal Court of Mostar regarding the “two schools under one roof” topic ordered to the Ministry of Education to “establish single, integrated, multi-cultural [schools] by September 1st 2012 with a unified curriculum fully observing the children’s right to education in the mother tongue”. For organising the education system along ethnic lines, the Court found two schools in the Stolac and Čapljina municipalities (Neretva Canton, FBiH) in violation of the law on prohibition of discrimination. The implementation of the 2012 ruling, which was already enforceable at the time of the violation, is proving to be highly problematic and politically disputed. Local NGO Vasa Prava¹⁰ confirmed that, in its discussion with the local authorities, these openly expressed their unwillingness to implement the ruling in the current political setting. Contrary to the ruling of the Court of Mostar, on the 3rd October 2012 the

Court of Travnik rejected the appeal submitted by Vasa Prava on the same topic, although both rulings are based on the same provision of the Law on Prohibition of Discrimination. While the fact that more law suits are filed to challenge discrimination in the education system is welcome news, unfortunately their impact should not be overestimated. As long as there will be such a complex political situation where the various levels of government are obstructing each other, it will not be possible to formulate a real and durable solution to the problem of education.

Vasa Prava is exploring the possibility to lodge an appeal on discrimination in the selection procedures for school management positions. However, the NGO reported that potential applicants refrain from bringing cases in front of the court fearing that they or their children could experience further discrimination at school, ostracism by their own community and potential political pressure. Moreover, the Ministry of Education of FBiH – which holds a coordinating role over education policies in FBiH, even if not recognised by the Croat Cantons, issued a series of recommendations on implementing the National law against ethnic discrimination. Yet, this document did not find full agreement among all cantons (only five Cantonal Ministries of Education agreed); unsurprisingly, among the disagreeing Cantons we find those where the two separate lawsuits on the “two school under one roof” institutes were filed (European Commission, 2012). It should be underlined that different policy approaches, the high politicisation of the agenda of the country, as well as the lack of effective policy coordination mechanisms represent additional obstacles to the development of a countrywide coherent educational policy. A coordination body of the Cantonal Ministers of Education was established to analyse the case of the divided schools, but the Croat Cantons have so far refused to participate to the forum.

Regarding EU membership, the European Union is loyal to its policy line according to which, from the perspective of political criteria, segregation or discrimination in education is not compatible with the aspirations of BiH of becoming a member State. Through the Stabilisation and Association Agreements¹¹, however, BiH has undertaken a process of commitment to cooperate with the European Union “with the aim of ensuring that access to all levels of education and training in Bosnia and Herzegovina is free of any discrimination on the grounds of gender, colour, ethnic origin or religion” (European Commission, 2012). The existing discrimination of children in many schools of the country was consistently raised as a topic in the context of high-level dialogue meetings between EU and BiH authorities (European Commission, 2012). In addition, from an EU integration point of view, access to quality education, as well as the creation of a multi-cultural and tolerant society, needs to be fostered by overcoming the

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division of children across ethnic lines, thus ensuring inclusiveness in education. The separation of children within the same school building along ethnic lines and the existence of “two schools under one roof” realities remain a serious issue of concern for the European Union (European Commission, 2012).

In such an exacerbated political situation, is it possible to look forward and hope that education might overcome ethnic boundaries and promote peace for the future of Bosnia and Herzegovina? The Dayton Agreement simply maintains the situation as it is, avoiding the possibility of a stronger and lasting reconciliation. While many politicians focus only on their self-serving campaigns based on nationalistic ideologies, and young adults have more possibilities nowadays to leave their country and live abroad, children and poorest families are forced to live under a cover of invisible, everlasting conflict. In the meanwhile, international organizations and NGOs make slow progresses in the education sector, as the political divisions and inefficiencies in the country make reform an upward battle.

The multicultural acceptance of Yugoslavia was systemically dismantled in the past years. Without major changes in the education system, it will not be possible to re-introduce tolerance and acceptance in the present society. Today, children in Bosnia and Herzegovina are growing up more isolated than ever before, and reforms need to reach the primary and secondary school levels quickly before change is too late. As discussed in this paper, the analysis of the present day education system of this country provides an insight into the high level of ethnic tension permeating the territories and hints at a gloomy future for the citizens of BiH. Even if education is a right recognised by the “Declaration of the Rights of the Child” (1959), very often the right to education is implemented according to the interests of the political and economic leaderships. This result is not surprising, especially since in current society educational professionals have very little social recognition and decision-making power. Education is a powerful means for political propaganda, and those in power, knowing its importance, have a strong interest in it. However, we should all be aware that education is too important to leave it completely in the hands of the political, religious and economic elites. It is only through a school system that is able to transmit the values of tolerance and peaceful coexistence among different entities that it will be possible to reconstruct a truly democratic society in Bosnia and Herzegovina. This is not only a warning for this country, but also a warning for other areas of the world.

Notes

- ¹ For a summary on the topic, in addition to other works cited herein, see Adila Pašalic-Kreso, *Education in Bosnia and Herzegovina: Minority Inclusion and Majority Rules*, Current Issues In Comparative Education, (Nov. 15, 1999) available at: http://devweb.tc.columbia.edu/i/a/document/25658_2_1_Pasalickreso.pdf . For a more comprehensive history of education in Bosnia, see also Miljenko Brkic, *History Background and Today's Parameters, in Question Of Survival: A Common Education System For Bosniaherzegovina* (Branka Magaš trans., 1998).
- ² About the topic, see also: <http://balkans.courriers.info/article18791.html> (accessed 16 January 2014).
- ³ About the topic, see also: Michele Nardelli, article: <http://www.balcanicaucaso.org/Materiali/Il-sorriso-di-Europa-39810> (accessed 16 January 2014).
- ⁴ http://www.slobodnaevropa.org/content/tema_sedmice_vjeronauka_bih/243-24337.html (accessed 16 October 2013).
- ⁵ OSCE in BiH Education website: <http://www.oscebih.org/Default.aspx?id=3&lang=EN>(accessed 16 October 2013).
- ⁶ <http://chalkboard.tol.org/bosnia-and-herzegovina-new-law-old-chaos/>(accessed 16 October 2013).
- ⁷ <http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/main/news/25892/> (accessed 16 October 2013).
- ⁸ Christine Bednarz, journalist's blog, cited.
- ⁹ Christine Bednarz, journalist's blog, cited.
- ¹⁰ <http://www.vasaprava.org> (accessed 16 October 2013).
- ¹¹ Office of the High Representative and European Union Special Representative, OHR Introduction, 2007, Retrieved from at www.ohr.int/ohr-info/gen-info/default.asp?content_id=38519 (accessed 16 October 2013).

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