



**Školski nazivi, simboli i manifestacije
u osnovnim i srednjim školama
u Bosni i Hercegovini:
presjek stanja i preporuke**

**Школски називи, симболи и манифестације
у основним и средњим школама
у Босни и Херцеговини:
пресјек стања и препоруке**

**School names, symbols and manifestations
at primary and secondary schools
in Bosnia and Herzegovina:
A status update with recommendations**

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School names, symbols and manifestations at primary and secondary schools in Bosnia and Herzegovina: A status update with recommendations

ENGLISH LANGUAGE

1. Introduction

2. Background

3. School Names

4. School Symbols

5. School Manifestations

6. Conclusions

Recommendations

Annex 1: The Criteria for School Names and Symbols

Annex 2: Overview of bylaws regulating school names, symbols and manifestations

1. Introduction

This report examines school names, symbols and manifestations¹ at the primary and secondary school level in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH). The report is the latest status update produced by the OSCE Mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina (the Mission) on the topic of non-inclusive education in the country. Findings are based on the Mission's regular monitoring of more than 2,000 central and branch schools located throughout BiH.²

Over the past quarter century, education authorities and decision makers in BiH have failed to address exclusionary components within the education system. While curricula and textbooks have a direct impact on what students learn in the classrooms, other characteristics of schools – including **school names, symbols and manifestations – complement divisive and one-sided policies**. This results in school environments promoting ethnic exclusivity rather than affiliation to a school and wider community, and create the potential for non-majority students to feel alienated or offended.

Despite positive steps being taken between 2004 and 2012 in some areas, it is clear that **backsliding has occurred in recent years, while some administrative units³ failed to make any progress at all**. The current situation is in violation of both the domestic legal and policy framework and international standards, and directly impedes meaningful reconciliation in BiH.

This report aims to assess the recent backsliding and to reemphasize the need to address exclusionary practices concerning school names, symbols and manifestations. Although there are relatively simple solutions to address exclusionary cases, education authorities and other key decision makers will be required to take decisive action and help ensure that school environments are appropriate and welcoming for all students.

¹ School manifestations refer to all events, commemorations and celebrations (holidays or other) held at schools involving students and/or school staff. These gatherings can involve special classes, performances and other activities. Officially sanctioned school field trips, including commemorations at locations outside of school property, also fall under this category.

² Note that central schools most often include grades 1-9 of primary education and branch schools most often include grades 1-5 only. All branch schools are part of corresponding central schools.

³ The term "administrative units" in this report refers to the entity of Republika Srpska, cantons of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Brčko District of Bosnia and Herzegovina, units that, when it comes to education, have direct competences.

2. Background

2.1 Historical Branding of the Public Space

The naming of public spaces and institutions such as parks, streets and schools serve numerous purposes. The naming and renaming of public spaces and institutions often occur during transitional periods in history in an attempt to replace one ideology or historical narrative with another. In many areas of the world, including the former Yugoslavia, this process has occurred as a means to bolster political, cultural and social ideologies. This is a powerful tool to rewrite or reinterpret the past in a way that is favourable and opportunistic for a new ruling authority. This process not only involves the commemoration of persons and events representing the new authorities, but also at times the de-commemoration of persons and events from the preceding regime.⁴

In the context of BiH, the revision of historical narratives and associated symbols has occurred in many areas since the 1992-1995 war. The dominant ethnic group in a specific area is often disproportionately commemorated and represented in public spaces, while other ethnic groups are poorly represented or neglected. Names of public spaces and institutions and related symbols continue to be important tools to mark territory and to demonstrate power and authority of one group over another. Schools continue to be one of the most common public spaces where names, symbols and manifestations are used to build historical narratives and strengthen ethno-national identities. Although these features are outside the conventional curricula at schools, they have similar purposes to deliver subtle, yet deliberate, messages to all community members – to both those belonging to the majority group and those who do not.

Controversial school names, symbols and manifestations in BiH first came in focus in the late 1990s when the return of refugees and displaced persons began to gain momentum. During this period, primary and secondary education emerged as a priority of the International Community as various forms of discrimination at schools were preventing families from returning to their pre-war places of residence. Equal access to education without discrimination could not be guaranteed. This reality was in direct conflict with the right to return of refugees and displaced persons and the implementation of the General Framework Agreement for Peace in BiH (Dayton Peace Agreement).

2.2. Post-war Attempts to Promote Inclusivity

Upon increased pressure to provide more favourable conditions to facilitate the return process, entity level Ministers of Education signed the *Interim Agreement on Accommodation of the Specific Needs and Rights of Returnee Children (Interim Agreement)* in 2002. The Republika Srpska (RS), the Federation of BiH (FBiH) and the cantonal level Ministers of Education subsequently signed the more detailed *Implementation Plan for the Interim Agreement on Accommodation of the Specific Needs and Rights of Returnee Children (Implementation Plan)*. All ministries also appointed representatives as members of the Coordination Board for the Implementation of the *Interim Agreement (Coordination Board)*, which was tasked to monitor the *Agreement's* implementation.

As part of the *Interim Agreement*, the introduction of the National Group of Subjects in returnee areas and the employment of returnee teachers became priorities.⁵ After encouraging results in these areas occurred in the first year of implementation, the Coordination Board began to focus more on school names, symbols and manifestations in 2004. Article 8 (13.c) of the *Implementation Plan* included the following provision:

“Ministries of Education shall undertake possible efforts to remove symbols and objects, and to replace school names, which may be viewed as offensive by returnee students, constituent peoples and national minorities. “

⁴ For more information, see Palmberger, M. (2012). *Renaming of Public Space: A Policy of Exclusion in Bosnia and Herzegovina*, MMG Working Paper 12-02; Rajić, Lj. (2012). “Toponyms and the political and ethnic identity in Serbia”, published in: Helleland, B., Ore, C.-E. & Wikström, S. (eds.) *Names and Identities*, Oslo Studies in Language 4(2), 2012. 203–222; Hodgkin, K. and Radstone, S. (2006). Introduction: Contested pasts, published in: Hodgkin, K. and Radstone, S. (eds.) *Memory, history, nation: contested pasts*, 1-21. New York: Routledge; and Azaryahu, M. (2012). Renaming the Past in Post-Nazi Germany: Insights into the Politics of Street Naming in Mannheim and Potsdam, published in: *Cultural Geographies* 19(3), 385-400.

⁵ The National Group of Subjects, as outlined within the *Interim Agreement*, consist of subjects: Language and Literature, Religious Education, Geography and History. It also includes the subject Nature and Society for grades 1-5 of primary school.

The Coordination Board developed the *Criteria for School Names and Symbols* (*Criteria*, see Annex 1) and proposed a specific set of guidelines for Ministries of Education to adopt. The *Criteria* defined the types of school names and symbols that were appropriate and acceptable, as well as parameters for school manifestations. The aim of the *Criteria* was to make school names, symbols and manifestations more inclusive and acceptable for all students.

2.3. Uneven Implementation of the *Criteria*

Initial Coordination Board reports indicated an increase in the number of schools changing disputed names and removing or relocating controversial symbols. There was also some progress related to decreasing the presence of students at war-related celebrations. By 2008, the Coordination Board reported that over 40 disputed school names in BiH had been changed and many inappropriate symbols had been removed from schools.⁶ During this period, most administrative units adopted by-laws regulating school names, symbols and manifestations. See Annex 2 for more details.

Despite notable changes, progress across the country was uneven. Some administrative units outright refused to recognize the *Criteria*. For example, in West Herzegovina Canton, the Cantonal Assembly adopted a *Conclusion on non-acceptance of documents on the "Criteria for School Names and Symbols"* while in Canton 10, authorities opposed any measure to regulate the matter. In Brčko District of BiH, appropriate measures had already been taken to remove controversial names and symbols, therefore authorities did not deem it necessary to adopt related by-laws.

In addition to not having full political support from all administrative units, the Coordination Board also suffered from an overall incomplete assessment of the situation in schools – especially related to inappropriate symbols and manifestations. School visits were sporadic and it was difficult to assess compliance across the country.⁷

The last time the Ministries of Education jointly discussed the issue of school names, symbols and manifestations was in 2009 when the Coordination Board presented a report on implementation of the *Interim Agreement* for the period 2002-2008 to the Conference of Ministers of Education in BiH. The Coordination Board has since ceased to exist and state-wide assessments by domestic institutions on the topic have not occurred.

2.4. Legal Analysis

When it comes to obligations of BiH per domestic and international regulation, the current situation contravenes Article 4 of the *Framework Law on Primary and Secondary Education in BiH*⁸ (*Framework Law*)⁹ which states that “[e]very child has a right of access and equal possibility to participate in appropriate educational process, without discrimination on whatever grounds. Equal access and equal possibilities signify ensuring equal conditions and opportunities for everyone, to start and further pursue education.”¹⁰

It is also in breach of several applicable international conventions¹¹ related to inclusive and non-discriminatory education. Indeed, related reports continue to highlight that very little progress has occurred in fostering inclusive school environments.

⁶ Coordination Board Report on implementation of the *Interim Agreement on Accommodation of Specific Needs and Rights of Returnee Children*, November 2008.

⁷ Aside from periodic reports developed by the Coordination Board, the only comprehensive report on this topic was developed by the NGO “Foundation for Local Democracy” in 2008. This NGO’s report, *Analysis on the Implementation of the “Criteria on School Names and Symbols” in Primary, Branch and Secondary Schools in BiH*, assessed numerous school names and manifestations as unacceptable due to different interpretation of the *Criteria*. The report diverged significantly from the findings of the Coordination Board. As a result, the report and its findings were publicly condemned or completely ignored by some education authorities and the Coordination Board. Although the report raised media attention and public awareness to the school names and symbols issues, it did not bring tangible results.

⁸ Official Gazette BiH No. 18/03.
Available at: http://www.mcp.gov.ba/attachments/bs_Migrirani_dokumenti/Va%C5%BEni_dokumenti/Va%C5%BEno-Zakoni/osnovno_i_srednje,b.pdf

⁹ The *Framework Law* aligned many aspects of education across the country, including the introduction of nine-year primary education and the basic management structure of schools. This law also called for the development and implementation of a common core curriculum.

¹⁰ *Ibid*, Article 4

¹¹ *International Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Racial Discrimination* (ICERD), *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights* (ICESCR), *Convention on the Rights of the Child* (UNCRC), *UNESCO Convention against Discrimination in Education*, *European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms* (ECHR)

- In 2017, the Council of Europe stated that “(...) public life continues to be dominated by a pronounced sense of segregation among the three main ethnic groups (the “constituent peoples”), which dictates modalities of coexistence within public institutions, urban spaces and schools (...)”.¹²
- In 2020, the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) stated in a report on education that “(...) authorities at all levels have failed to make progress in an area of such crucial importance for building an inclusive society and overcoming the deeply entrenched ethnic divisions in the country.” This statement was in reference to a 2010 ECRI recommendation that included “(...) ensuring inclusive and non-discriminatory learning environments in all schools and the removal of any symbols that represent an ethnic or religious bias.”¹³

What is important to note here is that while the *Criteria* outlined in section 2.2 and 2.3 is the baseline with what is acceptable for school names, symbols and manifestations, the above-mentioned domestic and international legal framework is more inclusive and should steer BiH authorities’ thinking on what is considered appropriate.

3. School Names

Background: During the Yugoslav era (1945-1992), school names often served as a tool to strengthen Yugoslav identity and consciousness. Schools were often named after Partisan military commanders, fallen Partisan soldiers and prominent historical figures from the area of Yugoslavia (including writers, scientists and other academics). During the war in BiH (1992-1995) and in its immediate aftermath, education authorities and politicians changed a large number of primary and secondary school names across the country. Many of the names were changed to commemorate events from the war (including military figures and battles) and to honour historical figures deemed suitable by the new ruling authorities in a given administrative unit. By 2000, education authorities and politicians changed the names of hundreds of schools across the country. Although there were some exceptions, the vast majority of these changes were made to commemorate the dominant ethnic group in the given communities.

Following the adoption of the *Criteria*, education authorities across the country took some action to address some of the contentious names:

- In the Republika Srpska (RS), for example, school name OŠ¹⁴ “Đorđije Kovačević Đoja” in Osmaci was changed to OŠ “Aleksa Šantić” and school name OŠ “Milan Jović” in Ugljevik was changed to OŠ “Filip Višnjić”. Both Kovačević and Jović were commanders of the Army of Republika Srpska (VRS) in the 1992-1995 war in BiH while Šantić and Višnjić were famous Serb authors from BiH. These changes directly complied with the established *Criteria*.
- In other administrative units, there were also examples of compliance to the *Criteria* related to changing war-related school names. In Bosanski Petrovac (Una Sana Canton), authorities changed school name OŠ “14. septembar” to OŠ “Ahmet Hromadžić”. The date 14 September commemorates the recapturing of Bosanski Petrovac by the Army of the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina (ARBiH) from the VRS in 1995, while Ahmet Hromadžić was an author from BiH.

¹² For more information, see the *Fourth Opinion on Bosnia and Herzegovina* of the Council of Europe’s Advisory Committee of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (2017). Available at <https://rm.coe.int/4th-op-bih-en/16808e2c53>

¹³ For more information, see the *ECRI Conclusions on the Implementation of the Recommendations in Respect of Bosnia and Herzegovina Subject to Interim Follow-Up (2020)*. Available at <https://rm.coe.int/ecri-conclusions-on-the-implementation-of-the-recommendations-in-respe/16809cde0e>

¹⁴ Throughout this report, primary schools are abbreviated with either ‘OŠ’ or ‘PŠ’. ‘OŠ’ (‘osnovna škola’) refers to a central school while ‘PŠ’ (‘područna škola’) refers to a branch school. The abbreviation ‘(M)SŠ’ (‘(mješovita) srednja škola’) is used for a (mixed) secondary school.

- In Novi Travnik (Central Bosnia Canton), authorities changed the name of SŠ “308. slavna brdska brigada” to MSŠ “Novi Travnik”.¹⁵ The 308. slavna brdska brigada was a military formation within the ARBiH in Novi Travnik. Authorities in Novi Travnik also changed school name OŠ “Jozo Gadžić Čupo” to OŠ “Fra Marijan Šunjić”.¹⁶ Jozo Gadžić Čupo was a member of the Croatian Defence Council (HVO), who was killed in 1993, while Marijan Šunjić was an educator and author from BiH.
- In Canton 10, despite failing to adopt any by-laws related to the Criteria, authorities agreed to change the name of the primary school in Drvar from OŠ “Dr. Ivan Merz” – named after a beatified Catholic scholar – to OŠ “Drvar” in 2007 following pressure from the large Serb returnee community. Similarly in Srebrenica (RS), authorities agreed to change the name of the central primary school from OŠ “Petar Petrović Njegoš” to “Prva osnovna škola Srebrenica” in 2012 following strong opposition from the large Bosniak returnee community. Petar Petrović Njegoš was a Montenegrin ruler and writer and some of his writings were considered inappropriate by members of the Bosniak community. Both cases showed an important willingness of education authorities to find common ground and neutral names acceptable to all in the respective communities.

Despite some progress in addressing divisive school names, education authorities have been reluctant in some areas to make changes.

- Some schools continue to be named after specific military battles (for example, OŠ “Lipanjke zore” in Višići, Čapljina, Herzegovina Neretva Canton) or dates of military triumphs (for example, OŠ “13. rujan” in Jajce, Central Bosnia Canton). Other names associated with the war in BiH – including fallen soldiers – also continue to exist.
- Similarly, several school names related to controversial historical figures have not been changed. These include Nazi sympathizers and individuals with political or military associations with fascist regimes during World War II. In Goražde (Bosnian Podrinje Canton Goražde), for example, OŠ “Husein ef. Đozo” is named after a high-ranking SS officer and imam from the 13th Waffen SS Handžar Division in World War II.
- Due to the close link between religion and ethnicity in BiH, most of the school names related to religious figures serve to represent only one ethnic group – the ethnic group in the majority. In the RS, 22 schools¹⁷ are named after Saint Sava, the Serb Orthodox patron saint of education. In Croat-majority areas in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (FBiH), several schools are also named after religious figures, including Cardinal Stepinac, the controversial Archbishop of Zagreb during World War II.¹⁸

Examples of Recent Backsliding

In recent years, there has been regression related to school names in some locations.

- In Una Sana Canton, in 2018 the Cantonal Assembly adopted a decision to revert names of four primary and secondary schools to names of members of the territorial defence or the ARBiH killed between 1992 and 1995. The decision to change the names back to figures associated with the war – as they were named in the immediate post-war period – is in conflict with the canton’s own by-laws.
- In Sarajevo Canton, local authorities in 2016 voted to rename OŠ “Dobroševići” after Mustafa Busuladžić – a highly controversial figure from World War II. A Cantonal Assembly decision in 2018 annulled the renaming of the school, but the name remains despite this.

¹⁵ MSŠ “Novi Travnik” operates according to Central Bosnia Canton curriculum in Bosnian Language.

¹⁶ OŠ “Fra Marijan Šunjić” operates according to Central Bosnia Canton curriculum in Croatian Language.

¹⁷ Including their branch schools.

¹⁸ Cardinal Stepinac remains a controversial historical figure due to his association with the Ustaše-led Independent State of Croatia during World War II. One school in Neum (Herzegovina Neretva Canton) is named after Stepinac.

4. School Symbols

Background: Similar to controversial school names, the widespread presence of ethnic and religious symbols at schools was common in many areas across the country in the immediate post-war period. Provocative war-related monuments were built on school premises (or within metres of school premises) and religious symbols became commonplace at schools – especially crosses and icons in classrooms and hallways. These symbols, along with controversial flags, portraits and statues, further aimed to demarcate schools for the dominant ethnic group. The *Criteria* explicitly outlined the symbols, flags, insignia and other signs that were deemed to be appropriate. Most notably, religious symbols were to be present only in classrooms for the subject of Religious Education and only official flags and coats of arms of BiH and the relevant entity/canton were to be displayed.¹⁹ The *Criteria* prohibited the installation of war monuments or plaques containing interpretations or qualifications of war and symbols of foreign countries, political parties, movements and leaders.²⁰

Many controversial symbols related to religion, politics and war were never addressed and remain at locations across the country.

Religious symbols

- Catholic crosses in schools are common in several areas of BiH – most notably in parts of Herzegovina Neretva Canton, Canton 10 and West Herzegovina Canton. Catholic crosses are often located in classrooms, halls, hallways and offices at schools. There are also examples of Catholic crosses in school yards and on monuments located in school yards. In Maglaj (Zenica Dobojski Canton), for example, a large cross is located outside of PŠ in Bradići (Maglaj). The school is in one of 28 locations in BiH with “two schools under one roof”.²¹
- In Stolac (Herzegovina Neretva Canton), a controversial Virgin Mary statue remains in the schoolyard of OŠ “Hodovo”. The school is notably an example of “two schools under one roof”. The presence of the Virgin Mary statue led Bosniaks to boycott the school in the past. On a positive note, a crucifix located at the multi-ethnic secondary school in Stolac was relocated from the school’s main hall to the classroom for the subject of the Catholic Religious Education.
- In the RS, Orthodox icons remain widespread and have caused strong reactions from non-Serbs. Rastko Nemanjić (later Saint Sava) remains a particularly sensitive topic. The historical figure has a dual role in Serb tradition as a pivotal educator and the founder of the autocephalous Serbian Orthodox Church (and its first Archbishop). Schools however often fail to distinguish between the two roles. In a 2006 report, the Coordination Board expressly stated, in relation to the icons of Saint Sava, that “In accordance with the Criteria, religious symbols can be used only in the classrooms for the subject of Religious Education. The pictures of Saint Sava (Rastko Nemanjić) are not disputable and may be placed on the school walls, next to photos of other writers and other prominent people.”²² Despite these clear instructions, Saint Sava icons remain prevalent while paintings of Rastko Nemanjić are not grouped with other writers and educators. Aside from the Saint Sava dispute, some positive steps have been taken concerning religious symbols in the RS. In Rudo for example, all religious symbols at OŠ “Rudo” were moved to the classrooms for the subject of Religious Education in an attempt to make the school environment inclusive for all students.

¹⁹ In smaller schools without specific classrooms for the subject of Religious Education, the *Criteria* stated that religious symbols are only to be present during classes of Religious Education subject.

²⁰ The *Criteria* stated that these symbols could only be used for learning purposes within specific lessons of a given curriculum and were not to be regularly on display anywhere at any school.

²¹ For more information, see the OSCE Mission to BiH’s report “*Two Schools Under One Roof*”: *The most visible example of discrimination in education in Bosnia and Herzegovina* (2018), available at: <https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/3/8/404990.pdf>

²² *Coordination Board Report on Implementation of the Criteria for School Names and Symbols*, April 2006.

- In some Bosniak-majority areas, this phenomenon can be seen manifesting itself through photographs and models of mosques, which can have indirect religious connotation. For example, in OŠ “Mehmedalija Mak Dizdar” in Goražde (Bosnian Podrinje Canton Goražde), a model of mosque is placed in the school hall.

Political symbols

- Unconstitutional flags and coats of arms continue to be present at some schools. In Croat-majority areas in Herzegovina Neretva Canton and Canton 10 for example, several schools continue to display the Herceg-Bosna coat of arms.²³
- In the RS, the previous coat of arms of the RS continues to be present in some schools²⁴.
- The coat of arms of the Republic of BiH²⁵ also continues to be present at some schools in Bosniak-majority areas, most notably in Bosnian Podrinje Canton Goražde.

War-related symbols

- At OŠ “Ćoralići” in Cazin (Una Sana Canton), a former ARBiH Mi-8 helicopter exists as a monument in the school yard. At PŠ “Brljevo” in Gacko (RS), a monument is dedicated to Radojica Perišić, a Chetnik commander during World War II. On a positive note, a photograph of Slobodan Praljak – a convicted war criminal which was on display at the school entrance of the OŠ “Lipanjске zore” in Čapljina (Herzegovina Neretva Canton) was removed.

Examples of Recent Trends

In recent years, there has been regression related to school symbols in some locations.

- In early 2021, six primary schools in Visoko (Zenica Doboј Canton) installed memorial plaques on their premises dedicated to fallen ARBiH soldiers who attended the schools. Although the plaques are technically not in conflict with the Criteria or cantonal by-laws on the matter, they are part of an upward trend of using school premises to promote war-related narratives.
- The unveiling ceremony of a monument at OŠ “Sveti Sava” in Istočno Sarajevo (RS) in 2018 dedicated to children killed during the 1992-1995 war, which was attended by political, religious and education authorities, represented a deliberate use of schools to commemorate victims of war.²⁶ This monument was erected in the school yard and serves a similar purpose to the Monument for Children Killed in Surrounded Sarajevo 1992-1995 in Sarajevo which, in contrast, is located in a public park.

²³ For more information, see the FBiH Constitutional Court Decisions, U-11/97, U-12/97, U-7/98

²⁴ For more information, see the BiH Constitutional Court Decision U 4/04

²⁵ Coat of Arms of Republic BiH was adopted on 4 May 1992. The current official coat of arms of BiH was adopted in early 1998.

²⁶ For more information, see <https://www.palelive.com/otkriven-spomenik-stradaloj-djeci-srpskog-sarajeva/>

5. School Manifestations

Background: The *Criteria* stated that annual ‘school days’ should not be associated with dates commemorating the last war and that schools should not organize or bring students to gatherings commemorating war and political events. The implementation of these and related requirements outlined in various by-laws has been partial. There are also negative trends – and examples of regression – in recent years related to school manifestations, celebrations and other school events.

The organization of school manifestations with **religious** connotations remains a source of friction in multi-ethnic areas across BiH. These manifestations are almost always organized for and by the dominant ethnic group. Marking religious holidays – for example, Eid, Christmas and Easter – occurs in some schools with student performances and other celebrations. These manifestations are not confined to the Religious Education subject classes, but are often school-wide celebrations. Although holidays could be an opportunity to promote BiH’s ethnic and religious diversity in an inclusive and educational environment, the programs are often not appropriate for students who do not celebrate the holidays in question.

- In the RS, Saint Sava Day on 27 January remains one of the most controversial dates. Although the RS Ministry of Education and Culture issued an instruction in 2008 stating that manifestations should be educational in character and respectful of the cultural diversity of all students, the instruction has not been equally adhered to by school officials across the RS. Saint Sava Day often includes religious ceremonies performed by religious figures and an additional political dimension with the presence of political officials. A number of schools had previously agreed to hold religious celebrations outside of school premises, but some have since reverted to again have divisive celebrations at schools during school hours. As an attempt to accommodate students who do not celebrate Saint Sava, schools give all students the option to stay home on 27 January. This process however continues to perpetuate divisions along ethnic lines and quietly serves to demonstrate which group dominates in the community.

War-related manifestations across the country have also increased in recent years. This has generally corresponded with a greater focus on the war in BiH (1992-1995) in the curricula for History subject used in the various administrative units.²⁷ Commemorations marking the war in BiH often include field trips to war-related sites and organized presentations by representatives of war veterans’ associations and victims’ associations.

- In Prozor-Rama (Herzegovina Neretva Canton), for example, all students and teachers attending schools in the municipality operating under the curriculum in Croatian language visit a memorial to Croat victims in Uzdol and receive a history lesson from a former military commander.

Other commemorations include celebrations at schools – or organized by schools – to honour specific military units and dates of military victories as well markings victims of war (from one side).

- For example, students from OŠ “Velešićki heroji” in Sarajevo (Sarajevo Canton), together with some other Sarajevo schools, visit the memorial of the 1. Slavne – 111. Viteške brigade of the ARBiH to celebrate the unit’s formation and attend a lecture held by former commanders²⁸ on events in Sarajevo and BiH during the war.

War-related commemorations often aim to strengthen ethno-national consciousness via narratives of historical victimhood or the glorification of battlefield victories and sacrifices. Messages of reconciliation are mostly absent from the war-related commemorations that students attend.

²⁷ In 2000, the Council of Europe formally recommended a moratorium on teaching about the war in BiH (1992-1995) stating that more time was needed to develop a suitable approach for teaching about the conflict. Some administrative units respected the recommended moratorium while others continued to teach about the war. Over the past decade, there has been a significant increase across the country in lessons related to the war in BiH. This increased focus on the breakup of Yugoslavia and the wars in the 1990s has also been reflected in newer history textbooks that cover the twentieth century.

²⁸ For more information, see <https://novosarajevo.ba/historijski-casovi-za-ucenike-osnovnih-skola-u-memorijalnom-centru-novo-sarajevo/>

Students have also become increasingly susceptible to **political** influence in schools. The *Framework Law* explicitly forbids the activities of political parties in schools, but students are not completely shielded from political pressures. Elected officials have on several occasions invited schools and students to attend events and gatherings that are politically sensitive. Furthermore, school premises are often used as venues for pre-election rallies, and posters and billboards promoting political parties and candidates are often found in the direct vicinity of schools.²⁹

Manifestations continue to be held with little consideration to inclusion even more so in regards to recent anniversaries related to 25 years after the war. Students are subject of political indoctrination through attendance to numerous history classes and presentations focused on war related events.

6. Conclusions



Politicians continue to use education institutions as a tool to mark territory, express political power and shape historical and cultural narratives in communities. Schools in BiH are striking examples of public spaces being utilized for political aims. As curricula and textbooks directly influence what students learn at school, school names, symbols and manifestations also influence the consciousness of young people. For students of the dominant ethnic group, school names, symbols and manifestations often reinforce their sense of belonging and identity. For students not belonging to the dominant ethnic group, the same features outside of the curricula and textbooks also reinforce what they often learn in the classroom — that their perspectives and their beliefs are not equally valued.

The *Interim Agreement* and the *Criteria* were designed to protect students – and communities as a whole – against the misuse of school names, symbols and manifestations for political and ideological purposes. Upon initial implementation of the agreements and the adoption of by-laws, a number of administrative units took steps to address controversial school names, symbols and manifestations. Although most of the progress has been sustained, there are concerning trends related to the increased politicization of schools, increased war-related memorials and commemorations on school property and continued non-adherence to principles of inclusivity across the country.

Education authorities, in co-operation with political officials and other decision makers, should revisit their respective by-laws that govern school names, symbols and manifestations with renewed commitment to inclusive education. Based on evidence of backsliding in this area, there is a growing need to safeguard progress achieved in the past, prevent further regression and promote school environments that are appropriate and welcoming for all students.

²⁹ In response to concerns, the Institution of Human Rights Ombudsman of BiH called on political parties ahead of the 2018 General Elections to show care for students and to completely exclude them from all activities connected with political advocacy. For more information, see: <https://ombudsmen.gov.ba/Novost.aspx?newsid=1059&lang=BS>

Recommendations



- 1 Authorities in all administrative units with education competencies should ensure that inclusive school environments – including school names, symbols and manifestations – are explicitly regulated through laws or by-laws. Laws and by-laws related to school names, symbols and manifestations should be based on the principle that schools are to be inclusive, depoliticized and appropriate for all constituent peoples, national minorities and others.
- 2 Authorities in all administrative units with education competencies should ensure that enforceable measures are in place for non-compliance to laws and by-laws related to school names, symbols and manifestations. Authorities should ensure that monitoring mechanisms to safeguard compliance are established and operational.
- 3 School administrators, teachers, students, parents and other members of the local community should exercise the role of proactive actors by regularly evaluating the status of their respective schools regarding inclusive school environments with an aim to improve it. This should be part of regular school development planning, shaping school policy, culture and practice. Constituent minorities, national minorities and others should all be included in these discussions. School officials should take action at the local level to address concerns raised by community members in an open and constructive manner.
- 4 All school names should comply with laws and by-laws regulating school names. For school names that do not comply with laws and by-laws, there are numerous options for alternative names, such as the name of the town or community where the given school is located, numbers, etc.
- 5 All symbols in schools and on school property should comply with laws and by-laws regulating school symbols. Controversial school symbols should be removed from locations where they are not permitted. All religious symbols in classrooms, halls, hallways, administrative offices and all other locations should be removed or relocated to the dedicated classroom for the corresponding Religious Education subject. If that classroom is also used for other subjects, the religious symbols should only be present during Religious Education subject classes.
- 6 All school manifestations, celebrations and commemorations should comply with laws and by-laws regulating school manifestations, celebrations and commemorations. All efforts should be taken to organize school manifestations in an inclusive and welcoming manner for all ethnic groups and religious communities. Schools should not bring students in an organized manner to gatherings commemorating war or political events. Field trips should be completely optional for all students. Before all field trips, students and parents should be provided with a clear schedule and program including stated objectives, speakers and related activities within the visits.
- 7 Official 'school days' should not occur on religious holidays, on dates related to military victories or defeats, or other dates that apply exclusively to students belonging to one ethnic group. All celebrations related to 'school days' should be depoliticized and secular in nature.

Annex 1. The Criteria for School Names and Symbols



ODBOR ZA KOORDINACIJU PROVEDBE PRIVREMENOG SPORAZUMA O ZADOVOLJAVANJU POSEBNIH POTREBA I PRAVA DJECE POVRATNIKA
ODBOR ZA KOORDINIRANJE PROVEDBE PRIVREMENOG SPORAZUMA O ZADOVOLJAVANJU POSEBNIH POTREBA I PRAVA DJECE POVRATNIKA
ОДБОР ЗА КООРДИНАЦИЈУ ПРОВОЂЕЊА ПРИВРЕМЕНОГ СПОРАЗУМА О ЗАДОВОЉАВАЊУ ПОСЕБНИХ ПОТРЕБА И ПРАВА ДЈЕЦЕ ПОВРАТНИКА
COORDINATION BOARD FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE MARCH 5TH 2002 INTERIM AGREEMENT ON RETURNEE CHILDREN

In accordance with Article VIII (Point 13 C) of the Implementation Plan of the *05 March 2002 Interim Agreement on Accommodation of Specific Needs and Rights of Returnee Children*, Pledge 1 of the Education Reform Agenda endorsed on 21 November 2002, and the Framework Law on Primary and Secondary Education in Bosnia and Herzegovina,
(Official Gazette of BiH, no. 18/2003);

the Coordination Board for the Implementation of the *Interim Agreement on Accommodation of the Specific Needs and Rights of Returnee Children* proposes to the Minister of Education and Culture of Republika Srpska and the Cantonal Ministers of Education in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina for adoption

CRITERIA FOR SCHOOL NAMES AND SYMBOLS

I. CRITERIA FOR SCHOOL NAMES

1. A school name is appropriate if:

- a) It is named after a recognized scientist, writer or any other artist from the curricula used in schools throughout Bosnia and Herzegovina, and particularly from the Common Core Curriculum;
- b) It is named after a well-known educator;
- c) It is named after a well-known character from literature that provides positive role models;
- d) It is named after a well-known humanitarian worker;
- e) It is named in appreciation for a donation and is in accordance with the remaining points of this Criteria;
- f) It is named after a reputable cultural or sports activist from Bosnia and Herzegovina;
- g) It is named after a specific vocation;
- h) It is named by using the appropriate geographical or topographical term, including the names of settlements and regions;
- i) It is named numerically;
- j) It does not have an exclusive, narrow religious connotation and is related to a person that has not in any way harmed the members of other peoples and religious communities;
- k) It does not present a date, event, military unit or military figure from the last war and persons from the previous wars that have harmed members of other peoples;
- l) It does not have exclusively political connotation.

II. CRITERIA FOR SCHOOL SYMBOLS

1. Appropriate school symbols:

- a) The flag and coat of arms of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the entity/cantonal flag and coat of arms;
- b) The coat of arms of the school (if it is in accordance with these Criteria);
- c) War commemoration plaques that provide the name of the deceased, year of birth and year of death and contain no interpretation or qualification of the war as well as monuments that contain no offensive or inappropriate messages;
- d) Religious symbols, which can only be located in the religious instruction classroom. In schools where there are no classrooms for religious instruction, religious symbols can only be used while religious instruction classes are taught.
- e) Symbols of foreign countries and symbols, photos or objects related to political parties, movements, leaders, or any war can only be used in classrooms when teaching lessons prescribed by the curriculum. These symbols, photos or objects cannot be exhibited in school premises and schoolyard.
- f) All signs, symbols and other insignia in schools will be used in accordance with the laws regulating the mode and usage of signs and symbols at all levels of government and public institutions.

2. School Manifestations:

- a) The celebration of the School Day shall be harmonized with the adopted Criteria (example: the date and celebration commemorating the event from the last war should not be celebrated, etc);
- b) Schools cannot organize or bring students in an organized manner to gatherings commemorating war and political events.

III. IMPLEMENTATION TIMELINES

1. The implementation of these Criteria should be carried out during 2004/05 school year.
2. Minister of Education and Culture in Republika Srpska and Cantonal Ministers of Education in Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina shall distribute the Criteria to founders and directors of all public Primary and Secondary Schools. The deadline for distribution of the abovementioned documents is **the end of the 2003/04 school year.**
3. In their regular meetings and consultations with returnee parents, Entity and Cantonal Coordinators for the Implementation of the Interim Agreement on Returnee Children shall provide information to parents and teachers about the Criteria.
4. It is recommended that school founders and education authorities ensure the necessary funds to cover expenses related to the implementation of the Criteria.
5. Competent Ministries shall provide the interpretation of the Criteria in cases of disputable school names and symbols.
6. The OSCE shall retain a monitoring and coordinating role relating to implementation of the Criteria.

Annex 2: Overview of bylaws regulating school names, symbols and manifestations

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| Republika Srpska | <i>Rulebook on Criteria for School Names, Symbols and Organization of School Manifestations</i> (Official Gazette of Republika Srpska, no. 85/04) |
| Brčko District of Bosnia and Herzegovina | No corresponding act on the Criteria for School Names and Symbols ³⁰ |
| Una Sana Canton | <i>Rulebook on Criteria for School Names and Symbols and Organization of School Manifestations</i> (Official Gazette of Una-Sana Canton, no. 7/05) |
| Posavina Canton | <i>Instruction on Criteria for School Names, Symbols and Organization of School Manifestations</i> (dated 16 February 2005) |
| Tuzla Canton | <i>Instruction for Implementation of the Criteria for School Names and Symbols</i> (dated 5 July 2004) |
| Zenica Doboј Canton | <i>Rulebook on Criteria for School Names and Symbols and Organization of School Manifestations</i> (Official Gazette of Zenica Doboј Canton, no. 14/04) |
| Bosnian Podrinje Canton Gorazde | <i>Rulebook on Criteria for School Names and Symbols and organisation of school manifestations</i> (Official Gazette of Bosnian Podrinje Canton Gorazde, no. 13/05) |
| Central Bosnia Canton | <i>Rulebook on Criteria for School Names and Symbols and Organization of School Manifestations</i> (dated 17 May 2006) ³¹ |
| Herzegovina Neretva Canton | <i>Instruction on Implementation of the Criteria for School Names and Symbols</i> (7 September 2004) |
| West Herzegovina Canton | <i>Cantonal Assembly adopted a Conclusion on Non-acceptance of the “Criteria for School Names and Symbols”</i> (Official Gazette of West Herzegovina Canton, no. 16/08) |
| Sarajevo Canton | <i>Instruction on Implementation of the Criteria for School Names and Symbols</i> (dated 11 July 2004) |
| Canton 10 | No corresponding act on the Criteria for School Names and Symbols |

³⁰ In Brčko District, authorities did not deem it necessary to adopt related by-laws as appropriate measures had been taken to remove controversial names and symbols.

³¹ The Rulebook was not published in the Official Gazette, but was sent to all schools in Central Bosnia Canton by the Minister of Education.

