



**Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
High Commissioner on National Minorities**

**INTEGRATION VERSUS SEPARATION:
EDUCATION IN MULTI-ETHNIC SOCIETIES**

Address

by

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Check against delivery!

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Ladies and Gentlemen,

It gives me great pleasure to be with you today in order to launch this important book and discuss the value of education. Education ties us together. In school children from different social and ethnic backgrounds meet. You realize that the boy or girl at the desk next to you may not be so different after all. Many of our friendships that last a lifetime are born while at school, and it is here that second and third languages are mastered and foreign cultures become appreciated.

Before I move on to the main substance of my address, I want to say a little more about my institution. The HCNM was established in 1992 on the backdrop of the wars in the Balkans.

The HCNM is a conflict prevention instrument. I try to identify potential or lingering problems between majorities and minorities as well as between different ethnic groups, which have a serious possibility of becoming a source of tension. I then look for ways to solve these problems. I see education as one of the important tools, if not the main tool, to ensure that the potential for future conflicts are dramatically reduced. If a society uses education as a vehicle for promoting tolerance, understanding and inter-ethnic co-operation, it is less likely to have misunderstandings or to be subject to divisive policies along ethnic lines. A State's educational system is a reflection of the way it approaches not only the future of its younger generations, but also how it wants to shape its society.

Europe today is multiethnic and multicultural. There is no monoethnic country left. We all have challenges with respect to integration and at the same time respecting each other's identities.

That is why I have taken a keen interest in advancing integration with respect for diversity through education. In 1996, my office issued the so-called "Hague Recommendations Regarding the Educational Rights of National Minorities", which outlines best practices and tools that States can use in order to ensure that a balance exists between the rights of all communities to safeguard and develop their own identity and the legitimate need of States to build an integrated society.

It is difficult for States to strike this balance. Today's launching of the "Student Workbook on the Culture, Origins and Traditions of the National Minorities in Bosnia and Herzegovina" is an effort to address this issue. When the HCNM was asked to lend assistance in seeing this book developed, we saw it as an important opportunity to help Bosnia-Herzegovina's recognized national minorities better retain their unique identities, while, at the same time, helping the rest of the country better understand who, beyond the three constituent peoples, calls Bosnia-Herzegovina their home. I hope that this book will move on from being a tool used on a voluntary basis in selected schools to one being used in all schools countrywide. Only then, will diversity be better understood.

Today, I want to address two issues, which constantly arise in our joint quest to build a better and more tolerant society, not only here in Bosnia-Herzegovina, but in the wider Europe. They are the question of examining and understanding the diversity of a state and how to use education as a tool to promote tolerance and integration.

In addition to the universal human right to education, international law recognizes the education rights of national minorities. This right is an indispensable means of realizing other minority rights that ultimately serve to protect and preserve individual identity. According to the Preamble of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, which Bosnia-Herzegovina has ratified, "a pluralist and genuinely democratic society should not only respect the ethnic, cultural, linguistic and religious identity of each person belonging to a national minority, but also create appropriate conditions enabling them to express, preserve and develop this identity." States are obliged to promote mutual respect and understanding, and co-operation among all persons living on their territory, irrespective of those persons' ethnic, cultural, linguistic or religious identity, in particular in the fields of education, culture and the media.

The difficulty to understand, safeguard and promote that rich diversity and to engender the positive values that such diversity brings is a struggle that most, if not all, societies must confront as we find ourselves in an age when all States are multi-ethnic. Grappling with this phenomenon through education is where we can all learn from one another. This workbook is an excellent example of how the rights of national minorities' can be better realized and of how the conditions can be created so that all members of a society can begin to acknowledge, understand and appreciate a society's true diversity.

Ladies and gentlemen,

All members of a society must be able to exercise their own rights. That is without question. We cannot, however, stop there. We must promote a greater understanding of one another's histories, languages, traditions and cultures with a view to enhancing greater tolerance and mutual understanding.

On this background I would like to turn to my second point. How can multi-ethnic societies such as Bosnia-Herzegovina use education as a tool to promote tolerance and mutual understanding within its rich patchwork of ethnic, religious and linguistic groups in order to integrate *all* of its communities? Integration of communities is not a grand notion or the creation of elites who wish to use the latest catch phrases. Integrating a diverse society is a key component for ensuring its stability which again is a prerequisite for long term investments and economic development. As I see it, education is a corner stone in any integration process, and, thus, a foundation for a country's economic development. This is your challenge!

To be blunt with you, I fear that Bosnia-Herzegovina is currently failing the test. Instead of promoting integration amongst the three largest groups, especially in the area of education, there appears to be a growing trend of segregation. This country has been through a devastating conflict and scars can not always be fully healed, at least not in a short period of time. Nonetheless, without a better integration of children through the education system you will keep the wounds open. While a pluralist and genuinely democratic society should respect and protect minority rights, separation along ethnic lines should be avoided since it reinforces ethnic divisions within communities and serves as a fertile breeding ground for negative stereotypes and prejudices among different ethnic groups, eventually leading to conflicts. Separation results in insufficient opportunities for young people to meet and work together. The list goes on when we think of the pernicious effect separation along ethnic, linguistic or religious lines has had.

While the merits of integrated education are universally recognized, separation along ethnic lines in education is growing in many OSCE participating States. In September 2005, Trevor Phillips, Chair of Britain's Commission for Racial Equality, warned that the British were

“becoming strangers to each other.” He worried that Britain would become a country "of passively coexisting ethnic and religious communities, eyeing each other uneasily over the fences of our differences.”

Divided education systems can cost us dear when it comes to building cohesive societies. Nowhere is this more evident than in Northern Ireland. The province's primary and secondary school systems are divided along religious lines, with Catholic schools on the one hand and “state” schools on the other. Recent research confirmed that these parallel systems produce adults who conform to the political ideas of their parents. Collating surveys from 1989 to 2003, it was found, for example, that 96 per cent of Protestants who had received a state education saw themselves as ‘British’, ‘Northern Irish’ or ‘Ulster’. While more than 90 per cent of Catholic-educated people saw themselves as ‘Irish’ or ‘Northern Irish’.

The experience of segregated education in Northern Ireland shows that sectarian attitudes among children are increasing rather than diminishing. This comes despite efforts to promote formal provisions for the teaching of a balanced history and to allocate time in the curriculum for an official programme of education for mutual understanding. Thus, it would be naïve to expect that any existing separation can be easily reversed.

So how do we address this? One of the major elements of integration and confidence building is the organization of joint activities inside and outside the classroom. Working together in an intensive and committed way is an important foundation for mutual understanding and eventual integration. We must endeavour to give children ample opportunities to meet and discuss things across the ethnic divide.

But, integrated education is not only about putting children of various ethnic groups in one classroom. It is about democratic school governance. It is about interesting and inclusive textbooks. It is about creating joint activities. Equally important is the depoliticization of curriculum and textbook development. The school curriculum has to be “kept at arm's length from individual politicians' idiosyncratic preferences”, to quote Professor John White of the Institute of Education at the University of London. This is essential if we are to equip pupils "to lead a flourishing personal and civic life in a modern liberal democracy".

This is an area where persistent shortcomings in inter-ethnic tolerance need to be rectified. Curricula in multi-ethnic countries must provide a balanced picture of all communities. Textbooks play a crucial part in this process. One-sided or skewed interpretations of sensitive subjects can perpetuate misunderstandings and negative stereotypes.

History is the most obvious victim of political manipulation. History needs to be “disarmed” in order to foster individual judgment and critical thinking. This is not to say that textbooks have to shy away from controversy. On the contrary, they need to provide a critical way of presenting such subjects and encourage more analytical and less stereotyped thinking.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We do not have easy answers to these difficult questions. But, we must begin to approach them with a view to better understanding and accepting that we all live in multi-ethnic societies. Though each society may be unique, we have much to learn from one another. We must also approach these problems with a view to ensuring that the rights of all – *and I mean all* – members of society are respected. But, most importantly, we must approach these questions from the perspective of future generations, who should not be burdened with the same problems that we face. They need to understand that their country transcends their own community, that it is the diversity that makes the wholeness. This workbook is intended to be a step in that direction. I hope it will be a help in creating a stable and strong Bosnia-Herzegovina where all ethnic groups can be at home.