



## History Curricula Analysis

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*Edin Radusic*

*Faculty of Philosophy, Department of History,*

*University of Sarajevo*

### **TEACHING HISTORY IN BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA WITH A COMMENT TO THE SIGNIFICANCE OF TEACHING PLAN AND PROGRAM AND THEIR CHARACTERISTICS**

Education in general, and especially education in divided societies, has great importance. It may be integrating, but also disintegrating factor. It may be used as means to deepen the divisions in the society and promotion of splits and intolerance, or it may be a significant factor of recovery of the society. These general comments about education refer also to history, or maybe most to history as a teaching subject. Depending on how it is approached, history in societies in crisis may be poison or cure.

In BiH education system history is a mandatory subject in primary and secondary schools, in primary from grades 5 to 8 (or 6 to 9), and in secondary schools it depends on the type of the school. In gymnasiums, history is a mandatory subject in two (1-2 grades) or four years (1-4), while in vocational schools one or two years (first or first and second grade). Whether students in vocational schools will listen to history one or two years depends most often on whether they attend a secondary (vocational) school with a three year program (history is then usually only one year), or a secondary (vocational) school with a four year program (history is then usually two years). As a rule, history is taught two classes a week, sometimes one class, or in some schools 3 classes a week, if they opted for the social sciences. In some schools (e.g. gymnasium in Canton Sarajevo) history is in the first two grades mandatory subject, and in the following two it is an integral part of social optional area. Although there are differences in number of classes, number of years where history is taught if we leave the details aside, we can say that there are three concepts of history studying as a teaching subject (Serb concept in Republika Srpska, Croatian and Bosnian-Bosniak in Federation BiH), which mutually differ very much, but they have some similarities, too. Differences are in content, while similarities are in content and in conception. Besides, Brcko for its special administrative status has certain specifics compared to the BiH entities. National and/or state history is taught as an integral part of the world's history and it is planned to go through the times from prehistory to the contemporary times. The principle of concentric circles is mostly maintained, so history classes in secondary school repeat the same matter from primary school, only in bigger volume. So in the primary school, in 5 grade it is history of Ancient times, in 6 grade Middle Ages, in 7 grade New Age, and in the 8 grade contemporary history or history of the

20<sup>th</sup> century. For gymnasiums, the distribution of content is the same – I year Ancient history, II year Middle Ages, III year New Age and IV year history of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (the exception is Canton Sarajevo). In vocational secondary schools the same content is studied in shortened form, that is, in I year up to the French revolution, and in II year history of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century. In Secondary vocational schools in Federation BiH, with only one year of history, the content is mainly history of BiH with short reflections to the European history. (See: Vera Katz, Teaching history and geography in Bosnia and Herzegovina, South-East Europe Textbook Network).

The current Federal Curriculum somewhat deviated from the mentioned concept of concentric circles, giving in early years more space to general characteristics of epochs, auxiliary disciplines, historiography, cultural and other institutions, but practice showed, especially after introducing common core curricula, that this concept was rejected and the practice went back to the old, we could say, old-fashioned model.

There are no teaching plans and programs at the level of Bosnia and Herzegovina, there are separated plans and programs for Federation BiH and for RS. Besides that, in Federation BiH there are, in essence, two plans and programs, one that is applied in cantons with Bosniak majority, the so-called federal program, and another one in cantons with Croatian majority population. Naturally, some specific schools (religious and similar) have specific plans and programs. This diversity is enabled by the fact that in the Federation BiH education is at the level of cantonal ministries of education, so cantons may profile their educational policy (example – Canton Sarajevo). On top of that, in BiH education system Brcko district since 2000 represents a separate unit, to a certain degree. In the middle of 2001, there was a common proposal for harmonized teaching plans and programs for primary and secondary schools, which started to be implemented from school year 2001/2002 in the practice. Generally speaking, multiethnic education has been established in Brcko district, but history and other subjects of the 'national group' are taught separately in primary schools. In gymnasium history teaching is performed jointly, regardless to the national affiliation of students, according to the harmonized plan and program. In secondary vocational schools, history classes are performed separately as a national group of subjects. In primary schools of Brcko district there was a reduction of contents of the national curriculum for cca 30%, in order to alleviate the teaching contents. The teaching is performed in accordance with common core at BiH level. On this subject students use textbooks written in the language and scripts of the people whose history is being studied. (*Ministry of human rights and refugees, seventh and eighth periodic report on application of international convention on elimination of all forms of racial discrimination in Bosnia and Herzegovina, 2008, 77-79*).

Although primary right in education was given to the cantons in BiH Federation and to an entity in case of the RS, there are other acts of higher institutions made with help of international organizations (OSCE, UNESCO, European Commission, Council of Europe, and other), partly regulating this area

(framework law on primary and secondary schools at the BiH level, promises in the education reform, common core curriculum and Guidelines for writing the textbooks of history and geography) and creating a legal frame for establishment of constructive educational practices that would be in the function of reconstruction and rebuilding of the society.

These documents envisage that education system should be such as to support the democratic development of Bosnia and Herzegovina, a system that promotes respect of ethnic and cultural diversity as a precondition for survival and development of the whole society.

Textbooks, plans and programs and generally history teaching in BiH attracted a lot of attention, and history teaching was rightfully defined as one of the most important factors for peace and stability in future. The attention and activity was coming more from the international factors, less from domestic. And even then, from domestic, it was more reluctantly than voluntarily. The basic problem is the fact that in BiH there are three parallel school systems with three different teaching curriculum and accompanying textbooks. The differences are particularly visible in 'national subjects', where history, again, has a special place. Since textbooks that were in use in BiH after the war were considered as partly discriminatory and since they did not reflect anything common in the field of history, culture and language of peoples who live in BiH, or BiH itself was negated, the audit and review of textbooks has been initiated with the help of the International community. Since 1998 various commission have been working on improving the situation in textbooks. During the school season 2002/03 there was a review of textbooks at the inter-entity level, with the aim to remove the inappropriate contents from history textbooks. This process was completed before the beginning of school year 2003/04. At the ministerial conference of Ministers of Education in May 2000, there was an agreement on harmonization of all three education systems. The Ministers, further on, agreed that starting from the summer of 2002, textbooks for national subjects will no longer be imported from Croatia or Serbia.

But the changes did not stop there. There followed an agreement on Common Core Curricula ('CCC') signed by all the Ministers of Education in 2003, in order to increase the part of 'the common' in education system in BiH, which would ease the transfer of students from one school to another in a different administrative area of the country. The 'CCC' for history is world's history, while contents of national history remained at the competence of cantonal or entity (RS) plans and programs. The 'CCC' did not change anything essentially, since as common were taken the contents that were already studied by all (topics from world's history). After that, education authorities in BiH, at the initiative of and supported by the OSCE Mission in BiH, CoE, and Georg Eckert Institute, produced *Guidelines for writing textbooks of history and geography for primary and secondary schools in BiH*, which were adopted at the beginning of 2006 by all the competent ministries. The starting points of the guidelines defined that the students should get the basic understanding of history of all three constitutive peoples and national minorities; that BiH should be the starting point; that all three constitutive peoples,

minorities and neighboring states should be represented in a non-biased way, and that interactive learning and comparative methodology approaches should be applied during writing of textbooks. Thus, the Guidelines became obligatory for textbook authors. *The Guidelines had different impact to Croat, Serb and Bosniak teaching curriculum.* It was assessed that textbooks for Croat plan and program had least improvements, those written for Serb curriculum were improved, but with no major changes in the contents, especially when it comes to the national history. In the textbooks for Croat majority the focus remained on national history of Croats, while in textbooks for Serb majority the emphasis is still on Serb national history. Textbooks made according to the federal plan and program (for major Bosniak area) had a significant improvement starting from 2003. In those textbooks general ratio and focus on the history of BiH was not disputable, but whether in representing the BiH history there is a sufficient part of history of all the constitutive peoples and minorities with the necessary review of the history of neighboring areas, or the stress was placed on the state and Bosniak history. Although there is a visible improvement, especially in some 'Bosniak' textbooks, we believe that pre-defined balance, which is necessary, (state, BiH peoples / nations, neighboring countries in which some of BiH constitutive nations also live, world's history) was not reached. (See: A review of changes in history, by Katarina Batarilo, Special annex, 'Svijetla riječi', January 2009.) All the aforementioned showed that despite the noticeable positive effects, the Guidelines without change in system of education and without quality plans and programs, cannot solve the essence of the problem, as for an essential change in history teaching of BiH and its people it is necessary to build-in the mentioned balance in curriculum, as the conception of textbooks – the most widely used teaching means in our reality, mostly depends on it. This does not mean the necessity of a unified teaching plan and program, but necessity of detailed harmonizing principles, that would be an integral parts of teaching programs, where disagreements or common points among peoples in BiH would be presented in a scientific way. The bottom line is, peoples of/in Bosnia are pointed one to each other.

Although legislative changes and changes in education in general were important steps in securing the preconditions for reform of education system, the analysis of teaching plans and programs and valid textbooks, who mainly come out of the teaching plans and programs, show little essential improvement in history teaching, both in terms of content and methodology. We agree that the set goals in the legal acts and accompanying agreements did not find the place, to a sufficient degree, in educational practice (meaning that: BiH education system in its all 12 administrative units develops the awareness of belonging to the state of BiH; to give education about self and others in a way that will stimulate mutual understanding and solidarity among peoples; to promote human rights and prepare an individual person for a life in a democratic society; to provide quality education freed from any form of discrimination for every child and at all levels). (See *analysis of history textbooks in: Education in BiH*)

– *what do we teach our children? Analysis of textbook contents for national subjects, Open Society fund BiH, proMente, Sarajevo, 2007.*)

The latest activities of authorities in terms of changing the existing state show there are certain moves forward, but there is no will and readiness for significant changes, but only cosmetic ones. This conclusion is well illustrated by a round table '*Analysis of teaching plans and programs for nine-year primary schools in BiH*' held on 19 May 2009, organized by the Federal Ministry of Education, which gathered in one place representatives of all levels of education authorities in BiH. This event, as stated by the organizers, '*gathered for the first time education experts for development of curricula from the whole BiH, representatives of Agencies for pre-school education, primary and secondary schools in BiH, Ministries of Education (RS, FBiH, Brcko District, Cantons), Pedagogic Institutes and representatives of the project EQA/OKO – ensuring quality in education and OSCE Mission in BiH.*' Conclusions reached ('it is necessary to make new, that is to amend the existing CCC that would correspond to the conception of a nine-year primary education; to make a quality evaluation of teaching plans and program in BiH in order to improve their quality, particularly adjusting the teaching content to the mental and physical development of children; to standardize and harmonize the existing plans and programs with special emphasis to the equalizing the names of subjects and defining the outcome of teaching and criteria of grading) and, especially, the conclusion that after comparing the framework curriculum for nine year primary education in BiH, curriculum for nine years primary education on Croat language and curriculum in Republika Srpska, and teaching program used in Brcko District, it was noticed their diversity, but also was noticed that there were no major problems with the transfer of students between classes and schools, that is, that there is a vertical and horizontal flow of students in BiH. This shows that in the near future it is hard to expect serious actions by the education authorities in this field, as there is no desire to touch the core of the problem, and that the problem, as such, is not recognized.

Also, the recent decision of the *Council for harmonization of textbook policy in Federation BiH*, composed by the federal Minister of Education and all Cantonal ministers, adopting the new *Rule book* (11 September 2009), offered new solutions in procedure of approving the textbooks and they do not touch into the problem of essentially three separated and, from the perspective of history as a subject, three confronted education systems of education (two of them in Federation BiH), but they deal more with procedural and technical issues. In summary, all independent analysis show that, although there is a certain improvement, there is still an internal division of education to three systems based on ethnic identity of constitutive peoples and all, some less some more, stress differences and avoid teaching about other and different. With realization of a Bosniak, Serb and Croat teaching curriculum (not entering into details that further deviate from positive norms, and differences are large), a selective historical awareness is being created among children, and it does not have sufficient number of

connecting points, and it is quite often confronted. Certain freedom (up to 30% of deviation from prescribed content) in performing history teaching on certain areas and subsystems, which is not systemically regulated and accompanied by organized and well-thought disburdening of teaching contents, often confuse teachers and does not produce the desired effect. This, and similar prognosis for the future, are sufficient reason for us to believe it is high time to look for essential changes through changes in teaching plans and programs.

Following this sentiment, EUROCLIO HIP, with support of the BiH Open Society Fund, this year realize a project that has unified several activities. It was planned and realized to hold seminars that aimed at promoting of development of skills in history teaching and exchange of experiences with teachers (by means of discussions and analysis of the questionnaire filled by the participants of the four held seminars) and analyzing their opinion about the teaching plans and programs and possible changes in them. As a preparatory work for the necessary future changes in the existing system of history education, we analyzed the position of history and way it is being taught in education systems of the west and in some countries in East and Central Europe. The first group is selected as a model of teaching history in developed societies, and C and E Europe countries that are undergoing a reform and transition (education sector included) have a faith similar to ours, so their experiences (good and bad) can be used in searching for the way towards freeing from ideological interpretation and modernization of history teaching (here we must add that our situation has additional difficulty – several national histories). An integral part of the project is the presented analysis of the current plans and programs, focused on basic concepts of teaching history without going into the accompanying details. This seminar in Sarajevo (6 to 8 November) should grasp the overall activity, possibly correct some of presented positions and offer a general proposed direction for changes the currently applied teaching Curricula.

**All the mentioned and implemented activities served to give a general assessment that the change of the existing state in education, speaking of history, is unsatisfactory and bad for the future of the country and its citizens, and that there should be deep and essential changes in the teaching plans and programs as basic documents for planning and implementing the history teaching.**

*General assessment and a proposal:*

*Important factor in further development of history teaching in BiH schools is defining the general approach to topics that are interpreted differently and sometimes conflictingly in historiography. The key problem is to select the bibliography that can be trusted. From this, our basic thesis is that more space should be left for selected topics to develop skills on, at the expense of accumulating facts and one-sided truths. This does not mean to completely leave out learning about the past, but to find the balance there.*

*The goal of our analysis was not to criticize for the sake of criticism, but a critic that would show the necessity of improvement and defining the areas where it is necessary. The offer of quality solutions is in good part limited by the actual political, social, psychological and other condition, since, if all these should be neglected and if the stress is put only on what would be the best for a student in BiH as a part of universe, the activity would not give real (realistic) result, while, on the other hand, too large consideration to this would close the possibility of a real improvement in quality of education for history as a subject. Therefore, we decided that our approach is a reasonable measure of both. The general proposal how to proceed would be to reduce the mandatory contents by shrinking the units and putting the accent on a system and a process, and from other side to define units that will receive more teaching time and enable a multiperspective approach. Putting controversial and sensitive topics into this group would reach double goal, it would develop a critic relation of students towards the past, and students' skills in general, and on the other side a student who would work with controversial and sensitive topics would be saved from exclusive truths, getting to know other views, through sources as well as through different interpretations in bibliography. We are aware that the teaching plan and program is just a frame that would enable that, while quality textbooks and manuals, and of course, the teacher, are a necessary part to such approach to history teaching – we believe more useful and more interesting one.*

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