

**Towards Inter-Religious Understanding  
in Bosnia and Herzegovina:**

**A Status Report on the Pilot Course  
*Culture of Religions***

**OSCE Mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina  
Education Department**

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## Summary

*Culture of Religions* is a subject designed to teach students about the major religions – Christianity (Catholicism and Orthodox religion), Islam, and Judaism – practiced in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH). The course is not intended to supplant a student’s right to religious education in the faith they so choose. Rather, it serves as a confidence-building measure which seeks to advance inter-religious tolerance and reduce potential misunderstanding that a lack of knowledge of faiths and cultures other than one’s own may create.

*Culture of Religions* was designed for students attending the last year of primary school or the first year of secondary school. Since its inception, it has been offered on a trial basis in schools throughout Bosnia and Herzegovina, and in many cases differently from how it was originally conceived. While the OSCE Mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina has supported the design and implementation of this course, there is currently no domestic “go to” source of information about its current or future implementation. Even the country’s education officials appear to have little information of how successful *Culture of Religions* is within their areas of responsibility. To fill this gap, this report provides a summary of the current efforts with teaching *Culture of Religions* and recommendations for its more successful delivery in the future. It identifies six major problem areas associated with the current teaching of the course:

- (1) Curricula for *Culture of Religions* differ from one school to the next.
- (2) No textbooks or standardized course materials exist.
- (3) Seminars for current and future *Culture of Religions* teachers are limited in number.
- (4) Government provides little to no oversight and guidance to teaching of the course.
- (5) Schools to introduce *Culture of Religions* face an already demanding curriculum.
- (6) Religious communities, most specifically the Catholic Church, oppose the course.

This research also shows that *Culture of Religions*, where it is offered, is working: teachers and students note increased levels of understanding, acceptance, and tolerance. Although the OSCE is committed to supporting and developing *Culture of Religions*, the future of this course is in hands of the country’s government officials and agencies. The problem areas highlighted in this report are not intractable; in fact, steps should be taken to ensure that all the necessary requirements for teaching of *Culture of Religions* are met.

## Recommendations

OSCE, together with its domestic and international partners in education reform, will work towards fulfilling the following recommendations:

- Teachers of *Culture of Religions* across Bosnia and Herzegovina use an inconsistent methodology, often neglecting to emphasize some of the proposed themes in the curriculum (e.g. religion in relation to history and geography). The Working Group of *Culture of Religions* experts’ revised 2004 curriculum is the most well developed, comprehensive *Culture of Religions* curriculum available. It should be distributed to and used by all teachers.
- Curricula across Bosnia and Herzegovina must be revised and reduced to make room for *Culture of Religions* as a stand-alone course along with religious education classes. This reform should generate a framework curriculum with detailed standards defined in terms of learning objectives (these could be developed by a future state education

agency). Changing the standards in this way will ensure that all students learn *Culture of Religions*.

- The lack of textbooks and course materials has been one of teachers' major complaints about *Culture of Religions*. Efforts should be made to produce and make available the necessary materials at a reduced cost.
- Teachers who have been trained to teach *Culture of Religions* all report benefits of such training. As *Culture of Religions* is offered more widely, teacher training should also be offered more regularly. The pedagogical institutes, ministries of education, as well as the country's institutions of higher education (where future teachers are generally trained), should all take part in this endeavour.
- To better understand local attitudes towards *Culture of Religions*, its effect on society, as well as where and how the course is being implemented, further research on *Culture of Religions* should be undertaken regularly. All actors concerned about *Culture of Religions* should be involved in this effort in order to advance understanding of the subject's successes and shortcomings.
- Dialogue should be re-engaged with religious communities in an effort to re-affirm and gain their support for *Culture of Religions*.

## **Introduction**

Inter-religious strife continues to be a significant obstacle to reconciliation in post-war Bosnia and Herzegovina. In the current school system, students who choose to attend religious classes are primarily learning about their own confessions and receive little introduction to the other religious practices in the country. Recognizing the importance of this problem, the international community, together with the country's education officials, set about to create and implement a course titled *Culture of Religions*. The course, it was hoped, would teach students about the beliefs and practices of all the major faiths practiced in Bosnia and Herzegovina (Christianity – Catholicism and Orthodox religion, Islam, and Judaism), thereby promoting inter-religious understanding and tolerance. Implementation of the pilot courses across the country began in earnest in 2004. To date, no studies have been prepared or data collected regarding their progress. This paper fills that gap and presents the current status of pilot efforts. It also recommends that *Culture of Religions* be designed for use in schools throughout Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The information for this report was gathered from a number of sources. Mission education officers conducted surveys in their areas of responsibility. These surveys included interviews with actors directly involved in the implementation of *Culture of Religions* – teachers, pedagogues, and school administrators. In addition, the Mission conducted interviews with relevant non-governmental organizations and its partners. Information and interview reports collected by the Goethe Institute were an additional source of information used in this research. Finally, a broad literature review of relevant decisions, cases, legislation, and journal articles was also conducted.

## **The Origins of *Culture of Religions***

The idea for *Culture of Religions* can be traced back to a meeting of the Conference of the Ministers of Education of Bosnia and Herzegovina held on 10 May 2000 in Sarajevo. At this meeting – convened by the Office of the High Representative and the Council of Europe – the entity Ministers of Education pledged a number of key education reforms in Bosnia and Herzegovina. For instance, they stated that education “*should be used to bring [communities] together and live in tolerance with one another.*” It was further noted that steps ought to be taken to at once honour the unique cultural and linguistic heritage of all constituent peoples in Bosnia and Herzegovina, while at the same time fostering “*intercultural understanding and communication.*” One aspect of this would include “*teaching about all major religions practised in Bosnia and Herzegovina.*”

This declaration provides the foundation for the entire *Culture of Religions* effort. Although no legislation related to *Culture of Religions* has been passed, the adoption of the course into any curriculum would make it a legal requirement. Until then, *Culture of Religions* will remain a pilot project implemented only where cantonal and entity ministers of education have the will to do so.

## **Regional Efforts in Teaching Religion**

In the Republic Croatia, Catholic religious classes are offered as part of the country's curriculum. Students choosing not to take classes on Catholicism may request that their religious instruction be offered through their faith community. Although many non-governmental organizations have worked with students and teachers towards promoting

“education towards peace”, the Croatian government has discouraged teachers from attending any similar training unless it sanctioned them. Accordingly, the government has organized little training in this regard, and not much progress has been made.<sup>1</sup>

In 2001, the Republic of Serbia introduced optional religious classes into their curriculum for the first years of both primary and secondary schools. Seven faiths were granted permission to offer religious classes in schools. For those students opting not to take religious classes, a course titled “Civic Education” was created. This drew criticism from religious authorities who argued that the name of the alternative course implied that civic values were not learned in religious classes.

The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia adopted a different approach. In 2000, a culture of religions class was planned but its implementation was found questionably illegal. As a result, all religious education in public schools was ultimately abolished by a Constitutional Court decision. Since then, the Macedonian government has had additional discussions about the course with the Macedonian Orthodox Church, but to date, no compromise has been reached. Many Macedonians, as chronicled by the Kotor Network, have been advocating for a course similar in content to that of *Culture of Religions*, in order to better reflect the multi-religious character of Macedonia.<sup>2</sup>

### **Timeline for Implementing *Culture of Religions* in Bosnia and Herzegovina**

Development of a curriculum for *Culture of Religions* began after the Conference of the Ministers of Education of Bosnia and Herzegovina had signed an Education Declaration and Agreement on 10 May 2000. From 2001 through 2002, the Office of the High Representative and the Goethe Institute put well over 100,000 euros into the development of this curriculum. At that time, *Culture of Religions* was a joint project between the Office of the High Representative, the Goethe Institute, UNESCO, ABRAHAM (which left in April 2003), and the OSCE. Currently, the Goethe Institute is in charge of this project, providing research, materials, and training. The OSCE has played a significant role in helping the Goethe Institute organize meetings with the local authorities and advocate for *Culture of Religions*.

A group of local experts – mostly from Bosnia and Herzegovina but also from Serbia and Slovenia – and two German experts developed a *Culture of Religions* curriculum. In November 2002, a preliminary draft and a Teacher’s Guide were distributed to the education ministers of all the cantons and entities and the Brčko District BiH. These ministers subsequently appointed teachers and pedagogues to attend two teacher seminars. The first was held in Neum in December 2002, while the second took place in Prozor-Rama (Šćit) in August 2003. In October 2003, the Catholic Church intervened to halt the Croat Ministers of Education involvement in the *Culture of Religions* effort. As a result, on 8 October 2003 a letter was issued, signed by the education ministers from the predominantly Croat Cantons<sup>3</sup> and the Director of the Pedagogical Institute in Mostar. The letter stated, among other things, that the signatories were “neither initiators nor holders of the project of introducing the subject of *Culture of Religions* in the curriculum. They went on to state that the course lacked “legal or theological-scientific and pedagogical grounds.” They found the course to be in and

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<sup>1</sup> Bognar, Ladislav, “Problems and Perspectives in the Development of Schooling in Croatia” [Online] [http://www-gewi.kfunigraz.ac.at/csbsc/country\\_reports/Education\\_Croatia.htm](http://www-gewi.kfunigraz.ac.at/csbsc/country_reports/Education_Croatia.htm), 3-22-2007.

<sup>2</sup> Matevski, Zoran, “The Religious Education in the Pedagogical System in the Republic of Macedonia”, [Online] <http://kotor-network.info/papers/2005/Macedonia.Matevski.htm>, 21-3-2007.

<sup>3</sup> Cantons Posavina, West Herzegovina and Canton10, as well as Cantons Herzegovina-Neretva and Central Bosnia

of itself contradictory, unsustainable, and representative of a ‘Marxist’ approach towards religion.

### ***Why Reject Culture of Religions?***

When the Ministers opposed the idea of *Culture of Religions* in 2003, their first objection was that there existed numerous logistical problems regarding teacher training and finding textbooks. In their view, instead of bringing students closer, the course would actually have lead to “a new unrest, division and conflict.” Furthermore, the Ministers argued that the content of *Culture of Religions* propagated religious relativism, syncretism, and unitarianism. They stated that education should promote differences to allow students to “respect one another in their differences and their identity in whole.” The Ministers were also of the opinion that *Culture of Religions* was a redundant course which could not be forced on students. They believed that students were already taught tolerance and respect in ethics and religion courses. Finally, to insist that students who had already been already enrolled in religious classes take an additional religion-related class was seen as going against previous agreements with the religious communities of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

However, earlier that same month, Ministers of Education and education representatives Zlatko Bundalo (Republika Srpska), Severin Montina (Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina), Šefik Mršić (Una-Sana Canton) and Esad Atić (Brčko District BiH) had agreed to pilot *Culture of Religions* courses in their regions. The next month, on 4 November 2003, Catholic and Orthodox Bishops issued a joint letter requesting that *Culture of Religions* be made an alternative subject to regular religious education. They also requested that their respective Churches play a role in deciding the content, textbooks, and teachers for the course. This request was confusing given that both religious faiths were involved in the initial development of the *Culture of Religions* curriculum. Moreover, the request to make the course an alternative to religious education, as opposed to a supplement, seemed to be an attempt by Church officials to minimize the number of students exposed to the course. The letter stated that 95 per cent of students in Bosnia and Herzegovina chose religious classes, which implied that there was a minimal student interest in *Culture of Religions*.

The initial phase of the pilot *Culture of Religions* classes was supposed to happen in 21 schools – one in each canton, ten in Republika Srpska, and one in Brčko. Although the course was originally designed for the last year of primary school or the first year of secondary school, the lack of state-level standards made it possible for Ministers of Education to introduce the course at varying levels. Thus, in Republika Srpska, *Culture of Religions* was introduced in the 9<sup>th</sup> grade of primary schools, while schools in the Federation and Brčko District BiH offered the course in the first grade of secondary schools. In Republika Srpska, the Minister of Education also commissioned new schools each year to pilot the course. In 2005, eight more schools were selected to pilot *Culture of Religions*. However, as will be discussed below, many of the schools that were selected to implement the course have failed to do so.

### **Current Implementation of *Culture of Religions***

In Republika Srpska, where *Culture of Religions* is offered in the 9<sup>th</sup> grade of primary school, the course is mandatory in addition to religious courses. The following 13 schools in Republika Srpska are currently teaching *Culture of Religions*:

| <b>Name of Primary School</b> | <b>Town in Republika Srpska</b> |
|-------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| PS Jovan Jovanović Zmaj       | Trebinje                        |
| PS Sveti Sava                 | Bileća                          |
| PS Njegoš                     | Berkovići                       |
| PS Đura Jakšić                | Šargovac, Banja Luka            |
| PS Petar Kočić                | Han-Kola, Banja Luka            |
| PS Petar Kočić                | Mrkonjić Grad                   |
| PS Petar Kočić                | Prijedor                        |
| PS Vuk Karadžić               | Omarska, Prijedor               |
| PS Radoje Domanović           | Doboj                           |
| PS Vuk Karadžić               | Ročević, Zvornik                |
| PS Jovan Dučić                | Bijeljina                       |
| PS Sutjeska                   | Modriča                         |
| PS Branko Ćopić               | Donji Agići, Novi Grad          |

The actual number of schools in Republika Srpska that offer *Culture of Religions* is difficult to assess because some schools, although instructed by the Republika Srpska Minister of Education to offer the course, have not done so. One example is Primary School Mladen Stojanović in Bronzani Majdan (Banja Luka Municipality), which was scheduled to pilot the course in 2003. However, the school director, Mr. Nenad Mihajlović, sent a letter to the Republika Srpska Ministry of Education in 2005, stating that the course could not be offered due to transportation reasons: offering *Culture of Religions* extended the length of the school day for students in that class who, given the intermittent bus service offered to the school, have had to wait 2-3 hours for the next bus home. Despite this, Primary School Mladen Stojanović was on the list of *Culture of Religions* pilot schools, distributed on 1 August 2006 by the Republika Srpska Ministry of Education. In discussing the case with an OSCE education officer, the school director and pedagogue both confirmed that *Culture of Religions* was still not offered in the 2006-2007 school year.

In the Federation, the implementation of the course varies. Because of interference by the Catholic Church, the predominantly Croat cantons have refused to participate in the pilot program. Conversely, a number of cantons have embraced *Culture of Religions* and made it available in every school depending, of course, on whether the course is taught in primary or secondary schools. The following shows a breakdown of pilot programs per canton and their current status:

| Canton                   | Number of Schools Introduced | Current Status  |
|--------------------------|------------------------------|---|
| Una-Sana                 | 0                            | Not Taught <sup>4</sup> .   |
| Posavina                 | 0                            | Ministry of Education has taken no action <sup>5</sup> .  |
| Tuzla                    | All                          | Available as alternative to religion classes in all grades of primary school, and first year of secondary school.   |
| Zenica-Doboj             | 1                            | Only taught in Srednja Tehnička Škola Zenica; Pedagogical Institute Zenica plans to introduce the course in all grammar schools in students' 4 <sup>th</sup> year.  |
| Bosnian Podrinje Goražde | 0                            | Previously taught in Secondary School Enver Pozderović Goražde. With revised grammar school curriculum, the course will be taught in the 4 <sup>th</sup> year of all grammar schools. Will begin in two years time. |
| Central Bosnia           | 0                            | Ministry of Education has refused to implement the course.  |
| Herzegovina-Neretva      | 0                            | Ministry of Education has taken no action.  |
| West Herzegovina         | 0                            | Not approved by the Ministry of Education.  |
| Sarajevo                 | All                          | Mandatory in 4 <sup>th</sup> year of all secondary schools, third year of teachers' school and 8 <sup>th</sup> grade of all primary schools.  |
| Canton 10                | 0                            | Not introduced.   |

In Tuzla and Sarajevo Cantons, *Culture of Religions* is taught in all primary and secondary schools, respectively. In Tuzla Canton, the course *History of Religions* was introduced in the 1999-2000 school year as an alternative to religious classes, not a supplement. However, in Sarajevo Canton, where religious classes are taught only in primary school, teaching of *Culture of Religions* in gymnasia neither replaces religious classes nor supplements them.

Currently, the course is not being taught in Brčko District BiH. In the 2005-2006 school year, it was offered as a non-mandatory class to first year students in the Brčko District BiH Gymnasium and scheduled to be taught during the 2006-2007 school year to fourth year students in the Gymnasium. However, the teacher fell ill and the course was postponed, most likely until the next school year. The remaining three secondary schools in Brčko District BiH (School of Economics, Technical School, and Agricultural School) have no plans to introduce *Culture of Religions*. In an interview with an OSCE education officer, the Head of the Secondary Education Subdivision stated that if the course "had to be" introduced into these secondary schools, then it would be. In essence, however, *Culture of Religions* is not a priority of Brčko District BiH education officials, and it seems that only outside pressure may change this. When the Brčko District BiH Educational Active drafted the new primary and secondary school curricula in 2001, religious classes were excluded from the curricula in secondary schools. This may point to why education officials are loath to implement *Culture of Religions*.

<sup>4</sup> School director of Medicinska Škola in Bihać was instructed by the Ministry of Education that *Culture of Religions* could be taught. This year, *Culture of Religions* was offered as an extra-curricular activity. Since student interest was so low, the course was not instructed at all.

<sup>5</sup> Recent comments by the new Minister of Education suggest that officials are open to the idea of *Culture of Religions*.

## Research Findings: Problematic Trends

In examining the success of *Culture of Religions* in the schools where it is currently offered, several problems have been identified.

### *Varied Curricula*

The use of a wide range of curricula for teaching *Culture of Religions* despite a well researched and fully developed curriculum for the course is an obstacle to its growth and success. It should be noted, however, that this curriculum was not immediately available to the Ministers of Education when they signed the agreement in 2000. Consequently, local authorities developed *their own* curricular elements for *Culture of Religions* – often just two or three pages of simple guidance rather than a formal curriculum. Once the *Culture of Religions* curriculum was developed, many teachers continued, however, to use the already existing curricular elements.

As previously noted, a draft curriculum for *Culture of Religions* was developed in 2002 and revised with input from Ministries of Education in 2004. Given the amount of time and money invested in this effort, the curriculum represents the most advanced and complete curriculum available for teaching *Culture of Religions* in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Nevertheless, the curriculum is not universally used throughout the country.

### ***Which Curriculum to Choose?***

Teachers across the country have been using different curricula to teach their *Culture of Religions* classes. In Primary School Branko Ćopić in Donji Agići, the teacher uses the Republika Srpska Curriculum from 2005. In Primary School Petar Kočić in Mrkonjić Grad, the teacher uses a combination of the Working Group's 2002 and revised 2004 curriculum. Primary School Vuk Karadžić in Bratunac uses the revised 2004 curriculum. All schools in Sarajevo Canton use their own curriculum. Interestingly, when Secondary School Enver Pozderović in Goražde taught *Culture of Religions* last year, they used the Republika Srpska Curriculum from 2005.

In Republika Srpska, a three-page curriculum was sent out to eight *Culture of Religions* pilot schools for the 2005-2006 school year by the Head of Primary Education, Ranko Savanović on 4 October 2005. Compared to the over 100 pages of the *Culture of Religions* Working Group's Revised Curriculum, this curriculum is clearly insufficient. Because the Republika Srpska curriculum is designed for secondary school students, it is difficult to adapt it for primary school students. Yet the class is still taught to the 9<sup>th</sup> year of primary school.

One school director in Republika Srpska claims that the entity's Pedagogical Institute itself has no information on the proper curriculum for *Culture of Religions*. However, according to the OSCE education officer reports, there is little communication between the Republika Srpska Minister of Education and the Pedagogical Institute, which has led to this confusion. The *Culture of Religions* teacher in Primary School Petar Kočić in Mrkonjić Grad is still using the draft curriculum from 2002 and lacks the revised curriculum from 2004. The *Culture of Religions* teacher Primary School Petar Kočić in Han-Koča does not have copies of any of the Working Group curricula for the course.

Sarajevo Canton has also issued its own two-page curriculum. The new curriculum was developed by Professors Vladimir Premec, Salih Fočo, Enes Karić, and Luka Markešić. In May 2005, a copy of this curriculum and an accompanying letter from the Minister of

Education was distributed to all primary and secondary schools in Sarajevo Canton. Before this, most teachers in Sarajevo Canton were using the curriculum developed by the *Culture of Religions* Working Group. As a result, many teachers have combined the two curricula in their teaching. Tuzla Canton secondary schools use the Working Group's curriculum; however, they have reduced the number of hours for *Culture of Religions* from two to one.

### ***Different Methods of Evaluation***

Due to the lack of standards in general, no standard means of assessment for *Culture of Religions* are used throughout Bosnia and Herzegovina. Thus, teachers grade students differently, alternating between descriptive and numerical grades, which then factor in differently in the overall grade point average. In other words, for all other subjects, students are graded numerically.

The method of evaluation has been a contentious issue, especially in Republika Srpska. Only recently, on 19 December 2006, did Minister of Education Anton Kasipović issue a notice that all grades for *Culture of Religions* should be numerical, not descriptive (as outlined in the 2005 curriculum). This was a positive development given that, as noted by teachers from Primary School Jovan Jovanović Zmaj in Trebinje, student interest in *Culture of Religions* was not high because they were grade descriptively.

In Tuzla Canton, teachers use numerical grades. Still, the way grading is conducted makes the overall quality of the course questionable. Namely, at the beginning of each school year, students decide whether to enrol in religious classes or *Culture of Religions*. If less than eleven students choose *Culture of Religions*, they do not attend any classes but are simply given materials and topics to prepare for one final exam at the end of the year, which then serves as their final grade. In other words, although students receive a numerical grade, they hardly benefit from taking the course. As a result, not much comparison of student knowledge can be made between students who complete the course in this manner vis à vis students who take a year-long course with their peers.

### ***No Textbooks or Teaching Supplies***

Teachers of *Culture of Religions* often complain about a lack of textbooks and teaching supplies. Of the relevant textbooks currently available, most specifically a *Lexicon of Religions*, many schools, such as Primary School Petar Kočić in Mrkonjić Grad, have found the materials too expensive. This means that teachers often need to spend extra time developing their own reading materials and teaching supplies, as those in Jovan Jovanović Zmaj in Trebinje and Primary School Jovan Dučić in Bijeljina. In Primary School Sveti Sava in Bileća, the school director noted that the lack of textbooks and teaching materials also decreased student interest in the course.

In February 2006, the Swiss non-governmental organization "HEKS" fleshed out a two-year project proposal to develop teaching materials for *Culture of Religions* courses. The project was supposed to produce four kinds of materials:

- (1) Children's Class Book (Focused on religious customs, corresponding to the classes in the *Culture of Religions* curriculum);
- (2) "100 Questions" Folder (Collection of young people's questions on inter-religious co-existence);
- (3) Teacher's Manual (Designed to assist in delivering lessons and conducting activities);
- (4) Reader (On inter-religious co-existence with an overview of recent interpretations by Bosnia and Herzegovina's theologians and historians).

Unfortunately, even after funding was secured, HEKS backed away from the project and it was never implemented. This was a result of pressure from the Catholic Church and the politicization of this issue in the Inter-religious Council, of which the Church is a member.

Some teachers have been successful in developing their own materials for their *Culture of Religions* classes. In Tuzla Canton, teachers, in lieu of textbooks, have used various encyclopaedias, articles, and essays on religion, as well as relied on holy books for the major religions as teaching sources. They have found articles published by the International Forum Bosnia on multiculturalism and religions in Bosnia and Herzegovina especially useful. The pedagogue from Primary School Đura Jakšić in Šargovac said she had been promised a copy of a *Lexicon on Religions* at a teacher training session hosted by the Goethe Institute, but she apparently never received it.

### ***Insufficient Teacher Training***

Effective implementation of *Culture of Religions* requires well trained teachers. To that end, various non-governmental organizations in cooperation with the OSCE have offered teacher training. This following table shows the series of seminars organized by the Goethe Institute (in conjunction with the OSCE):

| <b>Date</b>   | <b>Location</b>    |
|---------------|--------------------|
| December 2002 | Neum               |
| August 2003   | Prozor-Rama (Šćit) |
| October 2003  | Banja Luka         |
| 2004          | Neum               |
| 2004          | Prozor-Rama        |
| 2005          | Sarajevo           |
| August 2006   | Prozor-Rama (Šćit) |

Apart from the seminars offered by the Goethe Institute, the Pedagogical Institute in Tuzla organized teacher training in 2003. Due to a demand for more *Culture of Religion* seminars, the Tuzla-based non-governmental organization Amica Educa developed its own training titled “The Wisdom of Planet Earth”. This pilot program was a nine-day seminar split into three day modules which took place from February through April 2006. The training was well received and advertised through the Tuzla Pedagogical Institute. A second session is being conducted following the same three-module format in February, April, and June 2007.

Amica Educa’s seminars have been designed for teachers who work with students ages seven through ten. They are not conducted on any of the currently approved *Culture of Religions* curricula, but rather on an independent curriculum developed by Amica Educa and in response to the Tuzla Canton teachers’ demands. In these seminars, teachers are taught about Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Native American religions, as well as different interactive activities to engage their students in the topics covered in *Culture of Religions*. To date, Amica Educa’s two seminars have been administered to 27 teachers. In comparison, based on OSCE education officer reports and official Republika Srpska and Federation documents, some 44 teachers from across the country have attended the Goethe Institute seminars. Their interest has varied: while some have attended the seminar many times, others have taken it once or twice<sup>6</sup>. In all cases, both the Goethe Institute and Amica Educa trainees received certificates to attest their participation in professional development opportunities.

<sup>6</sup> See Appendix for the list of names of teachers who have attended the Goethe Institute seminars.

There is also teacher training available, or being developed, in universities across the country. The University of Sarajevo will begin to offer a master's program in Religious Studies in the fall 2007, predominantly designed for those who will teach *Culture of Religions* in secondary schools. This will be a two-year program, run in co-ordination with Arizona State University and the University of Oslo, and attended by 20 to 25 students each year. Additionally, the local non-governmental organization "Trans-Cultural Psycho-Social Education Foundation" plans to offer an undergraduate program at the universities in Zenica and Banja Luka to train primary school teachers. Still, two problems with teacher training persist: there is no co-ordinated body to organize and standardize teacher training for *Culture of Religions*, and a relatively small number of teachers is trained to teach the course.

### ***No Government Oversight and Non-Implementation of Culture of Religions***

Currently, teaching of *Culture of Religions* is flawed in many ways. The lack of government oversight (entity and cantonal) regarding the implementation of the course and a general lack of support have in particular had a detrimental impact on *Culture of Religions*. Given that the course is simply added to the existing curricula and requires teacher training and more commitment on the part of the school directors, assistance from government officials would be highly desired.

The School Director from Primary School Radoje Domanović in Doboj emphasized the lack of interest by education authorities in *Culture of Religions*. This lack of oversight is best illustrated by the case of Primary School Mladen Stojanović in Bronzani Majdan (Banja Luka Municipality). This school informed the Republika Srpska Ministry of Education that as of the 2005-2006 school year, the school would not be teaching *Culture of Religions* owing to student transportation issues. This decision was not rejected by the Republika Srpska Ministry of Education. Thus, when on 1 August 2006, this Ministry issued a list of schools included in the pilot project for *Culture of Religions* within Republika Srpska, it was surprising to find that Primary School Mladen Stojanović was still on included in that list.

Not all the schools designated by Ministries of Education to pilot *Culture of Religions* have done so. This is by and large the result of the Ministers not following up with the school administration on how to proceed with the course, as well as of an overall apathy in schools toward implementing new programs. As an illustration, a number of school directors in the Eastern Republika Srpska (Sarajevo area) received notification from the Republika Srpska Ministry of Education that *Culture of Religions* ought to be piloted in their schools in the 2005-2006 school year. However, the school directors claimed that they had received no further instructions from this Ministry, including copies of the *Culture of Religions* curriculum. Consequently, the course was never implemented in any of these schools. In an interview with OSCE education officers, the School Director of Primary School Sveti Sava in Bileća complained that there were a number of Republika Srpska schools, such as the ones in Gradiška, which had rejected to offer *Culture of Religions* without being penalized. The school director then went on to question why Primary School Sveti Sava had not done the same thing.

The Ministers of Education in the predominantly Croat Cantons have failed to authorize and implement *Culture of Religions* despite the agreements reached by the entity Ministers of Education back in 2000, which were subsequently endorsed by all the cantonal ministers. In Posavina Canton, Secondary School Fra Martin Nedić had two teachers attend training in 2004, and yet, the school directors never implemented *Culture of Religions* because the Posavina Canton Ministry of Education never provided any further instructions.

Another problem with government involvement in *Culture of Religions* is that ministries of education have offered very little aid to those schools attempting to pilot the course. Since the course is relatively new, many teachers and school directors have questions about how it should be taught and implemented. In Tuzla Canton, teachers object being given such the curriculum and no additional training, instructions, or literature which they might be able to use in their classes. This has then created the need for non-governmental organizations like Amica Educa to offer teacher training. In Republika Srpska too, teachers and school administration have complained that the Ministry of Education and Pedagogical Institute do not care much about *Culture of Religions* and have offered no clear instructions about the course.

### ***Demanding Curriculum***

In Republika Srpska, *Culture of Religions* is incorporated into the curriculum that already has religious instruction. In the Federation cantons that teach *Culture of Religions*, the course is offered as an alternative to religious classes, not an addition<sup>7</sup>. Hence, in Republika Srpska, *Culture of Religions* presents an additional burden to students and school administration. On a normal schedule, students attend 30 hours of classes a week or six hours of classes a day. With the addition of one hour of *Culture of Religions* a week, students have 31 hours of classes a week, and once a week, they attend seven classes in a row.

As explained by the School Director from Primary School Petar Kočić in Mrkonjić Grad, this additional course places a large strain on schools by forcing them to adopt floating schedules. Floating schedules create a system where the times of classes change unpredictably every week, which makes the hiring of part-time teachers extremely difficult. A number of teachers and administrators also claimed that this addition to the curriculum beyond 30 hours a week was illegal. However, in interviews conducted by the OSCE with the head of the Republika Srpska Pedagogical Institute in September 2006, it was stated that, at that time, no laws were being violated. In the future, it is hoped, framework curricula will help to resolve these issues by having a reduced number of courses taught, and *Culture of Religions* as a mandatory course offered along with elective religious classes.

### ***Religious Opposition***

One of the biggest impediments to the implementation of *Culture of Religions* within the Federation has been the opposition by the Catholic Church leadership. As previously noted, on 8 October 2003, the five education ministers of the predominantly Croat cantons in the Federation withdrew their support for the course. To date, the Ministers of Education in these cantons have failed to take any action regarding *Culture of Religions*.

The issue at hand seems to stem from the Catholic Church leadership itself, since in August 2003, a number of the same Ministers of Education who later backed away from supporting *Culture of Religions*, attended the Goethe Institute seminar in Prozor-Rama (Šćit). At that training, the ministers expressed their support for *Culture of Religions*, only to changer their minds a few months later. Until that point, there had been no communication between high-level Catholic authorities in the Vatican and the Mission. Therefore, in late November 2003, Ambassador Robert Beecroft held a meeting with the Apostolic Nuncio of the Embassy of the Holy See in which *Culture of Religions* was discussed. In 2004, meetings were held between Mission representatives and Don Ante Pavlović, but again, no tangible progress was made. It appears that without the support and co-operation of the Catholic Church, there is little chance that *Culture of Religions* will be implemented within the Croat majority cantons.

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<sup>7</sup> It should be noted that *Culture of Religions* was explicitly designed to be an addition to the curriculum, not a replacement or alternative to religious instruction.

## Research Findings: Positive Trends

Information gathered through interviews conducted by OSCE and questionnaires sent to *Culture of Religions* teachers by the Goethe Institute indicate two positive trends with respect to the course: satisfactory feedback from teachers and students and increased implementation.

In interviews conducted by OSCE education officers, teachers expressed mixed opinions about the Goethe Institute seminars. Yet the only complaint was not about the content of the seminars, but rather their frequency. Otherwise, teachers from Goražde to Zenica and Mrkonjić Grad all found this training useful. The Minister of Education from Sarajevo Canton even stated: “We deem the organization of teacher training [...] very useful, and would like you to inform us about their schedule so we can come up with a list of teachers who would attend the training.” Amica Educa reports having received overwhelmingly positive feedback from teachers, too.

Teachers viewed the promotion of coexistence and education about diverse religions as an important addition to curricula. The *Culture of Religions* teacher from Secondary School Enver Pozderović in Goražde stated: “*I think that this subject creates a prerequisite for a better coexistence of different religious groups. The greatest advantage of this subject is the fact that it emphasizes the similarity of monotheistic religions – not the differences.*”

### ***Culture of Religions Promotes Tolerance and Understanding***

The *Culture of Religions* teacher in Primary School Radoje Domanović, Doboj, emphasized that the greatest positive aspect of the course was “the fact that *Culture of Religions* conveys knowledge about all religions equally [and] the fact that research is based on historical facts. Students are educated in the spirit of respect [and] tolerance towards other people, without which life... is impossible.”

The *Culture of Religions* teacher from Primary School Vuk Karadžić in Bratunac stated that students especially enjoyed learning about “religion and family” because this brought differing religious beliefs and practices into a more practical model. Students in Primary School Petar Kočić in Mrkonjić Grad were especially enthusiastic about the course. One teacher quoted a student as saying that he “*finds the new subject interesting. It will help [him] get a broader insight into folk traditions and customs, especially for the area of the Balkans. [His] culture of interacting with others will increase, as well as [his] tolerance.*” The teacher at Primary School Petar Kočić noted concrete improvements in overall levels of tolerance: students began to comprehend the value of their own faith, while at the same time respecting the religion and culture of others. A student from Primary School Branko Ćopić in Donji Agići (Novi Grad) said: “*I consider this subject very different from others. It is interesting to learn something more about other peoples in Bosnia and Herzegovina. For example, I knew nothing about Jews and now I see that we live in the same state.*”

One extremely promising development has been an increase in cantonal commitments to a mandatory, far-reaching implementation of *Culture of Religions*. This, coupled with a gradually expanding pool of pilot schools for the course within Republika Srpska, gives hope to the continued expansion and success of *Culture of Religions* across the country. In Zenica-Doboj Canton, the Pedagogical Institute plans to make the course mandatory class in the fourth year of all grammar schools, and is thereby setting a positive example in the Federation. In two years time, the same thing will happen in Bosnian Podrinje Canton Goražde: *Culture of Religions* will be introduced to all students in the fourth year of grammar schools after the pilot course offered in Secondary School Enver Pozderović in Goražde

turned out to be highly successful. These developments, along with the already strong presence of *Culture of Religions* courses in the primary and secondary schools of Tuzla Canton, make the course a growing force within the Federation. The efforts of these three cantons will offer practical information and guidance for all other cantons which choose to introduce *Culture of Religions* into their curricula.

## Conclusions and Recommendations

This research clearly demonstrates major problems and deficiencies in the current piloting of *Culture of Religions* courses across Bosnia and Herzegovina. Before the course was piloted, students had been exposed to religious education classes, learning very little or nothing about the faith other than their own. With *Culture of Religions*, students are better able to recognize commonalities: wherever the course has been offered, teachers and students note increased levels of understanding, acceptance, and tolerance. While the Goethe Institute, supported by the OSCE Mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina ought to continue to support and develop *Culture of Religions*, any sustainable future lies with the relevant government officials and agencies within Bosnia and Herzegovina. Step should also be taken to address the obstacles to teaching *Culture of Religions* in the future.

### Recommendations:

OSCE, together with its domestic and international partners in education reform, will work towards fulfilling the following recommendations:

- Teachers of *Culture of Religions* across Bosnia and Herzegovina use an inconsistent methodology, often neglecting to emphasize some of the proposed themes in the curriculum (e.g. religion in relation to history and geography). The Working Group of *Culture of Religions* experts' revised 2004 curriculum is the most well developed, comprehensive *Culture of Religions* curriculum available. It should be distributed to and used by all teachers.
- Curricula across Bosnia and Herzegovina must be revised and reduced to make room for *Culture of Religions* as a stand-alone course along with religious education classes. This reform should generate a framework curriculum with detailed standards defined in terms of learning objectives (these could be developed by a future state education agency). Changing the standards in this way will ensure that all students learn *Culture of Religions*.
- The lack of textbooks and course materials has been one of teachers' major complaints about *Culture of Religions*. Efforts should be made to produce and make available the necessary materials at a reduced cost.
- Teachers who have been trained to teach *Culture of Religions* all report benefits of such training. As *Culture of Religions* is offered more widely, teacher training should also be offered more regularly. The pedagogical institutes, ministries of education, as well as the country's institutions of higher education (where future teachers are generally trained), should all take part in this endeavour.
- To better understand local attitudes towards *Culture of Religions*, its effect on society, as well as where and how the course is being implemented, further research on *Culture of Religions* should be undertaken regularly. All actors concerned about *Culture of Religions* should be involved in this effort in order to advance understanding of the subject's successes and shortcomings.
- Dialogue should be re-engaged with religious communities in an effort to re-affirm and gain their support for *Culture of Religions*.

## Appendix A: List of Teachers Trained in *Culture of Religions* by Goethe Institute

| School Name - Town                                | Teacher  |
|---|--|
| <b>OSCE RC Banja Luka AoR</b>                     |  |
| PS Mladen Stojanović - Banja Luka                 | Vesna Raković  |
| PS Petar Kočić - Banja Luka                       | Dragana Šibarević  |
| RS Pedagogical Institute - Banja Luka             | Dubravka Krstin  |
| Medicinska škola - Bihać                          | Enes Čizmić  |
| PS Branko Ćopić - Donji Agići (Novi Grad)         | Aleksandar Jovišević   |
| Srednja ekonomska škola - Livno                   | Božo Vrdoljak  |
| PS Petar Kočić - Mrkonjić Grad                    | Marija Rožić   |
| PS Vuk Karadžić - Omarska (Prijedor)              | Borka Sekulić  |
| PS Petar Kočić - Prijedor                         | Jelena Damjanović  |
| PS Đuro Jakšić - Šargovac (Banja Luka)            | Slobodanka Srdić   |
| <b>OSCE RC Mostar AoR</b>                         |  |
| PS Njegoš - Berkovići                             | Branka Kundačina   |
| PS Sveti Sava - Bileća                            | Boris Zdenović   |
| Gimnazija - Mostar                                | Milada Orman   |
| SS Fra Grga Martić - Posušje                      | Mira Crnogorac   |
| PS Jovan Jovanović Zmaj - Trebinje                | Milena Vico, Dalibor Babić   |
| <b>OSCE RC Sarajevo AoR</b>                       |  |
| Gimnazija - Bugojno                               | Mirsad Bušatlija   |
| Elektrotehnička škola Hasib Hadžović - Goražde    | Mula Imamović  |
| MSS Enver Pozderović – Goražde                    | Almira Uzunović  |
| SS Travnik - Nova Bila                            | Ankica Đuran   |
| Srednja škola primijenjenih umjetnosti - Sarajevo | Zuhra Kalauzović   |
| Elektrotehnička škola - Sarajevo                  | Ranka Katalinski   |
| <b>OSCE RC Tuzla AoR</b>                          |  |
| PS Jovan Dučić - Bijeljina                        | Jagoda Slijepčević-Todorović   |
| PS Zovik - Brčko                                  | Mirza Fazlović   |
| Gimnazija - Brčko                                 | Mira Đurović   |
| PS Hasan Kikić- Gradačac                          | Safer Kukuruzović  |
| SS Hasan Kikić - Gradačac                         | Kemal Nurkić   |
| PS Ivan Goran Kovačić - Gradačac                  | Edis Dervišagić, Alen Molić  |
| PS Safet Beg Bašagić - Gradačac                   | Ibro Alimanović  |
| PS Kladanj - Kladanj                              | Ševala Suljić, Aida Muharemagić, Almira Mašić, Abdurahman Avdić, Adisa Sujlčić |
| SS Kladanj - Kladanj                              | Amer Begirmendžić  |
| PS Sutjeska - Modriča                             | Ilija Vasiljević   |
| SS Fra Martin Nedić - Tolica (Orašje)             | Ruža Zuparić, Mladen Oršolić   |
| PS Vuk Karadžić – Ročević (Zvornik)               | Ivo Simić  |
| Gimnazija Meša Selimović - Tuzla                  | Nijaz Selimović  |
| Canton Tuzla Pedagogical Institute - Tuzla        | Šaban Smajlović, Hadžija Hadžiabdić  |
| Tehnička škola – Zenica                           | Faruk Kozić  |