

ANALYSIS: NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL PRIORITIES FOR EDUCATIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

“Bosnia and Herzegovina has a long and valuable educational tradition and it is constantly open to education development. As with many other countries in Europe and the world, it has been preparing itself to enter the 21st century by implementing educational reform...” — Minister of Education for the Federation of BiH, September 2001

Bosnia and Herzegovina: Six Years After Dayton

Since the signing of the Dayton Peace Accord in 1995, ending four years of all-out war, a process of social, economic and political recovery has been taking place in Bosnia and Herzegovina. This process, mainly led by the international community, has channelled financial and technical assistance into the areas of physical and, to a far lesser extent, psychosocial and educational reconstruction of the country and its people. In the area of education, the Minister of Education of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina summarized the past six years as follows:

“After signing the Dayton Peace Agreement, the first step was physical reconstruction of education, which was supported by the International Community. Since investment in education is essential for improving social, political, economic, technological and cultural conditions, new possibilities were opened for exchange of knowledge and experience, as well as the support of experts in planning and implementing changes in education. However, in the current circumstances, that approach has been mainly fragmented and has been implemented rather slowly. Lately, the activity of implementing changes in education has been intensified.”¹

Questions remain about the long-term future of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and of the entire Balkan region. Underlying prejudice and tension between the groups remains widespread and continues to erupt in acts of violence, threatening to destabilize the region. In Bosnia itself, extreme nationalism has not yet been excised from the body politic. Broadly speaking, a culture of peace has not yet taken hold.

The Situation of Young People and Children:

The groups hit particularly hard by the war and its aftermath in Bosnia and Herzegovina are children and youth of all ethnic backgrounds. Having experienced the atrocities, violence and pain, together with extremely difficult living conditions, children and youth along with their parents, have been severely traumatized. A critically important step in the process of reconstruction yet remains: to appropriately address the psycho-social needs of these young people, to assist them to gain confidence in their future, and to help them envision their own contribution to the development of a united and prosperous BiH.

At this stage, though they generally want to be close to their friends and families, an overwhelming number of Bosnian young people do not see enough of a future for themselves in their own country to be willing to stay and rebuild it. According to one survey, an alarming 62% of Bosnian young people would leave the country if they had the chance.² The consequences of such a pervasive

¹ “Basis for Education Policy and Strategic Development of Education” prepared by the BiH Federation Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sport, September 2001, Sarajevo.

² Conducted by Prism Research. Cited in Independent Bureau for Humanitarian Issues, “Human Development Report – Bosnia and Herzegovina 2000: Youth,” p. 11.

attitude on the part of its youth would be a crisis for any country, but for Bosnia and Herzegovina it is devastating. The UNDP-sponsored Human Development Report (2000) on the state of Bosnian youth indicated that the closely related problems of an antiquated education system and a lack of employment opportunities at home are among the most compelling reasons to leave.³

Young people in Bosnia and Herzegovina still face a future that seems void of the real prospect of peace. In 2001, outbursts of nationalist violence – some perpetrated by young people – underscored the need for a drastic change in the way young Bosnians see the development of their society and in the way they are educated. In response to these outbursts, the Office of the High Representative called upon the Ministry of Education to initiate a “government program for the democratization, reconciliation and education of the police and of the wider public, particularly of the youth” (OHR Press Release, 10 May 2001).

In these areas, the September 2001 FBiH Ministry of Education report indicates that there are significant problems still remaining in the school system associated with the war and its aftermath:

Strengthening democracy and establishing the rule of law is a long, slow process. Students are aware of the difference between what they learn in school and the life and environment going on around them. Students' participation in the administration of their schools is inadequate. The process of establishing Student Councils, which has lately been intensified, is expected to have a major influence on school life. The participation of parents, members of the local community, employers and other relevant partners in the life and work of the school also needs to be increased.

...The destruction of the system of social welfare and of the family caused by the war has brought in its wake not only juvenile delinquency, both in the school and in the community, but also the abuse of and violence against children. Although such incidents have been few so far, we need measures and activities for their prevention. A great number of unexploded mines and other explosive devices pose a great danger to children...

The sense of national identity in Bosnia and Herzegovina is related not so much to being a citizen of the state, but most often to membership in a certain ethnic group. In addition, it does not correlate with individual identity in a way characteristic of other pluralistic and democratic societies in which the concept of individuality is a basic principle of modern civil society and is protected as a fundamental human right. One consequence of the attitude in Bosnia is that a person's loyalty to his or her ethnic group is constantly being scrutinized, and the social status of certain ethnic groups called into question, rather than the individual's loyalty to society as a whole. These problems are reflected as well in the educational system.

The Educational System of Bosnia and Herzegovina:

Because of the complex political landscape in BiH at present, it is difficult to provide a unified common educational framework in which young people, the future leaders of BiH, can be prepared for the future role. Today, the country consists of ten federated cantons, one republic, and one district, each with its own educational system. Education is solely the province of the entities. The struggling state institutions do not include any body for general educational oversight, the establishment of standards, or policy coordination. Within the Federation, each canton has wide latitude to set its own educational agenda. This makes it difficult for young people to learn responsible citizenship and to develop to the fullest the knowledge, skills, and competence to make a contribution to the building of a unified country.

³ Independent Bureau for Humanitarian Issues, “Human Development Report – Bosnia and Herzegovina 2000: Youth,” pp. 33-35.

As summarized in a report of the FBiH Ministry of Education, the education system in Bosnia and Herzegovina is presently characterized by a number of weaknesses:

- Old-fashioned teaching technologies and irrelevance of certain teaching materials;
- Emphasis on rote-learning, memorization, and reproducing knowledge, not using it productively or creatively;
- Knowledge and skills strictly divided along subject lines, with rare use of structural or interdisciplinary approaches;
- Collective teaching in which the individual potential of students is neglected;
- Legally education is decentralized, but in practice, at the cantonal level, it is centralized.

Furthermore, the existing curriculum at all levels of the educational system is characterized by:

- Rigid class system;
- Old-fashioned and overloaded curriculum;
- Orientation to cognitive learning dimension;
- Conceptual solutions focused on elaboration of content, while goals and results remain neglected;
- Teachers expected to realize the program, but not to support the development of individual students;
- Obvious disagreement between theory and practice in vocational education.

The effect of the present system on students is such that:

- The teaching atmosphere and education system do not promote the development of students' potential;
- The students are overloaded with teaching content;
- The students are regarded as objects in the educational process;
- The inclusion of returnee students, their socialization and adjustment to a different environment presents major problems.

Educational Development Goals in Bosnia and Herzegovina:

At this time, the Ministries of Education in Bosnia and Herzegovina are trying to redevelop the educational system in order to ensure:

- Full protection and guarantee of the right to education, and education for all;
- Maximum individual development at all levels and in all types of education;
- Recognition of Bosnia and Herzegovina as an integrated member of Europe and the world;
- Democracy and humanization of the school;
- An education that fits both the individual and the society;
- Strengthening of decentralization processes in education and its orientation to greater school autonomy.

These developments are to be based on key principles, including:

- Civil rights, including the right on education, and education for all;
- Individual development according to one's potential;
- Right to diversity and equality in diversity;

- Respect for religious culture, religious expression and free choice of religion;
- School autonomy, publicity regarding the work of schools;
- Autonomy of school individuals (teachers, students);
- Importance of link between school and environment;
- Freeing schools of ideology;
- Fostering parents' involvement in school life;
- Quality teacher education and professional development.

Educational Development a Priority for BiH Government and International Authorities in BiH

Changes in education are the only sure means to catalyse social cohesion and development of the country. Realizing that economic recovery alone will not be sufficient to secure the success of Bosnia's transition from a post-socialist society towards integration with the rest of Europe, the international community has recently shifted its focus to other critical areas, among which is education. Until now, international support for education in BiH has been primarily in the area of reconstruction of school buildings. In the past year, the educational authorities of Bosnia and Herzegovina, along with the international community, have articulated the need to place educational reform at the center of the country's political agenda and within the primary strategy of BiH for political integration with Europe. However, as stated in a report of the Federation Ministry of Education⁴, the educational reform process has encountered many challenges, including modernization of content, methodologies and teacher-training in accordance with the high standards and quality with the rest of European countries, while at the same time protecting and promoting the country's cultural values. Moreover, although the most extreme evidences of nationalism and prejudice are gradually being removed from school textbooks across Bosnia and Herzegovina today, they persist in the hearts and minds of some teachers, parents, and even students. In some cases, evidence that nationalistic sentiments are actually being resuscitated in school textbooks exists.

"Education is a crucial issue for the future of Bosnia and Herzegovina and a high priority area for the International Community. It is essential for the future of BiH that schools become beacons for a peaceful future marked by tolerance and understanding. ...Donors, in particular the European Union, have completed a massive programme to reconstruct schools after the end of the war. Most of the physical damage is repaired by now. A more difficult task, however, must now be undertaken: intellectual and psychological reconstruction. ...The children of Bosnia and Herzegovina are the future of Bosnia, and they must receive the best possible education ...Bosnia and Herzegovina needs education that is in accordance with European standards, and which instils in children a cosmopolitan and tolerant spirit and teaches them to think critically."

OHR Human Rights / Rule of Law Department, May 2000.

As part of the international community's efforts to give attention to educational reform and harmonizing the different systems, one significant milestone was the signing of an agreement and declaration by the Ministries of Education of the Republika Srpska and the Federation, on 10 May 2000, providing "the modalities and time frame of a far-reaching harmonization of the present segregated, parallel education systems."⁵ In critical areas such as history, geography, literature, religion, and civics, as

⁴ "Basis for Education Policy and Strategic Development of Education," prepared by the BiH Federation Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sport, September 2001, Sarajevo.

⁵ "Meeting of the Conference of Ministers of Education of Bosnia and Herzegovina: Agreement, 10 May 2000," p.1.

well as instruction in the two alphabets of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the agreement certainly represents an important beginning towards harmonization.

The Role of Education for Peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina:

A critical element of the peace-building process, and one that can potentially contribute more than any other to the long-term peace and stability of the country, is to empower young people with the skills, knowledge, attitudes and confidence to play an active and meaningful role in shaping a peaceful society. Young people can be assisted in developing these skills through a specially designed peace education curriculum, using interactive, process-oriented and child centred methods of teaching, with the ultimate aim of creating inter-ethnic understanding and harmony. In the face of the challenges that still remain in BiH six years after the end of the war, it is becoming clear that what is most needed to effect real and lasting transformation is educating the younger generation to build a unified, multi-ethnic society.

The EFP Program stands out as a unique contribution to the development and progress of the society of BiH. It is the only program within the education sector that has been voluntarily adopted by all three ethnic communities and their respective education authorities, without any change in its fundamental components. The EFP Program has been able to cut across differences that have been obstacles to the creation of peaceful relationships between Bosniaks, Croats, and Serbs. During its almost two years of implementation, it has demonstrated that the principles and practice of unity in diversity can be a reality in this land.

EFP was first initiated at the invitation of the FBiH Minister of Education in June 1999. Since that time, all phases in the development and implementation of the EFP Program have been undertaken with the active partnership, cooperation and necessary participation of the Federation Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sport, the Republic Srpska Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sport, the relevant cantonal Ministries of Education, as well as the support of the International Community. Educational institutions, school administrators, teachers, support staff, pupils/students and their parents, as well as the teachers' associations and wider public have been the main actors, developers and advisors for the realization of the EFP program in Bosnia and Herzegovina, from program and curriculum design, to all aspects of implementation, and to the identification of strategies for expansion of the program. EFP has been a model for real and active participation of all segments of the school community and of BiH society. (See diagram of EFP Program Actors at the end of the document).

In addition to this most important feature, the EFP program has also been able to respond directly to the need in the BiH school system for:

- A structure that will ensure a systematic approach to teacher training;
- An increase in the number of providers of teacher training;
- Training in classroom practice, emphasizing active learning and competencies;
- Special programs for school directors;
- Training plan to integrate modern communication and information technologies;
- Educational dialogue and curriculum dissemination reaching all teachers in the country
- A new curriculum for primary, secondary and teacher education
- A model of integrative learning applied to different subjects and disciplines

EFP recognizes the importance of coordinating the program with others being implemented by the Ministries of Education with the assistance of the International Community. Consultation, cooperation and partnership with educational actors in other areas have begun to yield many benefits for BiH teachers, students and school administrators. One example is the recent consultations held with the coordinators of the UNICEF Child-Friendly Schools project in BiH, resulting in an agreement for selected EFP teachers to participate in complementary in-service training programs focused on child-centred learning methodologies.

International Priorities and the Role of Education for Peace

The comprehensive scope of the Education for Peace Program means that it responds to many key international priorities in the areas of education reform, civil society development, human rights and democratization, social reconstruction and peace-building.

As highlighted in the preparatory sessions of the United Nations World Summit on Children, to be held in New York in May 2002, Education for Peace addresses key needs in the area of quality education for all children. In particular, the need to:

- Create, with children, a child-friendly learning environment, in which students feel safe, are protected from abuse, violence and discrimination, are healthy and are encouraged to learn;
- Ensure that educational programs and materials fully reflect the promotion and protection of human rights and the values of peace, tolerance and gender equality, using every opportunity presented by the International Decade for a Culture of Peace and Non-Violence for the Children of the World (2001-2010);
- Enhance the status, morale, training and professionalism of teachers, ensuring appropriate remuneration for their work and opportunities and incentives for their development;
- Meet the learning needs of children affected by crisis, including armed conflict, natural disasters and social and economic instability, and conduct educational programs in ways that help to prevent violence and conflict.

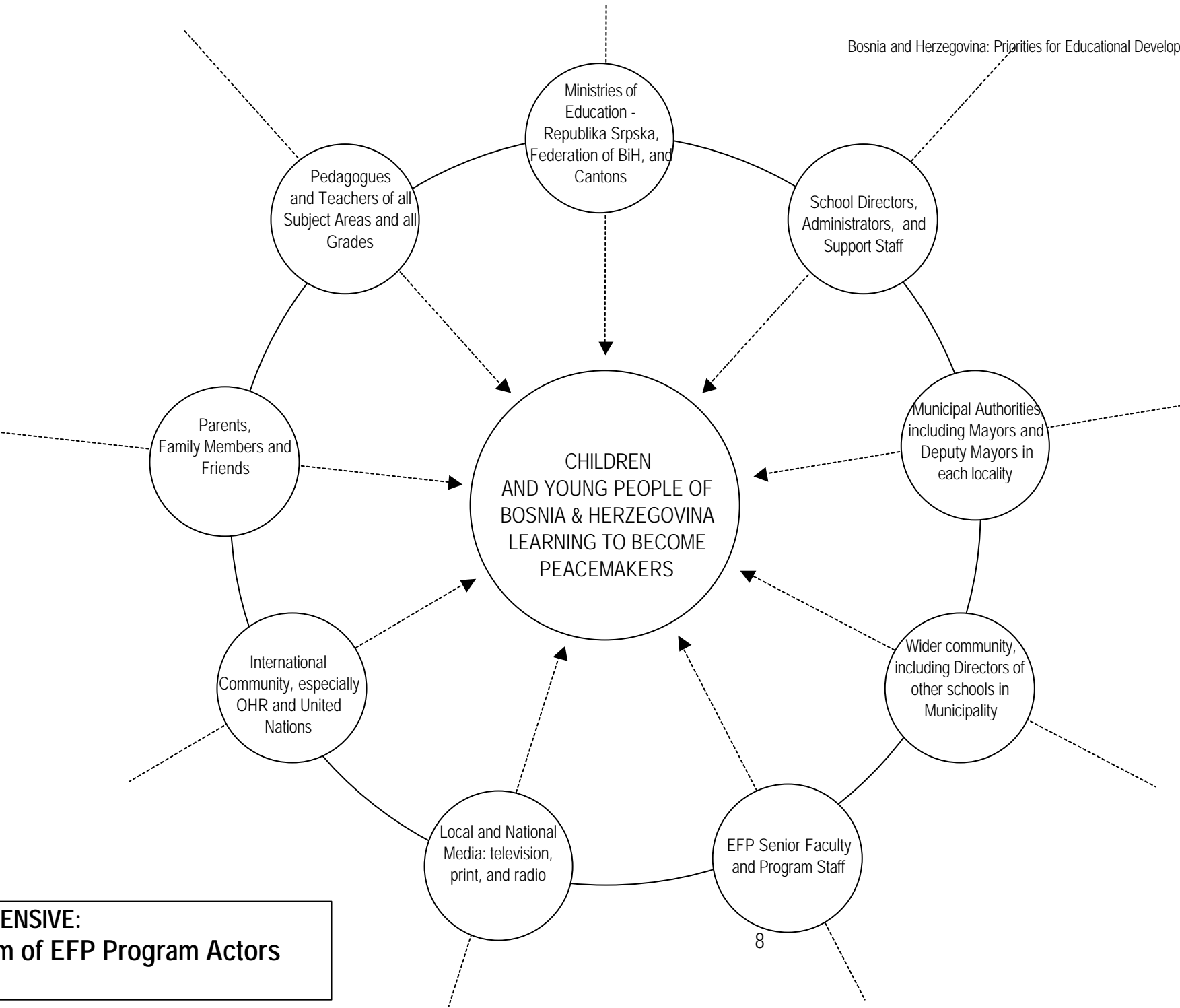
Furthermore, the EFP program will actively support the fulfilment of key rights as identified in the United Nations *Convention on the Rights of the Child*, to which BiH became a signatory on 6 March, 1992, including:

- The right to survival and development (Article 7);
- The right to form views and express them freely (Article 12);
- The right to seek, receive and impart information and ideas, through diverse media of expression (Article 13);
- The right to access information and materials from a diversity of national and international sources, aimed at the promotion of his/her social, spiritual and moral well-being, and physical and mental health (Article 17);
- The right to a standard of living adequate for the child's physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development (Article 27);
- The right to education on the basis of equal opportunity (Article 28);
- Article 29: (a) The development of the child's personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to his or her fullest potential;

- (b) The development of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, and for the principles enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations;
 - (c) The development of respect for the child's parents, his or her own cultural identity, language and values, for the national values of the country in which the child is living, the country from which he or she may originate, and for civilizations different from his or her own;
 - (d) The preparation of the child for responsible life in a free society, in the spirit of understanding, peace, tolerance, equality of sexes, and friendship among all peoples, ethnic, national and religious groups and persons of indigenous origin;
 - (e) The development of respect for the natural environment.
- The right to participate fully in cultural and artistic life (Article 31).
 - The taking of appropriate measures to promote physical and psychological recovery and social reintegration of a child who is the victim of: any form of neglect, exploitation, or abuse; torture or any other form of cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment; armed conflicts. Such recovery and reintegration shall take place in an environment which fosters the health, self-respect and dignity of the child. (Article 39).

Finally, the EFP Program fulfils important dimensions of the *Dayton Accord*, particularly in the area of Fundamental Rights and Freedoms (Annex 6, Article 1): EFP involves a method of educating and training a generation of youth and children who will be future builders of social, economic, and political systems in Bosnia and Herzegovina that are based on unity in diversity, justice, equality and a conscious commitment to maintaining the rights of every individual in society, from whatever race, colour, language, religion, political and other opinion, national or social origin, association with a national minority, property, birth or other status. (Article I – [14]).

One of the main objectives of the EFP project is to effectively train individuals to establish a prosperous, peaceful and democratic society. This goal pertains to specific sections of Article 1 (namely I, II, IV, VI and XI). Special attention needs to be paid to these fundamental rights, as they are most evidently lacking in the BiH community. Thus, EFP examines: 1) the causes and sources of aggressive behaviour, both individual and societal, leading to the creation of those very unjust conditions in which individuals and groups are denied the rights to live freely and securely in violence-free environments; and 2) the skills necessary to create peaceful and just conditions, in the family, the community, and the society at large, where such freedoms and rights can be fostered and maintained.



**EFP-INTENSIVE:
Diagram of EFP Program Actors**

SOURCES

- a. Ministry of Education, FBiH (Sept. 2001): "Basis for Education Policy and Strategic Development in Education."
- b. Dayton Peace Accord (1995).
- c. Convention on the Rights of the Child.
- d. Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe.
- e. Report on Human Development of Bosnia and Herzegovina 2000 – Youth, UNDP, 2000.
- f. Shared Strategy for Modernization of Primary and General Secondary Education in BiH, European Commission – Technical Assistance for Education Reform, 2001.
- g. "Declaration of the Conference of Ministers of Education of Bosnia and Herzegovina", Office of the High Representative, 10 May, 2000.
- h. "Agreement of the Conference of Ministers of Education of Bosnia and Herzegovina", Office of the High Representative, 10 May, 2000.
- i. "A World Fit for Children", Preparatory Committee for the Special Session of the General Assembly on Children, Third Substantive Session, 11-15 June 2001, Document A/AC.256/CRP.6/Rev.3.