

Recommendations of the Regional Forum* on Introducing Intercultural Education in Serbia

Preface and Acknowledgements

Intercultural education (ICE) represents an innovative concept of education in multiethnic societies and its main objective is to advance interethnic integration and at the same time to strengthen these societies. A number of European countries such as Austria, Finland, Germany, and Sweden have identified a need for new models of education in multiethnic societies. They have selected ICE as such a model. ICE stresses intersection of cultures and as a consequence greater integration of minority communities, as well as a different approach to educating members of the majority community. Therefore, in the context of the growing diversity of cultures in Europe, multicultural education is no longer sufficient, since the educational process is largely responsible for the formation of the youth. Unlike multicultural education that gives rights to members of minority communities but has no proactive approach towards the majority community, ICE applies to members of all cultures in the society and therefore represents a better response to the diversity among students. ICE offers a new concept that involves the entire student community, in which members of the majority community learn about minority cultures as well. Regarding the already achieved rights of national minorities, ICE strengthens and promotes their rights through supporting implementation of existing rights and by encouraging members of the majority community to interact with minority communities in a more profound way.

The Council for Inclusive Governance (CIG) initiated the debate with Serbia's national minorities about the implementation of ICE in Serbia through debates of the Regional Forum in 2016-2017. The Regional Forum is a regional platform that CIG has developed since 2011 in the Southwestern Serbia/Sandzak, which is the result of projects that CIG has implemented with the support of the Foundation for an Open Society (FOS) and earlier with the support of the British Foreign Office as well. The Regional Forum is a multiethnic and multi-confessional informal body for policy and political dialogue. It gathers Bosnjaks, Serbs and others, representatives of Sandzak's municipalities, political parties, civil society and the media from the region. All participants take part in the Forum in their personal capacities. In the five years of its work, the Regional Forum took up a range of important topics for both the region and for the whole of Serbia. It was logical for this body to also address the issue of implementation of ICE in Serbia.

In 2016-2017, CIG has organized four sessions of the Regional Forum dedicated to the issues of interethnic integration and education. Three of these sessions were focused on the issue of implementation of ICE in Serbia. In addition, CIG organized a introductory focus group which was used for mapping out the key issues related to ICE and its implementation, as well as an expert session which was used to review the draft recommendations made by the

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Regional Forum. The final result of the above mentioned activities are the recommendations for the implementation of IKO in Serbia which are presented in this publication.

With this program and by steering the Regional Forum to address issues related to ICE, CIG wanted to assist the process of multiethnic integration in Serbia. Also, the process of drafting the recommendations represents an indirect contribution to the debate about what should be the goal of a future minority policy in Serbia.

We want to make it clear to the reader that these recommendations are not those of CIG or FOS and do not necessarily represent the opinions of these organizations. They are produced directly by the members of the Regional Forum through the sessions held in 2016-2017. We tried in an impartial way help formulate these recommendations but the substance belongs solely to the participants in the initiative.

The recommendations are directed towards the Government of Serbia, especially towards the Ministry for Education, Technological Development and Science of Serbia, the national minority councils in Serbia, and all relevant bodies that deal with education in the country, including the civil society organizations from Serbia and abroad. Also, the recommendations are directed towards those representatives of the Council of Europe and the European Union who follow the implementation of minority-related legislation in Serbia and actively cooperate with the Serbian institutions in this field through the process of the European integration or directly.

We hope that the recommendations will be useful for the debate that will follow in Serbia in regard to the defining of the ICE concept and its subsequent future implementation, but also about acceptance and ownership of the concept by the national minorities in Serbia. Although the recommendations were made by representatives coming from only one of many multiethnic regions in Serbia, we firmly believe that the recommendations have relevance for the national level.

The author of this report is Igor Novaković, the CIG representative in Serbia, and his contributions were essential to the implementation of this program. CIG takes full responsibility for the content of this publication, which has not been reviewed by the participants.

We are proud of our cooperation with the Foundation for an Open Society and we are deeply grateful to our colleagues, particularly to Jadranka Jelinčić, Aleksandra Šanjević and Tatjana Stojić for their wholehearted support of the activities of CIG and the Regional Forum, for their confidence in our mission, as well as for their exceptional cooperation. Without their contributions, this initiative would not have been possible. Finally, the meetings of the Regional Forum that addressed the issue of ICE would not be possible without the dedicated work and commitment of Đurđica Ergić.

In conclusion, we would like to express our gratitude to all members of the Regional Forum for their active participation, critical contributions, their commitment to this program and their region and their acceptance of close collaboration with CIG.

*Alex Roinishvili Grigorev, President
March 2017*

Introduction

Since democratic changes in 2000, Serbia, in line with its multiethnic character, has actively engaged in improving the position of national minorities through introduction of reform and implementation of various minority legislation. However, there remain many challenges. And regardless of high standards in the protection of national minorities in the country, it is possible to conclude that the primary objective of the minority policy--multiethnic integration--has not been fully achieved. Moreover, the existing legislation has often contributed to further separate the minorities and the majority population, evident particularly in the educational system. In other words, multiethnicity and protection of minority rights have been achieved but the channels of communication between minorities and the majority population are still weak, thus contributing to the distancing of communities and to potential volatile outcomes in the future.

Participants in the sessions of the Regional Forum enthusiastically accepted the concept of ICE in principle, but they expressed and offered different proposals and suggestions regarding certain aspects of implementation. The Forum members particularly debated the implementation of ICE in context of preserving the existing level of rights of national minorities in Serbia. In other words, some participants expressed their concern that the application of ICE could result in the denial of the right to education in their language. On the other hand, other participants said that ICE not only does not harm the right to education in the mother tongue but, on the contrary, advances it.

The participants also underlined that ICE has a greater chance of success in Serbia than in other European countries because all of its minorities are autochthonous and there is a tradition of coexistence and certain positive practical experiences from the period of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia.

A special contribution in the context of the application of IKO in Serbia represent the recommendations on the compulsory elective subjects of Religious Education and Civic Education.

Most of recommendations have been completed, reviewed, and approved by the participants who were present at the last session of the Regional Forum on this subject on February 12, 2017 in Novi Pazar. However, not all of the Forum members who participated in at least one of the four sessions of the Forum have had the opportunity to review the final version of the recommendations. Therefore, the responsibility for the final version of the recommendations lies solely on CIG.

Recommendations of the Regional Forum

1. The Government of Serbia has to define the policy of the implementation of the concept of intercultural education (ICE) in Serbia and communicate it consistently to all citizens. The Government should promote this concept and inform the citizens about the concept and the modalities of its implementation. The Ministry of Education should include the ICE concept in its strategic documents.
2. Application of ICE should not jeopardize the right of national minorities to education in their languages, as guaranteed by the Constitution, laws, and ratified international documents.
3. Stakeholders should analyze the content of the existing curricula, take into account the ICE requirements, and offer recommendations for curricula reform. The analysis should be based on the following principles:
 - a. gender equality;
 - b. inclusion and representation of national minorities;
 - c. inclusion and representation of gender and other minorities;
 - d. determination to resolve the issue of negative connotations, prejudices and stereotypes about national and other minorities in textbooks and formulate a clear approach to eliminate such content from textbooks.
4. The analysis should result in concrete recommendations for the inclusion of the ICE principles through formulation of affirmative contents about the national minorities, gender and other minorities, gender equality, etc.
5. The Ministry of Education of Serbia should present the results of the analysis and the recommendations through broad consultations with the national councils, teachers' associations, professional associations, parents' councils, civil society and other relevant players. Modalities for consultations could be roundtables, focus groups, and surveys.
6. It is necessary to include representatives of all stakeholders in the working groups of the Ministry of Education of Serbia that will be tasked with preparing the concept for the ICE implementation in line with the analysis results and conclusions reached through the previously mentioned consultative process.
7. It is necessary to introduce the ICE principle into the standards and outcomes of education in primary and secondary schools.
8. In order to substantially implement ICE, it is necessary to develop and apply criteria, based on the ICE principles, for the election of members of all relevant bodies (the National Educational Council, the Commission for Approval of Textbooks and others) that decide on curricula, textbook content, and other teaching means in order to implement ICE in a meaningful way.
9. It is conceptually necessary to apply the ICE principles to all university programs. Also, it is necessary to introduce a special subject of *Intercultural Education* into university programs focused on education and upbringing.

10. It is necessary to regulate the application of ICE in the education process through laws and by-laws. This would ensure that all institutions that implement the concept of ICE would make all necessary steps to ensure that the implementation is effective and done in a desirable direction.
11. It is necessary to include the implementation of the concept of ICE in the professional development (trainings) of teachers and professors to raise their teaching skills and to increase their responsibilities. It is necessary to develop supporting teaching materials in line with the ICE principles.
12. It is necessary to promote ICE among all social and political factors of both the majority and the minorities.
13. It is necessary that the national minority councils, due to their specific role in the implementation of the right to education in mother tongue, adopt the ICE concept as their own practical approach and actively participate in its creation and implementation.
14. The teaching subjects of importance to ethnic groups, to both majority and the minorities, such as history, music, arts, native language and literature, and Serbian language and literature should reflect elements important for the identity of national minorities, gender minorities, and other social groups.
15. It is necessary to analyze the content of compulsory elective subject *Religious Education* from the ICE perspective. It is necessary to initiate a public debate on *Religious Education* in the context that Serbia constitutionally is a secular state. One of the questions that should be solved is that teachers who teach *Religious Education* must have regulated working and legal status and appropriate formal education (faculty) and, at the same time, obtain the obligatory teaching license. In addition, this process must also imply that that these teachers should acquire sensitivity for interculturality and intercultural contents through compulsory professional training.
16. It is necessary to review the status of the compulsory elective subject of *Civic Education* and work on improving the quality of the curriculum. *Civic Education* should be based on the ICE principles and become a compulsory subject for all. Also, teachers of *Civic Education* must have regulated working and legal status and appropriate formal education (university degree) and, at the same time, obtain the obligatory teaching license. In addition, this process must also imply that that these teachers should acquire sensitivity for interculturality and intercultural contents through compulsory professional training.*

* On February 11, 2017, upon proposal from the Society for Bosnian Language, CIG organized in Novi Pazar a roundtable session for professors and teachers from both Serb and Bosnjak community, who came from several elementary and high schools from the Serbian region of Sandžak/Southwestern Serbia. Participates reviewed the draft recommendations of the Regional Forum and proposed addition of three more recommendations:

1. Radio Television of Serbia (RTS) should introduce and increase the amount of educational programs that cover issues of importance for national minorities in Serbia.
2. It is necessary to include the subject “the language of the environment” (i.e. minority language classes) for members of the majority community in the municipalities where national minorities are numerous (at least 15% of the total municipal population).

Participants**

Members of the Regional Forum who participated in the sessions on the topic of education held in 2016-2017

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Nihad Hasanović, President, Sandžak Democratic Party

Mirsad Jusufović, Member, City Council of Novi Pazar, Sandžak Democratic Party

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Nezrina Dolovac, Teacher, Elementary School “Jovan Jovanović Zmaj“, Novi Pazar

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3. The Ministry of Education and the national councils should promote bilingual model of education through actively informing schools and parents. It is necessary to present the advantages and disadvantages in the implementation of existing models.

** Titles given are at the time of last participation.

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