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PISA banned from schools

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OECD has been implementing the PISA programme of international student assessment every three years since 2000. The number of participating countries has been continuously growing. This also applies to the acceptance of study findings and necessary changes in the education systems. With 79 participating countries and regions, PISA achieved the greatest international dissemination in 2018. Bosnia and Herzegovina participated in the PISA study for the first time three years ago. Around 7,000 students from 138 schools in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (FB&H), 70 schools from Republika Srpska (RS) and five schools from Brčko District took part in the international student assessment.

Bosnia and Herzegovina ranked 62nd out of 79 countries in the PISA study conducted three years ago. In all three areas, the results achieved by students in Bosnia and Herzegovina were on average three years behind those of their peers in OECD countries.¹

"The findings of the PISA study are devastating, but they are not surprising, given the fact that education has not been one of Bosnia and Herzegovina's priorities over the past three decades"- said Professor Emeritus and Head of the Foundation Education in Action, *Lamija Tanović*.²

Who is conducting the PISA study in Bosnia and Herzegovina? The Agency for Pre-School, Primary and Secondary School Education of Bosnia and Herzegovina (APOS) conducts the PISA study and other international comparative studies (Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study – TIMSS, and Progress in International Reading Literacy Study – PIRLS). In addition to the competent ministries of education, international partners were involved in this process: the OSCE Mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina, the EU Delegation, the US Embassy, UNICEF, the Norwegian Embassy, Save the Children and the Open Society Fund. A total of 12 ministries of education and two additional ministries coordinating this area were in charge of this study.³

The Deputy Director of the Agency for Pre-School, Primary and Secondary School Education of Bosnia and Herzegovina, *Žaneta Džumhur*, stated that the sample of 6,480 students included an equal ratio of boys and girls from 213 primary and secondary schools in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

An OECD representative, *Tanja Bastianić*, said that Bosnia and Herzegovina was at the bottom of the table and expressed hope that the results would serve as a motivating factor

¹ <https://www.unicef.org/bih/pri%C4%8De/objavljeni-rezultati-pisa-testiranja-za-bih>

² <http://source.ba/mobile/clanak/BiH/510665>

³ <https://bhrt.ba/1057140/uzivo-na-bht1-istrazivanje-pisa-koliko-su-ucenici-u-bih-sposobni-u-rjesavanju-problema/>

to ensure an improvement of the quality of education, so that better results could be achieved in the next study.

The Director of the Agency for Pre-School, Primary and Secondary School Education of Bosnia and Herzegovina, *Maja Stojkić*, emphasized that recommendations were an important finding of the study, based on which improvements or changes could be made to ensure a greater efficiency of those segments of education systems considered to be deficient. *Stojkić* pointed out that Bosnia and Herzegovina participated in this study for the first time.⁴

Adnan Husić, Assistant Minister from the Ministry of Civil Affairs in charge of education, said that the publication of PISA findings was the begin of a comprehensive and important process in Bosnia and Herzegovina:

"Bosnia and Herzegovina has obtained realistic and relevant indicators as to what our students know, understand and can apply and how ready they are to live and work in the 21st century. The diagnosis has been made, the recommendations were given and it is up to us to implement them. This is not the end, but rather the beginning of joint activities of all education authorities. The implementation of recommendations lies ahead, a great task that has no alternative."

The Head of the EU Delegation and EU Special Representative in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Ambassador *Johann Sattler*, emphasized how important it was to understand the PISA findings and recommendations as the beginning of important changes, as was the case in Austria, where the publication of the PISA findings caused a great shock and instigated numerous changes. The Head of the OSCE Mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina, *Kathleen Kavalec*, said she hoped that the data Bosnia and Herzegovina obtained as a result of the PISA study would be useful for the process of improving the education system in Bosnia and Herzegovina and announced further support for education authorities in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

PISA endangers "vital interests"

During a special session held on July 29, 2020, the National Assembly of Republika Srpska confirmed the statement of *Milorad Dodik*, a member of the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina, that the PISA study, which is supposed to be conducted in 2021, endangers the vital interests of Republika Srpska.

In the statement of the Ministry of Education and Culture of Republika Srpska dated February 06, 2019, the wording of the draft agreement on the participation in the PISA study of the Presidency is commented on and the use of the term "primary language of the country of the legal entity" as well as the use of the term "national" for the state of Bosnia and Herzegovina are assessed as unacceptable, since "the competences of Republika Srpska for education and the integrity and independence of its education system" are called into question by such an act.

The Serb member of the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina, *Milorad Dodik*, said that the competence for education lied exclusively with Republika Srpska.

Members of the National Assembly of Republika Srpska have confirmed the rejection. In addition to the PISA study, the Memorandum of Cooperation between the Ministry of Security of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the US Department of Homeland Security on the use of traveller information and the decision on the involvement of Bosnia and Herzegovina in the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study, PIRLS 2021 were rejected, too.⁵

⁴ <https://mondo.ba/Info/Drustvo/a917576/PISA-test-Bosna-i-Hercegovina.html>

⁵ <https://startbih.ba/clanak/poslanici-narodne-skupstine-rs-potvrдили-dodikov-stav/134821>

Independent participation

"We support internationally recognised research in education, but with the participation of Republika Srpska as an independent education system" – said Minister of Education, Natalija Trivić.⁶

As a result, students from Bosnia and Herzegovina will be unable to participate in the international student assessment conducted by OECD in 2022. The opportunity to implement long overdue education system reforms will thus be missed without any valid reason.

The behaviour and the result of this decision on the PISA study are an example of the political establishment's obviously frivolous approach to the country's future. The responsibility for the future is an important pillar of a country's politics. When a European country leaves the study and cites absurd reasons for it, it becomes clear how poorly responsibility is perceived.

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⁶ <http://srpskacafe.com/2020/07/dodik-srpska-ima-iskljucivu-nadleznost-u-obrazovanju/>