

Lecture by the High Representative and EU Special Representative to BiH, Christian Schwarz-Schilling



The Role of Education in Rebuilding Culture, State and Society

It is a both a pleasure and a privilege for me to speak to you this morning.

It is a pleasure because you have provided me with an opportunity to discuss some of my long-held and deeply felt ideas about the crucial importance of education to the success of the great European project in which we are all engaged.

Although I probably give more than my fair share of speeches and interviews, I do not often have the opportunity to step back from the pressure of daily events and to reflect upon what it is that my colleagues and I in the international community are actually trying to accomplish here in Bosnia and Herzegovina, which is to assist this country in becoming a peaceable, prosperous, democratic and functional state capable of reoccupying its rightful place in European civilisation and finding its place in Euro-Atlantic integration.

Without an educational system that promotes and sustains these goals, they will not be achieved. As I reminded the United Nations Security Council in New York on 16 May, the simple

words inscribed on the entrance to the museum in Kabul, Afghanistan, should be the maxim of all who aim to build or help rebuild a country: "A nation is alive if its culture is alive."

It is also a privilege to address you today because your university was the first – and is still the only – structurally integrated institution of higher education in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Not coincidentally, it was also the first to start implementing the modernising principles and practices of the Bologna Process.

I also appreciate the effort that Tuzla University is making to equip its students with the knowledge, skills and understanding required to prosper in an ever-more competitive world – and not simply to churn out ever-more holders of useless diplomas. There are, unfortunately, too many of the latter sort of schools, colleges and supposed universities in this country at present, which is a sign of the many weaknesses afflicting higher education in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

When, near the end of his career, journalists asked Jean Monnet, one of the fathers of the European Community, what he would do differently if he had the chance to start again, he replied that he would put education at the very heart of European integration. His message was clear: the contemporary EU is made of common treaties, laws, institutions, actions and, perhaps soon, a constitution, but before and after all this, it is made of people.

I have no doubt that education also lies at the heart of this country's regeneration, reconciliation and prospects for the future. And that is why I have made education reform one of my priorities during my time as High Representative.

As some of you may recall, in my first speech to the Parliamentary Assembly I asked deputies to adopt the already

long-overdue Higher Education Law without further delay. More than a year later, I am still waiting for this to happen. There have recently been some positive developments, but Bosnia and Herzegovina remains the only country to have signed up to the Bologna Process but failed to enact a state-level law on higher education – a fact that was duly noted by European education ministers in London week before last. I am still hoping, however, that this failure will be rectified before I leave office at the end of June.

If not, the university students of this country will continue to be denied the opportunity to take part in exchange schemes, to transfer to other universities in Europe or to have their diplomas recognised abroad.

There is probably no other area of human life connecting and influencing so many others as education, for virtually everyone has not only had nine or twelve years of it, but most people also have very definite views about it.

It is through education that we create and reproduce our culture, values, habits, attitudes, knowledge and skills, passing them from one generation to the next and so linking our past, present and future.

Today, education also represents one of the basic determinants for distributing power and wealth. Differences in race, rank, religion, social class, gender and nationality can all be reduced – even removed – by means of equal access to the right sort of education. Human beings may not be born equal, but equal opportunities to education, guaranteed by law, are the next best thing.

It is also through education that we directly shape the conditions of our cultural, social and economic growth. That is why it is necessary for each and every country to determine and agree on the core goals, values and standards that are to be promoted, embodied and transmitted by its educational

system.

In Bosnia and Herzegovina the decentralising logic of the Dayton Peace Accords made education a hostage of nationalism. Politically, education has been seen as a vehicle for creating or reinforcing three separate national identities and three separate educational systems, but not as a tool for developing any common loyalty or shared understanding of the citizen's rights and responsibilities, let alone equipping pupils and students for competing in the modern world.

And although there are few substantial differences in education policy or practice across Bosnia and Herzegovina, which remain largely rooted in the past, the politics of fragmentation, separation and segregation makes even the most basic coordination and cooperation very difficult.

Since the early 1990s, therefore, curricula at all levels of education have been systematically "nationalised" according to the ostensible interests and tastes of the locally predominant constituent people, focusing on the so-called "national subjects" of each: language and literature, history, geography, religious instruction, music and art.

Despite repeated efforts after 1995 by many domestic and foreign agencies – and the passage of some important framework laws – little has been done to right the balance between particular entitlements and general obligations. Changes have been announced, upheavals produced and reforms proclaimed, but the essence of this simultaneously "nationalised" and hidebound system has remained.

This is not a situation conducive to European integration any more than it is to integration within Bosnia and Herzegovina. If the politicians and citizens of this country want to join and then compete inside the EU, they are going to have to embrace European standards and values, as well as build a fundamentally modernised system. Such a system must be

democratic, open and inclusive. If it is not, it will fail students not just as future citizens and voters, but also as employable workers, scientists, entrepreneurs and artists.

Such considerations are even more obvious when it comes to higher education, particularly in view of current efforts to forge a European Area of Higher Education (EAHE) across the entire continent and to implement by 2010 the common standards prescribed by the Bologna Process.

On the one hand, a stable and harmonious Europe needs educational systems that reflect shared goals and values and so contribute to social cohesion and the free movement of goods, people and ideas. On the other hand – and as set out in the EU's Lisbon Agenda of 2002 – if it is to remain prosperous and competitive, Europe needs education systems that will ensure the EU remains a knowledge-based economy with sustainable economic growth and more and better jobs for its citizens. A knowledge-based economy, however, also means a knowledge-based society that reinforces the democratic legitimacy of both member states and the union.

This Lisbon Agenda primarily targets higher education and both “blue-sky” and applied scientific research. Together with the more wide-ranging Bologna Process, it represents a closely coordinated, pan-European effort to meet the educational, scientific and economic challenges posed by fast-developing countries in the rest of the world.

As the final level of formal education to which most young people aspire – and in which almost half of all 18-24 year-olds nowadays participate in the majority of European countries – higher education directly shapes the “real world” by opening the doors to professional careers for its graduates and keeping their countries competitive with the likes of the United States, Japan, India and China. That explains why higher education, along with scientific and social-science research, has a higher priority for the EU as a whole than

does general education, which is still, almost entirely, a matter for individual member states.

But if the EU faces serious competitive challenges in the educational and economic arenas, this corner of Europe confronts yet more difficult tests. Twelve years after a hugely destructive war, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Montenegro, and Croatia – albeit to differing degrees – are still seeking to recover lost ground. All four countries, but Bosnia and Herzegovina most of all, are attempting to make multiple transitions: from war to peace, from national authoritarianism to pluralist democracy, from moribund socialism to a vibrant free-market economy, and from nationalistic isolation to European integration.

The destruction of the former Yugoslavia, many would argue, began not with Milosevic's rise to power or the disintegration of the League of Communists or even the first shots in Croatia in 1990 or in Slovenia in 1991, but years before in academe: in particular, in the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts (SANU) with its notorious draft memorandum arguing that the Socialist Federative Republic of Yugoslavia had become a means of repressing and containing both Serbs and Serbia.

This, of course, was not the only case of academics planting the seeds of catastrophe. Professors, intellectuals and journalists were everywhere in the vanguard, lending their support to the various "national" projects when they were not actually leading them. Here in Bosnia and Herzegovina there were Karadzic, Koljevic and Plavsic. In Croatia there was Tudjman and his intellectual backers from the diaspora.

Many years later, professors and academicians are still hugely over-represented in most of the successor republics' politics. You might think, as a consequence, that the reform of higher education would now have the highest priority among these professors-turned-politicians. This, alas, has not been the case so far.

We still await concrete moves on the part of the Balkan intelligentsia to cut the vicious circle of nationalistic introversion that has prevailed for so long and to provide the younger generation with the European future it needs and deserves. For European integration will not be possible or complete until the universities of the western Balkans are once again worthy of the name, are reintegrated in the intellectual and scientific ferment of the continent, and turn out graduates equipped to compete with their peers everywhere.

Instead of reintegration, however, here in Bosnia and Herzegovina we continue to witness attempts to close off universities as the preserve of one particular people, entity, canton or private owner. The result is that this country now has ever-more public and private institutions of supposedly higher education – but of ever-lower quality.

I have even heard it said that citizens of this country, newly equipped with doctorates from the world's best universities or already well-established in their academic careers abroad, are not welcome to apply for posts in universities here because those with jobs fear the changes and competition these returnees would bring.

Yet even if this relatively small country were to rationalise its university system – with fewer institutions of higher quality – it would still need to forge links abroad. In fact, it is my firm belief that Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Montenegro and Croatia would benefit enormously if they were, in the first instance, to address at least some of the issues confronting their higher education systems together.

This is not to argue for recreating Yugoslavia, but rather to take advantage of a mutually intelligible language area, economies of scale, relative advantages in particular specialisations, common problems, and shared traditions.

Such symbiotic relationships are, in any case, part and parcel of the Bologna Process – and would assist the universities of the region to become truly Euro-compatible and competitive. Cooperation, coordination, strategic planning and perhaps even the rationalisation of institutional provision would be a real boon to staff and students alike.

If television viewers in the four countries can nowadays vote enthusiastically for each other's entries in the Eurovision song contest, their universities surely ought to be able to exchange postgraduate students, work on joint research projects, and collaborate on library acquisitions and all manner of other activities.

Particularly in the areas of basic and applied science, as well as in much postgraduate research, the universities of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Serbia and Montenegro could and should pool their intellectual and professional expertise, as well as their financial resources, if they aspire both to reclaim their positions in the world of learning and to reverse the brain drain of their best and brightest minds.

Why not, for example, build on the strengths of the Inter-University Centre in Dubrovnik or the Centre for Interdisciplinary Postgraduate Studies in Sarajevo to create a full-fledged equivalent in the western Balkans to the European College in Bruges or the European University Institute in Florence as collaborative flagships of postgraduate research, training and capacity building for this region?

Such collaboration would require difficult and, at least at the outset, politically sensitive decisions by all the countries. It would first be necessary to build consensus in favour of cooperation among each country's governmental and academic establishments. But if their higher education systems are to survive – let alone to prosper and enhance both their countries' intellectual capital and their citizens' life chances – this is clearly the way forward.

Cooperation in the western Balkans will also promote the goals of the European Area of Higher Education and the region's place in it. Although all four countries have acceded to the Bologna Process, each still has much to do in terms of reform if it is to meet the detailed and specific requirements set by this process.

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, the current fragmentation of the system, which wastes resources while still ensuring institutional penury, makes sustainable reform even more imperative. Progress needs to be made on four more or less equally important fronts.

First of all, this country must have a new, state-level **legislative framework** consonant with the European Area of Higher Education rather than old Yugoslav practice. As I mentioned at the outset, BiH is currently the only member of the Bologna Process without a state law on higher education that meets Bologna requirements.

Secondly, reform and harmonisation of the **financial framework** according to which higher education is funded is essential. This should be based primarily on a *per student* and *per program* formula, since current funding mechanisms are inequitable, inefficient, lack transparency and minimise accountability, but do provide too many opportunities for discriminatory decision making and the waste of already inadequate resources.

Thirdly, a **framework for setting policy, deciding strategy and planning** should be established at the state level, but with a clear perspective that such a framework could move to the regional level, especially for postgraduate studies and research.

Finally, a new **institutional framework** for individual universities is required. Universities must be restructured as integrated institutions in which participatory decision-

making is the norm, autonomy protected, and governance and management are made more efficient.

All this is necessary to bring higher education in Bosnia and Herzegovina within the ambit of the European Area of Higher Education. More importantly, all four key elements must be put in place together – as mutually reinforcing components of a systemic reform – if higher education is not only to be reformed, but also *transformed*.

Failure to adopt and implement the full package would likely result in new quarrels, misunderstandings and confusion regarding the future of higher education in Bosnia and Herzegovina. We've had enough of those already.

It is important to bear in mind, however, that creating new frameworks in these four areas is a vital pre-condition for reforming higher education, but it is not the final goal.

The ultimate goal is a high-quality, up-to-date, affordable, open and integrated system that attracts and satisfies even students and staff who could go abroad if they wished.

It is a system that reintegrates Bosnia and Herzegovina in the European and worldwide community of learning, scholarship and research.

It is a system that accentuates the fact that the citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina are also inheritors of the unique European heritage of individualism, the scientific spirit and the rule of law.

It is a system that encourages the peoples of this country, in both their diversity and their unity, to demonstrate what they still have to offer the rest of Europe.

It is a system that pays dividends in terms of economic development for the taxpayers' money and parental tuition fees invested in it.

It is a system that produces the graduates, research and works of art the country actually needs and wants.

It is a system that nourishes and rewards talent, not political or social connections.

And it is a system of which all citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina can be proud – and to which foreign students and scholars will want to flock.

Impossible? Not at all. But it will take time. As the people of this country know all too well, it far easier and quicker to destroy than to create or rebuild. Yet rebuild you must if Bosnia and Herzegovina is to have a European future as estimable as its European past.

I am sure you, collectively, have the skills and brains and endurance required. I trust you will also have the will and the daring to make this effort.

For my part, I am ready to support the establishment or consolidation of a European university institute or research academy in the western Balkans such as I have suggested this morning should be a principal aim of regional cooperation.

I hope to see the results before too long. I will be watching with keen anticipation.