

Schwarz-Schilling: Time to End Higher Education Chaos

Chaos reigns in higher education throughout Bosnia and Herzegovina, and even after students have endured the mismanagement of the university system, their qualifications are not recognised outside the country because the authorities here have failed to meet their international obligations in respect to the accreditation and validation of academic qualifications, the High Representative and EU Special Representative, Christian Schwarz-Schilling, wrote in his weekly newspaper column.

The High Representative and EU Special Representative noted a recent case where nearly 300 graduates from two private faculties in Republika Srpska had their degrees annulled because the Education Ministry concluded that the process of academic assessment at the faculties was flawed. Although the authorities of Republika Srpska acted decisively, "this is just one among many instances where students have been penalised because of institutional failures," he wrote in an article that appeared in *Dnevni avaz*, *Nezavisne novine* and *Večernji list* today.

In response to this situation, Mr Schwarz-Schilling called on the members of Bosnia and Herzegovina 's Parliamentary Assembly to debate and enact the Higher Education Law, which enjoys widespread support throughout the country.

"While it will not on its own solve the problems of the university sector, it represents a huge step towards rehabilitating tertiary education in this country, especially when coupled with related reforms aimed at placing universities on a sound financial footing and establishing codes of ethics and improved standards of democracy, autonomy, governance and management," he wrote.

The current draft legislation was produced by educationalists from throughout Bosnia and Herzegovina working over an extended period together with international experts under the aegis of the Education Ministries and the Council of Europe, the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe and the Office of the High Representative. It will help pave the way for recognition of academic qualifications from Bosnia and Herzegovina in the rest of Europe and make it possible for students to complete part of their studies at foreign universities – something that is the norm elsewhere on the continent.

It will also provide for the integration of faculties in the universities throughout Bosnia and Herzegovina – replacing the current system where faculties are a law unto themselves, administering degrees and study courses in ways that are neither transparent nor accountable. And it will represent an important step towards Bosnia and Herzegovina fulfilling its obligations under the Lisbon Convention (which it signed in 2003), the Bologna Process (which it joined in the same year), and the European Partnership, the broad reform agenda designed to prepare the country for eventual EU membership.

“Members of Bosnia and Herzegovina’s new Parliamentary Assembly now have a real opportunity to enact a reform that will benefit everyone in the country,” Mr Schwarz-Schilling concluded. “They can do this by debating the Higher Education Law and enacting it without delay.”

The text of the High Representative/EU Special Representative’s [weekly column](#) can be accessed at www.ohr.int and www.eusrbih.org.