

OHR, OSCE, World Bank and Council of Europe concerned with yet another delay with the Higher Education Law

The Office of the High Representative, the OSCE Mission to BiH, the Council of Europe and the World Bank Country Office in BiH note that continued political infighting over the draft Higher Education Law will result in the cancellation of several key programs supported by the World Bank and other international organizations. More importantly it could deprive BiH citizens of the legal framework necessary for modernizing education in BiH. This follows the Council of Ministers' postponement, again, of the vote on the draft State Framework Law on Higher Education.

This continued obstruction following Monday's meeting with international organizations, in which key members of the Council of Ministers clarified their commitment to higher education reform, undercuts and jeopardizes the integrity of the body as well as the future of BiH education. The failure of Ministers to attend sessions of the Council of Ministers at a time when BiH has little over three months to fulfil the European Commission Feasibility Study conditions and the requirements for Membership of Partnership for Peace, demonstrates a complete lack of seriousness and responsibility. It also puts into jeopardy the Council of Europe's post accession requirements to adopt new education legislation based on European standards.

The new Higher Education law aims to improve the quality of this system through a more efficient use of BiH's tax payers' and students' resources. This law was prepared in cooperation with local experts and governments and its recommendations were welcomed and accepted by all sides at the conference on Reform of Higher Education held in Neum, on September 29-30, 2003. This law is also fully consistent with the principles of the Bologna Declaration which are implemented throughout

Europe and have been recently endorsed by BIH.

Without the new High Education law, university-level education in BiH will continue functioning poorly and will not appropriately serve the needs of its students, the economy or the society at large. In addition to problems of fragmentation, quality and relevance, the current system will continue using public resources inefficiently, and student completion rates will remain among the lowest in Europe.

In addition, this law is directly linked to two project supported by the World Bank – Education Restructuring Project worth US\$12 million and Economic Management Structural Adjustment Credit (EMSAC) worth US\$30 million. A key component of these two projects was the adoption of the High Education Law, which was supposed to establish accreditation of BiH universities at the state level and financing of higher education on the entity level.

Cancellation of the two projects will not only mean that this country would lose World Bank financing worth US\$ 42 million; **Firstly**, US\$ 30 million from the EMSAC project are already calculated into the 2004 budget and the loss of this money will create budget deficit which will effect payment of salaries, pensions and other budgetary expenditures.

Secondly, the loss of two important projects because of political infighting among government officials will certainly be reflected in the future interest of foreign and local investors as well as international donors to this country.