

# PDHR Donald Hays Holds Education Talks in Banja Luka

During a visit to Banja Luka on Tuesday, Principal Deputy High Representative Donald Hays briefed the rectors of Banja Luka University and Srpsko Sarajevo University on the OSCE Permanent Council meeting held last week in Vienna, at which it was decided that the OSCE will take over the role of coordinating the international community's education work in BiH.

Addressing the Permanent Council, the High Representative, Paddy Ashdown, argued strongly in favour of the OSCE taking the lead on education. With its broad field presence and experience in handling education issues in other countries, the OSCE is uniquely qualified to take on this task. The OSCE will continue to involve other institutions, including the OHR and the Council of Europe

The High Representative believes the international community is most effective when one agency takes a clear lead on an issue, coordinating the others as necessary. This has now been achieved with regard to education.

Before meeting the university rectors, Ambassador Hays participated in a roundtable discussion with students. Topics included the status of current efforts to bring BiH universities up to European standards. The Education Ministers have committed themselves to preparing BiH to become a signatory to the Bologna Declaration, which standardizes university education across Europe, and they are also supposed to be preparing BiH for accession to the Lisbon Convention, which provides for the fair recognition of qualifications and degrees and is necessary in order to make BiH degrees acceptable in Europe, and European degrees acceptable in BiH.

However, the Education Ministers have so far failed to make progress on this issue, which directly affects the career and earning prospects of thousands of BiH students.

Other issues adversely affecting the education of university students in BiH include the appalling waste of scarce resources entailed in maintaining seven universities, compared to just four before the war, corruption among university teachers, and disruptive political influence exercised by politicians over university funding and appointments.