

High Representative Reaffirms International Community's Commitment to Education Reform

The High Representative, Wolfgang Petritsch, expresses his full support for the message conveyed by Principal Deputy High Representative Donald Hays on Thursday at a roundtable on education reform. The High Representative reaffirms the commitment of the OHR and the International Community to substantial and rapid reform of the BiH education system, so that teachers can teach effectively and children can learn in a creative and secure classroom environment. The High Representative calls for an all-encompassing effort on the part of local authorities, teachers, parents and pupils to bring about real improvement in the standard of education in BiH – something which can only be achieved if education is viewed as a strategic priority.

Ambassador Hays was participating on the High Representative's behalf at a roundtable discussion with principals, parents and pupils from Jovan Ducic School in Kasindo and its two sister schools, 6th Primary School in Stup, and Vrhbosna Faletici School in Sarajevo's Stari Grad. The schools are among the leading exponents of modern teaching methods in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Assessing progress over the last two years, Ambassador Hays noted that there have been intensive efforts to eliminate chauvinism and intolerance from textbooks and create an educational environment in which any child from any background can feel welcome and secure at any school in BiH. These efforts will continue. Now, BiH schools must begin the work of

replacing obsolete teaching methods, based on rote learning, with progressive and effective techniques which are already the norm elsewhere in Europe.

Ambassador Hays noted that during the almost three years that the High Representative has been in Bosnia and Herzegovina he has repeatedly stressed the preeminence of education for the country's recovery. "A well managed school and university system that uses effective modern teaching methods to educate a new generation is not a luxury, it's a necessity as BiH competes with its neighbours to attract foreign investment and create a functioning market economy," Ambassador Hays said. "It is also a necessity if BiH is to prepare itself for further integration with the rest of Europe."

Despite the fact that "everyone recognises that education is the key to social and political harmony and economic development," he said. "Some politicians are still determined to create barriers between schoolchildren instead of building bridges."

The International Community has coordinated its approach to education and made it a priority, and the IC will work with local education stakeholders to overcome political obstruction, Ambassador Hays said.

Ambassador Hays noted that a countrywide education campaign currently being prepared by OHR will seek to "discover and disseminate the many ways in which good teachers around the country are already raising standards and giving the children in their care a better chance in life." He said that teachers and parents must take the initiative where politicians fail. "There is a great deal that schools can already accomplish, despite obstacles placed in their way by politicians who continue to cling to their own obsolete agenda," he said.

Ambassador Hays had an opportunity to hear the opinion of parents, teachers and pupils.

One parent noted that he is happy that his children attend a multiethnic school, but he is concerned about the reality facing returnees in both Entities. He said that this situation would be easier if the same textbooks were used throughout BiH. He also said that some school names should be changed, so that no pupil would feel out of place.

Teachers were primarily concerned about obsolete aspects of the curriculum.

“The International Community has partners in the BiH education reform. I recognise partners around this table this afternoon. You represent tens of thousands of parents, teachers and pupils around the country who want modern and efficient teaching in well run and open-minded schools. We are committed to working with you,” Ambassador Hays said.