

BiH Parliament Should Adopt Higher Education Law by Early May

The Board of Principals and the PIC Steering Board Ambassadors, along with the Council of Europe and the European Commission, urge the BiH Parliament to adopt the State-level Framework Law on Higher Education by 7 May in order not to jeopardize a vital aspect of Bosnia and Herzegovina's future in Europe and put at risk substantial international funding.

"The current education system in BiH is causing a terrible hemorrhage of young and talented individuals who are vital to the sustainability of this country," said the High Representative. "The Higher Education Law sets European standards by which BiH can support its younger generation and prepare them to take on the challenges ahead. It also demonstrates BiH's commitment to being part of the greater European community by providing a common educational framework that fully respects the national identity of all BiH's constituent peoples."

"Unfortunately," added Paddy Ashdown, "the recent attempts to create a full-scale university in Zenica are going in just the wrong direction. It is simply economically unsustainable to create a new university in a country that cannot properly fund the ones it already has. This case shows, most forcefully, why we need this State-level law."

Investing in quality higher education is an essential goal for Bosnia and Herzegovina. BiH authorities confirmed this by signing onto the Bologna Declaration and ratifying the Lisbon Recognition Convention and thereby taking steps for the BiH higher education system to be mutually recognized and respected throughout Europe. The Board of Principals and the

Steering Board Ambassadors remind the BiH Parliament of these commitments and their importance to BiH's future generations.

The State-level Framework Law on Higher Education is the culmination of a year's work by a team of experts, including Education Ministry representatives of both Entities and university professors who carefully crafted the document to reflect BiH's realities while ensuring BiH's position in the European Area of Higher Education.

The law specifically guarantees:

- To support students to receive quality courses on par with European institutions
- The recognition of BiH diplomas according to the same standards throughout Europe
- Student and academic participation in the decision-making process
- Student mobility and quality assurance, giving BiH students choices and ample opportunities

The law fully meets international standards and fulfils a key Council of Europe post-accession criterion. It aims to improve the quality of the system in order to serve not only student's needs, but the average tax payer. The new Higher Education Law makes spending of taxpayers' money more transparent and accountable.

The World Bank, recognizing the importance of higher education to the future prosperity and economic viability of BiH, is prepared to make available two loans worth 42 million USD that include 30 million USD of budget support and 12 million USD for essential higher education reform that will assist BiH to restructure its education institutions in line with those throughout Europe. Among other things, it means the introduction of the Diploma Supplement and European credit transfer system as main tools for promoting the mobility of students and teachers within the European Area of Higher

Education.

“The Higher Education Law is an opportunity for BiH to prepare its future generation along with those throughout Europe,” said OSCE Head of Mission Robert M. Beecroft. “Imagine, in just a few years BiH students will have the same opportunities as those in France, the UK and Germany – right here in their own country. Europe will be in BiH.”