

Failure to pass the Higher Education Law betrays students

The Office of the High Representative, the OSCE Mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina, the World Bank and the Council of Europe expressed their regret today on the failure to pass the Higher Education Law within the agreed deadline and outlined the unfortunate losses that have begun and will continue to mount.

Politicians in the State Parliament are holding up a law that will, if and when passed, put BiH into the European Higher Education Area. They are denying every student the chance to gain qualifications in BiH that would be recognized throughout Europe and following the World Bank's decision today, their prevarication has lost this country millions of dollars in international assistance. BiH's hard-pressed universities now have been denied 12 million USD – the equivalent of 1.7 million USD for every university in this country.

This is a blow to the future of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Moreover, unless those deputies who are against the law change their position and put the interests of the citizens first, they will also accelerate the already-serious exodus of motivated and ambitious young people from BiH to countries in Europe and beyond, where the criteria and standards contained in the Framework Law are already in force. They will also jeopardize the return of well-educated, highly dedicated young graduates who had decided to return to their country to contribute to its reform because they will be unable to seek due recognition of their degrees and diplomas acquired abroad, as provided for in the Framework law. They would be rejecting commitments to education reform already made by the

authorities, including the HDZ. And they would condemn the taxpayer-funded universities of this country to long-term inferiority and growing irrelevance, producing graduates whose diplomas are not seen as credible beyond the borders of BiH.

The choice is stark: either BiH moves forward without further delay toward a coherent, tolerant and enlightened public higher education system; or its young people, their families, and educators throughout BiH continue to pay an ever-increasing price for failure.

The future of education in BiH now lies in the hands of the State Parliament. They bear a heavy responsibility and they will have to explain why they are holding the future chances and opportunities of every student in BiH hostage.