

High Representative calls for urgent reform of BiH education system

The High Representative, Wolfgang Petritsch, today called on the BiH education authorities at every level to sweep away "the unacceptable habits which have accrued during a long and trying period of war and stagnation" and make reform of the education system a matter of the utmost priority.

Addressing administrators and academics at a conference on the future development of Sarajevo University, the High Representative noted that one of the reasons young people want to leave Bosnia and Herzegovina is the inadequacy of an education system plagued by poor facilities, old-fashioned teaching methods, and inadequately standardised qualifications, and cut off from research and teaching developments elsewhere in Europe.

"In the six years since Dayton, the focus of the International Community in Bosnia and Herzegovina has been on keeping the peace and kick-starting the economy," the High Representative noted. "There have been commendable efforts by NGOs to make a positive impact in the field of education, yet it may have been the case that insufficient attention has been paid to this area, at least by the lead agencies. It has become clear, though, that as long as the education sector severely underperforms, this will threaten the economic and social future of BiH and its prospects of European integration."

The High Representative called for the number of universities in BiH to be reduced from seven to four, and he advocated rationalising the present system whereby public funding is

allocated to faculties rather than universities as a whole. He said this resulted in money being used inefficiently and non-transparently. He called for BiH's speedy accession to the Lisbon Convention on the recognition of Higher Education qualifications. As things stand, degrees offered by BiH universities are not universally recognised, even inside the country. The High Representative also urged the Entity Education Ministries to make the necessary preparations for Bosnia and Herzegovina to become a signatory to the 1999 Bologna Declaration. This would let BiH students benefit from the European Credit Transfer System, which allows students to complete parts of their degree courses at different universities.