

SDHR Matthias Sonn calls on citizens to insist on their rights when faced with official incompetence, inefficiency and corruption

The Senior Deputy High Representative, Matthias Sonn, today called on BiH citizens to stand up for their rights when politicians and officials fail to do their jobs properly. The SDHR was addressing students at the Second Gymnasium in Sarajevo on the role of authority and the role of citizens in a democratic society, part of a series of external lectures in a course on Education for Democracy and Human Rights.

Ambassador Sonn noted that a broad range of rights are enshrined in the Dayton Peace Agreement, including the right to a fair trial, the right to privacy, the right to express opinions freely, and the right to travel and live wherever a citizen chooses. These and other rights are also supported by treaties, signed by Bosnia and Herzegovina, such as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination and the Children's Rights Convention. These treaties require signatories to make regular progress reports, yet Bosnia is behind schedule in producing no fewer than 14 such reports.

"Similarly, of the nine human-rights related laws whose passage was required before Bosnia and Herzegovina could become a member of the Council of Europe, only three were adopted by the domestic legislative bodies," Ambassador Sonn pointed out. "The other six had to be imposed by the High Representative."

The Senior Deputy High Representative argued that citizens in BiH “still tend to believe that officials have the upper hand, that officials must always be obeyed, or that they must be bribed. Authority figures are often viewed with misgiving, or fear, or simple cynicism.” He said that corrupt and incompetent officials must be weeded out, while citizens must insist on their rights.

“You have a right to freedom from corruption,” he told the students. “Politicians who deliver favours for their friends, infringe that right. You have a right to an efficient civil service. Bureaucrats who are insolent or lazy, officious or unhelpful infringe that right. You have a right to protection from crime. Police officers who are prejudiced or dishonest infringe that right. You have a right to competent government. Politicians who are lazy, self-serving or obstructive infringe that right.”

Asked, during the question and answer session which followed the lecture, why other countries do not accept BiH academic qualifications, Ambassador Sonn cited, as a case in point, the obligation of the Entity Education Ministries to make necessary preparations without further delay for Bosnia and Herzegovina’s accession to the 1997 Lisbon Convention, which will among other things, lead to the international recognition of BiH high-school diplomas.

[See full speech](#)