

Universities, Democratic Culture and the Sensible Transfer of Sovereignty



Passage of a Higher Education Law, which will be debated in the BiH Parliament in the next two weeks, will help ensure that governments do not dictate what is taught in universities and that the universities maintain acceptable standards of academic integrity, the Senior Deputy High Representative, Peter Bas-Backer, told students at the University of East Sarajevo in Pale today.

Ambassador Bas-Backer said the Law would begin to address serious shortcomings in the tertiary education sector. "In many subjects course work has not been revised and upgraded for years and the latest in international research has not been incorporated," he said. "And because Bosnia and Herzegovina has been unable to honour its international commitments and enact a Higher Education Law, BiH university degrees are not recognised outside BiH and non-BiH university degrees are not recognised inside BiH. The failure – until now – to harmonise course work with European university standards means that students from this country do not yet have the option of completing parts of their degree studies at foreign universities."

Passage of the Higher Education Law will allow Bosnia and Herzegovina to join the other 45 countries that have enacted

legislation underlining the importance of higher education for the development of democratic values.

Placing the Higher Education Law, which is a European Partnership requirement, in the broader context of Bosnia and Herzegovina's European integration process, Ambassador Bas-Backer said the Law "will bring European standards to Bosnia and Herzegovina and bring Bosnia and Herzegovina closer to Europe."

He argued that the application of European standards and values emerged from a long tradition of pragmatism. The EU founding states were willing to surrender elements of sovereignty because they recognised that joint management of strategic resources would deliver economies of scale and make it harder for countries to go to war again. "It was not about glory, honour and national pride – it was about the wellbeing and security of millions of people. They did not transfer sovereignty lightly – they transferred it sensibly," he said.

Ambassador Bas-Backer suggested that Bosnia and Herzegovina could follow the development pattern of Ireland, which has a comparable population size, land area and tradition of communal diversity. "The size of Ireland's economy has nearly quadrupled in the last 20 years. Taxes have been reduced, unemployment has been slashed and foreign investment has skyrocketed. The accession process and the post-accession influx of development funds from Brussels made it possible to set in place the nuts and bolts of an economy that could begin to compete in the global market," he said.

He stressed that emulating Ireland's success is a realistic prospect, but "only if citizens hold their leaders accountable for the strategic decisions that they take, and that is exactly why we need to see an exponential growth in the democratic culture of the universities."

The text of Ambassador Bas-Backer's [speech](https://www.ohr.int/) can be accessed at <https://www.ohr.int/>.