

Ambassador Beecroft supports greater parent involvement in schools

Sarajevo, 22 January 2004 – OSCE Head of Mission, Ambassador Robert Beecroft, addressed the second state conference of the BiH Council of Schools and Parents "Partnership for Better Education". The conference in Sarajevo gathered parents, teachers and students from all over BiH. At present, there are approximately 200 Councils operating in five Cantons and in the Republika Srpska.

Ambassador Beecroft's Speech

Catholic Relief Services, World Vision and UMCOR, as the hosts of this conference, have invested a great deal in the promotion of a more democratic, participatory and responsive education system in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The OSCE Mission to BiH has offered its support to this process and we are proud of a strong record of field co-operation. Through the creation of parent school councils, contact groups, and other community-based groups, the bar has been raised on parental involvement in schools - promoting a standard comparable with that of other nations in Europe and North America.

The inclusion of a reference to such Councils in Article 53 of the Framework Law on Primary and General Secondary Education is a landmark step supporting the creation of these Councils at a country-wide level. Our joint concern is to ensure that the input of those most affected by education reform - parents, teachers and students – have sufficient input into many stages of the education reform process.

Members of Parent School Councils participated in the six Working Groups that developed the five Pledges of the Education Reform Strategy. Parent School Councils are and will continue to be directly involved in the implementation of reforms, as well as the feedback process.

The OSCE also would like to stress its support for the establishment of a National Parent School Association, which would be capable of lobbying at all levels of decision-making in the education process. While the formation and support of these bodies enables education reform, it also should assist towards the proper implementation of reform. These bodies can ensure that minimum standards set out in the education reform legislation are being met and that students' needs, rather than political agendas, are genuinely addressed.

Looking to the future, we would like to see the National Parent School Association, or NPSA, receive the support it needs to be an effective voice for education stakeholders. We would like to see the NPSA working for excellence in education in BiH, by promoting

the democratic participation of those most well-placed to communicate the needs of students.

We therefore encourage PSCs to voice their needs as this NPSA structure is developed, to maximize its response. We also encourage Ministries of Education and school administrators to solicit collaboration and input from individual Councils and the NPSA, and be receptive to their initiatives and requests.

OSCE sees Parent School Councils as a vital source of grassroots information on how reform is progressing at the school and classroom level, to participate in ongoing refinement of the reform, and to explore mechanisms through which to collaborate with Ministries at various levels.

The OSCE is committed to continue its support of parent and teacher involvement in schools, by pushing forward article 53, supporting youth initiatives, and continuing to promote an environment of collaboration and learning among all stakeholders.