



Opportunity for New Beginnings

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The formation of new authorities is always a good opportunity to reflect on the previous mandate, and an even better occasion for a fresh start.

This has become the standard language in BiH after the formation of authorities. Usually, citizens are disappointed by the end of each mandate and, consequently, many have decided to leave BiH.

The mother of all questions in Bosnia and Herzegovina is, how to overcome past and present divisions and build a stable, prosperous country beneficial to all? No doubt, this is possible, but it would require a change in political behavior and methods. Political leaders must fully commit to constructive politics, oriented towards healthy compromises, set aside their differences and work for common goals.

As we have seen, this is easier to say than do in Bosnia and Herzegovina. To be realistic, the international community cannot and should not do the work for BiH politicians. This does not mean that we are not prepared to safeguard the achievements and reforms of the post-Dayton era, and to prevent possible backsliding. It means that the quality and the pace of progress is primarily the responsibility of political representatives – and the citizens who elect them.

We need not look very far to find inspiration for positive changes. Let us remind ourselves of the name dispute between Skopje and Athens that lasted for more than two decades. It took two leaders in the right place, at the right time, understanding that cooperation is better than confrontation to resolve the issue, for the benefit of both sides. These two leaders understood the spirit of time. They understood that immovable positions are not indefinitely sustainable.

Also in BiH, in 2010, the Council of Ministers, under the Chairmanship of Nikola Spiric, implemented a list of more than 170 requirements, which opened the doors for visa-free travel to the European Union for all citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Same positive changes are possible in BiH, but are they realistic? Let us hope for the best. Let us hope that the political elite understands the spirit of time and the urgency needed to improve the standard of living in the country.

Unfortunately, Bosnia and Herzegovina is still to some extent stuck in the past. Moreover, it appears that certain basic questions are repeatedly reopened, and distract attention from current problems that should be dealt as a priority, such as air pollution or the changes in the rule of law area and other areas. In fact, it appears that many in BiH share the same problems, but there are very few joint solutions. The current political dynamic simply makes no sense.

There are many capable people in BiH, including in politics. It is clear what is required to turn this country into a stable and prosperous democracy, attractive for foreign investors. First, political stability must be improved. Second, the rule of law must be dramatically strengthened and fight against corruption should become a real priority. Lastly, administrative procedures should enhance, not hinder, economic growth.

There is considerable expertise and willingness in the international community, foremost in the EU and international financial institutions, which could help guide BiH through the necessary reforms. It is up to BiH to take the helping hand of its international partners.

Beyond that, there are pending issues that should have been addressed long ago. For example, the citizens of Mostar have been deprived of their right to vote for more than a decade. It is a travesty. It is humiliating. The political parties have a responsibility to find a solution on Mostar. Another issue is the implementation of the ODIHR recommendations that would improve transparency in the election process in BiH.

The implementation of the Sejdic-Finci decision remains an obligation of BiH. It is also totally unacceptable that the decision of the Constitutional Court establishing the constituent status of the Serb peoples in Herzegovina-Neretva Canton is not implemented after one decade.

Also, of course, the appointment of a new FBiH government and governments in two cantons must be completed. Until this is done – and, again, it should have been done long ago – officials must continue to diligently perform their duties. A case in point, the appointment of the FBiH Constitutional Court judges is stuck at the level of the FBiH Presidency for no justifiable reason.

The year ahead will objectively be very demanding, particularly due to the local elections. I hope politicians will not make it even more difficult with unreasonable, divisive and often insulting rhetoric and actions – which say plenty about them, but do nothing to improve the country.

I will finish with the words of a universally known humanitarian born in our neighborhood what is now North Macedonia, Mother Teresa: *"Yesterday is gone. Tomorrow has not yet come. We have only today. Let us begin."*