

Article by Larry Butler, Principal Deputy High Representative: “Spring Cleaning”

It's the time of year to clear away the cobwebs, open the windows, let in the fresh air and engage in some vigorous housecleaning.

This might usefully be applied to politics as well as to the home.

In the course of this year, as we move forward to the October elections, we are going to start hearing more and more from politicians. This may fill many citizens with a certain amount of weary skepticism, but there is a way of minimizing the hot air that politicians characteristically produce (in my country as well as yours) and making them talk about things that really matter.

To do this we need to engage in a spot of political spring cleaning. Let's open the windows and let in some fresh air and identify which politicians or policies have turned out to be useful and which have turned out to be useless. In due course the useful can be retained and the useless can be recycled or thrown away.

The municipalities are a good place to start. It is in the municipality that, nine times out of ten, the government meets the people.

It is at the municipality that we have to stand in line and wait for permits, licenses, stamps and documents of all kinds, and it is to the municipality that we look for services such

as local clinics, refuse collection, road maintenance, and the upkeep of children's playgrounds and a variety of other amenities.

If the municipality is working well, our lives are noticeably better.

If the municipality is working badly, our lives are noticeably worse.

Let me offer two contrasting examples.

In Zenica the municipality has successfully obtained an ISO 9001 certificate – which doesn't mean that it is necessarily going to deliver efficient and timely service, but *does* mean that it has set in place the structures that are needed in order to do that. It's an important start. In recent years the municipality has been able to work effectively with investors and with other levels of government to attract new capital to the district and thus create new jobs.

Compare this to the situation in Ilidza. There has been a good deal of building throughout the municipality, but unfortunately a lot of it is in the wrong place. Money has come into the community, but it has been used to build luxury villas rather than to start new companies or create new jobs. It *hasn't* been used to improve the infrastructure or the running of Ilidza's most celebrated attraction, Vrelo Bosne. Vrelo Bosne is one of Sarajevo's – and the wider region's – prime recreation areas, a place where, in the summer, families can spend time inexpensively and in environmentally friendly surroundings. Yet it is underdeveloped and badly managed. This park should be a jewel. Instead, it's a disgrace.

The issue here isn't a *party*-political one. Zenica and Ilidza are governed by the same party.

But it *is* political.

It can be addressed by identifying which politicians or policies have turned out to be useful and which have turned out to be useless. Zenica and Ilidza and all of the other municipalities in Bosnia and Herzegovina have to be opened up to this kind of scrutiny. It's a good time of year to do this – when we are opening the windows and letting in fresh air.

I have cited these two municipalities as respectively a good example and a bad example. Perhaps residents will correct me. And perhaps the municipal leadership in Ilidza will be able to explain why they have been unable to manage Vrelo Bosne more effectively and why building construction in the municipality is thoroughly unregulated.

In each municipality in the country there are distinct political forces at work. In some cases the mayor is prevented by the municipal assembly from working effectively; in others it's the opposite way around. Some municipalities have natural economic and demographic advantages; others labour under immense practical handicaps.

But these are the very issues that have to be explored and explained.

Municipal residents have to explore. And municipal officials have to explain.

The officials don't *own* the municipality; the residents do. Let municipal officials explain what they've done, what they're doing, what they plan to do.

Some policies – the ones that work – will certainly be retained. Others really ought to be thrown away.