

Weekly column by Christian Schwarz-Schilling, High Representative for BiH: “Gesture Politics Deliver Nothing”

In just the last ten days we have witnessed a spate of political manoeuvres that have taken up a great deal of time and energy (and in some cases public funds) but produced no positive dividends for citizens.

Last week the Srebrenica Municipal Assembly, in an initiative that clearly exceeded its constitutional authority, adopted a resolution calling for separation from Republika Srpska.

In the same week, an attempt was made to appoint a new Federation Government two days before the OHR completed the vetting process, a process that, in the absence of domestic legislation at Entity level, is a well-established as an effective means of ensuring those who are personally unfit to exercise ministerial office are not allowed to do so. It's a process that had been officially requested by Federation President Borjana Kristo.

Meanwhile, as Mostar observed the third anniversary of the city's Statute, which laid out clear steps to be taken in order to begin providing urban services on an equitable, affordable and sustainable basis, a variety of Mostar politicians publicly lamented the failure to transform the city's prospects over the last three years.

Each of these cases has one thing in common – they show politicians focusing on problems instead of solutions. I

believe this is because they have yet to understand that what is important is not where you are – it's where you want to go, and how you propose to get there.

In each of these three examples there is broad political agreement on where we want to go. The desired outcome is that:

- Srebrenica's economy is rehabilitated (agricultural projects and investments in light manufacturing have succeeded, but haven't been seized upon by the local authorities and developed into wholesale community regeneration) and that projects appropriate for addressing the traumatic events that took place there (justice being seen to be done together with educational, memorial and reconciliation projects) are placed on a sound footing and then expanded;
- that the Federation Government – after a five-month delay caused exclusively by party-political horse-trading over ministerial positions – can at last get to grips with reducing unemployment, providing adequate social services, and raising living standards;
- that Mostar completes the unification process and exploits to the full its World Heritage status and turns itself into a tourism and manufacturing dynamo for the economy of Southwest Bosnia and Herzegovina and, indeed, the country as a whole.

Has the Srebrenica Municipal Assembly's resolution on separation brought this goal nearer?

Has the attempt to form a Federation Government without vetting brought this goal nearer?

Has the acrimonious hand-wringing of Mostar politicians brought this goal nearer?

In each case, the answer is no.

These manoeuvres have delivered nothing and wasted a great

deal of time and energy – time and energy that citizens have a right to see put to much, much better use.

All of the political parties claim that it is “others” that are causing the problem (in each of the above examples the parties have been particularly vigorous in pointing the finger of blame), but this is merely an excuse to do nothing, an excuse to not even seek solutions in good faith. Effective politicians ask themselves questions that produce new approaches not new accusations: if the others are creating obstacles, what am I doing to get them to change? What am I doing to persuade them to see reason? What am I doing to carry them along to the solution that we all want?

Srebrenica deserves better; Mostar deserves better; the people of the Federation deserve better – as does the entire population of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

And politicians will *do* better – in sharp contrast to what we have seen in recent days – if they focus on where we all want to go and how we can get there, instead of wasting time, energy and public funds on the politics of pointless gesture.

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