

Weekly column by Christian Schwarz-Schilling, High Representative for BiH: “Three Members, One Presidency”

On Monday, the new Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina will take office. The Presidency of any country has an important representative and symbolic function both on the domestic and international stage. The tripartite Presidency here is a creative response to a complex challenge. Over the past ten years this unique institution has sometimes risen to meet that challenge and sometimes it has failed to meet it.

When it has succeeded, it has discharged what is an indispensable duty in any functioning democracy – it has created a robust and impartial presence through which to uphold the interests of citizens at the very heart of the political process, at the same time representing the citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina in an appropriately dignified way at national and international events. It has been an institution of which any citizen could be proud, not just citizens from one constituent people.

When it has failed, it has reduced even further citizens' faith in the political process domestically and raised questions about the ability of Bosnia and Herzegovina's representatives to represent the country on the international stage. On Monday, we will have a new beginning and all of us – the citizens of this country and those who wish it well – want the new Presidency to succeed.

The manner in which it can succeed is clear. The Presidency

works well when its members honour their formal commitment to represent not just those who voted for them but all citizens.

As everyone knows, the three members of the Presidency come from the three constituent peoples. Less well understood, however is the fact that they do not represent the constituent peoples as such. The Presidency and its members represent – and work on behalf of – the country as a whole.

The institution has failed – indeed it has been brought into disrepute – when members have set themselves up as champions of one or other constituent people. It has worked when its members have acted in concert to secure benefits for the entire country.

In public at least, almost every member of the Presidency in the past has subscribed to the principle that they have the interests of all citizens at heart, even if in practice some have conspicuously failed to abide by it. The three incoming members of the Presidency will also no doubt commit themselves publicly to working not for a narrow constituency but for the whole country and every citizen. I expect them to live up to such a commitment and to act in the common good.

If the constitutional reform process proceeds as quickly and as successfully as we hope it will, this might be the last Presidency that operates along the complex lines laid out in the Dayton Peace Agreement. But until there is a change, this is the Presidency we have and it must carry out its duties in accordance with the law and in the most efficient and practical manner possible.

In the past week, I have met with the three incoming members of the Presidency – Zelko Komsic, Nebojsa Radmanovic and Haris Silajdzic – and discussed their future work with them. Together, the three of them can and should have a positive impact on the lives and prospects of all the people of Bosnia and Herzegovina . I wish them well.

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