

Removal of Ahmed Smajic, Minister of Agriculture, Water Resources and Forestry of the Federation of BiH

The High Representative, Wolfgang Petritsch, today issued a Decision removing Mr Ahmed Smajic from his position of Minister of Agriculture, Water Resources and Forestry of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

As Minister, Mr Smajic impeded the economic reform effort in Bosnia and Herzegovina and development of transparency in all aspects of the work of his Ministry through obstruction, continued inaction and corrupt practice. Given the importance of economic development in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and the exhortations of the Conference of the Peace Implementation Council held in Brussels in this regard, the High Representative has been compelled to remove him from office.

Mr Smajic has been aware of the outbreaks of infectious animal diseases in Bosnia and Herzegovina since 1998. Despite the International Community's urgings, he failed to take appropriate action, which has resulted in this sickness becoming widespread among domestic livestock and, in recent months, humans. Today, the Federation of BiH has amongst the highest instances of Q-Fever in the world, for which Mr Smajic is directly responsible. As Minister, Mr Smajic removed animals from quarantine, even though they were nevertheless in a diseased state. Further abuse of livestock acquisition programmes involved buying unhealthy and unsuitable animals from abroad instead of, as envisaged, in the Federation, thereby allowing the import of infected animals through the subversion of international donations. Moreover, a significant number of animals were fraudulently delivered to recipients who later proved to be non-existent. These practices have endangered the health of the very people he was supposed to serve. Many more animals will have to now be destroyed, further damaging the country's agriculture.

The adoption of much needed agricultural reforms, designed to promote a free market economy which would kick-start agricultural productivity, currently at half the level achieved in Western Europe, were delayed by Smajic's inaction. Even after their eventual adoption, following pressure by the International Community, Smajic's Ministry has failed to implement this strategy for agriculture.

Similar obstruction to reform can be seen in the water sector, where despite investments totalling over 350 million US dollars by the International Community to reform the water sector in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Vodoprivredas remain parallel institutions dominated by non-transparent, inefficient and self-serving operating methods. Independent reports show that water charges are four times those required to operate, and there is no clear trace of how these surplus funds are used. Furthermore, Mr Smajic's ministry systematically stalled any development in this vital utility which means that many areas remain without supplies to support the population.

Mr Smajic's removal from his position as Minister of Agriculture, Water Resources and Forestry of the Federation of BiH is effective immediately, and he is banned from running in elections or holding any positions of public trust. The vacant position shall be filled according to the regular appointment procedure. However, if no replacement is found within 30 days, the High Representative may appoint an individual to serve in the capacity of Minister. The Deputy Minister will be acting Minister in the interim period.