

New Year, New Outlook



The New Year is off to a good and auspicious start with agreement on the formation of a government after months of negotiations, the High Representative and EU Special Representative, Christian Schwarz-Schilling, wrote in his weekly newspaper column.

“Bosnia and Herzegovina should soon have a new government in place and, critically, the seven parties that have come together to form it have also agreed a comprehensive programme to take the country forward,” Mr Schwarz-Schilling wrote in his column, which appeared in *Večernji list*, *Nezavisne novine* and *Dnevni avaz*.

The High Representative and EU Special Representative indicated that he was encouraged by the fact that agreement had been reached by the parties themselves with minimal intervention from the international community. “This is in line with the philosophy I laid out when taking up my position as High Representative and EU Special Representative just under a year ago, namely that I would not intervene in problem-solving where solutions were properly the responsibility of Bosnia and Herzegovina’s elected leaders,” he wrote.

Mr Schwarz-Schilling paid tribute to the way in which the Presidency, which has constitutional responsibility for nominating the Chair of the Council of Ministers, had helped broker the agreement. “The ability to form governments within a reasonable timeframe is also critical to meeting the ownership challenge necessary for transition to take place in Bosnia and Herzegovina as scheduled,” he wrote.

Mr Schwarz-Schilling also praised party leaders for demonstrating a willingness to make necessary compromises and

accommodate each others' positions to agree a common programme. "This is precisely the kind of pragmatic approach that politicians need to demonstrate to take responsibility for Bosnia and Herzegovina's future and govern the country effectively," he wrote.

The High Representative and EU Special Representative pointed out, however, that a new administration was still not in place and that much work remains to be done to ensure that Bosnia and Herzegovina has an effective government. "A House of Peoples still needs to be formed for parliament to be able to pass legislation and this, in turn, depends on the formation of governments at both the cantonal and federation level," he wrote.

Mr Schwarz-Schilling noted that the programme that the parties agreed places Bosnia and Herzegovina's European integration and, in particular, fulfilment of the various conditions for the signing of a Stabilisation and Association Agreement with the European Union, including police reform, at the top of the agenda. "In order to fulfil the conditions for signing an SAA and help make Bosnia and Herzegovina a candidate country for EU membership, political leaders will have to continue to demonstrate the pragmatism and capacity for compromise that they have shown in reaching Wednesday's agreement," he wrote.

Mr Schwarz-Schilling also pointed out that drawing up a programme that all coalition partners can agree on is only the first step towards the creation of an effective government. "The test of the government will be the way in which it seeks to develop policies to back up this programme and address key issues, such as constitutional reform, on which there are currently diverging positions," he wrote.

"It is critical that the new government comes together as soon as possible and that it and parliament focus on the reform agenda and address the many outstanding issues that can contribute both to Bosnia and Herzegovina's European

integration and to improving the living conditions and prospects of all its citizens," Mr Schwarz-Schilling concluded.

The text of the High Representative/EU Special Representative's weekly column can be accessed at www.ohr.int and www.eusrbih.org.