

Statement by the High Representative for BiH, Christian Schwarz-Schilling at the Press Conference



Good afternoon and thank you for coming at such short notice.

After several false starts, it appears that Bosnia and Herzegovina 's state-level institutions have truly begun functioning this week. That is the good news.

The bad news is that the Federal institutions have just made a false start.

I have deliberately stayed out of the government-formation process, believing that this is a core function of any normal democracy.

I have underlined in my meetings with Western capitals that one indicator of Bosnia and Herzegovina 's progress is that elections and the process of government-formation have been handled competently by the institutions of this country.

That is why I take no pleasure in announcing that today I signed a decision to nullify yesterday's decision to appoint the Government of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The outgoing Federation Government will continue to act in a caretaker capacity until a new Government is appointed. That

can only happen once my Office has announced that the vetting process is complete. I have just informed President Kristo that this process is complete.

Had any other option been available to me, I would have taken it. I was, however, faced with a blatant attempt to appoint a questionable candidate by manipulating the vetting system and was obliged to react.

The Federation authorities left me with no other option.

At the start of my mandate, I said I was ready to use my powers in the event that the stability of this country was brought into question.

There is no doubt in my mind that a Federation Government staffed by unsuitable Ministers would undermine the ability of the country to complete the tasks that lie ahead during the next four years.

The fact of the matter is that at least one individual appointed yesterday has not passed the scrutiny of the vetting process.

I'm not going to name names here. The vetting process is not public.

The OHR has undertaken not to comment on the vetting process and I intend to honour my commitments, even if others have not.

My office informed Federation officials of our concerns regarding the process by letter on Wednesday and by telephone on Thursday. We also thought we had a solution to avoid this situation.

This situation was, therefore, entirely avoidable.

In her letter of 9 March, Federation President Borjana Kristo asked OHR to vet Ministerial nominees prior to their

appointment.

Yesterday, the OHR informed Federation leaders that Ministerial appointments must not go ahead until the vetting process is complete.

The Government of Republika Srpska, as well as all Cantons in which governments have been appointed, have all respected the vetting process.

The Federation should be no different.

Despite the fact that vetting is now a well-established, countrywide practice, despite the fact that the OHR received a request to carry out the vetting process, and despite the fact that the international community made clear it had concerns with nominees, Federation leaders hurried to appoint all nominees before the OHR could announce the results of this process.

I've heard suggestions that the delay to Federation Government formation is a result of the vetting process.

This is not the case.

The vetting system is widely supported because Bosnia and Herzegovina's citizens are aware that all too often candidates who were plainly unfit to hold senior posts were being nominated to them.

It has also undoubtedly improved the quality of governance in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Given five months of vacillation by Federation officials and the hurried move to appoint the Government only days before my office was to announce the results of the vetting process, I can only conclude that that the decision was a deliberate attempt to circumvent and manipulate this process.

The OHR is as keen as any to see a Government appointed in the

Federation. However, given the issues that this country faces during the next four years, the OHR maintains that the vetting process should be completed.

Thank you.