

Task Force Launches Five-Point Plan for Public Administration Reform

Public Administration reform will change the way citizens react with the state and save millions of KM in taxpayers' money, BiH Justice Minister Slobodan Kovac said today at the inaugural meeting of the Intergovernmental Task Force on Public Administration Reform. The Task Force was set up to develop and implement reform proposals presented to, and endorsed by, the PIC-Steering Board in Brussels on 28 March.

"Our Prime Ministers have taken the joint initiative to accelerate reform of public administration at all levels," said Dr Kovac, who chaired the meeting. "They presented an ambitious reform package to the PIC, and the International Community has expressed its full support for these targets. Implementing them will improve our chances of entering the European Union by the end of this decade – and they will be instrumental in bringing BiH into a common European Administrative Space."

The Task Force meeting, which was held in Brcko, was attended by the State-level and Entity ministers responsible for public-administration reform, the Mayors of Brcko, Sarajevo and Banja Luka, the heads of the Civil Service Agencies, BiH experts, such as Auditors, and members of the International Community, including EC Ambassador Michael B. Humphreys.

Dr Kovac emphasised that, in addition to improving public finances and bringing BiH closer to European standards, reform of the bureaucracy will improve services to citizens. "City and municipality administrations are the levels at which citizens usually interact with the authorities – and these authorities must have the necessary funds to offer and run

services required when people purchase property, get married or register their car, for example.”

The Task Force’s work will focus on five aims:

- Public administration has to be cost-effective and efficient, and downsized where appropriate;
- It has to be able to manage public funds, taxpayers’ money, reliably and efficiently;
- It has to be run by professionals, not political-party appointees, at all levels of Government;
- Funds available to the administration must be used transparently and in accordance with EU best practice;
- The administration has to serve citizens, not politicians.

“There are initiatives already ongoing, but what BiH needs is a common and coherent countrywide strategy – the Task Force will be the heart and mind of this strategy,” Dr Kovac said.

The Task Force will present a comprehensive strategy by Autumn 2004. A detailed work plan, drawn up by SDHR Gerhard Enver Schrömbgens, who will serve as the secretary of the Task Force, will be considered at the next meeting, on 15 May.

Tuesday’s meeting also touched on issues such as fully implementing Freedom of Access to Information legislation, and using modern technology, including the Internet and email, to improve services to citizens.

Noting that the Task Force’s inaugural meeting was held in Brcko, and subsequent meetings would be held in different towns and cities around the country Ambassador Schrömbgens said it was “important that the Task Force carry out its work as a countrywide exercise.” He added that “the Task Force will allow us to implement our various activities under one roof – professionalising and depoliticising the civil service, strengthening independent auditing functions, improving procurement standards, and optimising service delivery

performance.”

Ambassador Schrömbgens said BiH politicians and experts must take charge of Public Administration reform, on which the success of all other government reforms will depend. “It is up to the BiH members of the Task Force – not OHR, or the International Community – to decide how to move forward,” he said.

Ambassador Humphreys, who is also a member of the Task Force, said the Stabilisation and Association process requires the development of an overall BiH public administration reform agenda, the adoption of compatible civil-service laws in the Entities and completion of the review process for civil servants. “The results of this reform should very quickly be visible to all,” Ambassador Humphreys said. “Public administration has to fulfil a huge number of roles in order for the government on all levels to be more efficient – both towards its citizens and in representing the country abroad.”

Ambassador Humphreys added that “strengthening” the bureaucracy “does not mean increasing the number of staff, but rather the setting-up of an effective, professional and cost-efficient public administration.”