

Weekly column by Christian Schwarz-Schilling, High Representative for BiH: “Governing Coalition Must Ensure Reform”



The Council of Ministers led by Nikola Spiric has been in office now for just over 100 days. Party infighting brought the work of the Council of Ministers to a standstill in February and March before it had even begun to function properly. But, after a slow start, the government has had some successes.

Over the last three months Prime Minister Spiric and his team have played an important and constructive role in, for example, finding a solution for decertified police officers; bringing the new Regional Cooperation Council to Sarajevo; returning BiH airspace fully to the BiH civil aviation authorities and introducing greater participation by civic groups in public life. This Council of Ministers has also put in place agreements on social insurance with the Republic of Slovenia, on visa liberalisation and on the seats for the State's Postal Agency, Civil Aviation Directorate and Flight control as well as on the quality of liquid fuel.

I commend these achievements and the positive role played by Prime Minister Spiric. However, the Prime Minister himself would immediately agree that more results are needed and that the pace must be accelerated.

Some will point to the structural limitations of the BiH government as the underlying reason for its failure to do more. I do not believe that any of the previous chairs of the Council of Ministers would argue with the fact that the Prime Minister has limitations placed on his ability to coordinate and direct the Council of Ministers. Incidentally, this was one of the issues addressed by last years April package of Constitutional reforms.

But the fact is that many Ministers in the current Government still act as if they were responsible to their parties first and the citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina second; as if their Ministries were parallel and independent pillar, with no sense of the collective nature of coalition government. They must understand that when they became ministers they stopped being responsible, primarily, to their respective parties and started being responsible to the general public.

The Council of Ministers has now adopted and published its own work plan for 2007 and coordinated the adoption of work plans for each of the ministries. This year special attention has been given to BiH's obligations in the Stabilisation and Association process. They have laid out what they propose to accomplish and how and when they intend to do it.

That means Nikola Spiric, Tarik Sadovic, Dragan Vrankic, Sven Alkalaj, Selmo Cikotic, Barisa Colak, Safet Halilovic, Bozo Ljubic, Sredoje Novic, and Slobodan Puhalic have set themselves clear and measurable tasks, tasks that the BiH public can review their performance against.

It is essential now that Ministers appropriate for themselves maximum freedom of action within the work plans now agreed, and that they minimize the constraints placed upon them by short-term party political calculations.

Crucially, all coalition parties must pull together to put into practice the coalition agreement they have adopted. They

need to give the Ministers they have nominated the freedom to deliver results for the people of this country. Citizens rightly expect action and after a slow start, it is time for results.

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