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THE NEW CABINET: ABLE TO DELIVER OR THE SAME OLD SAME OLD?

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The excitement and disappointment (in some quarters) regarding the appointment of President Cyril Ramaphosa's Cabinet has settled. A number of articles have already been written about the Cabinet and its strong points, weak points, old members, and new recruits. The question remains: can the new Cabinet deliver on the President's promises?

It is essential to remember that the most fundamental change to the new Cabinet is the chairman. How President Ramaphosa will lead - and what he prioritises - will distinguish his Cabinet from that of its predecessor. In addition, what is new is the support he will have. It is now generally understood that the choice of Ministers and deputies was a product of intense behind-the-scenes negotiations with various stakeholders. In the end, of the 28 Ministers, only five are known-Zuma supporters (including Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma, who in the recent past has actually become supportive of the Ramaphosa cause). This implies that Ramaphosa has more than 80% of his Cabinet not in opposition to him or his plans. Even though the number of Deputy Ministers was inflated beyond initial plans, it is clear that at most, 12 of the 34 deputies were products of compromise with the *Zuptoid* faction. This gives Ramaphosa 75% support in the entire group and even more in the actual Cabinet of 28. That is a strong start, especially when one considers the potency of various factions and stakeholders in the ANC alliance. It is believed that the President (as many before him) will have a smaller, trusted circle, a kitchen Cabinet - and this is where he will start.

President Ramaphosa must also be given credit for appointing 50% of Cabinet Ministers as women, a first for South Africa. However, to gauge whether the "new dawn" will rise, a number of factors must be taken into account. Support for the President personally or for his plans are but one consideration. Other factors include:

- Support for reforms in fighting and ending corruption and State capture;
- Support for reforms of the revival of the economy in a market-based system;
- Effectiveness and work ethic.

On the issues of corruption and State capture, it can be safely stated that the President has in principle, the support of more than 80% of his Cabinet. It is unclear how the new (and rather young) Minister of Justice, Ronald Lamola, will be able to manage and drive this process. A question mark hangs over the ability of the very outspoken Minister of Police, Bheki Cele, to give the Hawks more bite and capacity (so vital to effective prosecution of corrupt politicians and officials). Although they are both staunch Ramaphosa supporters, their drive and competency will be rigorously tested.

In terms of the President's economic reform plans, he is supported by the experience, standing and competence of Pravin Gordhan and Tito Mboweni. They would likely be assisted by Patricia de Lille (in Public Works and Infrastructure), an outspoken advocate of the State playing a facilitative role so that the private sector can create the necessary jobs



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and opportunities for growth. Economic reforms could, however, be countered by Ebrahim Patel (Trade and Industry), a strong proponent for State interventionism in the economy, and Thulas Nxesi (Labour and Employment), a Zuma supporter who will likely resist all market-related economic reforms. The mixed portfolios of Transport (Mbalula), Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development (Thoko Didiza), Human Settlements, Water and Sanitation (Lindiwe Sisulu) and Environment, Forestry and Fisheries (Barbara Creecy) could swing the pendulum back to the reform side. On the other hand, the old stalwart Blade Nzimande (Higher Education, Science and Technology) remains a centralist at heart and would gently resist market-related reforms. The basic question is what some of the Cabinet's attitude will be to the ANC policy of radical economic transformation (RET)? The choice is clearly between market-related economic growth and the ideology of RET.

President Ramaphosa's problems may lie in efficiency and work ethic. According to him, he wants to move towards a "developmental State". But in order for that to work, our country needs effective bureaucracy and modern economic policies. Both of these are presently lacking in South Africa. New initiatives will require not only a purge of the civil service of corruption, but a new civil service altogether. The present one has been dismantled by the toxic mix of racial transformation, affirmative action gone wrong, and cadre deployment. The question is: Even if the cabinet adopts the right policies and has the right attitudes, will the public service have the capacity to carry out their policies? Will the new Ministers have the political will to establish effective departments with the right people in charge? One does not have to look further than Eskom's woes, to see what havoc racial transformation has wreaked. The President can say, "when I look to engineers to assist with Eskom, I see no colour". Nonetheless, the problem is that 99% of the ANC and government do.

In a recent article in *Rapport*, it was stated that out of a sample of 20 Cabinet Ministers, seven were in Ramaphosa's "A-Team", another four had "potential", but that nine were "Jansalies" (loosely translated as laggards). If one takes the whole of the Cabinet, one could be slightly more optimistic. Some of the new appointees may set a fresh tone, and some of the older ones may be reinvigorated by recent changes. In applying *Rapport's* analysis, the present Cabinet may have 11 in the A-Team, seven with potential, leaving 10 in the 'laggard' category. Those in the latter category are mostly known Zuma supporters and were rarely influential in the past. It is a positive development to have a Cabinet that satisfies various stakeholders and can secure their buy-in. However, those appointed must prove their worth in terms of development and implementation of government policy. This is clearly not true of more than 30% of the new Cabinet.

In line with this, it is instructive to see what the composition of the Cabinet clusters would be and who would be in the majority where. Government clusters are, according to official documents, groupings of government departments with cross-cutting programmes, fostering "*an integrated approach to governance that is aimed at improving government planning, decision making and service delivery. The objective is to ensure proper coordination of all government programmes at national and provincial levels.*"



Of course, the President can change the composition of the clusters, but it is unlikely that new clusters would look different. The Chairpersons of the clusters may simply vary, depending on who holds the Cabinet portfolios. Some Ministers (such as Finance and Communications) serve on more than one cluster. There are five such clusters:

- The *Economic Sectors, Employment and Infrastructure Development* cluster is the biggest of the five, consisting of 16 ministries, including that of the Minister in the Presidency, Jackson Mthembu. In addition to the “obvious” portfolios (Finance, Trade and Industry, Labour, Public Enterprises), it also contains some sectoral portfolios, such as Environment, Forestry and Fisheries (Creecy), Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development (Didiza), Transport (Mbalula), Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs (Dlamini-Zuma) and Higher Education, Science and Technology (Nzimande). This cluster mirrors our present Cabinet, with a 70-30 split between those in favor of market-related economic reform and those opposing it.
- Ramaphosa supporters clearly have the upper hand in the *Justice, Crime Prevention and Security* cluster. With Lamola (Justice), Cele (Police), Motsoaledi (Home Affairs) and Dlodlo (State Security), one expects effective coordination and implementation to follow from decisions.
- In the *Social Protection, Community and Human Development* cluster (the second biggest cluster with 13 ministries), the pro-Zuma group is represented by at least four ministries: Women, Youth and Persons with Disabilities (Nkoana-Mashabane), Social Development (Zulu), Sports, Arts and Culture (Mthethwa) and Labour (Nxesi). This group may not be a match for the combined efforts of Motshekga (Basic Education), Creecy, Health, Didiza, Sisulu, Mbalula and De Lille.
- The *Governance and Administration* cluster has no known Zuma supporters and consists of a strong team, including Mchunu, Pandor, Dlamini-Zuma, Lamola, and Mboweni amongst others. One does not expect resistance to reform within this cluster.
- The *International Cooperation, Trade and Security* cluster consists of a mix of political viewpoints, including not only Defence and Military Veterans (Nosiviwe Mapisa-Nqakula) and Patel, but also Mantashe (Mineral Resources and Energy), Mboweni, Dlodlo and Communications (Ndabeni-Abrahams).

It is clear that, although President Ramaphosa has the numerical upper hand in Cabinet and in some clusters, disputes will inevitably arise in other clusters. As stated by the Foundation before, he should also be worried about what will happen in Luthuli House, where under the guiding hand of Ace Magashule, a number of those left out and spurned are being gathered - and could easily become an undermining factor from outside Parliament.

The composition of the Cabinet seems to reflect well the ethnic and linguistic diversity of the African population of South Africa. There is a balance of isiZulu, Tshivenda, Sesotho,



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Setswana and isiXhosa speakers from the various provinces. However, only one Afrikaans-speaking South African, Patricia de Lille, sits in Cabinet. In terms of the principle of non-racialism, the Cabinet does not follow even the ANC's own ideology of demographic (read: racial) representation of 80% African, 9% white, 9% coloured, and 2% Indian. There is only one white and one brown South African in the Cabinet (Creecy and De Lille). This does not bode well for the rights of minorities in the ANC under the Ramaphosa leadership. The role and place of minorities is something the President will have to pay serious attention to, lest racial polarisation worsens and minorities feel ill-at-home in the country of their birth.

The Cabinet has the potential to make a difference and strengthen President Ramaphosa's reforms. However, South Africans who have heard countless promises before and have seen them ignored and broken as many times, will keep a wary and watchful eye before they celebrate.