

portal 049: Interview with PDHR and Brcko Supervisor Michael Scanlan

By: Milos Subotic

nula49.com: You visit Brcko District of Bosnia and Herzegovina quite often, and it seems you are more involved than your predecessors. What are the goals, what are the results of this visit?

Michael Scanlan: I come here often because I enjoy Brcko. In fact, my wife and my 7-year old boy will be coming up to spend the afternoon here with me, because they say "You are always talking about Brcko, let's go see Brcko". So there's just a personal pleasure of it. But, when I come to Brcko, I have to be honest, I often look at the Brcko that could be, as opposed to Brcko that is. Brcko is blessed with unique qualities that other parts of B&H don't have. It's has an incredible market strategic advantage in terms of location, the ability to make its own decisions having been created as a District, and the highest per capita budget in B&H. So, the Brcko that should be is a responsibility that I have as the supervisor, to come and to discuss with the politicians, with the media, with others – why what should be the natural outcome of these factors is not what we see today.

nula49.com: You've been the Principal Deputy High Representative and Brčko District Supervisor for more than six months now. What's the comparison from when you started? Are you happy with the progress made and what do you think are the biggest issues Brcko faces?

Michael Scanlan: Progress is defined by things changing. So this is what we are waiting to see, I think, in speaking to the residents of Brcko, they too are waiting to see those changes. What has changed, at least in terms of oral commitments, is the acknowledgment by the ruling authorities here, indeed by all the political parties, that these changes are needed. In terms of good governance, in moving forward with private sector growth – which is the key, – and infrastructure development which addresses quality of life issues, as well as makes this community an attractive investment destination for private sector. So, what has been good is that there's has been this acknowledgement, and that there is a commitment to do these changes. What is good is that adoption of legislative and budget allocation decisions, steps related to infrastructure development, actions related to attracting private sector, these should all take place this fall. So this fall we'll see if the elected leadership of Brcko is truly committed to these outcomes. But progress is only progress when you see change.

nula49.com: You've announced greater involvement of the International Community in September and October if there's no progress on certain points by then. Those were - fiscalisation, which is in progress, new budget law for more transparent spending and modernization of the port. Do you see any progress there and are there steps that the OHR can take to speed things up?

Micheal Scanlan: What I said on March 8th is that the International Community will be supportive and engaged if the authorities of Brcko take these steps. It's not for us to do their job. It is for them to do the job that you elected them to, and to be honest, it is for the voters of Brcko to hold them accountable. People often forget that every single voting citizen in this community has a responsibility. And they should take it seriously, because it defines the life they live and the life their children live. On fiscalization, as you've said, it is finished. There are some final things that have to be done in terms of people who have chosen not to participate. In every country that I have worked in, taxes is how you create the budget to go forward. Everyone needs to contribute in the same way as it funds schools, the streets, a better life. So this is something that should be fully acceptable. The issue of the budget is transparency. Citizens have a right to know where their money is paid. The previous budgets have been created with 700 amendments. Everyone knows what that means. It means the movement of money in not transparent, it means the movement of money, in most cases, is not for the greater interest of the community, or any subset of the community, to be quite honest. So, OHR experts helped them create a new budget law. The good news is this budget law will go to the assembly and has every opportunity to be adopted this fall to be used in the creation of the budget for 2020. That's the key. It's not just the adoption of the budget, but applying it to the 2020 budget process. But with that, it's also a commitment to redo, rework and make fixes to the law on allocations to associations and NGOs. This is another budget process that has phenomenal loopholes that is not transparent in terms of how money is spent and that is not good governance. On the port, the EBRD is doing a final study on where is the last step of this port should go. We have a commitment, and the EBRD has the commitment, from both the mayor and the speaker, that when that final expertise is done at the end of October, they will then make

the necessary changes, if they require any on permissions, or whatever is necessary for the construction and if that's the case, this port will be fully modernised by the end of 2020. With that comes new jobs, new business, new growth and again makes Brcko an attractive investment opportunity. This also applies very importantly to the renovation of the bridge. This is a solution that the authorities can solve themselves. They don't have to wait for anyone else. And to their credit they've reached out to Vukovar zupanja, and collectively they can move fast, so at the end of next year, not only is the port is fully modernised, but the bridge is back and the economic impact should therefore be quite profound and good for Brcko.

nula49.com: Hopefully so. You've mentioned the Brcko that could be. The community is of legal age, are you disappointed? Do you see it as a successful community?

Michael Scanlan: You know, I have the benefit of coming and going from this part of the world since I was of legal age, and so I very well know the Brcko that existed before the war and you look at Brcko and you look at Bijeljina – Brcko was the city that people would go to. Now you look at Bijeljina and it has a vibrant city center, at night there's activity and life. Here, you don't have that. You look at Orasje down the way – before the war it was a small village, now you have a waterfront there, you come here – there's no waterfront. So, again, it goes to the question – if Brcko has its natural advantage, if Brcko has the freedom to make decisions, if Brcko has the highest per capita budget should it not be the best place for foreign private companies to invest and tourists to come, and people to live, why is that not the case? And I think that is my answer. And this is what I said on the 8th of March at Brcko Day – that in speaking to all the prior supervisors that worked here, they all have said that Brcko has the potential. The potential just has not been realized, but the people who are responsible are the elected officials and ultimately the citizens. And this is where the choice now lies, do people want to take responsibility for their future?

nula49.com: How do you hope the people of Brcko remember you, what is your hope for the future and your role in it?

Michael Scanlan: I have to say – that is not what drives me, how to be remembered. This is not about me, I find myself particularly lucky and blessed to have a job where I can help others, support others, applaud others who create a better life for a broader group of people. That's unique. In fact I've shared that same sentiments with your leadership here in the political parties. I say that in they should feel extremely lucky that they have been chosen by the people here to help create the incredible life that Brcko could have and that's an honor. There obligation is to live up to that honor and that opportunity. But also, I want to emphasize, it is also the responsibility of every single citizen, resident of Brcko to do their part. Lots of people complain, but when I ask them "Who do you vote for?" , what do you do, suddenly it's "Well, it's not really up to me". Not true. If these authorities do all that they have promised to do this fall, they should be applauded. I'll applaud them. People should support them. But if they don't, like in any other country, there's a process – it's called elections, and if the politicians do not deliver on what is possible it should be reflected in how people vote.

nula49.com: You've mentioned your family is visiting today. What do you plan on showing them?

Michael Scanlan: Well, they'll come just in time to join me for lunch, and then we will basically do a stroll down the walking street and then we'll of course go the waterfront. I told my son there are all these little boats and he is very excited. He's seven years old, he wants to go fishing, I'm not sure that's gonna happen on this trip, but I also know that my wife, who is a designer is going to be constantly saying "Well, why don't they have a restaurant here, why don't they have a cafe here, why isn't there this here...?", because it is really simple, so there is no reason not to have them, unless it's a conscious choice. So, what I hope to see in a couple of years, when I come back for a visit, the beginnings of this vibrant Brcko that I think everyone wants.