

Interview: Paddy Ashdown, High Representative: “Before I leave I must accomplish another 11 tasks”

(Avdo Palić's fate must be exposed – PIC will announce today who my successor is – RS must stop being obstructionist – No pardons for Bičakčić, Jelavić, Alibabić...)

Interviewer: Sead Numanović

As Dnevni avaz has already written, the Peace Implementation Council (PIC) will announce today that Christian Schwarz-Schilling is the new High Representative for Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The handover between the two High Representatives will take place on January 31, at noon sharp, and Paddy Ashdown will address the representatives of both Houses of the Parliamentary Assembly of BiH one day before that.

Talking to Dnevni avaz, Ashdown stresses the priorities for the remaining six weeks.

Fruits of the reforms

– It is time citizens of this country began enjoying the fruits of the reforms. PIC will announce today who my successor is, and I want to finish what I began and open a new stage for my successor. I have, therefore, set for myself 11 priorities with which I want to conclude my work here and «empty the drawers» for my successor.

First, the Law on Obligations must be adopted first. I expect the RS authorities to stop being obstructionist not only in this segment and, with regard to this, I sent them a very clear message. The RS must stop obstructing not only when this law is in question, but when it comes to a transfer of authority in the segment of defense from the entity to the state and when it comes to the Law on Conflict of Interest.

The RS and PM Bukeylović must also resolve the issue of the fate of Avdo Palić. This is an obligation I undertook and on which I am working. I expect Bukeylović to inform me about what he has done on the implementation of the Human Rights Chamber's decision. I do not know whether and if he is working on this issue, and that's why I want to hear an answer. By the end of this month I must receive answers to questions I asked in a letter. Before I leave, this will be one of my priorities.

What are the other priorities?

– I want the Brčko Office with the Council of Ministers opened before I leave; the ICTY cooperation working group should be completed, and remaining documents from the archives need to be forwarded to the Court; I also expect property seizure legislation to be adopted soon.

SANCTION AGAINST RS

– There were 11 transfers of persons indicted for war crimes to the Hague this year. Carla del Ponte is the final arbiter to judge if there is the cooperation or not, but it is the fact that she also stated that there was the cooperation with RS.

I am in contact with Del Ponte and if her assessment is that there is no cooperation or that it is insufficient, I will respond in line with my powers.

I will ensure that cooperation of BiH, in particular of authorities in Banja Luka, with the Tribunal is maximum and that nothing hinders it. Prime Minister Terzić said that Karadžić and Mladić were not in BiH. If there would be any evidence that RS is not exerting maximum efforts in cooperation with the Hague, I will respond.

It is up to them. It is they who should decide whether we are going to face the period of peace and stability or the period of decisions, which will be painful for Banja Luka.

Some small things

I also hope I will succeed, together with Mirsad Kebo, implement the so-called «motor cultivator» fund project. These are funds to be collected as first aid to returnees. In my visits to returnee areas I noticed that assistance stops with their takeover of renovated houses. Assistance is required so that return can become sustainable. Returnees don't need much, some small things, such as motor cultivators, chain saws, chickens... I hope we will manage to raise some funds for that.

SIPA must resolve the issue of its accommodation and whether the regional HQ will be in Tuzla or Brčko. Police legislation must be clarified in the paragraph on experience

before taking office and the same must be done with the Election Law.

An article in this law stipulates that a person who violates the Election Law, regardless of the extent of this violation, is banned from further running in elections. This must be changed before the next year's elections.

IMPORTANCE OF CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENTS

– It is very important that the process of constitutional amendments has started. I have always considered this evolution and not revolution. I am not favoring opinions that a new constitution may be produced overnight. This is a step-by-step process. The more it is done, the better, but it is good that they have started and that are ongoing.

I have to say that I was strongly involved in commencement of this process two years ago.

Constitutional amendments are also required in order for ordinary people to feel the difference and benefits of reforms we have initiated. 70 percent of GDP cannot be spent on authorities.

And when do you leave?

I leave on January 31. By then, space for the next stage must be opened – transfer to BiH authorities.

When I took this office I presented my plan of action. More than 260 items of this action plan have been realized; there are some thirty left and I intend to realize these before I leave. Practically, the Dayton phase is over and a Brussels phase is now before BiH. That will be led by my successor.

I WILL NOT REMOVE SEADA PALAVRIĆ

– I do not intend to remove Seada Palavrić from the position of a judge of the Constitutional Court of BiH. Two days ago I phoned her and told her that ongoing debate was not the debate about her but about the procedure. I know Palavrić.

She made outstanding progress as compared with the first days and I appreciate that. We will see how she will be acting as a judge of the Constitutional Court of BiH.

Her election was made in accordance with the law.

However, the election to a prominent position such is the position of a judge of the Constitutional Court of BiH is very essential. This concerns the substantial issue of rule of law. If the process is misused for political purposes, then the loss is huge.

Is it good to have nontransparent elections for such a position? Secret vote took place for the first time, no one knows who voted for who ... It is completely nontransparent.

If you want to judge your Constitutional Court as the very top of the rule of law, then there must be the appropriate procedure for nomination, control and election of judges.

Thus, this has nothing to do with Seada Palavrić but with flaws in the law. I hope that these will be eliminated.

What will be transferred?

We shall see. I want to see what will happen with the amendments to the vetting procedures that I sent two days ago to House of Representatives of the BiH Parliament. We shall see what can be done with Phoenix (pardons for removed officials, aut.remark).

There is one thing, however, that I will not do – and this is to limit the maneuvering space of my successor in any way. I will consult him in all my next steps.

What is in store for Bičakčić, Alibabić, Jelavić, for example, after they were pardoned recently?

– No, no, no. My decision was a small step. It remains to be seen in what way some of these persons will be able, possibly, to return to the positions from which they were removed. And there are a number of limitations in this.

My successor will be deciding on new rehabilitations. But, since you mentioned certain individuals, I think their names give a clear answer to the question you asked.

PAINFUL INTRODUCTION OF VAT

– Politicians must tell the truth whatever it may be. Introduction of VAT caused instabilities even in countries with perfect systems like in Great Britain.

After 1st of January, weeks, maybe months of turbulences are to come and people must know that.

But, there will be no fragmented sales tax system any more, which used to be the paradise for criminals and in which rich people could have evaded tax payment. We will earn much higher revenues that can be used for the benefit of citizens.

My message is that the introduction of VAT will not be easy but it is indispensable and will be followed by real rewards.

CRITICISM OF THE COUNCIL OF MINISTERS

– In order for BiH's European path to be more successful, authorities must be more efficient. This particularly applies to the Council of Ministers. For the last three months it had only five sessions. If this is not changed, the success cannot be expected. Prime Minister Terzić has set a very ambitious task, which I support, to finalize the association and stabilization negotiations with the EU by next elections. I am afraid that this will not be achieved with the current dynamics.

Out of nine ministers, we have two acting ministers as the result of political games. This must be solved.

Slovenians have adopted 3,000 laws in order to become a part of the EU. A huge task is ahead of BiH.

If it is going to be tackled with the current dynamics, the failure is inevitable. Therefore, the Council of Ministers must intensify its activities but it must be followed by the State Parliament, too.