

Interview: Paddy Ashdown, the High Representative for BiH: “There will be no new political negotiations”

*When the RS is ready to discuss an agreement based on the three European principles, let them call us * Terzić is the least guilty for such a result*

Following the decision of the National Assembly of Republika Srpska not to accept the measures for the police reform, BiH will be, together with Belarus, the only European country which does not have contractual relations with the European Union, warned High Representative Paddy Ashdown at the beginning of the interview for “Dnevni avaz”.

– two nights ago was very sad for the RS and its citizens, and for BiH as a whole, it was very disappointing. Two nights before the RSNA had in its hands the key for entry into Europe but it threw it off.

Citizens of the RS and BiH will not have now what Serbia will have in the next three weeks – the way to Europe. The RSNA voted for the Serbs to go separate ways – ones to go to Europe and others to stay outside that community – says Ashdown.

Responsibility of SDS

The High Representative emphasizes that the 10th anniversary of the Dayton Agreement will not be a celebration of what could have been marked as a success within the scope of Dayton, but there will be increasingly more talks about what many in the International Community are already asking: how is Dayton being used as an impediment to the future and reforms?

– Over the past three years we have shown how Dayton may be used for reforms. The SDS showed two nights ago how it can be used to obstruct these reforms – stressed Ashdown.

Dnevni avaz: Responsibility thus lies with SDS?

Paddy Ashdown: With the RS Government and, in particular, with the biggest ruling party – the SDS. That party has abandoned the three European principles and the European future.

Dnevni avaz: What actions are you going to take?

Paddy Ashdown: Yesterday I talked with Prime Minister Terzić. Both of us have clearly said that there will be no new political negotiations. In particular, taking into account the conclusions of the RSNA. When they are ready to talk about the agreement, which is based on the three European principles, they know our telephone number, so let them call us. Until then, there is nothing to be discussed nor will there be anyone to talk with.

I want to underline that Prime Minister Terzić worked brilliantly on the police reform and made every effort to have successful negotiations. I wish he had succeeded but I do not think that he could even be the least guilty for such a result. It is clear that those who have been permanently refusing all offered compromise solutions are guilty for that.

What next?

Dnevni avaz: Is there any deadline to reach the agreement after all and to get the signal for starting negotiations with the EU on the 10th anniversary of the Dayton?

Paddy Ashdown: No. It has elapsed. It is clear that the opportunity has been missed to start negotiations by the 10th anniversary of Dayton . That deadline has passed. Negotiations may start again only when the SDS accepts European principles. Until then, there will be no discussions.

Dnevni avaz: Will there be any sanctions against the SDS, and also against the PDP?

Paddy Ashdown: It is obvious that the major culprit for this failure is the SDS. The PDP is with it. We have to consider what to do next, but sanctions have already been faced by people in the RS – they are isolated, they are becoming the dark *vilaet* of Europe and the price for that will be the loss of jobs, more difficult travel, lack of prospects... Every citizen of BiH will pay the price for the negative answer by the RSNA but the RS citizens will pay the high price as well.

The RSNA deputies will have to explain why they chose to use Dayton as an obstruction mechanism.

Dnevni avaz: Dayton has to be changed?

Paddy Ashdown: I did not say that. However, it is obvious that the 10th anniversary will now be marked by discussions about how the Agreement is being used for obstruction. I am not saying that this situation cannot be overcome. It is up to those who can initiate discussions to make a move.

I cannot impose the police reform

Paddy Ashdown: I could not impose police reform. Simply, the High Representative cannot impose the way to Europe. You can reach Europe only through the actions of BiH politicians. There are two ways of not reaching the EU. We saw one two nights ago when the European principles were refused. The second is to leave work to the High Representative.

The European Commission has clearly said that this reform must be done by BiH politicians and that it cannot be imposed by the High Representative.

Serious question regarding Belgrade position

Paddy Ashdown: The international community is united when it comes to this reform. However, somebody in the RS had wrong

information from diplomatic sources in the region that we are not united. That is complete nonsense. There is a very serious question when it comes to the position of Belgrade . If you are serious in your efforts to be on the European path, then you have to work constructively to help your neighbours on that path as well. You cannot be on the European path in your country and play a destructive role when it comes to your neighbours.

Whether Belgrade hampered negotiations on police reform or not, I do not know. However, that is not the point. It is also a matter for Belgrade to encourage reforms in neighbouring countries. If they want to be on the European path, they have to support European reforms in BiH. This was not the case here.

I said last year in Brussels that word should be sent to Belgrade that we do not know whether there is any truth in what was presented by the International Crisis Group in its report, that is, that Belgrade is very active in opposing police reform. However, it is obvious that Belgrade has not been supportive at all of that reform in BiH or, to speak plainly, in Banja Luka .