



InfoBrcko: Interview with PDHR and Brcko Supervisor Michael Scanlan

By: Alma Kajevic

BiH Brčko District Supervisor Michael Scanlan paid his regular monthly visit to the Brcko District of BiH. This time he decided to visit the editorial staff of the InfoBrcko and on that occasion he talked with our journalist about his view of the situation in Brčko.

InfoBrcko: The first time you visited Brčko on the 21st of February this year. At that time, you expressed certain expectations regarding the reforms necessary for progress in the District. Has there been any progress since then?

Michael Scanlan: Yes, when I arrived in February, I clearly said that the international community is ready to help Brcko but Brcko must take responsibility to help itself. Unfortunately, over the past few years, politicians have forgotten that their main task is to secure the future of this local community. Thus, I said that the International Community wants to see steps by the authorities that will restore their confidence in them, regardless if they are in majority or not, or whatever political party or ethnicity they come from. I said that fiscalization should be completed, which is now at the final phase, and then a new law on the budget should be adopted, which will put an end to the “games” with the budget that is not spent in a transparent manner; action should also be taken to finalize the modernization of the port, which will open space for new infrastructure projects. Commitments have been made to this by all the politicians I have spoken to, be they in the power [ruling majority] or in the opposition. We will see in September and October whether they will deliver on their promises. If they do, the international community will become more involved, but if they do not, then citizens must hold them accountable.

InfoBrcko: You said that the international community would be more involved. What exactly do you mean by that?

Michael Scanlan: It is our pleasure and we are interested in helping people who are willing to help themselves. If you have a transparent budget, so it is clear that its being used for the benefit of the community, of course, we will get involved with technical assistance programs. But if it is not clear where the local taxpayer's funds go, why would someone else, from another country, want to spend their taxpayers' money here? Unless they [authorities] are able to finalize the last steps in order so the modernization of the port can be completed by the end of next year, then there is no reason to go forward with projects such as water purification, waste disposal and other ones that benefit the community.

InfoBrcko: You come to Brcko often, I would say much more often than your predecessors did. Do you consider that your more frequent visits to the District affect local authorities in terms of their performance?

Michael Scanlan: I come to Brcko every month and I will continue to do so for the coming period. I meet with people in power [authorities], but not only with them. I think it is important to be clear and transparent when it comes to what we will do, but also when it comes to what we do not want to see. We intend to say that clearly to both politicians and citizens. Thank you for the opportunity to pass this message through your news portal too them. I already shared with you what our expectations are and what is even more important – the opportunities that are available and those that will be available in the future, if the authorities decide to commit to the benefit of the community. This is the result from my visits here.

InfoBrcko: In the previous period, you pointed out the need for adopting the budget within the prescribed deadlines. In a way, you insisted on the need for the approval of cooperation with the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development in relation to the loan for the revitalization of the Brcko Port. You are pointing out the need for a more transparent spending of public money. You mentioned the need to make additional efforts, so that the District would have greater stability in the area of power supply. Is there anything else you plan to draw attention to, because it seems to me that whichever issue you point out as a problem, that issue gets its epilogue in a very short period of time?

Michael Scanlan: All of the issues you mentioned can be resolved in the next three to six months. I would also add the initiative to promote the growth of the economic sector presented by Mr. Ilija Studen to the District Assembly on behalf of the business community, both foreign and domestic. It is crucial to emphasize that these are all promises, as nothing has been done yet, apart from fiscalization. We need now to focus on these unfinished activities because they need to be completed in the next few months. If they are completed, it will open up many opportunities for the further development of the Brcko District and the local community. This will create an environment in which everyone wins. If that is not the case, we go back to what I said in February: the international community will engage only if the people here get engaged. If that's the case, I will come back here to visit, but I will not talk to the local authorities.

InfoBrcko: The financial stability of the Brčko District of BiH is largely based on the VAT coefficient that is guaranteed to the District. Many times, there have been concerns that this amount could be reduced. How realistic is that and what, in your opinion, would happen in the District in case of the reduction?

Michael Scanlan: The coefficient was introduced as a transitional measure to provide the Brcko District and the authorities with the opportunity to use the robust budget to build the foundations for an efficient public administration that has, in the meantime, increased to enormous proportions. The most important thing was to have created incentives for building a dynamic private sector in the Brčko District, which would generate jobs, income and a good quality of life. The question is do people in Brcko want to live in a prosperous and dynamic city. If they do, then action must come quickly to begin this process. If it is only based on the coefficient, Brcko's future is not sustainable; we see it ourselves as people are leaving.

InfoBrcko: Today, you visited the editorial board of InfoBrčko, a media that is after Radio Brčko and one private television, one of the oldest media outlets in the city. It was founded by young people out of their love for the city and their writing significantly contributed to the resolution of some situations in the District. We are also witnesses that, for example, the executive authorities are becoming rather "rejuvenated" by capable and educated people. What is your opinion the ability of young people to make some changes in our society?

Michael Scanlan: In every society, young people bring new ideas, energy and creativity that complement what their predecessors have done. However, the fact is that in Brčko this critical, driving force is leaving. This means that the generation before them did not succeed. They did not create an environment for development, quality of life and opportunities that everyone wants to have when they embark on the wonderful adventure we all have, which is called life. It seems that the current generation will have to deal with the issue of how to visit their children abroad. At the same time, my appeal to the young people is not to give up, to wait to see what will happen in the autumn. If all that we have been talking about is achieved, it can bring hope for young people to stay for a while, to invest time and energy, as things will have started moving, Brčko could become one of the best places to live in BiH, with its beautiful river and a promenade with restaurants, bars and other facilities. The authorities need to give hope to the new generation by doing all these things we have discussed during this conversation. At the same time, the residents of Brčko have to take steps and take responsibility. Through voting, they will decide whether they choose to create this future or that of short-term personal interests. I will give you a simple example. We are all aware of the importance of the Sava Bridge to the life of Brčko. I am happy about the fact that your leaders in power turned to colleagues from Vukovar to agree on a short-term solution for the existing bridge. This is an example of good leadership, rather than ridiculous amendments that are not for the benefit of the community. The first step now is to start the process of financing an initial feasibility study. For this first step, it takes 19 people to meet for 15 minutes and vote in favor of it. However, as far as I understand, this will not happen until September. It is still July – I am here working, you are as well. These people were elected to create a future and they have a great opportunity now to show that they are committed to this future. These are expectations the citizens of Brčko rightly have of their elected officials. We will see if they will rise to this challenge. At the next election is when there will be accountability on this.