

# Otisak.ba: Interview with PDHR and Brcko District Supervisor Michael Scanlan



**Journalist: Adis Mujdanović**

**Otisak.ba:** You have been the most active Supervisor since the “freezing” of supervision in Brčko District of BiH in 2012; you have been visiting this local community every month since February. Have you noticed any positive results of your visits and your talks with the local leaders?

**Michael Scanlan:** The very fact that we are talking about it, I guess, means that something is positive. It is good that you now have talks that take place in the Assembly and in the Government and in the media. People are saying that it is high time to do something. Economic trends and public services are obviously still not good enough since we still see people leaving Brcko District. Now is the time to do something, to take some actions, and by that I mean your authorities in the first place.

**Otisak.ba:** You had a speech in the District Assembly, in which you expressed your dissatisfaction with the current situation in this local community, stressing that you expected the situation to improve by spring. Can you once again briefly touch upon the most important segments of your speech?

**Michael Scanlan:** One thing that I want to stress is that what I said in my speech is not my position only but the positions, impressions and views that I have heard and seen in the past six months, in the time since I have been coming to Brčko. Some of them are also the positions of the deputies from the Assembly. This gives me heart, that all those people acknowledge that there is a problem, and this problem needs to be solved. In order to demonstrate that there is a genuine interest to reverse the trend to the better, one of the things clearly is a lack of, transparency in the budget process, i.e. in the finance sector that is controlled by both the Government and the Assembly. In that area we have two things: the new Law on Budget and the new Law on Foundations and Associations, that is, organisations within the non-governmental sector. The international community, and by that I don't mean the OHR only but also my colleagues from the EU and OSCE, has the necessary expertise in this area and they have provided suggestions in the sense of European standards that need to be created and respected in this legislation, in particular in the sense of transparency, clear management and disposal of funds. It is of key significance that that law be adopted this fall, so that it can be applied to the drafting and adoption of the 2020 budget. It is important that this be done before the next election, so that this is component does not get overly politicised in the election process. Another key thing is the finalisation of all that is necessary for the implementation of the Port modernisation project, so the implementation could start this year. If that is done, that will mean the opening of the possibilities for other infrastructure projects. The third, maybe most important factor, is to ensure that all the legislation that you have, including the legislation within the public administration, be formulated in such a way to work for the benefit of businesses, for the benefit of those who are interested in opening jobs in this area, so that they are enabled to do business without any problems. As Mr. Studen, as a representative of this group, said in his presentation to the

Assembly, if that is ensured in the sense of the legislation required, he is ready to start with the implementation of projects which mean an investment of half a billion KM in the District. The improvement that will enable him to start with the implementation of his investments will also be useful for all other business people who decide to develop their businesses here.

**Otisak.ba:** Considering the current situation, can we realistically expect the situation to improve before spring and to what extent?

**Michael Scanlan:** People should be motivated to improve the situation because people are leaving, and eventually so will their children. People are the main actors here, and when faced with the current situation they will make decisions about their future, and they may decide to leave. I think you can hardly imagine a better motive for the authorities to improve things. People who follow you or read what you publish must also play a role in all this. It is right for the voters to have expectations from those who are in government and govern. The initial steps that should be taken by them are very clear. These are not complicated things. So, if they do the things I mentioned, the things that need to be done, the changes indicating that Brčko is moving towards a better future and in the right direction will be visible in the spring or summer. And then, the people can be mindful of this when they elect their representatives in elections. But, if they do not see this, if they do not see these changes – and this is equally important as what I was saying earlier – then the citizens of this District, the voters in this District must say clearly that they have expectations and wish that these expectations to be fulfilled. This must be reflected in the way the voters vote in elections.

**Otisak.ba:** So, let's sum up. By spring you expect the Assembly to adopt the new budget law, adopt the budget for the next year and finally, the Port modernization project should be

**launched.**

**Michael Scanlan:** Yes, that's right.

**Otisak.ba:** In your previous public addresses, to a greater or lesser extent, you spoke about the bad situation in the District, about how few or no steps were taken towards the prosperity of this local community, about stalled reforms, but you never said specifically who the main culprits for that were. Is detecting the main culprits one of the ways to improve the situation?

**Michael Scanlan:** Something that really surprises me in BiH – people easily spend a whole day talking about who is to blame and what they need to be blamed for, but they often do not seem to be prepared to talk even for an hour about what can and should be done in order to move forward. I come from a country where results, changes, changing things always come first. I prefer to spend my time and energy in a way in which some future could be created. But, I did say very clearly, as we all know, who is responsible for what needs to be done: the District Assembly, District Government, public administration and eventually the voters. If you do not expect your government to govern in such a way as to do the things that are in your interest, but instead focus on somethings that are simple benefits for that moment, instead of looking to create a system which will ensure a better future for you and your children, change won't come.

**Otisak.ba:** In your address to the Assembly, you emphasized that the status of the District would not change, unless there were serious violations of the Arbitration Award. However, if the situation does not change for the better by spring, as you expect, what will be your reaction?

**Michael Scanlan:** When I was speaking about the status of the District, I was speaking about the status of the condominium. The presiding arbitrator, who visited Brčko earlier this

month, gave this exact comment as you were saying just now. So, the status of the condominium stays as it is. This is not something linked to a prosperous or economically unprosperous Brčko. As I was saying in my speech, what concerns prosperity is something you all have in your hands. If you want this, earn it, ensure it happens. If you want to join the European Union you must work on this road, you must earn this membership and must ensure that some things happen in order for you to come to the EU. And when you are in the EU, this is the way things function in the EU. So, let's start immediately, let's start now. If the situation does not improve by spring, my reaction will be as I said in my speech on March 8. The international community is happy to be a partner here in constructive processes, but you must make the first step. We will see whether you will make the first step.

**Otisak.ba:** In my opinion, this can go on forever. Obviously, if there are no sanctions local officials do not change anything.

**Michael Scanlan:** This is your district, your future, it's you who vote, you participate in these processes. What do you want? Ensure this happens. You can have a prosperous community because you have all the elements necessary for that, including the coefficient. But, if things are not resolved, if you do not go in that direction, the international support and donor projects will not come in this case, investment into the private sector will not happen. And then, what is the purpose of the coefficient? So, it's you who make the decision, all of you.

**Otisak.ba:** So, all these things can be sanctions for this local community?

**Michael Scanlan:** I would rather look at that as something that is utterly logical. If you want to work, if you want to achieve something you must get on board to earn the things that is as valid here as in all other places.

**Otisak.ba:** If nothing changes for the better in this local community in a foreseeable period, is the coefficient applicable to the District going to be taken away?

**Michael Scanlan:** Let's see what can be done and then we will all make an assessment about what needs to be done, at least from our viewpoint. In 2020 you are going to have full fiscalisation, you will have a clear picture of the benefits and then think about how important the coefficient is to you.