

Interview: Paddy Ashdown, High Representative for BiH: “We can catch up with Serbia and Montenegro”

*If the agreement on police reform is adopted by Tuesday,
negotiations with the EU can start in mid-December * Those who
obstruct this reform have much to lose * There are no hidden
parts of the agreement with Cavic and Dodik*

– I am convinced that we will implement police reform in accordance with the EU requirements and with determination that police regions should cross the inter-Entity border line in those areas where this is necessary. It is of great importance that the EU and the U.S. are involved in monitoring this process, with a mandate and instruments to ensure its implementation.

If the agreement on police reform is adopted in both houses of the Federation and State Parliament by Tuesday, we will be in the SAA process by mid-December, thus catching up with Serbia and Montenegro – said the High Representative for BiH, Paddy Ashdown.

Waste of time

In his interview for Dnevni avaz, he noted that time must not be wasted because it means that an extraordinary opportunity ahead of BiH might be lost.

Dnevni avaz: How can this be done?

Paddy Ashdown: One should not be wasting energy on minor

issues, thus sacrificing a grand reward. I would like to convey a message to politicians at the Federation and State level not to waste any time. Seize this opportunity!

Dnevni avaz: Is there a deadline?

Paddy Ashdown: If the House of Peoples of the State Parliament adopts the agreement without any amendments on Tuesday, then the European Commission can state on 7 November that BiH has done all the work concerning police reform and the public broadcasting service. After this, the EU needs seven weeks, which would be a record time, to assemble a team that will enter into negotiations with the BiH authorities.

If this happens, EU ministers of foreign affairs could give a green light on 12 December for the start of negotiations.

Dnevni avaz: What happens with the implementation of this agreement?

Paddy Ashdown: It is clear why we have said that the implementation of this reform will take five years. This is the largest and most expensive reform that we have conducted so far, much larger than, for example, defence reform. The State simply cannot implement this reform any faster than in a period of five years, as envisaged in the agreement.

If we start SAA negotiations by the end of the year, then already early next year we can begin activities on the establishment of the database, identity cards and the setting up of a State-level forensics institute... Although most items from the SAA implementation package cannot begin before September next year, some items can, and I think that time should not be wasted.

Dnevni avaz: RS Prime Minister Pero Bukejlović or Mladen Ivanić have different views of police reform...

Paddy Ashdown: They are entitled to have their own opinion. I am interested in action and we will have zero tolerance for

obstructionism. Whoever opts for obstructionism will find himself in a very dangerous situation.

As for Ivanic, he is always skeptical of everything. In this case, he is wrong. There are no secret supplements or agreements apart from what is already in the public domain. I hope the PDP will take an active part in the implementation of what has been agreed upon.

Dnevni avaz: What about objections of some councilors, for example those from the HDZ?

Paddy Ashdown: This is a paradise for conspiracy theories. Instead of wasting energy on inventing new conspiracies, it would be much better to focus on the implementation of what has already been agreed upon and get some wind beneath one's wings ahead of the SAA process.

Full cooperation of RS with the ICTY

Paddy Ashdown: I talked to Ambassador Nicholas Burns about the situation in BiH. Of course, talks about police reform and cooperation with the ICTY featured prominently in our discussion. Karadzic and Mladic must be arrested, and without this there is no joining the PfP. Americans are adamant about this and I share their position.

At the moment, the RS authorities are fully cooperating with The Hague . A dozen of indictees are already in The Hague , but still more has to be done on the path towards integration in the European and Euro-Atlantic institutions. Karadzic, Mladic and Gotovina have to be in The Hague .

I support the position of Judge Kreso

Paddy Ashdown: When I came here to BiH, my objective was to establish legal institutions capable of trying even

individuals in the top echelons of power, if it is proven that they committed criminal offenses. I agree with the stance taken by the President of the Court of BiH, Meddzida Kreso, about reducing the number of foreign judges. This is a good sign.

I am convinced that now we have the best judicial structure in the Balkans.

Not everything is ideal, and I do not believe that there are no corrupt judges, police officers, politicians... But, now we have institutions in place – institutions capable of trying, acquitting or convicting people who seemed to everyone only a few years ago to be untouchable. Thanks to this effort, we are on the way to creating a firm conviction among citizens that they live in a safe environment.

I support BiH

During the interview conducted yesterday, we asked the High Representative whether he would watch the BiH vs. Serbia and Montenegro match, and which team would have his support.

Paddy Ashdown: I will watch tonight's BiH vs. Serbia and Montenegro match on TV, and I will support BiH. I had a chance to see some heated statements about the issue of support to one of these two teams. I do not think this is helpful for anyone or anything, but that is sport. I want BiH to win tonight – said Ashdown.