Interview: Paddy Ashdown, High Representative to BiH: “We’re leaving Dayton, and entering Brussels!”

Ashdown: BiH will not be a black hole of the Balkans

*Peace Implementation Council commended Terzic * It is possible for the Ministry of security to be transformed into the Ministry of police * Negotiations can start by mid-December*

Police reform in BiH could be accelerated if the financial structure of the state allows for that possibility. In an interview for «Dnevni avaz», the High Representative Paddy Ashdown explains that the deadline for the implementation of police reform has not been accidentally specified as a five-year period.

-We had the financial capabilities of the state in mind. As things stand now, the state could not sustain a police reform process of shorter duration. But, if the influx of funds into the budget increases with the introduction of VAT, and if the readiness prevails, the reform can also be accelerated – this is the High Representative’s message.

Potential progress

Dnevni avaz: We talked to Ashdown after the session of the Peace Implementation Council (PIC).

Paddy Ashdown: We were discussing the events of the last seven days. The potential progress made with regard to police reform was commended. I expect that the parliaments of the state and

the Federation, and the Council of Ministers will accept the agreement on police reform, and that the Law on Public Broadcasting Service will be adopted soon. I believe that these obstacles will be overcome soon and that is why I think that the opportunity that BiH recently lost is now here again – Ashdown said.

Dnevni avaz: Is there a «but»?

Paddy Ashdown: There is! Adoption of laws and decisions is one thing, and their implementation is quite the other thing. The PIC was very clear: the state will get exclusive competencies for police matters, the state ministry of police is the one which issues all strategic and policy decisions, while the operative activities are being conducted at the local level. Where necessary, in three cases, let's say, the inter-Entity line will be crossed. The European Union, with the support of the United States but also with the support of other PIC members, will monitor the police reform. It will be implemented by experts in the Directorate which will be constituted specifically for that purpose.

Dnevni avaz: You mentioned the state ministry of police. That ministry will be established?

Paddy Ashdown: It already exists, that is the Ministry of security. It may be renamed, but a Ministry of interior may also be created. That issue has remained without an answer. It is possible for the Ministry of security to be transformed into the Ministry of police.

Dnevni avaz: How many areas will there be? No more 9+1?

Paddy Ashdown: The Directorate will have to answer that question. For the time being there is no other proposal but 9+1.

A secure future

Dnevni avaz: Apart from the police issue, what else is interesting from the Peace Implementation Council meeting?

Paddy Ashdown: The 10th anniversary of Dayton was discussed, OHR transition… This issue was taken off the agenda, but it is here again now. Prime Minister Adnan Terzic was congratulated on the results he has produced. He is a person we can be relied upon and that's a good thing. BiH will not lag behind its neighbours, it will not be a black hole of the Balkans. The future of this country is certain and we are on the way to start the process for achieving everything that people wanted: better salaries, new jobs, visa-free regime, better services…

Dnevni avaz: When could negotiations start then?

Paddy Ashdown: This will be decided by the European Commission (EC). My assessment is, if everything goes the way we hope, that the negotiations might start by mid-December.

Dnevni avaz: How do you respond to criticism of the Agreement on police reform?

Paddy Ashdown: I'm already accustomed to criticism by people who claim that they can do my job better than I do.

A powerful instrument

Dnevni avaz: Yet, what are the guarantees that we won't have again the situation like the one we had a few days ago?

Paddy Ashdown: The European Commission will monitor the process of implementation of the reform. If there is no implementation, the process of integration will be stopped. To simplify it – the improvements in life that would already be noticeable would be stopped. This is a very powerful instrument. The EC, as well as my successor, will act as

policemen and monitor the reform process. If it gets blocked for any reason, the stabilization and association process will also get blocked. Sanctions for those responsible for that will be draconian. Also, this process cannot be reverted to the beginning without the culprits experiencing severe punishment directly. We have passed a huge crossroads, but the job is only ahead of us. We are leaving Dayton , and entering Brussels . Enormous changes are yet to happen. Within the European integration process we have ahead of us the issue of the change of the Constitution, we can start asking for a visa-free regime, go into the process of building strong, functional state institutions.

If it doesn't change, the SDS will vanish

Ashdown: A clear choice

Paddy Ashdown: The SDS has a clear choice, as well as other nationalist parties – either it will reform itself or vanish. It should demonstrate that it is committed and active in co-operation with The Hague , on police reform… That party, which has to show that it is a new party, and not the party which follows the ideas of Radovan Karadzic, will start the process of its reform then.

It's been very interesting for me to follow how the nationalist parties are being reshaped in the Balkans and how they are becoming a part of the pro-European people's parties' centre right. For instance, Sanader did that with the HDZ. The SDS, SDA and HDZ should be asked if they are ready to do such a change. So far the SDS did not want to hear about it, and if this continues to be the case, they will be extinguished. But not by the hand of the High Representative, but rather they'll be punished by voters. For as long as the SDS does not change the situation due to which I had to act, their account will remain blocked. Until the supply of their money to persons

indicted for war crimes is stopped, the accounts will be blocked.

SDA and HDZ

Paddy Ashdown: Sulejman Tihic has recently said that he wishes to turn the SDA into a modern, European people's party. Now they need actions that are authentically consistent with this wish. Now the question is if the most recent developments regarding the election of Covic and the correspondence they have with the EPP represent a chance for the HDZ for a new beginning and getting an image of a reformist European party.

I have not met with Covic

Paddy Ashdown: So far, I have not met with Covic although he is the president of the HDZ. There was no reason to meet him. If necessary, I may meet him, although the fact that I removed him and that his trial starts on Tuesday is not really helpful for a possible meeting of ours getting organized. But, if necessary, I will meet him. So far there has been no need to.

Co-operation with the Tribunal

Ashdown: Improved co-operation

Paddy Ashdown: Although the assessment of co-operation with the Tribunal is in the hands of Carla del Ponte, I may say that the situation in this regard has considerably changed compared to a year ago. Among other things, this is also due to the sanctions I imposed towards the end of the last year, but also due to other things, in particular due to the change of the public mood. Now, co-operation has improved. Karadzic and Mladic are isolated, flows of money directed to them are

seriously threatened… When I last spoke to Carla del Ponte, there was, finally, a significant improvement in co-operation. But, I wish to say clearly that this issue will not be concluded until Karadzic and Mladic are in The Hague . The sooner, the better. When that is done, BiH will enter NATO and the EU. Therefore, let's finish that as soon as possible.

The state will be paying the police as of October 2006?

Dnevni avaz: When could the state start paying the police?

Paddy Ashdown: I hope that it could happen already after October, next year. The activities concerning the creation of the budgetary item in this regard could start then.