

Interview: Martin Ney, Senior Deputy High Representative: “I expect an agreement on police reform this week”

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MOSTAR: On the occasion of a recent visit to Mostar, Martin Ney, Senior Deputy High Representative in BiH, sharply criticized the cantonal authorities for dividing schools along ethnic lines, and invited the cantonal government to renounce such decisions as they are a step in a wrong direction.

He also expressed hopes that a final agreement on police reform would be reached this week. Ambassador Ney said he was struck by the fact that the people of this country are so approachable and have a strong desire to enter the European Union.

Dnevni list: Police reform, according to current indicators, is going slowly, and negotiations are drawn out. Do you think the negotiations are headed in the right direction?

Martin Ney: Police reform is one of the 16 key points of the Feasibility Study. We have gone through an enormous process with many reforms and now we are focusing on the two last unfinished elements, police reform and the PBS. Police reform is the most important issue that needs to be solved and is extremely hard. The European Commission clearly defined three basic principles along which police reform needs to be implemented. The European public is quite critical over the lack of reform in BiH. It is a common opinion that the EU has helped this country most in comparison with other countries in the region and that this process is not going the way it should be. That is the reason why there is no giving in or granting any concessions with regard to these three principles of the EU.

Dnevni list: By when should the police issue be resolved?

Martin Ney: Deadlines are linked to mid-September, for reasons coming out of Brussels . If we want to start the EU SAA process around the tenth anniversary of Dayton , then a decision concerning police reform should be made around the middle of September. Twenty-five foreign ministers need to make a decision in Brussels on whether all the required criteria are met. I am saying this because these 25 ministers will not automatically accept what is placed before them; it is a process after all. I sincerely hope that we will be concluding a successful police reform discussion this week.

Dnevni list: What do you think about the establishment of the public broadcasting system?

Martin Ney: After the decision of the Constitutional Court concerning the issue of national interest invoked by the Croats to the effect that the PBS does not violate Croat national interests, we believe the House of Peoples of the BiH Parliament will soon make a decision on the PBS. This will clear the way for the PBS Law, which will close this chapter.

Dnevni list: The question of dividing schools on ethnic lines has been very topical lately, in particular in Čapljina, Prozor/Rama and Stolac. What is your opinion about that?

Martin Ney: When the school year began last week we were expecting problems in Central Bosnia , not in Herzegovina-Neretva Canton. I had been told officially that a seven-day delay was necessary due to some small items concerning the administrative and legal merger of the schools. Instead of taking these additional seven days to solve problems, these three municipalities abused this period. Instead of solving the issues of administrative and legal unification, they decided to by-pass these problems and establish new schools. These decisions are not within the spirit of the Education Law. They do not comply with the obligations this country committed itself to when it joined the Council of Europe. Let me also remind you that the OSCE made an extremely strong statement against these occurrences. Twenty-five ambassadors met over this in Sarajevo , stating that this was a serious step in the wrong direction.

Dnevni list: In which way can this problem of segregating schools along ethnic lines be resolved?

Martin Ney: I think the only solution is for these three schools that made a decision to segregate schools to withdraw their decisions and finish their administrative and legal unification of schools. I visited Mostar's «Gymnasium» and I must say that this school is a good example of how the concept of two schools under one roof can function. I sincerely hope that the schools in Čapljina, Prozor/Rama and Stolac will be able to work in this way.

Dnevni list: What is the current situation in Mostar in terms of institution mergers, is there any progress?

Martin Ney: The Decision on the unification of Mostar is of extreme importance for OHR and we are determined to continue on the path of unification of the city. At this moment, we can say that there is some sort of radicalization of the situation in the city, which is not acceptable to us. The process of appointing officials in the City Administration is actually being used for wrong purposes in order to spoil some of the process that has been completed. Similarly, it should be clear to everyone that OHR will not accept any actions by any individual or party which would damage the unification process we have completed in the past or which is ongoing. If there are concerns about an appropriate ethnic balance in the City Administration, I really take that seriously. The process of appointments is not something you do once, it is a process that continues. Staffing on the basis of internal vacancy announcements was only a beginning. It is true that internal vacancies did not serve to achieve an ethnic balance, but it is absolutely clear that there are still some positions which would be filled on the basis of external vacancies and this is a good opportunity to rectify the ethnic balance. This is not an easy task because you need good candidates for every position.

Dnevni list: In what way is the ethnic balance planned to be introduced?

Martin Ney: There is another element I discussed with the Mayor of Mostar, Ljubo Bešlić. He agreed to the organization of some sort of a training program as a voluntary system for Serbs and Others, to enable their participation in the City Administration in this interim period. Let me be clear: OHR is determined that the ethnic balance at the end of the process corresponds to that of the 1991 Census. There are two principles here. The first is the principle of effectiveness of the City Administration and that is why we need appointments. The second principle is an appropriate ethnic representation. This means, on the one hand, we have appointments made through an internal process overseen by the Federation Civil Service Agency and in accordance with law, and this was in the interest of an effective City Administration. When this part of the work is over then the principle of ethnic representation will have to be complied with.

Dnevni list: What impression have you gained of BiH from the moment you assumed the position of Senior Deputy High Representative?

Martin Ney: When I came to BiH three months ago, I was amazed by the people – they have an admirable will for life. The people here are friendly people and want to enjoy life. This country possesses remarkable natural and cultural wealth. The people are tolerant and they are connected with a history of peaceful co-existence. When you look at the public opinion polls, you'll see that 80 percent of the people here wish to be a part of Europe. What can be seen here is an incredible will to go to the EU. According to opinion polls, only eight percent of citizens think that their political leadership will take them to the EU. The promise of Europe that it will extend its hand to BiH is still there, but Europe is becoming impatient. The issue is in fact how the politicians see their responsibility towards the young people of this country and towards the whole population. I think that at one juncture, the younger generation will ask the present politicians about what they did to lead them to Europe. And I hope that these politicians will be able to say – I was in favour of police reform, or defence reform, I was in favour of the unification of Mostar.

The people in BiH have an admirable will for life

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their political leadership will take them to the EU,” Ney emphasized.

Unacceptable division of schools

“When the school year began last week, we expected problems within the Central Bosnia canton, and not in the Herzegovina-Neretva canton. We’ve been officially told that a seven-day postponement was necessary in order for some details regarding the administrative and legal unification of the school to be sorted out. And instead of using these additional seven days to resolve problems, these three municipalities abused these seven days. Rather than having resolved the issues and problems relating to the administrative and legal unification, they chose to bypass these problems and establish new schools. These decisions are not in line with the Law on education in BiH. These do not respect the obligations taken by this country when it joined the Council of Europe”, ambassador Ney said.