

Interview: Paddy Ashdown, High Representative for BiH: “I will punish SDS for obstructionism”

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*If the police reform talks fail there will be consequences *
Warnings to Bukejlović, Cenić and Matijašević * SBS director
named this week*

High Representative Paddy Ashdown is worried that Bosnia and Herzegovina could miss the big date and as a result see another postponement of the talks with the European Union on the Stabilization and Association Agreement.

Speaking to “Dnevni Avaz” Ashdown took the opportunity to warn the Republika Srpska, and in particular the Serb Democratic Party, that time was running out and that it was necessary for this party and a number of politicians from BiH’s smaller entity to finally change their positions and begin acting more constructively in the police reform talks.

– Institutional talks on the police reform have yielded some small progress. But, it is very small and does not refer to the key issues. If we had eons (millions of years, aut. rem.) at our disposal, an agreement could be reached. But no, we don’t have that –there is less and less of time.

Tribute to Terzić

I have to pay tribute to Prime Minister Terzić for the way in which he has conducted the talks, but, unfortunately, progress is very small. RS representatives have not given one millimeter in the last 11 months when it comes to the

standards defined in the three principles of the European Commission. This has been said countless times. They are now pretending that their proposal meets these standards; but that is not true – Ashdown said.

Dnevni Avaz: Do you expect substantial progress in the meeting on Wednesday?

Paddy Ashdown: If there is none, then we will miss the deadline, the tenth anniversary of Dayton , for the start the negotiations with the EU. Even if there is progress, I am not sure that we can meet the set deadline.

The RS representatives must change their position. Unless they can come up with a different proposal to their current one, we will fail; the talks will fail, and the RS will be the only small enclave, in the whole of the Balkans, resisting the European way.

In this case, I will clearly and unequivocally blame the SDS! The three representatives in the talks, Prime Minister Bukejlović, Finance Minister Svjetlana Cenić and Police Minister Darko Matijašević, although not SDS members, represent this party. This party nominated them, chose them and supports them.

Unless they table a proposal quickly which will be in line with the European principles it is only BiH that will not be with the rest of the Balkans – on the road to Europe . In this case, the RS will be identified as the party to blame and the International Community will have to consider this fact very seriously. The SDS will thus prove once again that it is the party of the past and of obstructionism. I am now ringing alarm bells!

Dnevni Avaz: How do you intend to react?

Paddy Ashdown: I can't – although many expect me to – impose this reform. The European Commission said very clearly that it

is the BiH government that must implement the police reform. If it fails to do that, it is clear who is to blame and it is clear that there will be consequences for that.

Dnevni Avaz: What consequences? You will ban the SDS? Abolish the RS?

Paddy Ashdown: I don't rule anything out, nor do I announce anything until the time comes. There is no more time for little games. It is time they made up their minds, either they want to implement this reform or not.

Party politics

Dnevni Avaz: President of the RS and SDS Dragan Čavić advocates a different approach for his party ...

Paddy Ashdown: I don't want to get into intra-party discussions. They occur in the SDS, but also in the SDA and HDZ, too. I know that some from the SDA want to use the police reform for their own intra-party tricks...

Dnevni Avaz: You mean attempts to use this to remove Prime Minister Terzić?

Paddy Ashdown: I don't want to get into that. All I want to point out is that we are at a point which is of the highest importance for the whole of BiH. Those in the SDA, or perhaps in the HDZ, who use this reform as their own battlefield in which they want to rid themselves of someone or something, must know that they are not helping the country and the people they serve. On the contrary!

Dnevni Avaz: Will there be a meeting of party leaders on September 5?

Paddy Ashdown: No. We had hoped that this date would be the date by which some progress would be made, but this did not happen. Another missed deadline.

Ugly message

Dnevni Avaz: We are still witnesses to a vacuum in the leadership of the State Border Service. SIPA only has a director. Will you have to intervene for this situation to change?

Paddy Ashdown: The SBS has been without leadership since July 17. This is not good. We are in the middle of a war against terrorism, BiH wants a more liberal visa regime. If we add to this the incident in Čajniče, which was not ethnically motivated – and everyone knows that now – then the situation in the SBS is not good and can no longer be tolerated.

The Council of Ministers meets this week and I expect this issue will be on the agenda then. If they do not succeed in resolving this issue, then I will have to react.

Dnevni Avaz: When?

Paddy Ashdown: I said this issue would be on the agenda this week. I hope an agreement will be reached. If not, I will have to intervene. And this would be a very bad signal to the world. I expect the politicians of this country to do their share of the work.

If I have to intervene, I will also hold responsible those politicians who interfered quite unnecessarily, for the sake of their own narrow interests, in issues which did not concern them ...

Dnevni Avaz: Sulejman Tihić?

Paddy Ashdown: I won't mention names. But, some politicians interfered quite unnecessarily and inappropriately in issues which do not allow for political interventions, but are clearly defined by law.

Selection of a new High Representative

Paddy Ashdown: At this time, at least three people have been nominated officially for the position of the High Representative. Who will be selected? I don't know. It is up to the International Community. It is my duty to leave my job to my successor in the best possible condition

I intend to withdraw from this position at the end of this or the beginning of next year. There will be a meeting of the Peace Implementation Council in early October, which could discuss the issue of my successor. It is possible that then, or at least in the next six weeks, we will know who will replace me in this job.