

Interview: Paddy Ashdown, the High Representative in BiH and Special Representative of the EU: MINISTRY OF SECURITY EXISTS SOLELY IN THE PERSON OF MR. COLAK

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By: Dejan Jazvic

- *The International Community will have to rethink its role, in order to make it a less interventionist one*
- *I will leave BiH before the end of 2005*
- *Authorities have surprised both the citizens and those members in the International Community who are monitoring the situation in BiH*

Following the summer holidays BiH and its authorities will face a rather hot political autumn season, during which, we can freely say, the future of this country will be decided on. The High Representative in BiH Paddy Ashdown, in his first interview after returning from his summer vacation, says that the months ahead of us will determine to a large degree what road BiH will take.

VL: What are the priority tasks that the authorities of BiH should work on during the following months, i.e. until the end of this year? What do you expect from them?

Implementation, implementation...

ASHDOWN: I expect three things: implementation, implementation, and, again, implementation. I think the authorities have surprised the citizens. For the first time I can also say that the authorities have surprised those members of the International Community who are monitoring the situation in BiH. Many believed it would be impossible to fulfill the famous 16 requirements. True, these requirements have not been entirely completed, but I believe that the BiH Government certainly has enough reasons to feel proud for having finished the major part of the work, at a time when most of the people believed this would not happen. Now, the completion of these reforms is within our grasp, and it is of utmost importance that we see this process through.

VL: What are the priorities?

Six priorities

ASHDOWN: We in OHR believe there are six key priorities. The issue here are state-level institutions, and all these institutions must start functioning in reality. This includes SIPA, the War Crimes Chamber with the Court of BiH, the Indirect Taxation Authority, Intelligence-Security Service, Ministry of Defense and Ministry of Security. The security issue is of utmost significance for BiH, but it is a fact that the state-level Ministry of Security exists solely in the person of Barisa Colak. Therefore, we must first find buildings and office space for all these institutions. We are willing to help BiH authorities in this process. If they succeed in finishing all the tasks I've talked about by the end of the year, I see no reason why BiH could not start negotiations on Stabilization and Association process with the

EU early next year.

VL: What are the greatest obstacles to meeting these requirements? Is it due to financial problems, lack of political willingness, or the fact that local elections are approaching?

Reform-oriented laws

ASHDOWN: The authorities have focused very decisively on adoption of reform-oriented laws. I hope we will not lack political willingness in the implementation of these laws. The greatest problem that we will encounter is finding adequate office space for new state institutions. We will have to see what the authorities will do in this situation, but for time being I do not see that we are lacking political willingness.

Funding is a substantial problem, but it is not unsolvable. I must admit that my primary concern has to do with certain games that are usually played in the pre-election period. Each side is trying to provoke the opposite side, because both sides are aware of the fact that this will buy them more votes for the elections. I see this game being played in the RS, in Central Bosnia, in Southern Herzegovina. It is an old game, the purpose of which is to ensure as many votes as possible in the nationalist ballot boxes. I may not like the game, but it is a legitimate political tactic. Certainly, this is the case only as long as the game does not jeopardize the long-term future of this country. I will take this opportunity to convey a message to all politicians, through *Vecernji List*: you may play these games if you like, but do not allow them to go too far and do not sacrifice the future just to gain few more votes.

VL: You often talk about the need for BiH politicians to assume responsibility for leading this country. However, it is precisely you and the International Community they usually reproach for preventing them from doing so, complaining that

the “sword of removal” is always hanging over their heads?

People will always complain

ASHDOWN: As we move along, down the transition road, we will come to a point when the International Community too will have to redefine its role in this process. People will always complain, but they should not forget that the present role of the International Community in BiH is a part of the Dayton Peace Agreement. I hear some people saying that the International Community’s mandate in BiH will inflict long-term damage to democracy here. This is nonsense, because this is not the first mission of this kind. For example, after the Second World War, the Alliance forces remained in power in Germany for fifteen years, but this did not prevent Germany from becoming one of the leading democratic countries in Europe. As we approach EU and NATO, and the time when it will not be possible to reverse or jeopardize the peace process anymore, the International Community will have to rethink its role, in order to make it a less interventionist one. If BiH begins negotiations with the EU, this fact alone will restrict the influence of the International Community on the authorities of BiH.

VL: Does that mean that you will have less powers and competencies at the end of your mandate than you have today?

A long-lasting process

ASHDOWN: That is a question we must seriously consider, but it is important that everyone understand that we are in a transition process. It is a gradual process and it is unrealistic to expect that someone will suddenly appear one day and simply close down OHR.

VL: Recently you removed from office an entire group of high-level officials in the RS. Are you satisfied with the results of this decision?

They will go further

ASHDOWN: It is too early to give such an estimate. There are certain indicators that some highly positioned officials in the RS understand what must be done. Some of them are even showing significant courage. I hope that the measures I took will suffice, but if it becomes necessary, they will go further in order to ensure that war criminals and those who aid them do not jeopardize the future of this country.

VL: For how long are you willing to remain in the position of the High Representative and the EU Special Representative in BiH?

ASHDOWN: I can tell you that a minor mistake was made when quoting one of my statements regarding this issue. I serve the International Community and the citizens of BiH.

However, I also serve my family. My family told me, and I concurred, that November next year, the tenth anniversary of Dayton Peace Agreement, should be the final deadline for me to remain in this position. If the International Community wishes me to stay until that date, I will stay, although I would not object to leaving earlier. Some members in the International Community have asked me whether I would be willing to stay on until May 2006.

My response was that November 2005 is the final date we can discuss. My family threatened me with war if I am not home for Christmas 2005.

Only NATO can arrest Karadzic and Mladic

VL: Do you believe that the police forces in BiH are now capable of arresting the Hague fugitives?

ASHDOWN: In case of Karadzic and Mladic, the answer is – obviously not. I acknowledge the fact that these persons are most likely protected by an organization that only NATO, or

SFOR, can tackle. However, police structures in BiH have an absolute responsibility to cooperate in such efforts with SFOR. As for other persons indicted for war crimes, I think that police in BiH have the capacity to arrest them, and in cases when they need help, they can ask SFOR to provide it.