

Interview: Paddy Ashdown, High Representative in BiH: “Possible removals of RS officials”

Following SFOR's action in Pale, Paddy Ashdown warns the authorities of the Republika Srpska

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“Following the events that took place in Pale, I will have to take action against the RS authorities, because I have been thinking, for some time now, what steps to take, so that the whole of BiH does not have to suffer and risk its chance to join the Partnership for Peace,” announced the High Representative, Paddy Ashdown.

In the interview for “*Nezavisne novine*,” Ashdown indirectly announced, in a decisive tone, the possibility of removing certain officials of the RS. “From Dayton onwards, the RS authorities have not arrested a single war criminal, nor have they closed down or taken any action against any of the companies that provided money for supporting Radovan Karadzic,” Ashdown noted. “This represents a flagrant violation of International Law,” he added.

Nezavisne novine: A day after another action of SFOR troops in Pale, yet another unsuccessful attempt at arresting Radovan Karadzic, how would you evaluate the events that took place in Pale, including the injuring of the Orthodox priest and his son?

Paddy Ashdown: No one wants to see civilians get hurt or injured. We are all hoping and wishing them a fast recovery. This is my earnest wish, as the High Representative but also as a human being. When evaluating and analyzing who is responsible for what happened, we must take into account the fact that yesterday's events would not have taken place had the RS authorities complied with their responsibilities in accordance with International Law. One year ago, two, five years, or eight years ago. Why are there international troops walking the streets of Pale? Because they have to do what the RS has not done!

Allow me to illustrate this by an example. This morning, the Croatian Government ensured that persons who are indicted and should go to The Hague do indeed go to The Hague. In the past eight years, the majority of persons from the Federation indicted for war crimes did in fact go to The Hague, because the Federation Government made sure of this. Yesterday marked exactly three years since the Serbian Government sent Milosevic to The Hague. Since the signing of the Dayton Peace Agreement 15 people from the RS have gone to The Hague, but none of these persons was sent to The Hague by the RS authorities but, rather, as a result of actions carried out by international troops. During this period of nine years, the RS authorities have not arrested a single war criminal nor have they closed down or taken any action against any of the companies that provided money for supporting Radovan Karadzic. Furthermore, they have not expressed or indicated any criticism whatsoever, even when some highly-positioned members of the Orthodox Church stated that protecting Radovan Karadzic is a matter of duty.

Therefore, the RS authorities have not expressed a single word of criticism for what represents a flagrant violation of International Law. Certainly, when you take all these facts into consideration, you must come to a reasonable, rational conclusion that the RS is violating its obligations,

continually and in a scandalous manner, and it is not fulfilling its responsibilities in accordance with International Law. It is precisely due to this failure of the RS authorities to carry out their responsibilities that the International Community had to do this.

Nezavisne novine: Does that mean that the current authorities in the RS, as well as all the previous ones, from Dayton onwards, are the most radical ones in the region?

Paddy Ashdown: I think it is not the High Representative's job to make such comparisons. To be perfectly frank, I am not fully competent to say whether this political party or that one, this country or the other, is more radical in comparison to others. I do not even think about that. But what I can comment on, what I can indicate, is when I see that someone is violating the law, and the RS authorities are clearly violating it!

Nezavisne novine: Will the International Community, OHR and SFOR in the first place, initiate an investigation in order to determine how the priest and his son sustained such severe injuries, and who is responsible for that?

Paddy Ashdown: This is NATO's responsibility, and NATO has its own procedures to follow. However, allow me to be perfectly clear on this point. I have heard a lot of talk about an illegal and unauthorized action. I am not familiar with the information on the basis of which SFOR acted, and I am not supposed to know such information. It is not my job to know that. Nevertheless, let me be absolutely clear on the issue of legality. If SFOR, in this case, was in possession of clear and compelling evidence that this house was harboring a well-known war criminal, which I certainly do not doubt, and if they knew that Karadzic was being protected by armed men, who publicly swore that they would rather die than turn themselves in and that they would kill as many international troops as they could in the process, NATO does have a mandate and a duty

to respond. In any case they have a duty to respond with appropriate use of force, in order to reduce any risks they deem to be high. I do regret the fact that members of the Orthodox Church stated they were proud of this, namely with regard to protecting war criminals, and protecting Radovan Karadzic in this particular case. This is a matter of International Law, the highest instance of Law that exists. And no one can get away with violating this Law, not individual politicians, not the Orthodox Church.

Nezavisne novine: The action, however, ended without success. Will the International Community initiate an investigation against the "informant," in order to determine whether the informant was in possession of relevant information?

Paddy Ashdown: This question is addressed to the wrong person. If you want to know why, the question you should be asking is not why NATO was unsuccessful. The real question, rather, is why the RS was not cooperating in the process. NATO does not bear the prime responsibility for doing this, it is the RS authorities that carry the prime responsibility. If NATO was not working on the basis of reliable and relevant intelligence, it is not NATO's fault but the fault of the RS authorities, because they failed to provide and ensure appropriate intelligence. Therefore, the real question is not why NATO did not succeed, but why didn't the RS do this instead, or why didn't it cooperate in the process.

Nezavisne novine: Why don't you, then, use your powers?

Paddy Ashdown: You have just brought me to a very significant point. For some time now I have been thinking what steps to take, so that the whole of BiH does not have to suffer and risk losing its membership in Partnership for Peace, on account of such flagrant disrespect of International Law by the RS. The events that took place in Pale two nights ago only further aggravate the situation. This must not happen again. And the only way for us to ensure that it does not happen again is for

the RS to carry out its duties, and not leave it to us to do their work. Yes, you are quite right. I must think and consider what steps to take.

Nezavisne novine: Therefore, it is possible you might take vigorous action against the RS authorities?

Paddy Ashdown: Not only is it possible. It is certain to happen.

Nezavisne novine: Was the International Community aware that, by carrying out the action in the particular manner in which it was carried out, it would only strengthen the radical forces in the RS, in particular the SDS, in the eve of the upcoming elections?

Paddy Ashdown: Justice is blind. Let us presume, for the sake of argument, that Radovan Karadzic is located in that building across the street, and you know that he is there, I do not see how we could justify not arresting him, as that could result in certain political consequences. In that case, you could criticize me as well. Honest people might criticize me, if there was a chance to arrest Radovan Karadzic, and I did not take advantage of such an opportunity.

Nezavisne novine: After another unsuccessful action by SFOR, do you believe that Karadzic will ever be arrested?

Paddy Ashdown: Yes.