Interview: Paddy Ashdown, High Representative in BiH: “I Fear of the Door to NATO and Europe Closing on us”

*I’m very concerned because if we don’t accelerate the current pace of reforms, I fear we won’t succeed * I’m optimistic about the implementation of the decision on the administration of the City of Mostar * A dispute about electricity for «Aluminum» is an attempt to manipulate for political purposes*

The International Community’s High Representative in BiH, Paddy Ashdown, in his interview for *Jutarnje novine* expressed his deep concern about the impermissible halt in reforms at the very start of this year.

Paddy Ashdown: I’m absolutely dissatisfied with the current situation. At present, I’m even very concerned. In 2003, we had excellent progress in the field of reforms, and it was an exceptional year. However, now it’s perfectly clear that things have slowed down catastrophically, and if we don’t accelerate the pace of reforms, I fear we won’t succeed. So, the areas where we initiated reforms last year are now bogged down.

Jutarnje novine: Have you informed the local officials about these facts?

Paddy Ashdown: After this interview (Friday), I’ll have a meeting with the three prime ministers and my message will be that we’re failing. So, if we don’t accelerate this process of reform, if we don’t accelerate the pace, the door that we opened in 2003 on BiH’s road to NATO and Europe will slam shut in our faces.

WARNING TO THE PRIME MINISTERS

Jutarnje novine: Mr. Ashdown, you've untangled the Gordian knot in the case of the administration of the City of Mostar. Will it now be difficult to implement this decision in practice, i.e. do you expect that Mostar, as you envisaged it, will become a reality soon?

Paddy Ashdown: There is nothing new in the fact that parties, such as HDZ and SDA, won't be too satisfied or too pleased with some of the solutions. I believe these solutions will be more plausible for some multiethnic parties. However, in some private conversations I had with them, they were constructive and had some very useful and interesting comments and suggestions, and some of these had an effect on certain elements in the laws. We have a clear position on those issues on which they failed to reach an agreement. However, even when their views differed, the discussions we had with them on the issue of Mostar were conducted in a friendly atmosphere marked by mutual respect. In these discussions, they also clearly stated that if they found themselves in a situation in which I had to impose a decision, they would surely express their disapproval and oppose such a solution, and then at a later stage, they would wait to see the position that their parties would take to decide on how to react to implementation.

STRONG INDICATIONS

Jutarnje novine: Do you expect obstruction from the HDZ and the SDA, bearing in mind the facts that you presented, and the dissatisfaction with your decision already expressed by HDZ and SDA?

Paddy Ashdown: Although these parties haven't yet decided how to act in relation to what is stated in the decision of the High Representative, I've received some quite strong indications that even though they disagree with some elements of the decision, they still want to do what is in the

interests of all. I believe this has been confirmed by certain statements given by Ms. Seada Palavric, and it is good they haven't immediately given their official position, but they provided time for themselves to evaluate. So, the concrete answer to your question whether I expect obstruction is negative. I'm quite optimistic about further implementation of this decision because I believe everyone will look at the decision positively, and this is exactly the basis upon which we plan to build further dialogue. Of course, if that's not the case, then I will have to see what needs to be done on my side. However, I don't expect such a situation to develop, nor would I like to find myself having to consider possible actions. Still, in this sense, I find that it's not relevant what the position of national parties will be, but more important is whether the parties on the whole will be able to control actions of their representatives on the local level.

TWO SIDES OF THE COIN

Jutarnje novine: The problem of Aluminium arises again. SBiH warned of behind the scenes actvity;they claim that following the F BiH Government session in Mostar, a meeting between the prime ministers, some representatives of the international community and the General Manager of Aluminim took place with the objective of securing electricity for this company for a non-market price. On the other hand, the General Manager of EPBiH Enver Kreso claimed that the international community threatened him with dismissal because of Aluminum. Your comment?

Paddy Ashdown: It is a very complex matter. I think it was misrepresented by both sides, and it was done for certain political ends. I was recently a guest on a Croat TV station where they presented a position completely different from that you've presented here. Namely, it was said there that Mr. Kreso ignored my decision because a supply of electricity to Aluminum was not secured. So, there are two sides to the coin, so to say, concerning this very complex problem. Neither one

of these sides has things in black-and-white fashion. There are various shades of gray in there. However, they are trying to manipulate this issue for political purposes, in fact they're counting on the very complexity of the issue, and that most people don't understand what is it all about. The essence is in this. I reached a decision, and made it public, and this decision needs to be implemented accordingly. If this isn't done, I will have to take measures. So, a solution here hasn't been found yet, but I expect it will happen soon. Further reactions on my part will be decided at the time when all aspects of this issue are clarified.

Zelengora isn't the Iraqi desert

Jutarnje novine: The Iraqi dictator Sadam Hussein was arrested «expressly». However, major war criminals Radovan Karadzic and Ratko Mladic still laugh at the messages they receive daily from international officials regarding their impending arrest. How come there is such an inability or ultimaterly inertia of the IC when it comes to their arrest?

Paddy Ashdown: Primarily, Zelengora is not the Iraqi desert. Perhaps, it's a bit easier to hide on Zelengora.

Jutarnje novine: But eight years are not the same as eight months – the time it took to arrest Sadam Hussein?

Paddy Ashdown: There was a bomb explosion thirty years ago in Belfast which killed many people. Thirtry years later we still havn't managed to capture the person responsible although in Belfast we contrtol each centimeter. So, this is not a simple job, but it has to be done. I can tell you that the international community is increasingly determined to have these persons face justice and I believe the current situation is shameful for the international community. However, I will tell you who bears this shame – primarily the RS authorities who do nothing. They haven't done anything effective to ensure that these persons get arrested. If you follow the situation

closely you will see that those responsible for such a situation will have to face the consequences too. Despite this, I believe that in the last year, we have managed to make some progress with blocking their bank accounts, freezing their assets and a ban on visas.

It is too early to tell whether I'll be the last High Representative

Jutarnje novine: Many BiH politicians confirmed it was good that the High Reprtesentative's mandate extended because of the concern that it wasn't yet the right time for them to take the destiny of this country in their hands. Do you believe, in light of the facts you've presented here, that you'll be the last High Representative in BiH?

Paddy Ashdown: I would consider it a success if I could be the last High Representative for BiH. However, it's still too early to tell whether I'll be the last High Representative or not, but I believe that by mid-year we could be more knowledgeable about the situation. However, I'll reiterate once more, if in the first few months of this year we don't accelerate the reforms, i.e. if we don't do something quick about the significant delays that already existent BiH won't be able move forward on European integration. It means that we won't be able to transfer certain competences to BiH authorities. I believe there is a real danger of failure.