Interview: Paddy Ashdown, High Representative: “Decision terminates municipalities, and election system is adapted to special circumstances of Mostar”

Today at noon, in Mostar, High Representative Paddy Ashdown will announce the Decision on the future organisation of this city. We spoke to Lord Ashdown yesterday in his Sarajevo office, shortly before his departure for Mostar.

Vecernji list: What kind of solution can we expect? What does it bring to Mostar and its citizens?

Paddy Ashdown: That solution must ensure the guarantees that we will not have a divided city again some time in future and that there will be no room for a renewed construction of parallel institutions. The solutions must be such as to guarantee that no single people governs the city on its own. For that reason there will be no municipalities below the city level, and the election system has been conceived in such a way as to suit the specific circumstances of Mostar. The solutions I will announce will ensure that city authorities can only be formed through the mutual cooperation of peoples. Two more things are very important for me. The first one is that citizens still be guaranteed adequate services. Although there will be a single City Council, citizens will receive the same services in the same offices as they do today. The other thing is that we have to have an appropriate implementation period, so that the services provided to citizens are not impeded. The present municipal employees will work for the

City Council in decentralised offices and they will continue to provide the same services to the citizens. This decentralised way of providing services to citizens will be an example of the most modern practice in European cities.

Vecernji list: Will you propose an initiative that such decentralised organisation be applied in other cities, like Sarajevo, Banja Luka or Travnik?

Paddy Ashdown: I hope that this revolution which we are about to start in Mostar will also be applied in other BiH cities. Yet, when it comes to some aspect of the Mostar solution, I would not like to see them applied in other cities. It would be very bad if in other parts of BiH we were to redraw electoral areas according to ethnic lines. It would be as if we exported the curse of Mostar to other cities. I have to clarify one thing. The Dayton Agreement mentions only two cities – Sarajevo and Mostar. However, they are mentioned in a different way. Dayton defined Sarajevo as a divided city and I cannot interfere with that. The Dayton Agreement defines Mostar as a city whose final status has still not been regulated. And that is the difference between Sarajevo and Mostar, which many cannot and do not want to understand.

Vecernji list: Can you say to the ordinary citizens of Mostar what your decision on the future of that city will change in their lives?

Paddy Ashdown: Ordinary citizens will feel very few changes in their everyday lives. However, as time goes by, many things will change. First of all, if Mostar unites, new investments will come to town. Second, Mostar will regain its status as an exceptional European city. Third, we can begin to build a unified instead of a divided city. And finally, I have to say that all the money which is being spent uselessly on politicians and bureaucrats will be directed to other purposes in the interest of the citizens and the city of Mostar. If I make this Decision, I can give Mostar a chance but not a

future. There is no system that I can come up with, which the politicians of Mostar could not destroy if they wanted to. The only ones who can stop them in that are the citizens of Mostar.

Vecernji list: So you admit that there is a possibility that your Decision not be implemented?

Paddy Ashdown: Yes, of course.

Vecernji list: What then? How will you react if the Decision is not implemented?

Paddy Ashdown: You know I cannot respond to that. Yet I will tell you that in that case there will be no foreign investments, the investment conference organised by the BiH Presidency in February will not be a success because a small number of investors will take part in it. That will mean that a very small number of statesmen will come to the formal opening of the Old Bridge, and after all it will be an obstruction of the Dayton Agreement, and I as the High Representative cannot allow the Dayton Agreement to be obstructed by individuals or political parties.

Vecernji list: Which is the deadline for the implementation of your Decision and will somebody from the International Community be especially responsible for the implementation of the Decisions or its supervision?

Paddy Ashdown: There will be no supervisor as is the case in the Brčko District, but all the sides have told me that it would be very useful if the International Community helped in the implementation of the Decision. I listened to those requests and I believe that it would be a reasonable solution if there existed an implementation unit which would give technical assistance to the Mayor and Deputy Mayor. I can tell you that I have asked Ambassador Werner Wnendt to remain my special envoy for Mostar, who will supervise the process. However, the responsibility for the implementation of the

decision does not lie with the International Community but with the Mayor, Deputy Mayor and municipality heads. They will have to take the responsibility in case the decision is not implemented.

Vecernji list: Can you let us know at least a provisional deadline for the implementation of the decision? Do we speak about weeks or months?

Paddy Ashdown: The deadline was not invented by the High Representative. If we fail to carry out the preparations for the October elections to be held on the new basis, then we lose that opportunity for the next four years. Those are the deadlines. We must ensure that the citizens are able to elect their representatives on the new basis, in the unified and instead of divided Mostar.