

Interview: High Representative Paddy Ashdown: “I don’t think there will be “bratstvo i jedinstvo” (brotherhood and unity) again with the new administration of the City of Mostar”

“Bratstvo i jedinstvo” could be attained over time because trust was established among peoples. In Mostar, there is no trust. You cannot rebuild Mostar either on the basis of trust or “bratstvo i jedinstvo”, said the High Representative.

The High Representative for BiH Paddy Ashdown, prior to the interview for *Dnevni list*, had no information about the results of discussion between councillors of the Mostar City Council at yesterday’s extraordinary session, which, as announced, was to address the City’s Draft Statute. “As far as I know, the City Council has done something, which hasn’t surprised me. They opposed decisions of the Winterstein Commission. What else could we expect? If they failed to reach a solution in the period of ten months, then I am afraid, they couldn’t reach it in three hours.”

Dnevni list: Winterstein announced that the issue of the administration of Mostar had to be resolved by the end of this month. What can we expect in the next ten days?

Paddy Ashdown: I announced this deadline in September last year. This process has been going on for 10 months already. We had two commissions working on this issue. The Winterstein

Commission outlined 90 percent of the City's Statute. There are two unresolved issues: the issue of municipalities and the electoral system. My principle was that I wouldn't interfere in those issues on which parties reached agreement. The solution for Mostar must be obtained by the end of the month if we wish people of this City to be elected in the October elections in accordance with the new electoral system. If we miss this deadline, we won't be able to resolve the issue of Mostar in the next three or four years because if the new City Council is elected according to the old system, we won't be in a position to disturb this relation in the next three or four years. This is also requested from us from the EU. I don't wish to impose the solution for Mostar and I'm ready to use the time of two weeks for negotiations with everyone. According to Dayton, Mostar is my responsibility. I have no responsibility for Bugojno, Travnik, Vitez or Sanski Most, but I do have it for Mostar. It means I will act if there is no consensus. You should ask yourselves whether the International Community will be ready to invest in a divided Mostar. Millions of dollars have been marked as assistance to Mostar. It may easily happen that Mostar is proclaimed a failure, and this funding reallocated to Pristina. Mostar survives at present owing to Elektroprivreda. The World Bank said this was a provisional situation, with this arrangement coming to an end on 1 April. I'm afraid this arrangement won't be extended, and the City will be left without funding.

Dnevni list: Are the citizens consulted in all of this? Will you have meetings with representatives of citizens in the next fifteen days?

Paddy Ashdown: I've already talked to many citizens, and I continue to talk to them. Whenever I go to Mostar, I try to organize a meeting with them too. It seems to me they have a different position. Do citizens know that six municipalities in Mostar cost 100 million KM? Each citizen contributes 909 KM annually to the financing of municipalities, excluding the

funding of the City Council. This is almost an annual pension.

Dnevni list: What's your position on having a referendum in this period on the kind of City which citizens would like to have?

Paddy Ashdown: Ten years after the war most of the citizens are aware of the dangers associated with having a referendum, especially monoethnic referendums or referendums where a single nationality sets the question, the same nationality responds to it, and finally this one nationality does the counting. I am not saying it is illegal, but it's not wise either. I said if it was done by Bosniaks, Croats would do it too. Even if there is a referendum, I will listen to its results, but when making a decision, I will decide in the interest of all peoples. It may be predicted what Croats will say, probably the opposite to what is said by Bosniaks. You don't have to be a fortuneteller to guess this, but neither referendum nor anything else may divert me from my position.

Dnevni list: And what will happen after a solution for Mostar is reached?

Paddy Ashdown: Then we will have a complex issue that needs to be implemented in practice. It will be easy to distort the whole process. If politicians do this, they will be destroying both their City and the future of their children, but they will also lose money that is on the way to Mostar. We hope that the decision will be implemented and a better future secured. If they wish to take another road, I cannot stop them.

Dnevni list: What is this money for Mostar you are talking about?

Paddy Ashdown: I asked the World Bank to look at the situation and report to us. It is important for me that it be known. If Mostar fails, if a solution is not reached, a lot more will be

known about these figures very soon. The amount of money and the funding marked for Mostar will be known.

Dnevni list: You cannot speak about whether there will be any assistance of the International Community or the World Bank in implementing the solution for administration of Mostar?

Paddy Ashdown: The International Community has significant funding, which is planned for assistance to Mostar. We have the European Commission and the World Bank. We also have individual donors. I know it is millions of marks, which would be invested in Mostar in the coming years. We must know that Mostar is headed in the right direction, so we are not disposing of our money, as in a black hole. It is the money of our taxpayers. I am trying to get the figure of contribution paid by Elektroprivreda for the use of hydro-electric power plant, but I believe that after this arrangement is terminated in April, Mostar will find itself on the verge of bankruptcy. I'm trying to convince the World Bank to extend the arrangement beyond 1 April, but I wouldn't be surprised if they refuse.

Dnevni list: Why do you say that it will be easier to resolve problems such as Aluminium and others if the issue of Mostar is resolved? Aren't these separate issues?

Paddy Ashdown: They are separate issues indeed, but they are interrelated. My problem is that there are too many problems here. It's as if I'm looking at the forest. Metaphorically speaking, once I cut down one tree, it's easier for me to move on to the next one. Resolving one issue creates preconditions for solving the next one.

Dnevni list: Metaphorically, what's the next tree? What's coming after Mostar?

Paddy Ashdown: If Mostar were less of a curse, and more of a model for the future, perhaps it could be used for other places, but we have to remind ourselves of the specific nature

of Mostar, which is defined under Dayton as my responsibility. If some principles of the Mostar solution can be applied to authorities in other cities, I have nothing against this, but it must be done by local politicians, and not by the High Representative. I will resolve Mostar, but Bugojno, Banja Luka and similar towns will have to be resolved by local politicians.

Dnevni list: Do you really believe there will be “*bratstvo i jedinstvo*” again with the new administration of the City?

Paddy Ashdown: No. I believe there is a fundamental principle here that we have to resolve. “*Bratstvo i jedinstvo*” could be attained over time because trust was established among peoples. In Mostar, there is no trust. You cannot rebuild Mostar either on the basis of trust or “*bratstvo i jedinstvo*”. You have to build it on guarantees, and one of the guarantees is that we cannot go back to parallel systems, which means you cannot have municipalities. My Bosniak friends and friends from the SDA promise me they won’t be creating a divided city if they are left with municipalities. My Croat friends tell me they won’t override the other peoples if they are given power in Mostar. I cannot trust these promises. We have to build Mostar on guarantees.

Removal of politicians due to obstruction

Dnevni list: Should we expect a removal of some politicians due to their obstruction of the process of finding a solution that is in the interest of all citizens?

Paddy Ashdown: I never say in advance what I will do, but I will tell you that the special status of Mostar and its contribution to stability of BiH is outlined as a specific case in Dayton. Accordingly, those who obstruct the administration of Mostar are, in a way, obstructing the Dayton Agreement.