

Interview: Paddy Ashdown, High Representative in BiH: “I will punish leaders from RS if there are further obstructions to the Report on Srebrenica”

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Telecom*

– Contrary to my previous trips to Western capitals, this time I did not have to explain and convince some interlocutors that Bosnia and Herzegovina was not a black hole and that changes for better were obvious. It shows that this country has made great progress, and the majority of Foreign Affairs ministers and the majority of the people in the ministries of Foreign Affairs believe that BiH is on the road to become the most successful story in the process of peace and stabilization, although a lot of work still remains and the problems we are facing are not harmless and negligible – Paddy Ashdown, the High Representative for BiH, said in an interview for “Dnevni avaz”.

After summing up his visits to Western countries, Ashdown said he had come back satisfied.

Obvious Progress

– There is still a lot of work to be done, but look at the conditions in other crisis areas. Here the progress is

obvious, palpable and now the International Community is needed to finish the job. The story of BiH is an International Community success story, but the story has still to be completed. Your country is facing dangers, of which the biggest is economic. That is why I was all the time repeating how it was necessary to maintain the level of economic assistance to BiH if we want to avoid this danger – Ashdown said.

Dnevni avaz: You talked about SFOR. It seems that the idea for EU to take over NATO's mandate over the peace operation in BiH is gaining weight.

Paddy Ashdown: They asked me what I thought about that, although that segment of the Dayton Agreement is not in my hands. I said that for more than ten years I had been emphasizing that Europe must resolve this problem that was taking place in its own back yard and how it was scandalous that we had to wait for Uncle Sam to save us ... I still think the same way. However, I have to admit that firstly some problems have to be solved, such as a time framework, which should be proposed by SFOR itself, but also the issue of perceptions of ordinary people here.

For whatever reason, they do not have trust in Europe. This is highly unfair since France alone, for example, lost 80 people in BiH. However, the fact is that people believe that the USA came here and stopped the war, while Europe did not do anything. That is why the issue of mistrust towards Europe has to be solved. We have to show to the citizens of BiH that we are willing and able to deal with this challenge.

Europe is very serious about its intention to take over NATO's mandate in BiH. The EU is the biggest donor to BiH, and this assistance will not be reduced but it will increase in the next year or two. The EU Police Mission in BiH is a good thing. Simply, a recent public opinion survey shows the feeling of security of ordinary citizens is growing. EUPM is

better and works better than the IPTF, and European organizations are trusted the most among all international organizations. Now Europe has to show to the people in BiH that it is deadly serious in its intentions to ensure further peace and stability.

If that transfer of authority happens, then it would be useful to change the mandate of EUFOR, so that forces are able to confront organized crime more aggressively. If those forces come, then it would be useful for them to interfere in this fight even more closely and strongly than SFOR. The crime network has to be wrecked in the joint fight led by peace forces and/or the International Community and the BiH authorities.

However, all this should not be done without the strong presence of the USA and some "third countries". The USA has to be a part of this coalition, although the EU would lead it.

Dnevni avaz: You talked about the new phase of reforms. What is that all about?

Paddy Ashdown: We have progressed significantly on the road of building a functional state and I do not want us lose this momentum. We are very interested to see reforms in the fields of indirect taxation, defense, intelligence services, and also the issue of Mostar, completed by the end of the year. After which we can commit ourselves to improving the efficiency of the BiH State.

It is not an issue for the International Community but for BiH citizens. Is such consumption of the state institutions affordable while so little has been allocated for citizens? These are the issues I am also thinking about. I still do not have some defined ideas or proposals. For example, I know that pensions are small because we are paying too much for the different levels of government.

Losses of PBS

Dnevni avaz: You are now in the middle of the discussion on the public broadcasters. None of the High Representatives has solved this issue so far, so why are you involved in that?

Paddy Ashdown: Because you cannot go to Europe if you do not have independent public broadcasters, since that is an integral part of the road to European structures. I will remind you that this was one of three key areas on which I announced upon my arrival that I would be working – independent judiciary, independent system of the Central Bank and independent public broadcasters. If we cannot achieve this, we cannot go to Europe.

This issue might be difficult, painful and it may require hard work, but it must be solved. I have to emphasize that here the problem is not only how to create a new hardware but also software.

People in this country, especially politicians, very often simply do not understand that in a modern European state politicians cannot make editorial decisions about TV programs. The Decision of the RS National Assembly and the Parliament of the Federation, which insists on coverage of sessions, is a very disappointing example of how some people are still living in the past.

Dnevni avaz: Can we interpret your position as a defence of some media and broadcasting that do not meet even basic professional standards?

Paddy Ashdown: The manner in which PBS has been managed is a reason for concern and it has to be solved as well as the problem that they are running up a million KM in debt every month. However, politicians cannot solve this by taking control of PBS; it has to be done by governing structures, which have to start dealing with problems and stop sweeping them under the carpet.

Dnevni avaz: These days you are also in some kind of conflict with the RS authorities with regard to Srebrenica. How are you going to solve that?

Paddy Ashdown: First of all, it was not my decision not to accept the RS Report on Srebrenica. That was the decision of the court. That has to be respected. In this case there is a clear line of responsibility. The President of the RS, Dragan Cavic, says that all those who could have information related to this case are not under his control.

That is true. At this moment, the RS Minister of the Police and the RS Ministry of Internal Affairs, the BSA, the RS Intelligence Service are not under the control of Cavic at the moment, but the RS Army certainly is. I want to state clearly that if there are further obstructions, I will consider competent persons responsible for these obstructions. In the case of the RS Army that is clearly President Cavic.

Therefore, this is my recommendation to Republika Srpska – there have been enough postponements. It is completely unacceptable that the truth about this crime, which is required by the decision of one of the highest judicial levels in this state, has to be squeezed out of the RS drop by drop.

Answers have to be given and that is the international obligation, which arises from the rule of law. Everyone, who holds it back, from the President down, may expect to face consequences.

Dnevni avaz: What do you expect that the Commission will do?

Paddy Ashdown: Give the full truth. We will appoint one representative of the International Community to the Commission on Srebrenica, although we still do not know whom, maybe someone of high rank or maybe someone who is local and will work full time in the Commission. I am waiting for Carla del Ponte to recommend someone from the Hague Tribunal and a representative of the people of Srebrenica.

So, this time the investigation is not going to take place among a closed circle of people but will be carried out by those who ask only for the whole truth.

Responsible individuals should cooperate in the investigation. If some information is in Belgrade, I expect Banja Luka to ensure that the Commission receives this information. I am sure that the RS authorities will know how to make this clear to Belgrade.

The time of hiding information and the truth about Srebrenica has passed.

This is not only for the reason of the request of judicial authorities but also the fact that on 17 December at a session of the Council of the North Atlantic Alliance, NATO will discuss some of these issues in the context of the debate over BiH's proposed entry into Partnership for Peace. On that occasion they will assess the level of cooperation between BiH and the ICTY and that is why it is so important for this issue to be solved as soon as possible.

Dnevni avaz: When?

Paddy Ashdown: That is up to the current governments. The Human Rights Chamber was clear. Time is already passing and the Commission should be established as soon as possible.

Crime in Telecoms

Dnevni avaz: The audit reports have shown some terrible things in the business operations of those companies...

Paddy Ashdown: Yes, certainly! I am not surprised that those whom the audit report revealed are now trying to escape from that light and to throw dust in the eyes of the public. I do not want to name individuals, but the public knows very well who I am thinking about.

I would like to emphasize that the audit reports have nothing

to do with the possible privatization, and even less with any decrease in the value of the existing telecom companies. If anything has reduced the value of telecom companies in BiH, it is the terrible things they have been doing. It is ridiculous that those who are guilty are now calling upon the International Community and blaming it for mistakes they made.

Look at this – BiH has the highest prices of mobile telephony impulses and the worst service in Europe. Ordinary citizens in this country, who are using mobile phones, deserve to have the lowest prices and the service as it is elsewhere in Europe. It is scandalous that the pockets of political parties and some individuals were filled via Telecoms instead of using the money for improving their services and lowering prices.

Dnevni avaz: Which political parties? Which individuals?

Paddy Ashdown: I do not want to say anything more than this. You can draw your own conclusions, it is not difficult and the auditor's report is very clear.

Dnevni avaz: The auditor's reports we have had so far led to removals and criminal charges. Why is that not the case with Telecoms?

Paddy Ashdown: That is the result of the fact that BiH is getting closer to Europe. In the past I have made certain moves and now that is up to the BiH governments. And there is no doubt that their actions are necessary in this case. If I did that, this could have a negative reflection in the eyes of Europe.

Dnevni avaz: In recent days SFOR has raided FOSS and the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Federation. Do you have any information about what they found there?

Paddy Ashdown: I think that is a question for SFOR as it is refers to security and not peace implementation. However, I can say that the action you have mentioned is part of SFOR's

routine activities.

Amendments to the Law on Intelligence Service of BiH

Dnevni avaz: The HDZ has recently expressed its dissatisfaction with the proposed Law on Intelligence Service of BiH. How do you respond to their positions?

Paddy Ashdown: We have received lots of amendments to that law and now we are examining them. However, I can say that this draft law provides the best foundation for organizing an intelligence service in Europe. What the Commission headed by Kalman Kocsis achieved in several months (while Hungary needed five to seven years for the same work) is a great success.

This law provides a basis for strong institutional control over the work of the intelligence service by the BiH Parliament and also other institutions. I think it is what the citizens of this country want.

I am not saying that this is a perfect law and that it cannot be improved in some aspects, but it would be a tragedy to destroy this work for some petty political objectives.

Those who want to go back to the old days when parties controlled the intelligence services, damage the interests of BiH citizens. The latest scandals with intelligence services in BiH are the best illustration of this.

Clear Message to Minister Mladen Ivanic

Paddy Ashdown: There is no connection between Kosovo and Bosnia and Herzegovina, and I want to say this clearly to everybody. If someone wants to stop BiH and SCG on the road to Europe, let them initiate the discussion and advocate the exchange of territories.

I expect those who represent BiH, especially abroad, to argue for the sovereignty and integrity of BiH and nothing less than that.