

Interview: Javier Solana, EU High Representative for Common Foreign and Security Policy for Euro Blic on Bosnia and Herzegovina and police restructuring

Blic: At this moment, the control of political life in BiH is such that citizens and most politicians see international community institutions, and in particular the OHR, as a protectorate. Is such an influence really necessary, and how long will BiH remain so dependant?

This is a common accusation, but you cannot describe BiH as a protectorate; you have your own legislature, executive and judiciary, the High Representative has even subjected his decisions to the scrutiny of the BiH Constitutional Court . Furthermore the key reforms put in place in BiH to date, the reforms required for EU accession, have had to be adopted through your own legislative process: the EU will not recognize them otherwise.

The position of the High Representative and the Bonn powers were designed to meet a specific need in a specific time. Without the High Representatives' interventions BiH would not have been able to achieve the progress it has already made. Even when the High Representative has had to remove someone it is in pursuit of a legitimate aim and based on serious grounds – of that I am in no doubt.

But if you want to get into the EU then you must do so without the High Representative.

This means adopting and implementing the necessary reforms for starting a Stabilisation and Association Agreement – the first step in the EU accession process. Among these is police restructuring.

I also want to stress that the principle of local ownership is central to the EU's approach to BiH, for instance in a mission like the EU Police Mission (EUPM).

Blic: Given the current BiH set up, is centralization – or a very high level of it, the key requirement for Euro-Atlantic integration? How do you envisage the existence of the Entities in the future when you consider that now, particularly in the RS, there is a clearly stated fear of loss of competences, especially when it comes to defence, police and the economy?

BiH is a decentralised State and the EU doesn't require this to change. Nobody is talking about the abolition of the entities. Instead, what is required is for those minimal institutions that exist at state level to be effective and affordable. So, for example, if the EU is negotiating with BiH on a policing matter it must be confident that the interior minister with whom it is talking wields sufficient power within the country to deliver results. The EU will also never be able to liberalise the visa regime unless it receives guarantees that BiH's security forces are co-ordinated enough to ensure European standards of law enforcement within its own borders.

Blic: What exactly will the police reform in BiH bring? What are it's advantages and disadvantages? Will Entity police structures exist in near future?

There are currently more than 14 separate police forces in BiH. That means that the police are unable to operate effectively across entity and cantonal boundaries. Criminals can often escape justice by crossing an entity or cantonal border.

Police restructuring will bring a single police structure to BiH. That will help make the police more effective in fighting crime. It represents a way of overcoming systemic deficiencies in the organization of policing in BiH and provides a means of providing an effective and efficient police service that is free from political interference.

Police restructuring is also a requirement for a Stabilisation and Association Agreement with BiH.

The European Commission recently approved a Feasibility Report assessing the readiness of Serbia and Montenegro for a Stabilisation and Association Agreement. Failure to reach an agreement will therefore risk meaning that BiH is the only country in the region that has not begun SAA negotiations.

Police restructuring will also give policemen and policewomen a professional service, with access to modern equipment, proper career structures and better salaries, benefits and training. My understanding is that there may continue to be a role for Entity Ministries of Interior – but that is a matter for your politicians to agree.

The systemic deficiencies that I mentioned are also present in the defence structures. These weaknesses were highlighted just recently in the incidents relating to new recruits in the armed forces. Such events show that there is a lack of effective command and control over the armed forces.

Blic: How realistic is it to expect this reform to be implemented the consensus of one party, the RS, is consistently opposed to its core preposition? Do we need a police that the citizens will not trust?

These reforms make sense because they bring the citizens closer to the EU. The EU has outlined three principles for police reform that must be met. The first of these is to free policing from political interference, the second is to put all competencies for police legislation and budget at the State level. The third is to make sure that regional policing is based on good police practice. Everything else is up for negotiation.

Blic: Provisions of the DPA together with the RS and BiH Constitutions are being violated by this insistence on a single police in BiH. How to explain to citizens that this is what we need, if the highest law of the land is not being respected?

There is no violation of the DPA (Dayton/Paris Agreement) in these reforms; the DPA allows for change with the agreement of all constituent peoples. It is normal for states to amend their laws and constitutions in order to fit into the EU framework.

Blic: Do you believe that BiH's current political scene has enough capable politicians to make this turn around, and what do you see as the crucial problem? Have the nationalist parties and their leaders been democratised enough in the last ten years to be able to do this?

Starting negotiations on a Stabilisation and Association Agreement with the EU is, and must continue to be a priority for BiH politicians. The EU will evaluate BiH's progress towards the EU on its ability to achieve the necessary reforms, and less on the basis of internal politics.

Blic: What EU activities are currently the most important in BiH? Can you order these priorities? Is it realistic to expect a positive answer on the Feasibility Study?

As you have seen, the EU has focused a lot on BiH in recent years. In addition to our economic reconstruction programmes, we have launched our first police mission, EUPM, in BiH. Last December we launched EUFOR, our largest military operation to date. Politically, we have made High Representative Ashdown our EU Special Representative. I think the EU is doing all it can for BiH.

And, perhaps most importantly, we have offered BiH a European perspective. As I have said, starting negotiations on a Stabilisation and Association Agreement with the EU is, and must continue to be a priority for BiH politicians. How soon this will happen will depend on BiH's ability to implement the necessary reforms. This includes the transfer of all indicted war criminals to the Tribunal in The Hague .

Blic: Could you, as the EU Commissioner for foreign policy, state what represents the biggest problem in your communication with BiH and SCG politicians; is it their indecisiveness, hunger for power or inconsistency? In which spheres do you find such communication satisfactory?

I have good working relations with leaders in both BiH and SCG – I was in Belgrade a few days ago and had productive talks. And as I have said, the EU will evaluate BiH's progress towards the EU on its ability to achieve the necessary reforms, and not on the basis of internal politics.

Blic: Honestly, when do you expect BiH and SCG to join Europe?

The European perspective is there. But that will depend entirely on BiH and SCG, their ability to implement the necessary reforms and co-operate in full with the ICTY.