

Interview: Donald Hays, Deputy High Representative "Police know who the biggest tobacco bosses in BiH are"

Police and customs officers now catch small fry, but large fish will see their turn too – Many parameters showing that the country is moving forward

DH: I was in BiH in 1994 when I arrived on a military plane. Since then, I've been here on two occasions. I must say that this time I am surprised by the amount of change that has happened here. Despite the problems you are complaining of, there are many parameters showing that the country is going forward.

I'm an optimist and I think that, with a strengthened engagement of the Government and engagement of the public, we can achieve key progress in the next twelve months – Donald Hays told "Dnevni Avaz", in his first interview since he took office of Deputy High Representative.

Problem of corruption

DA: In your inaugural visit to the Presidency of BiH, Jozo Krizanovic said that BiH is a complex and uneconomical state. What chances does a country stand whose nominal head thinks that it is badly organized?

DH: This depends on the people here. On the other hand, I think it's a sign of real democracy when your high officials admit that they don't know all the answers. It's clear that BiH is an unbalanced country with a complicated structure. However, what gives me confidence is the quality of your people. Young people won't tolerate being left out and excluded from the events. Simply, with free media, open economy, democratically elected government, things will change in a positive direction.

DA: Where do you see key problems with regard to corruption and what are you going to do to reduce it considerably?

DH: Corruption is a bigger problem under the conditions of weak economy, where the rules of the game are not clear, where there's no law. I must say that we have a good cooperation with the local government in fighting corruption.

We're trying to train professionals who'll be able to stand up to corruption. However, everything will need a lot of time. All in all, corruption is a big problem in the police, courts, some government services ...

If we continue with adopting laws in the coming months and with an aggressive campaign, we'll have results very soon.

DA: This all sounds very abstract. Can you point at the problem somehow more specifically, with certain figures?

DH: Well, a big problem is tobacco being smuggled across the BiH borders. I spoke to a great number of customs officers and police. We concluded that there is no way to stop it until Bosnian neighbours get involved in the campaign of stopping smuggling chains.

On the other hand, I get the worst picture about the situation here when I talk to ordinary citizens of BiH. They tell me one has to bribe your way to medical services, to getting a driver's licence, when you need someone to connect electricity ... In this case, BiH is faced with the problem of corruption on a large scale.

DA: The non-governmental organization Transparency International announces a study which will show that the International Community is not impeccable.

DH: We are very interested in this investigation. On the basis of thirty years of experience working with international organizations I can tell you that I was a part of making very difficult international compromises.

As a matter of fact, wherever we work, whether it's a dictatorship or democracy, they want us to cooperate with local authorities. Things here are even more complex. OHR is a unique organization with certain authorities, but, for us to be able to work efficiently, we must have partners.

Secondly, I can tell you that what we do we do for certain governments which ask us to act as they want. We are responsible to PIC. It's a group of countries that got together to promote the state of BiH. They want us to cooperate with those in power.

Border coverage

DA: Milorad Dodik said recently that there is a secret group "Typhoon" in the RS Customs Service smuggling goods which are sold on the black market and that this money is used to finance SDS and guard Radovan Karadzic. Do you have any knowledge of that?

DH: I can't deny or refute this information because I'm not monitoring the work of customs. OHR doesn't do intelligence work and doesn't have the capacities for this kind of information. But, we have a department for fighting corruption and we take these allegations seriously.

I suppose that the information Dodik presented is known to those from the International Community who are dealing with such issues. What I can say is that this also shows how important it is that the business of establishing the Border Service is completed.

The Border Service now covers about 70% of the BiH border. If adequate means are found, the whole border should be covered by the end of the year.

DA: Who are the major tobacco bosses in BiH?

DH: There is no doubt that appropriate police authorities know who these people are. Now, police and customs officers catch small fry. It's always more difficult to come to those who are on top, but it'll be their turn too.

DA: Will this happen soon?

DH: As I said, what we have here is cross-border smuggling. Therefore, there is a possibility that main centers get transferred from one country to another. So, until there is a common effort of the countries in the region, I don't know how this smuggling could be stopped.

That's one of the reasons why we advocate here the regional concept in fighting corruption and organized crime.

An example to the rest of the International Community

DA: Two days ago the High Representative and the Chair of the Council of Ministers signed an agreement where OHR commits itself to pay contributions for its local staff. Will this example be followed by other international organizations working in BiH?

DH: One of the reasons why we did that was to give a good example to the rest of the international organizations working here, which could do the same. I think they are going to do that.