Otisak.ba: Interview with PDHR and Brčko Supervisor Dennis Hearne

By: Adis Mujdanović

Otisak.ba: Considering that on Thursday we marked the 18 anniversary of Brcko District , can you look back at this period and give us your opinion on the current situation in this local community and about expectations for the future?

Dennis Hearne: The 18th anniversary of the Brcko District reminds us of the difficult path the District has crossed from a war-torn place to an inspiring model of multiethnic coexistence and tolerance. It serves as proof that a sincere commitment to progress, constructive approach and close cooperation do pay off. I am proud that the OHR has been a part of this progress.

Naturally, the situation in BiH, including Brcko, is far from ideal. Brcko is not immune to problems seen elsewhere in the country. They necessarily spill over. There are also problems specific to Brcko. The best response to both is a sustained focus on reforms and an accelerated path of reforms. The adoption of the 2018 budget and the approval of key infrastructure projects are immediate priorities. Sustained engagement is also required when it comes to the rule of law, economic environment and education. I also expect a robust approach to fighting corruption. I hope the adoption of anti-

corruption laws and a new law on budget – which the Finance Directorate is currently preparing with the OHR's support – can help the efforts to this end. We all want Brcko to remain a success story.

Otisak.ba: There is a problem with the functioning of government in this local community, especially after the "suspension" of the supervision. Was the "suspension" of the supervision a right decision and is there any chance that it could be re-activated if the situation gets worse?

Dennis Hearne: Although the Supervisor has decided to suspend his daily functions, the Supervision is still in place. As I said in my speech at the 8 March ceremony, in my capacity as Supervisor, I remain committed to safeguarding Brcko's stability and sustainability from external and internal challenges. Moreover, the OHR continues to support the District in building upon the progress achieved so far. We are in regular contact with the District leadership and are ready to provide our expert and political support whenever needed. In addition, the Tribunal is still in place. In 2012, the Supervisor informed the Presiding Arbitrator that substantial progress has been made in the implementation of the Final Award, but was not in a position to notify the Tribunal that the conditions for its closure have been met. This is still the case.

Otisak.ba: The Assembly majority in Brčko currently has a problem with an insufficient number of Croat representatives for adoption of certain decisions, among other things, adoption of the budget, on which the representatives should take positions at the end of this month. Even though there is a sufficient number of Croat representatives in the opposition, who are the majority within this ethnic group, announcements are that two Croats will vote on the budget, which is contrary to the District Statute. According to our information, you have spoken to the main actors in this case. What is your position on this issue?

Dennis Hearne: Adoption of the 2018 budget is an immediate priority. If the budget is not adopted by the end of March, when temporary financing expires, all budget payments will be suspended. In other words, salaries, subsides, social welfare and other payments, with the exception of debt payment, will be withheld with immediate effect. This would lead to a serious crisis with far reaching consequences that serves no one. I trust all delegates in the Assembly will demonstrate political wisdom and responsibility on this matter and continue to work in the best public interest. Continued financing of all budget beneficiaries, including delivery of services to citizens, must not be put at risk.

Otisak.ba: Deputy Mayor of the District, Anto Domić, continues with his incidents, about which Otisak wrote many times. (nazi salute as voting gesture, wearing of tie with Croatian insignia, RS day and Kordic-Praljak statements) He obviously disturbs inter-ethnic relations in this multi-ethnic community, but no-one has publicly condemned the incidents he has made, except the media and a small number of public actors, nor has anyone initiated his removal from office in which he represents all citizens of the District. The attached article shows that such incidents have occurred over a number of years. Your opinion?

Dennis Hearne: When discharging their mandates, politicians ought to be aware of how their rhetoric and actions impact citizens. In my dealings with District officials so far, I have encountered no obstacles or major problems. The Brcko officials have demonstrated political courage and determination to tackle some of the most pressing problems. I expect them to deliver on their commitments, and I stand ready to provide them with any support they might require.