Dnevni avaz: Interview with PDHR/Brčko Supervisor Jonathan Mennuti

By Nerma Ajnadžić

– Unfortunately, the public arena is saturated with pointless discussions going back to the 1990s and futile politicking, while young people continue to leave the country. The reason for their departure from Bosnia and Herzegovina is not its multiethnic nature – in fact, many choose to relocate to areas that are even more diverse. Nor is it the complex decision-making structure. Young people are opting to leave because they refuse to continue gambling with their future. The citizens of this country have shown, despite numerous challenges, that they genuinely desire to build a shared and prosperous future. As we enter another election year, it is safe to say that it is time for the political elites to present viable solutions that address the actual needs of the people rather than engaging in political posturing – Mennuti said.

He underscored that the authorities in Brčko have succeeded in maintaining the reform course in 2023 concerning good governance, infrastructure development, and improved fiscal discipline.

– Brčko continues to be a model of peaceful coexistence and cooperation for the benefit of the community. It exemplifies

how progress is possible, despite a complicated decision-making structure, if there is political will and a shared vision. Significant strides on budget transparency and the capacity to combat corruption have also been made, and we anticipate further progress in the future. Looking ahead to the elections, crucial steps were taken four years ago regarding election integrity, including the cleanup of voter registries. Law enforcement bodies were successful in preventing and penalizing attempts to buy votes or register fake voters. We expect nothing less in the lead-up to this year's elections.

Asked if the District is being neglected, Supervisor Mennuti said that positive steps have been made in terms of political bickering and constant delays, as it is notable that Brčko is mentioned less frequently in this context.

– In recent years, the authorities in Brčko have commendably prioritized maintaining a peaceful and stable atmosphere, addressing the genuine needs of the community. This success did not happen by chance. It is a result of the joint commitment of the District Government, Assembly, police, and judiciary—an exemplary model for others. It is more constructive to highlight Brčko's potential as a distinctive local community with a substantial budget, the ability to make its own decisions, and a strategic location boasting the only inland port in BiH, as well as a vital railway corridor and a future highway junction, some 60 kilometers away from an international airport – Mennuti said.

He added that the District authorities have been making progress towards harnessing this potential, with ongoing efforts regarding public administration reform and the anti-corruption drive. Significant strides have already been taken to facilitate public-private partnerships and attract new investments, particularly in the energy sector. Public and media attention and scrutiny on these issues are essential for achieving the authorities' objectives.

Mennuti said that, in accordance with the Final Award, entities must demonstrate steadfast support for coexistence and prosperity in the District.

– Institutions and public officials in both entities bear the responsibility to contribute to peace and stability, not least by choosing their words carefully in public statements. Alongside the Presiding Arbiter and international partners, I will continue to closely monitor their compliance with the Final Award. In terms of troop deployment in Bosnia and Herzegovina, practical assessments fall under the purview of EUFOR. Our focus should shift to addressing tangible issues such as improving public services, fostering better conditions for investment and business initiatives, and finding solutions to curb population outflow – Mennuti said.

Brčko has been an example of coexistence for years, and the PDHR emphasized it is time for politicians across BiH to face reality.

– Citizens are weary of perpetual fearmongering, and the younger generation is opting to build their future elsewhere. As evident in Brčko and other local communities, winning elections based on tangible achievements is far more rewarding than relying on myths and fear. This is also a message to voters: Choose those who have proven their ability to deliver solutions, not those who use public platforms to spread fear. Positive outcomes in one area often pave the way for opportunities in others. Robust infrastructure, the fight against corruption, and an efficient public administration create conditions for investments, leading to new jobs and better prospects for young people to plan their lives and careers here. In this way, everyone stands to gain – Mennuti said.

He added that it is crucial for the Brčko District to take swift action before the summer break, as the latter part of the year will be focused on elections and subsequent

government formation.

– Specifically, this pertains to completing the modernization of the Brčko port, installing the new crane, and finalizing the new rail and road access within the previously established deadlines. Prompt engagement from all relevant bodies is imperative to successfully adopt the new spatial plan, a prerequisite for finalizing the new highway route and preparing for the construction of the new waste management facility, as well as pending regulatory plans before the start of the construction season. Preparations for five infrastructure projects in collaboration with the World Bank for enhancing environmental and flood protection capabilities should be expedited – Mennuti underscored.

He noted that the necessary bylaws need to be in place so that Brčko can fully capitalize on recently enacted energy legislation.

– Faster progress is needed to prepare new laws on public administration and civil service. Authorities must also complete the work on bolstering the capacity and transparency of law-enforcement and anti-corruption bodies.

These are all vital initiatives for improving the quality of public services and overall conditions in Brčko. Meeting these objectives on time requires unwavering commitment from all political representatives.