

Interview: Paddy Ashdown, High Representative: “25 people from BiH persona non grata in the European Union”

*I suggested developing a list of the one hundred most unwanted people from the Balkans *State Prosecutors will soon start investigating cases of serious crime*

– 25 individuals from BiH will soon be on the “persona non grata” list of the European Union. This is our part of hundred individuals for whom we have evidence that they participated in organised crime and have been helping individuals indicted for war crimes to hide – the High Representative, Paddy Ashdown, said at the start of his interview with “Dnevni avaz”.

We interviewed the High Representative following the publication of the first names from the EU list which contains individuals from the Balkans suspected of serious violations of the law.

Important Event

Paddy Ashdown: This is a crucial event in our fight against organised crime during recent months, this is the crowning feature of our efforts to persuade our European partners to extend our fight against organised crime and the networks that support war criminals still at large. We have vigorously worked to apply the same procedures that were used in the fight against Milosevic. It was agreed at the level of ministers of foreign affairs of the member states of the European Union to develop a list of the most unwanted persons in the region.

If you are involved in organised crime, support war criminals or are involved in other fraudulent criminal dealings, you cannot expect that the door of Europe will be open to you. This is why I suggested the creation of a list with one hundred most unwanted persons from the Balkan.

Dnevni avaz: How many of this one hundred persons are from BiH?

Paddy Ashdown: Everything started with individuals from BiH. The first two are from this country – Momcilo Mandic and Milovan Bjelica. There will be more names. I expect that there will be 25 such names – for the time being.

Dnevni avaz: When will these 25 names appear on the “EU *persona non grata* list”?

Paddy Ashdown: I cannot comment on this. We must first conduct the required procedure and, given the consequences, we must act carefully and with precision. Let me, however, point out that we will have at least 25 names on this list relatively soon and that the list will not be finished with this number. This is the number of persons from Bosnia from a list of one hundred. Should the system prove efficient, and we have reason to believe that it will, this list might be extended.

Dnevni avaz: Where are these 25 persons from? Only from the RS, or are some of them from the Federation?

Paddy Ashdown: These are individuals who are involved in criminal activities and support operations which benefit individuals wanted by the Tribunal. It is not important where they are. It is important that we will not let them do what they have doing so far.

Comprehensive Plan

Dnevni avaz: There have been reports of the development of a comprehensive plan to combat corruption through a financial,

tax and police authorities as well as the international community joint action.

Paddy Ashdown: We have spent the last ten months in efforts to complete the instruments which are to be used in combating organised crime. The time has come to demonstrate what we have been doing. This includes amendments to the Criminal Code, action to establish business courts, the formation of a special police unit capable of coping with organised crime, which was trained by SFOR during autumn amongst others...

Dnevni avaz: The Commercial Department of the State Court expected to become operational...

Paddy Ashdown: This will be the signal that we are capable of dealing with major crimes that are so often the topic of extensive of media coverage.

Dnevni avaz: When will it start working?

Paddy Ashdown: Very soon. Over the following weeks we expect that the Prosecutors of the State Court will, at least, start investigations.

Dnevni avaz: To which extent do these actions coincide with the actions in Serbia?

Paddy Ashdown: These activities started in BiH before they did in Serbia. In Serbia they have started to adopt certain things that we have developed here and it will take them some time to adopt specific legal reforms – such as those regulating the blockade and forfeiture of property.

I must point out that I am greatly impressed by the courage and determination of the Serbian authorities in these efforts. During my recent visit to Belgrade I said clearly that their problems are ours and vice versa. I also said that we would be glad to help them arrest their criminals, because they will help us to get rid of our criminals.

I want to state something very clearly here: there will be no safe place for criminals or for those who are not sufficiently determined to come up against them. In this context I have paid particular attention to comments made by Vladan Batic, the Serbian Minister of Justice with regard to the RS authorities. If Belgrade has concerns over whether Banja Luka is doing everything in its power to apprehend organised crime's chief players then so do I.

Dnevni avaz: Will you help the RS authorities?

Paddy Ashdown: Ambassador Fassier will soon lead a delegation to Banja Luka to tell the RS government that the international community is ready to help them in the fight against crime. Fassier will tell them: "Just tell me know what your concerns are and we will be happy to help you as much as we can". We here need to say that we are ready to share information obtained by the blockade of assets with those who have similar concerns. If this helps the Serbian authorities to apprehend their criminals, it will also help us in our showdown with here.