

Interview: Paddy Ashdown, High Representative for BiH: “Within BiH New Borders Will Be Drawn!”

** The Dayton Agreement worked in the last ten years, but it cannot work in the next ten years: you have to change the Constitution * We should have been more sensitive towards Croats; Bosnia and Herzegovina will not be what it is in essence without Croats living in it*

MOSTAR – The British Lord, Paddy Ashdown, who will officially hand over the post of High Representative for BiH to his German successor Christian Schwarz-Schilling at the end of this month, in his last interview for *Vecernji list*, mainly focused on the future of Bosnia and Herzegovina, which, according to him, will be spent in the company of European countries. He characterized the last four years spent in BiH as reasonably successful.

Paddy ASHDOWN: I will leave those judgments to others. In my inaugural speech, I set two objectives for myself, namely to take BiH on the path towards full statehood and Europe. We have established a single judicial system, customs administration, taxation system, intelligence service, army, and there are also preconditions for the establishment of a single police force. We have created a framework for a modern decentralized state.

Vecernji list: Your critics accused you of carrying out these processes too hastily, while others say that you were on a mission to ensure the survival of Republika Srpska?!

Paddy ASHDOWN: My mission here was to defend Dayton, which is the legal basis for the foundation of Republika Srpska. In Banja Luka, on the other hand, they call me “aždaja” instead of Ashdown (*Translator’s note: the meaning of the word is “a dragon”; it was probably chosen because of its sound resemblance to HR’s surname*). They claim that I have taken away competences from the RS.

Vecernji list: Do you agree with positive evaluations of the RS’s cooperation with The Hague while the two most wanted war criminals, Karadzic and Mladic, are still at large?

Paddy ASHDOWN: It is not my responsibility to pass judgment on this issue, but it is the responsibility of Ms. Del Ponte, who made this comment concerning the level of cooperation shown by Banja Luka . Great progress was made with the extradition of 11 indictees. But my greatest disappointment ahead of my departure and after being here for four years is the fact that Karadzic and Mladic are still at large.

Vecernji list: The Catholic Church criticized the whole International Community, including yourself, on the grounds that you were not supportive enough of the return of Croats to the RS!

Paddy ASHDOWN: The Catholic Church did not criticize me more than the Orthodox Church , or Reis-ul-Ulema for that matter. The voice of the Catholic Church would have been much stronger if I had heard at least one Catholic who advocated for the return of Serbs to the Krajina region. BiH will not be what it is in essence without Croats living in it. I am very concerned about the number of Croats who have left BiH. If I am to speak on behalf of the international administration, then I can say that it was not sufficiently aware of and sensitive to the vulnerability of Croats. If I myself accept this kind of criticism, then it can also be done by most of my colleagues.

Vecernji list: Croats claim that they are a minority in both Entities, and hence they ask for the reorganization of the country, while the International Community is reluctant to do anything about it!

Paddy ASHDOWN: This is not something within the domain of the international administration.

Vecernji list: But it was the International Community that imposed the Dayton Agreement!

Paddy ASHDOWN: The Dayton Agreement worked in the last ten years, but it cannot work in the next ten years. Therefore, you have to change the Constitution, which is something I have been repeatedly saying over the last three years. Any state which is ready to invest 70 percent of its resources in politicians and bureaucrats, and just 30 percent in health, social welfare and insurance, cannot survive. The next phase is the establishment of an efficient and functional state. This is a job for citizens of BiH, not for us.

Vecernji list: Just now, as we speak, the American ambassador is trying to convince the parties to accept the proposed changes!

Paddy ASHDOWN: This is actually our role, namely to support this process without imposing solutions. Any successful solution must be a result of agreement among all three peoples. There must be no impositions to the detriment of others.

Vecernji list: Is it realistic to expect the drawing of new borders within BiH?

Paddy ASHDOWN: Change has to happen within BiH. If you cannot do it – there will be no accession to the European Union. Is it realistic to expect accession to Europe ? Yes. However, the external borders of BiH cannot be changed ever again. The issue of internal arrangements is far more an economic issue

rather than a constitutional one. Simply put, this country should not be poor because it has huge resources at its disposal. In reality, it is poor because of constitutional provisions to spend a lot of it on politicians who take too much for themselves and leave too little for the people.

It is up to Covic to decide; he should be worried

Vecernji list: Do nationalist parties have a future and can they lead BiH into the EU?

Paddy ASHDOWN: The Croatian Prime Minister Sanader understood that the HDZ should focus on a reformist agenda in the future. This is the only path for nationalist parties in BiH, including the SDS and SDA. HDZ BiH should follow Sanader's example. Reformist elements should prevail in all these nationalist parties.

Vecernji list: By agreeing with Sanader's moves, are you actually sending an implicit message to Covic to step down?!

Paddy ASHDOWN: This is up to Mr. Covic and the HDZ to decide. I do not wish to get involved in what is basically an internal discussion. As the most powerful political force of Croat people in BiH, the HDZ will do the most for its people by reforming itself into a European centre-right party. He should be worried that a sister party of the HDZ, the European People's Party (EPP), is putting a question mark over the HDZ's future membership.