

Interview: Paddy Ashdown, High Representative: “If Politicians Fail to Reach Consensus, I Will Impose Mostar Solution”

Of course the process will be painful, but less painful than the situation we have now and because of which Mostar is the black hole of the Balkans. I will do my best for consensus to be reached, but if no consensus is reached on the Mostar solution, I will have to impose it, the High Representative said

“Divided Mostar is the sick tissue of Bosnia-Herzegovina. That problem has to be resolved, or otherwise Bosnia’s way to Europe will be destroyed by Mostar. We cannot afford a failure. General principles have been agreed upon by all parties. Around 90 percent of all activities have been completed within the Winterstein Commission. I will not change what they have agreed upon in any way. That means that we will have to decide on two major issues: administration and the election system. These things cannot be resolved on the basis of trust because, unfortunately, there is no trust. There is no trust among the peoples, but that is a consequence of the war. The only thing we can expect are guarantees, guarantees that in the established city structure there will be no space for a renewed establishment of parallelisms that would divide the city, a single administration without municipalities, and guarantees that no constituent people can rule the city on its own. We are not asking for a perfect solution, but the best possible solution,” Paddy Ashdown, the first man of the OHR, said in his interview for Dnevni list, as a message, primarily

to the citizens of Mostar, about the organisation of the city they live in, which has caused many polemics and politicising, and concern, among the public.

Dnevni list: You say that you will decide on the issues of administration and electricity system. Which solution do you propose?

Paddy Ashdown: I have already made a decision on electricity system. What remains is the question of the authorities. The decision I made should be complied with. Based on that decision, before electricity is exported it should be provided to local consumers like Aluminij. That is a provisional solution, which remains in force until a permanent one is found.

Dnevni list: Is it possible to carry out a painless unification of the city as intended?

Paddy Ashdown: Based on different opinion polls in the whole of Mostar I saw that a large majority of citizens is in favour of unification. This is about compromise, and compromises are difficult. That is the only future of this city. Of course the process will be painful, but it will be less painful than the situation we now have, because of which Mostar is the black hole of the Balkans. I will do my best for the consensus to be reached, but if no consensus is reached on a Mostar solution, I will have to impose it. In that case the question will be whether political parties can still participate in that process. That will also question the international investment conference which Dragan Čović announced for February, as well as the position Sulejman Tihić will have on the political stage when the Old Bridge is opened in Mostar. How will it look when people from the whole world come together, and the question is posed whether there are any local politicians who can work together? I cannot stop them in that intention, nor can SFOR forces in this country. If they wish to destroy the city, they can do it.

Dnevni list: What does the unified city have to do with the investment conference?

Paddy Ashdown: Look at it from the practical side. President Čović asked me to convince business people that they should come to the conference. How many business people will give a positive response to investing in a divided city? They will not be prepared to give their funds to a city in which strange things happen. Will businesspeople whose countries gave a huge amount of money for the reconstruction of the Old Bridge come to that city for its opening if Bosniaks reject the proposal that the city be unified?

Dnevni list: What you say is the law in this country. That means that the unification of the city will take place.

Paddy Ashdown: I think that those in charge of implementation will have a say. Regardless of what I say or do, they still have the possibility to destroy it or to ensure that it happens. That is their responsibility, not mine.

Dnevni list: Will the administrative tasks, the dismissals of administrative staff and the remaining work that needs to be done be taken over by the OHR or will the local authorities have to do it?

Paddy Ashdown: The entire process will be implemented by the local authorities. We speak with the authorities about whether the help of the International Community will be needed and welcome in that process. Nobody in the OHR suggests a new Koschnik, we do not speak about yet another international official. But I have spoken about the possibility of existence of a small department that would be in charge of the implementation of the entire process and that would provide assistance to mayors. This not someone who would be above them, but someone who would support them in their work. In discussions with different city officials I found out that something like that would be welcome.

October elections questioned because of Mostar

Dnevni list: If the decision on the organisation of Mostar is made by the end of this month, when would it be possible to implement the solution?

Paddy Ashdown: It will take time. The reason a decision has to be made by the end of this month is the October election, which will not be possible without a solution for Mostar. Several months will be needed for things to start functioning. Since the process of implementation will take some time, the solution must be found as soon as possible.