

Interview: Paddy Ashdown, High Representative in BiH: “Will Dayton protect the RS if the RS opposes Dayton?”

We know that Jovan Cizmovic is close to Karadzic and that's why we put him in the forefront, responsible for the Srebrenica Commission * If the RS proved to be the only reason that prevented BiH from joining NATO, then it would really be a very serious issue for BiH and for the RS * I am impatient when it comes to BiH's European integration

High Representative Paddy Ashdown is pretty much convinced that Bosnia and Herzegovina will become a member of Partnership for Peace at the Istanbul Summit this summer. But...

“Nothing in this country is probable, but all issues related to defense reform have been fulfilled. However, if there is no root reform of the RS when it comes to meeting the conditions related to the work of the Srebrenica Commission, criminal prosecution of war criminals, then I have to be pessimistic. RS police operations, such as the one that was conducted recently in Visegrad, must continue. If that is not the case, BiH will not be able to use this opportunity and the RS even less so”, says the High Representative.

Oslobodjenje: Many people are surprised with your – I would say – mild decision when it comes to obstructing the work of the Srebrenica Commission. There is an impression that you have removed non-influential and unimportant officials?

Paddy Ashdown: I have but one goal, and that is to achieve results. I take into account what people think about different steps, but this does not concern me too much. Everything should be judged on the basis of whether we will divulge to

the public the information that was covered up in the past. People may judge whether I am too harsh or too mild, but I only have one person in mind, and that is the Srebrenica mother who wants information on where her dearest are buried, how they died... My decision contains two stages and you should not judge it only on the basis of the first stage. When I made the decision, and I must tell you that it was one of the hardest decisions, I had to take into account what I considered to be the first signs of a change of attitude and I must tell you that I regret and criticize the fact that it took nine months. It appears in the last days of the Commission's work that the RS authorities finally realized they need to change attitude, and this is the first time we received a different kind of information that was not in the report. People will say that I have been tricked again and that I received the information at the last moment. But we will see. Now comes the second decision, April 30, involving responsibility of people from much higher levels. Whether I will decide then about their personal responsibility depends on the information that comes. We must view this as a whole.

Oslobodjenje: You believe, therefore, you will get the right answers?

Paddy Ashdown: I do not know. We have three deadlines – one is for people who are at the political level of responsibility. I will decide then whether there has been a substantial change of attitude, whether we have more information. Then, there is the second deadline, which could have an impact on some people with top responsibility. This is the Istanbul Summit. The RS is protected by law, whether you liked it or not. The RS is protected by the Constitution, i.e. Dayton, and they can call upon this protection. But, will this legal protection get reduced if they behave contrary to the law? If the RS proved to be the only reason that prevents BiH from joining NATO, then it would really be a very serious issue for BiH and for the RS. It will have considerable consequences. And we have

the third deadline – middle of July. Each of these deadlines is important and they bring different consequences. This should not be looked at as an event but as a process.

Oslobodjenje: How did it happen that one of those who will be responsible for the report of the Commission is Jovan Cizmovic. You know that he was one of Karadzic's close associates and probably still is?

Paddy Ashdown: We do. That is why we put him in the forefront. We will see! We have people who are in the shadow and who are still influential and sometimes it is useful to bring them out of the shadow.

Oslobodjenje: Did you meet Cizmovic during the war?

Paddy Ashdown: We did not meet as far as I know. I know I went several times to meet Karadzic, but I absolutely do not remember Cizmovic. When I made the decision, Cizmovic was a name associated with some things, someone who was a close associate to Dragan Cavic. Maybe this is a way to send a message both to Cizmovic and to Cavic.

Oslobodjenje: A month ago, together with the highest-ranking international officials in BiH (Packett, Beecroft, Locker) you sent out a dramatic warning to the local politicians that they had to take urgent measures when it comes to BiH's accession to the PfP. It seems that apart from the appointment of the State-level Minister of Defence nothing major happened. What is your impression?

Paddy Ashdown: I think it is much better today than a month ago. I think Mr Radovanovic has taken a very encouraging stance for the beginning. There is much to do. It may not be on Oslobodjenje's front page, but there are some things that had to be done and were done. But, the general position is that Mr Radovanovic took office with great energy and courage and there were major changes. If we continue this way, and Mr Locker also claims so, we believe BiH will meet the reform

goals. I think things have changed and are better.

Oslobodjenje: Are you that optimistic when it comes to meeting the 16 requirements for opening Stabilization and Association negotiations. BiH Prime Minister Adnan Terzic is convinced that the conditions will be met by the end of May.

Paddy Ashdown: We need optimists in this country. I also wish we had people in this country who have too optimistic goals and deadlines. You can be forgiven if you are too active, but not if you are too inactive. We may not meet the deadline by the end of May, but I think Mr Terzic is right in setting such deadlines. I must say that progress was disappointing in most issues. The procurement law is adopted, we may be close to the adoption of the law on public broadcasting. . , so we are running late to an extent, but progress is still being made.

Oslobodjenje: OHR is again in a paradoxical situation. Exactly as it is written in ESI's report – in order for the IC to leave BiH it has to get involved more. How do you comment on that?

Paddy Ashdown: Yes, it is paradoxical. And it is true. My strategy is to go forward mercilessly, insist on reforms so that this country can go into the tunnel leading to Europe, to NATO. Once you are in the tunnel, once you are involved in the stabilization and association process and PfP, then the magnetic force pulling that way is stronger than the High Representative. Europe is changing. Public opinion in Europe is changing. Ordinary voters in Germany, France, are not so committed to hold the door to the east open forever. I keep telling my friends – and that is why it is so important for Croatia not to wait – to be careful, the door will start closing. I am impatient. Sometime I say this is like pushing the Wild West frontier.

Oslobodjenje: This is the reason why it appears sometimes that it is only the Office of the High Representative that works in

this country?

Paddy Ashdown: Not true. At least for now. But, I sometimes wonder myself whether some foreigners in this country believe in this country more than its politicians. I wish all politicians in BiH would believe in this country as much as some people who are not local.

Oslobodjenje: Have you seen the report sent by the SDS on budget spending? This party claims that the report is good and they hope you will change your decision on suspending budget funding for the SDS.

Paddy Ashdown: We will consider the report in detail. But, before we do that, I do not wish to comment. It is an important document. We need to see if it is true and complete. I think we will finish this by the middle of next week, and then we'll decide what to do. However, the report itself will not change my decision, but it has to show that the SDS does not fund the war criminal network.

Oslobodjenje: The HDZ is also complaining about the decision you made. What do you recommend to this party?

Paddy Ashdown: That they meet their international obligations! I do not really understand them. The HDZ of Croatia has gone through a fundamental change of its frame of mind. At least speaking of its leadership. The HDZ is not only in power but support for them on the European way is growing, too. Why can the HDZ in Herzegovina not realize this? Why are so many of them stuck in the past? Look at the situation with education. They signed the Bologna Declaration and welcomed BiH's entry in the CoE and they cannot ignore that now. However, the issue runs much deeper – is the HDZ of Herzegovina going to follow the HDZ of Croatia and become one of the forces reforming BiH or are they going to remain one of the forces preventing the European way.

Oslobodjenje: Do you have a feeling that local politicians are

silent in these key moments? A month ago, election campaign was very much alive?

Paddy Ashdown: It is obvious that non-functionality at the levels of the State, the FBiH and the RS is halting the process, and it is not my job to analyze it but use those who want the process to go on and continue with reforms. It would be hard not to agree that internal tensions among political forces in power represent the principal obstacles to the process. On the other hand, are you certain that HDZ opposition to education issues is not related to the election campaign? Or that Dodik's criticism of Djerić is not related to the election campaign? Or, are you certain that the onslaught from the SDS is not related to this. Of course, it is about another kind of strife, a struggle between those who obstruct reform and those who support them.