

Interview: Paddy Ashdown, High Representative: “We Can Afford No Failure in Mostar”

*Unresolved status damages Bosnia's reputation * Are world leaders ready to come to the opening of the Old Bridge in a city that is still divided * Will there be any sanctions for BiH politicians*

Mostar is a black hole, the Bermuda Triangle of Bosnia-Herzegovina, it's unresolved status damages not only the citizens of that city, but of the whole country, not only internally but also externally.

Look, I have already said this to Dragan Čović, Chairman of BiH Presidency: in mid-February you have a very important donor conference on Mostar and a large number of important people are expected to take part. But, how will they be encouraged to show up at that gathering if Mostar remains a divided city?

Bridge opening

In July of this year, when the reconstructed Old Bridge of Mostar is opened again, Sulejman Tihić will be the Chairman of BiH Presidency. That event will draw the attention of the world's media back to Bosnia and Herzegovina, numerous world leaders should attend this event. But how many of them will really be ready to come to a city that is still divided? A city which opens its bridge that was reconstructed with the help of the International Community, but also a city which has not been integrated due to the failure or unwillingness of politicians – High Representative Paddy Ashdown says in his interview for Dnevni Avaz.

Ashdown says that the situation in Hercegovina's largest town

can no longer be tolerated.

Dnevni avaz: How will you resolve the situation in Mostar?

Paddy Ashdown: I hope that the solution will be found by local politicians and not by me. However, we can afford no more failures in Mostar. There have been too many, and each of them had a negative impact on the stability of Bosnia-Herzegovina. Furthermore, the resolution of the status of Mostar is a Dayton requirement. Today I will give you my view of the resolution of that city's status. I can already tell you that I will be guided by three key principles. First: Mostar cannot be rebuilt on trust. Unfortunately, there is no trust in that city and that is a fact. There is no trust between Bosniaks and Croats there. I wish things were not that way, but that is the reality.

Furthermore, I can allow no parallelisms. That has been the case up until now and the Interim Statute of the City of Mostar has been used not to eliminate them but to maintain them.

Thirdly, I will have to ensure that there is no domination in Mostar and that one people cannot lead the city on its own, controlling the other two. In a way, the safety mechanisms of BiH need to be applied in Mostar too.

I want to make it clear to the HDZ's leaders that they should be careful. It is strange that some of them say that one Bosniak vote in Mostar is worth five Croat votes when in the Federation one Croat vote is worth five Bosniak votes.

Dnevni avaz: Although you are reluctant to say it, it is evident that you will have to be the judge in the case of Mostar as there is no agreement between local politicians.

Paddy Ashdown: If that happens, that will be a failure of the local politicians. It will damage the attempts of BiH to join Europe. The same time it is our Dayton obligation to resolve

this issue and remove a source of instability for BiH.

Of course I want the local authorities to resolve this problem, but if they prove incapable of doing so, we will have to act.

Dnevni avaz: Will some politicians be sanctioned for not reaching an agreement on Mostar?

Paddy Ashdown: We'll see, I do not think it is wise to say anything in advance. However, there is a fundamental difference between those who intentionally obstruct and cause instability and those who fight for their principles. I don't rule out anything, but in this moment I am much more interested in resolving the issue of Mostar than investigating who is to blame for the problems.

One administration

Dnevni avaz: President Tihić claims that there is no other feasible organisation for Mostar other than the one that foresees six city municipalities with reduced powers.

Paddy Ashdown: I have heard that position. I have to say that we in the International Community believe that the right solution for Mostar is the one that was foreseen in Dayton – an integrated city with one administration.

I understand the concerns of Bosniaks in Mostar and their fear that they would be outvoted by the Croats, just like I understand the Croats fear of being outvoted at the BiH level. That does not necessarily mean that I agree, but I understand.

But we will ensure that there are guarantees that that does not happen.

Benefits for citizens

Paddy Ashdown: The integration of Mostar will bring benefits to all of its citizens. They will have one efficient and

affordable administration, getting rid of the huge bureaucratic apparatus, they will get rid of a complex system that swallows huge amounts of money... That money can now be used to ensure better salaries for judges, teachers, doctors, policemen...

Besides, they get a better city, which has a future, which will attract investment. Who would want to invest in a divided city which is a source of insecurity? – No one!

After all, the opinion polling that we have carried out in Mostar shows that a vast majority of citizens, from all ethnic groups, expressed their wish for this city to finally become a single, united city.