

Interview: Paddy Ashdown, the High Representative for BiH: “No-one In Mostar Will Be Minority”

8 July 2003

At the end of April, the OHR's Senior Deputy High Representative, Gerhard Enver Schrömbgens, delivered to the members of the Commission tasked with drafting the Statute of Mostar a letter signed by Paddy Ashdown containing eight principles representing the basis upon which that Commission is to re-organise Mostar. The deadline for the Commissions report is approaching and that is why we spoke to the High Representative in BiH.

Dnevni List: How successful is the work of the Mostar Commission currently and what is your comment with regard continued obstruction by certain members?

Paddy Ashdown: This is a significant moment for Mostar and for BiH in its entirety. Mostar is the only town mentioned in the Dayton Peace Agreement and the only town to have had an EU Administration. We have reached a very important point at a very important time – when BiH is applying for membership of the EU. One of the things the EU will consider is whether we are able to solve our own problems without the EU's involvement and assistance. In the Mostar Commission we have the first example of a huge problem, which has been completely put into the hands of the participants, that is people from BiH itself. Europe is monitoring to see whether or not we can do this. I think it would be a great blow to the future of Mostar and BiH in Europe if people from BiH once again prove not incapable of solve their own problems.

Dnevni List: How is that process progressing?

Paddy Ashdown: The process is going in a positive direction, but not as fast as it could. By July 31 we are to arrive at a conclusion and I think that, so far, we have not even managed to hold two meetings a week – this is very important for the Commission. It is time the Commission's work is accelerated and that the Commission started resolving some key issues if BiH wants its accession to the EU to be taken seriously. I think people should give up on the idea only Croats or only Bosniaks will run Mostar on their own. Mostar will be a careful balance of the interests of all the communities in the city. Such a solution can be found. Nothing will be incorporated that would be detrimental to any of the peoples in Mostar. Those who say that this could happen are simply spreading fear amongst their own people. There are reasonable solutions to the problems and they have to be found. The aim is unification of Mostar. There is no other way in which Mostar can become a normal European town and no one should be afraid of this. As for the results of the Commission's work, everyone has a role to play and, by saying this, I have in mind that the debate can be expanded beyond politicians. I think that each citizens should also take part. There is a web-site: **mostar-statute@max.net.ba** and a fax number **[036 580 032]** on which the voice of ordinary citizens can and should be heard. We cannot wait forever, there will be elections next year; there is a deadline beyond which it would be impossible to wait for the Mostar issue to be resolved, if we want to have elections next year that would be the basis for a Mostar authority working in the interest of it's citizens. So, time is slipping away.

Dnevni List: Certain people want to turn Mostar into an area where petty local power-wielders would preserve their influence under the guise of protecting national interest. We have had a statement by the Mostar Mufti who directly interferes in the organisation of the town. What will you

undertake if no results are yielded?

Paddy Ashdown: This is not about what I will do. I think the international community will have to sigh and say that they had expected that this thing would move further. I think there will be a certain amount of disappointment and I believe that the disappointment will spread to ordinary citizens in Mostar, who want to live normally in a European town. There are those whose weapons have not always been hope, but fear – in other words, those who use fear as political ammunition. Their aim is to intimidate people, as this is the only language these people know. It is absolutely unproductive and very destructive. This is very likely to be one of the biggest impediments on our road to finding a rational solution. I have heard the language that is full of unacceptable words, the language that aims at evoking the old hatred from the past. And I was sorry about it. It would be far better if the voice of ordinary citizens were heard more often. I wish the Commission would be left alone so that it can fulfil its task. What will I undertake? Well, I will have to reconsider the situation. Foreign investors will only sigh and leave.

Dnevni List: Do you support the idea of having several electoral units or the idea of Mostar as one electoral unit?

Paddy Ashdown: This is something that the Commission has to decide upon. Mostar can only be a European city. It can regain its old flare only if it is a unified city. I think it is not up to me to say how to make it or what the solutions to the issues are. I hope it will never be up to me to resolve. These are issues that the Commission should solve, at least at this stage. I hope they will finish it.

Regarding the property of the current Municipalities in Mostar, these are also the issues to be resolved by the Commission. People address me and ask me for a solution. Perhaps I will have to consider it, but not yet. Mostarians should be the ones to resolve these issues. We cannot come

closer to Europe through the Office of the High Representative; you have to do certain things by yourselves. However, if we have to do it, we will do it. Nevertheless – that would be very disappointing. Regarding vital national interest in Mostar and other cities, that is also in the hands of these cities, or rather, the Constitutions. The citizens of BiH have to answer these questions.

If you do not resolve the issue of expenditure and the inefficiency of the administration, then you cannot spend enough on the citizens. Such a state cannot survive. Consequently, this refers to structures and vital national interests. In a way, Mostar paves the way, leading in the direction that the whole of BiH should take. If Mostarians find their own solution, Mostar could be an example for change in other parts of BiH. Politicians must not think about themselves but about the citizens of Mostar. Go out amongst the people and listen to what they say!

Inset

The Government of the Herzegovina-Neretva Canton must start working

The High Representative, Paddy Ashdown, also tackled the issue of the Canton. “I hope the politicians in the HNC will stop playing petty games. The situation in this Canton makes me wonder whether it is in this Country’s interest to have the Cantonal authorities at all. It seems to me that the HNC Government is not serving the citizens in the best way. They seem to want to self-destruct. I hear there are stories saying that the HNC Government will not start working without the 3 Ministers for whom vetting is required. We have just received the names and we will reply once we have completed the vetting procedure. There is no reason for the HNC Government not to start working in the mean time. They have a lot of work to do and the citizens are following what the Cantonal Authority’s will do. I would like to tell them that I will send a reply on

these names as soon as possible, but that they should not wait for this, rather start working straight away. I hope they will do so soon", Paddy Ashdown, the High Representative in BiH said.