

Interview: High Representative Paddy Ashdown: “RS must finally understand that it is an Entity, and not a State”

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*Police reform has to be implemented * BiH politicians showed leadership qualities on Vlasic * RSNA knows what needs to be done*

Negotiations on police reform have collapsed. Whether they will continue will be decided by the RSNA delegates, who need to give a mandate to their politicians to bring this very important process to a conclusion. In his interview for “Dnevni avaz” Paddy Ashdown expresses his hopes that this will be done. He says that Serb leaders have told him they will persuade the delegates that RS can only benefit from police reform.

– “Perhaps, now is the time for a pause in the whole process because if you want to have a final solution, the RSNA should be given some space. I do not think this is the right time to give statements that would inflame the atmosphere even further. The RSNA knows what needs to be done. EC conditions will not change, and as soon as they do this we will be able to move forward,” said Ashdown.

Additional approval

Dnevni avaz: You knew even before Vlasic that Cavic and his

team had no mandate from the RSNA to accept the abolition of the RS MoI, crossing of the IEBL, but in spite of this you decided to convene 11 leaders. Why?

Paddy Ashdown: A response to your question is a very interesting one. We had high-quality negotiations on Vlasic. All of those present showed leadership traits and a significant amount of courage, leaders from FBiH in particular, but I have to say the same virtues were shown by the RS leaders. Certain compromise solutions were agreed upon on Vlasic, such as the Police Board and Assistant Police Directors. There was also a readiness on the part of RS leaders to accept the setting up of police regions that would cross the IEBL in three or four places, where this was deemed by experts to be necessary. I trusted together with those from FBiH who reached this compromise that RS would be willing to negotiate on the crossing of the IEBL where necessary. This was to serve as the basis for our negotiations at "Konak". Unfortunately, when we met at "Konak" it became obvious that RS representatives were not willing to use this as a basis for further negotiations. They said they needed additional approval from the RSNA to continue these negotiations.

Dnevni avaz: So, we are back where we started off, and everyone is clear that this reform has to be implemented. Citizens are the ones who suffer the most.

Paddy Ashdown: I understand that this is very difficult and complicated. The implementation of this reform is far more difficult for RS than it is for FBiH. Some politicians made deliberate attempts to persuade the public in RS that this was about the abolition of RS, which is not true. This reform has to be implemented, or otherwise RS will become a small black hole of obstructionism standing in the way of the progress of the whole of this region to Europe. RS will become a barrier standing between citizens of this country and their dream of Europe, and we know that 66 percent of RS citizens want to go to Europe. RS finds itself in a very dangerous position not

only politically, but this position is also dangerous for its citizens. No investors will invest in some black hole that is not going to Europe. No international leader will say: "We will provide a visa-free regime for you!" The highest price is paid by the citizens of BiH.

Dnevni avaz: Why didn't you try organizing Vlasic first because you yourself know that the expert part of the job is easier to finish than to reach a political agreement?

Paddy Ashdown: It was not possible to organize negotiations in such a way. We applied the same model to this reform as in the case of other reforms. First, we had experts discussing the topic and then politicians would sit down at the table. This model proved successful. It was necessary to agree on certain details before political negotiations could take place.

Dnevni avaz: You compared RS with the Turkish part of Cyprus. Does it mean that FBiH is the Greek part that could join the EU on its own?

Paddy Ashdown: Some journalists took poetic license in the headlines of their articles. I was very cautious when speaking about this matter. I said that RS would be isolated, that BiH would be isolated, and it is not exactly fun when you are isolated. It was actually the point of my analogy.

Dnevni avaz: When you scheduled the extraordinary press conference the day before yesterday, they expected the removal of politicians in RS?

Paddy Ashdown: Perhaps, they hoped for some removals. However, there is a moment when politicians have to bear the consequences of their actions, and this is one such moment. They are responsible to their own people, not to the High Representative.

Dnevni avaz: Yes, but in this case it is the people who bear the brunt of these consequences?

Then you have to decide who to vote for in the elections. This country has to mature. It is a technical issue that we are speaking of. I cannot impose this reform due to two reasons: one of them being legal and the other one political. Legal because it is beyond the powers vested in me, and political because if I impose this reform we cannot go to Europe since Europe specifically requested that this reform be implemented by the politicians of this country. So, if I have no authority to impose this reform, consequently I have no power to remove those who oppose it. The High Representative will not resolve their problems for them. They themselves will have to resolve them.

Dnevni avaz: Why is an accepted European standard even being negotiated? Europe said: Take it or leave it! End of story.

Paddy Ashdown: That is what I am saying. When they are ready to accept this European standard, then only we can negotiate further about details and see how to implement them in practice.

Dnevni avaz: Do you expect Serb politicians to show the level of maturity characteristic of leaders before the RSNA?

Paddy Ashdown: I am not sure whether expectation is the right word. They promised they would show it. I hope they will. If they give a mandate to their politicians to negotiate, this will mean that we are able to overcome this problem and that BiH can move forward. If not, they need to be clear that these conditions remain and will not change. They will be the same in seven days, in a month, in a year. There is a famous Beckett's play "Waiting for Godot" and I say: "Waiting for RS".

Dnevni avaz: The word "maps" is reminiscent of ugly things from the past and it causes immediate apprehension of people. Was it possible to use some other term, which would perhaps lead the whole process in a more positive direction?

Paddy Ashdown: You know why this is so. The IEBL is actually drawn in blood. I perceive it as a very delicate line, which follows the front lines. But there is always a time, which has come for this country, to look to the future rather than look back to the past. No one says that these lines need to be abolished, but the needs of institutions such as SIPA or the ITA have to be taken into consideration and it is only logical that these lines should not exist for the sake of their more efficient operation.

Dnevni avaz: Isn't it illogical that there is so much opposition in RS to the crossing of the IEBL in the case of police, when this was accepted in the case of SIPA, OSA and the Indirect Taxation Authority?

Paddy Ashdown: Yes. It is illogical when you look at it from that perspective. However, if you look at it from the perspective of RS they consider it as yet another trap.

Dnevni avaz: In the sense of losing their "state"?

Paddy Ashdown: It is already high time and very important for RS to understand that it is an Entity, and not a state. Maybe we are impatient. Maybe you are frustrated and angry, but it is a fact that if you want to resolve this problem you have to understand what I have just said.

Dnevni avaz: Finally, do you hope that the agreement on police reform in BiH will be reached by the end of your mandate?

Paddy Ashdown: I hope so.

Andan and Miletic must stop giving political statements.

Dnevni avaz: What will you do about statements given by Dragomir Andan concerning terrorists from BiH, which he failed to back up with relevant evidence?

Paddy Ashdown: I am waiting for the Report from Commissioner Carthy, who met with Andan yesterday. After having a chance to study these facts, I will decide what actions need to be taken.

Dnevni avaz: Perhaps, remove him from his position?

Paddy Ashdown: I never say in advance what I will do. The custom of police officers giving political statements has to stop. This refers not only to Andan, but to Zlatko Miletic as well. I will have a report on Andan, but I also need to be aware of Miletic's comments about Karadzic having lunch in Herzegovina . Police officers should not be media stars, but people who work on capturing criminals.

A message to Ratko Mladic

Dnevni avaz: The 10th anniversary of the Srebrenica genocide is ahead of us, and Karadzic and Mladic are still at large. Every day we hear statements about hopes that they will be captured.

Paddy Ashdown: I have never given a deadline. Everyone hopes and I hope too. I would ask Mladic the following question: What kind of hero would allow his generals to show more courage by going to The Hague and taking responsibility for crimes that he himself presided over? On the other hand, we have the case of the Albanian Prime Minister who went to The Hague without causing any problems.