

Oslobođenje: Interview with High Representative Schmidt

By Vildana Selimbegović

Oslobođenje: How do you comment on the blockade of all institutions and the unsustainability of such a situation? Who should resolve this, and what are the priorities?

Christian Schmidt: The institutional blockade is not only a political issue – it is a direct threat to the functionality of the state and the rights of its citizens. Institutions exist to serve the people, and their paralysis undermines the very foundation of a democratic society. Such a blockade shows finally fundamental disrespect for the citizens. The international community, including my office, stands ready to support, but the key lies in the readiness of political actors to put the interests of citizens above party agendas. The priorities are clear: unblocking institutional work, adopting the state budget, and ensuring conditions for free and fair elections.

Oslobođenje: The state still does not have a budget, and we are entering the second half of the year.

Christian Schmidt: This is extremely irresponsible. The absence of a state budget paralyzes the basic functioning of the government—ranging from election preparations to the payment of public sector salaries. The responsible authorities must act urgently and adopt the budget to ensure functionality of Bosnia and Herzegovina's institutions. This financial incapacitation of state institutions undermines their effectiveness and fuels a damaging narrative that portrays BiH as inherently “unsustainable.” The adoption of an appropriate budget in the situation that BiH is facing goes beyond partisan interests and should not be linked to the absence of

a coalition at state level.

The operational functionality of state institutions is intrinsically tied to their financial sustainability. By blocking or delaying budget adoption and forcing reliance on temporary financing mechanisms, key actors have systematically weakened state institutions for too long. So there is a duty of all politically reasonable persons to act and get out of their trenches.

Oslobođenje: The “Viaduct” case and other arbitration proceedings are becoming a serious threat to Bosnia and Herzegovina’s financial stability. What should be done?

Christian Schmidt: These cases serve as a warning about the high cost of political irresponsibility and the failure to uphold legal obligations. The whole story is an example for bad governance.

Those responsible for the damage caused, must be held accountable. Also, greater accountability and coordination are urgently needed among the institutions that represent the state in international disputes. The competent authorities must urgently assess the underlying causes and establish an effective mechanism for timely legal and financial response to this and similar cases, in order to prevent further damage to the state budget and avoid deeper financial destabilization. The entities should not be allowed to ignore their contractual obligation in the face of an arbitration making BiH responsible for their payment. Accepting a situation where BiH will need to step in for defaulting entities while having been starved by them for more than 15 years will only bring BiH institutions closer to a financial precipice. Accepting that certain core Dayton institutions, such as the Central Bank will have to bear the consequences of these acts sets an unacceptable precedent; a means must be created for the state to be made whole. Not to mention that the whole story sounds suspicious.

Oslobođenje: The Central Election Commission (CEC) has repeatedly warned that it has not been provided with the funds to conduct general elections under the new rules. What should be done?

Christian Schmidt: Without secured funding for elections, the very foundation of democracy is under threat. Elections must be held in accordance with the law, on time, and with full financial and institutional support. This includes implementation of the integrity package I have introduced, to safeguard transparency, accountability, and fairness in the electoral process. The success of the pilot projects last year has shown us the way: this is something that enjoys broad support within the domestic and international community.

These measures are essential to restoring public confidence in elections. Citizens must be able to trust that their vote will be counted exactly as it was cast. Anything less undermines democracy itself. Authorities at all levels must act without delay to assist the Central Election Commission and ensure that it is equipped—both financially and technically—to fulfil its constitutional mandate and organize elections that meet democratic standards. There is no excuse for inaction.

Oslobođenje: The Border Police claimed several times that it is underfunded – how do you perceive the situation?

Christian Schmidt: Now as the agreement with FRONTEX is finally reached it is about time to upgrade the structures of the Border Police in order to safeguard a successful cooperation with the EU.

Oslobođenje: Do you have any information about progress on the law on national cultural institutions?

Christian Schmidt: There was a lot of support for my order to fix the administrative frame for these institutions. From the side of the government I have not heard of any concrete proposal. Unfortunately it seems that the political class of

BiH is not willing to act in this matter. Dayton of course provides place for the identity of its peoples but there are things that connect all people in this country and that should be emphasized too. The state has to secure the financing, these institutions can not depend on voluntary donations. The diverse richness of the culture of Bosnia and Herzegovina is a common treasure and not a threat for anyone. Bosniaks, Serbs and Croats can maintain traditions and still embrace a heritage that connects all of them in some ways. I see with concern, that some politicians are heading towards total segregation. This would be against the spirit of Dayton which calls for mutual respect and acceptance.