

Transcript of the Press Conference on the consequences of failing to Agree to Police Reform

OHR, Paddy Ashdown

US Embassy, Douglas L. McElhaney

EU Presidency, Matthew Rycroft

European Commission, Michael B. Humphreys

OHR – High Representative, Paddy Ashdown

The purpose of this press conference is to deliver to the SDS led Government of the RS a simple stark and united message from Washington , from Brussels , and from the international community. And the message is simple. Think again – before it is too late.

Just over a week has passed since the RS Government, and the RSNA, blocked police restructuring, and in so doing, dashed this country's hopes. The only future that this country can have.

We in the international community have left a little time for people to reflect on the consequences of that decision for the SDS, for the RS Government, for the citizens of the RS and BiH as a whole. But it is now time to give the first stage of our considered response.

There has been much speculation about what I will announce today and in the coming weeks – some of it accurate, some of it less accurate.

I will not dwell on that aspect today.

If the SDS-led RS Government persists in this path, it will face the consequences of its actions, as sure as night follows day, and we will have, I regret, plenty of time to set out our response. One cannot expect to wreck an entire country's hopes with impunity, and if the SDS-led RS Government insists on doing so, it will suffer the consequences that come with isolation – but let us remember that the people who will suffer most will be the people of the RS. For them the cost of isolation will be fewer jobs, more poverty, no chance of visa free travel, and no question of joining the rest of the region on the road to Europe

There is no danger for the RS in police restructuring: there is a real danger in opting for total isolation.

So I want to focus this morning on what the SDS led RS Government's decisions mean – not for the politicians, but for the people of the RS, and the people of this country as a whole.

And we want to set out, once again, our complete determination – mine, the EU's, the United States', the rest of the International Community – to see this reform succeed, however difficult it may be, however much the RS may try to block it, however long it may take.

The European Union has been very clear that it wants BiH, and the rest of this region, to join the Union.

That offer remains on the table today just as it did a week ago. It will stay on the table next week, next month, next year.

But if you want to join the club, you have to meet the standards it sets.

Police restructuring is one of the last requirements it has set for BiH. It will remain one of the requirements – next week, next month, next year.

No police restructuring means no negotiations on an SAA, and no progress towards Europe – it means isolation. It's as simple as that.

So the people of the RS need to be very clear about where their SDS-led government is leading them.

Now, there is a wider issue that we may wish to return to.

Police reform is not the only area of obstruction from the SDS-led RS Government. But police reform is currently the central issue.

By blocking police restructuring, they are taking the RS into isolation.

When they could have chosen integration, they have instead chosen the political equivalent of solitary confinement.

This makes BiH – and within it the RS – the only country in the whole of Europe, apart from Belarus, without a contractual relationship with the EU. Do the people of the RS really want that – to choose Belarus over Brussels?

It means that while Serbia and Montenegro gets ready to start SAA negotiations in a few weeks' time, BiH is stuck on the sidelines, friendless and alone, as their neighbour overtakes them on the road to Europe. Do the people of the RS really want that?

It means that all the benefits of joining Europe – jobs, freer travel, higher living standards – the benefits that countries such as Hungary and Slovenia now take for granted, will not to BiH but to BiH's neighbours, but not here, because of the obstinate intransigence of the RS Government. Is that what the people of the RS really want?

That is not what we want, and that is not what anyone in BiH should accept.

Police restructuring will have to happen if BiH – and the RS – want to join the EU, and begin to enjoy the benefits of closer association with the EU even before they join.

The question is not whether police restructuring will happen, but when: the longer it takes for the RS Government to reach agreement, the more damage it will inflict on the RS, and the people of this country as a whole.

So the RS Government now has an urgent choice to make – this is the eleventh hour – police restructuring that meets EU principles; or to condemn their people to isolation and to suffer the consequences.

The choice is theirs, and theirs alone. It needs to be made now. I hope they make the right choice.

US Embassy – Ambassador Douglas L. McElhaney

This November is going to be the tenth anniversary of the signing of the Dayton peace agreement, and I think that date's a reminder to us here in Bosnia and to the entire world of exactly how far this country has come. Since I arrived last summer I've seen myself the many hurdles that Bosnia and Herzegovina has overcome in order to take its place as a partner in Euro-Atlantic institutions. Once again this country has reached a critical stage and a critical point in this journey. The promise offered by an EU Stabilization and Association Agreement represents a qualitative leap forward for Bosnia and Herzegovina's future development and role in Euro-Atlantic affairs.

As Paddy has pointed out, discussions on meeting the EU'S requirements on police have been blocked by the unwillingness of the entity government, SDS, of the Republika Srpska, to come to terms with the necessary reforms, and this is a requirement for beginning SAA discussions. I don't think that

we should forget what this agreement means as a promise of a better life for all of this country's citizens, *all* of this country's citizens. But like all great leaps forward, it will take a lot of effort. And as EU's newest members know, Hungary , Slovenia and others, difficult decisions are required of all countries seeking to join the Union as full partners.

Let it be clear that we strongly support the EU on this issue and all those in BiH who want to see this resolved. We, with our allies, are determined to see this through. Many are asking what sanctions will be forthcoming for the failure of the RS government to negotiate seriously on police reform. Unfortunately, the greatest sanction at this point already lies before the citizens of the RS and Bosnia-Herzegovina as a whole: indefinite suspension of their hopes for getting on the path to joining Europe.

Immediately, we look to the leaders of Bosnia and Herzegovina, particularly the leadership of Republika Srpska, and the SDS government, for progress in three key areas: cooperation with ICTY, defense reform and the issue which we are discussing today, police reform that is key to the beginning of these important SAA negotiations.

The eyes of the world and my government will be on Bosnia and Herzegovina weighing the progress that's been made, the opportunities that have been missed. I hope, for the welfare of this country and its courageous citizens that a way will be found to achieve these goals. Thank you.

EU Presidency – Ambassador Matthew Rycroft

The international community is determined. Europe speaks with one voice. We all want Bosnia and Herzegovina to integrate with Europe. But, as with all other countries, only when all the conditions are met. In BiH's case, that means that

negotiations for a Stabilisation and Association Agreement, the first step towards joining the EU, can only begin when there is an agreement on police reform. And that in turn means a deal that respects the three EC principles.

European integration is not going to go away as our strategy. Police reform is not going to go away as a precondition of EU integration. And the three principles are not going to go away as our test of police reform.

So police reform will happen. The question is whether it happens quickly, and leads to benefits. Or slowly. The slower it goes, the more negative measures there will be against those who do not fulfil their obligations to implement Dayton and make progress down the road to Europe.

As I have repeatedly said, there is no threat to the RS from doing police reform. The threat to the RS comes from not doing policing reform.

At present, the RS government has taken the RS down the road to obstructionism and isolation. It is not too late for them to change course. There is one last chance to realise the consequences and make up for lost time. Otherwise BiH will slip even further behind Serbia and Montenegro and others as they progress towards Europe. For the sake of Europe, for the sake of BiH, for the sake of the RS, it is time to change course.

European Commission – Ambassador Michael B. Humphreys

I was in Brussels last week and clearly felt that last Tuesday positive feelings about the future of Bosnia and Herzegovina were dashed by the decision of RS not to move forward on police reform.

An immediate diplomatic point was felt in New York where the

European Union in the Troika format was due to meet with the BiH Foreign Minister. This was disrupted; the EU Troika refused to meet with Foreign Minister Ivanic as the EU does not talk to obstructionists.

As my colleagues have pointed out all of us are disappointed by the breakdown of the negotiations on police reform.

We were clearly hoping that an agreement will be reached, fully in line with the 3 principles for successful police reform.

I think that the principles have been repeated so many times that most people in this country can recite them.

But, just in case there is any doubt what are the 3 principles – I will repeat them:

- 1) Securing the exclusive state-level competences on police,
- 2) Elimination of political interference from police and
- 3) Ensuring that police regions are determined on the basis of technical and professional criteria.

Police reform clearly remains a condition for progress of this country towards the EU. This will NOT change.

It is not because we are stubborn, but because this is clearly the most efficient way to organise police forces in this country.

Good, politically independent and efficient police services are a backbone of any democracy. And a fully functioning democracy is one of the basic requirements for EU membership.

When the European Commission published the Feasibility Study in November 2003 we hoped that sufficient progress would be made within 2004 to move to the next stage. Start of the Stabilisation and Association Agreement negotiations.

Good progress has been made during 2004. Many important pieces of legislation were adopted, institutions established and this country made progress on cooperation with ICTY.

A lot of time and effort has been invested by all the political parties, both in government and in the opposition in order to make progress towards the EU.

Therefore it is a waste not to take one more step. To complete this phase and move on the next one.

If we look at our neighbours – we see Croatia on the verge of starting accession negotiations; Serbia and Montenegro will start negotiations on an SAA on 4 October; we will make a recommendation to the European Council before the end of the year regarding Macedonia's application for membership of the European Union; Albania should complete its negotiations on a Stabilisation and Association agreement in the coming months. Only Bosnia and Herzegovina stands alone without any clear prospects on European integration. Is this what the citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina want? Is this the desire of the people of the Federation or of Republika Srpska? I doubt that it is.

The ball now is clearly in hands of RS politicians. It is up to them to move

We cannot take this step on behalf of the politicians.

We can only say that we are ready to continue working on this issue whenever they are ready.

RTQs:

Amra Hadžiosmanović, AFP News Agency:

Ambassador Ashdown, is there any deadline for the RS authorities to change their minds?

The High Representative, Paddy Ashdown:

Let's be clear. The deadline is gone. It's broken. This country has lost the opportunity to join the SAA in time for the tenth anniversary of Dayton. That deadline is crossed. It's not going to be resurrected, it can't be brought back. That opportunity has been lost. What you hear, however, now, especially in the comments of my colleague Douglas McElhaney from Washington, is that there is the tenth anniversary of Dayton. Now the question is – can this issue be politically resolved in time to make the tenth anniversary of Dayton, a celebration of what Dayton has achieved, or will that fail with the natural consequences of the terms in which we will look at the tenth anniversary of Dayton, which everybody can understand? So, that's the point. The point is – can a political agreement be achieved across BiH, in accordance with the EC Three Principles, in order that the tenth anniversary of Dayton celebrations can be celebrations of what can be done under Dayton, rather than what can't be done under Dayton?

Now, obviously if that can be achieved, if that political agreement can be achieved by the tenth anniversary of Dayton, then we would open the door to the SAA and beyond that, at some stage later than that. But, there is no deadline, because the deadline is broken and it's gone. And it can't now be repaired, unfortunately.

Can I make a second point, so that people perhaps understand some of the background to this. The international community is engaged right throughout the Balkans in trying to bring stability to the region, to settle the uncertainties of the region. There are two prevailing uncertainties in the region. One is the question of Kosovo, and the other is the question of Serbia and Montenegro. Frankly, up until last Tuesday night most Western capitals, engaged in resolving and stabilizing the Balkans, have looked at Bosnia and Herzegovina and said: "Fine, everything's going very well. It's stable. It's going towards the SAA. You don't have to worry about

Bosnia .” And suddenly last Tuesday night they wake up with a jolt to realize that there is potential instability in Bosnia too, that the destination to which this country was heading is now lost. And there is a very simple calculation, and you heard it very clearly from Washington , we cannot afford a third point of instability, not instability, of uncertainty in the Balkans. Bosnia is not unstable, but it’s future has become uncertain as a result of this.

You heard the word “determination” today, very clearly expressed. There is a very clear determination in the international community that we cannot be left with a third inconclusive question about the future of a Balkan country – Bosnia and Herzegovina . That is unacceptable, and that is the power behind the statements you’ve heard today. We are determined to see this done and there is a moment for the RS to consider the consequences of isolation. And we hope they will do so, very soon.

Amra Hadžiosmanović, AFP News Agency:

Can you please clarify. Is it correct to say that the RS authorities have up to November 21st to reach an agreement in order to avert sanctions?

The High Representative, Paddy Ashdown:

No. It’s fair to say that they’ve got a very short time now to show that they are prepared to reconsider and move towards a resolution of this issue. That will take some time to deliver, but they certainly haven’t got until November. This is a matter of days and weeks. Weeks – I used the word plural, maybe I shouldn’t. I’m not going to set deadlines, and you very well know why on this occasion. But there has to begin to be movement.

I opened my paper today to discover that Mr. Bukeljević is coming up with some new proposals. Good. I hope he is thinking

again. But, let this be no more time wasting. No one is interested in proposals that do not conform to the European Three Principles. If they are coming up with proposals that do conform to the Three European Principles – excellent. Now we need to see them, within the next few days. So, perhaps you could do a service by asking Mr. Bukeljević, as I certainly shall, what are his proposals? And when is he going to produce them? Because if there are new proposals being considered, within the next few days we need to see them. There has to be an understanding in the very near future that the position which the RS has taken, the position of isolation, is one which is unacceptable and extremely dangerous. Not for me, not just the citizens of BiH, but for the RS itself.

Sead Numanović, Dnevni avaz:

Mr. Ashdown, two questions. First, what the political agreement means? Passage in the parliaments, of the entities in the state, of the deal on the reforms? And the second, so you are not planning, for the time being, to remove anyone?

The High Representative, Paddy Ashdown:

I never tell you what I'm planning Sead Numanović. So, don't ask me. What I'm planning you will begin to see when it begins to happen. But look, a political agreement has to be an agreement between the parties, supported by the democratic structures of BiH, everybody knows that.

US Embassy, Douglas McElhaney:

I'd just like to add to what Paddy said. The last couple of days we've had some contacts with people in the government here, from Sarajevo, and my Under Secretary of State made very clear to them how important this issue is. Yes, we've done a lot on defense reform, there's been some movement on ICTY, certainly not the major issues. But this is something that has to be resolved and that's why we met with Mr. Terzić

and Mr. Ivanić – to make extremely clear to them: American determination to get this done. I must say, I think this took Washington something by surprise, that all at once on an issue like this, it's going to stop a whole process of integration.

We are enthusiastic, as NATO members, about getting Bosnia and Herzegovina into the partnership for peace, as my British colleagues and all our other NATO members are. And we're enthusiastic about bringing Bosnia and Herzegovina into the European Union, because it means integration into all of the things that we stand for. If Bosnia and Herzegovina one day is part of an EU negotiating team and you have the United States on the other side of the table, so much the better. That's the way our system works. And to hold all of this hostage with the negotiation over forming a modern police force, it is just unacceptable. So, as Paddy said, we need to have answers. We need to have a proposal. And we'll get it.

Journalist #4:

Mr. McElhaney, will this have the effect of America increasing pressure in regards to constitutional change?

US Embassy, Douglas McElhaney:

Look there are discussions going forward on constitutional change and I don't want to bring that into the discussion right now. What's important today, and what we're focusing on is the police reform. We're going to go ahead with all the other initiatives and we certainly expect cooperation. But, this is the one that's on the table today and this is the important issue.

Beth Kampschorr, Christian Science Monitor:

You've been saying basically that the RS – the message you are sending, all four of you – that the RS should be reconsidering. Haven't you been giving them that message ever since they reneged on the Vlašić Agreement. I mean, what's

different now? What's the carrot you are going to use now, or the stick you're going to use now? What's different now?

The High Representative, Paddy Ashdown:

Everybody knows what the carrots and sticks are. The carrot is very clear. The carrot is all the things that flow from engaging in the European Union process: investment; the possibility of visa liberalisation; the whole question of the security of the country; Serbs being able to join their fellow Serbs on the way to Europe, from Serbia and Montenegro . So the carrots are very clear and so are the sticks. The sticks are isolation. The sticks are no investment. We all know what they are and there will be other actions that have to be taken.

But yes, the message is – think again. This is the eleventh hour. Think again. And think about the consequences of isolation in particular. Let me give you, say something about little dangers. Quite often when my local colleagues want to frighten the international community they say “Oh, it feels like 1991,1992! You know, what I’m feeling here is like 1991, 1992!” We all know what that means. This doesn’t feel like 1991 or 1992. I’ll tell you what it feels like. It feels like 1995 for Republica Srpska. Complete isolation. Belgrade is not going to help you. Belgrade is not looking at Banja Luka now, it’s looking at Brussels . In a weeks time, ten days time, Belgrade will be on it’s way. Banja Luka will be left behind. Belgrade will not cast a backward glance at Banja Luka . You are completely isolated. You are isolated from your own friends who you have been careful to insult in Bosnia and Herzegovina . You are isolated from the international community. You are not going to get help from Belgrade .

So, if you want a parallel for today don’t think 1991 and 1992, think 1995 and think again.

Hugh Griffiths, Balkan Investigative Reporting Network:

Two questions really. The first one is – is the future of the RS and the whole Dayton Agreement being cast into doubt by the SDS's intransigence? And the second question is – we are hearing a lot of talk of isolation and sanctions, are we going to see any smart sanctions which target the obstructionist political elite and their business interests as opposed to the general population who do want to join the EU?

The High Representative, Paddy Ashdown:

Well, when I decide what I'm going to do, I tell you. I don't tell you in advance. So questions about the future are interesting speculation, which, I mean no insult, the press will obviously indulge in, and it's good fun, but I'm not going to indulge in it.

Secondly, as for the Dayton Agreement, look, the Dayton Agreement is a solid international treaty. And we all know what that means and we all know the guarantees it gives. But, you've heard the British Ambassador, you've heard the American Ambassador, you've heard me and I'm sure Michael would say the same thing: the danger to the Republica Srpska comes from putting itself in a position of isolation, not from accepting police reform that does no damage to the Republica Srpska's basic competencies and future. That's where the danger comes from.

Nedim Dervisbegović, Reuters:

When you say you are going to consider about sanctions and your moves after reply from Banja Luka, but is police reform Dayton category? Is it only up to you to decide or is it a matter for the international community to deal with, as Mr. Humphreys said, snubbing Minister Ivanić and similar actions? Who knew, could you act the way you acted last year by sacking officials and so on, in this case?

The High Representative, Paddy Ashdown:

I am merely the instrument of the international community.

That's it. Thanks very much.