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Senad Slatina, Analyst of the ICG

STATE BUILDING DOES NOT HAVE A TIMETABLE

A political analyst of the ICG and journalist of *Slobodna Bosna* for years, Master of Arts Senad Slatina speaks to *Dani* about the work methods of the ICG and reasons for a faith in Ashdown's risky game

Interview by Irham Ceco

DANI: How are data necessary for the ICG's studies being collected? How many people work on their preparation?

Slatina: The ICG studies tend to stick to the standards of academic researches in humanities, but at the same time they try to be topical and practical analyses that might influence the political process and contribute to the quality of the political debate. It is clear from our texts that we have tried to consult all previously published texts and analysis, collect as much as possible of the original documentation on the selected topic and have as many as possible interviews with relevant speakers. This is the main material that is used for writing a report. Once it is written, the report goes through several phases of arranging, acquisition of additional suggestions and final editing. Together with researchers and writers in field offices, several people from Brussels also work on the final preparation of the report.

DANI: The report of the ICG emphasizes a number of achievements, which are the result of Ashdown's "contract with the devil" and the marriage of convenience with "nationalists who accept reforms". Does the ICG believe that "the OHR giving a hand" to the ruling parties could still produce expected results at the end?

Slatina: We have tried to present some important aspects of Ashdown's pact with nationalists, but we did not enter into estimate of his final success. However, we said that the work of certain bodies did not give a reason for optimism. Beside, we have reminded that nationalists in power are in the position to block the most of planned reforms. Finally, we have invited the High Representative not to accept partial solutions and his office to abandon the approach of looking for the smallest joint multiple in the processes of mediation between different parties in BiH. If the goal is to advance the quality of life in BiH and to organize the state in a more functional manner, then there is no reason to hide this, to accept unnecessary compromises or to be satisfied with the minimum.

DANI: There is an impression that while detecting almost the same features in the behavior of the High Representative, the ICG and ESI draw diametrically opposite conclusions. Can you clarify this difference in approach?

Slatina: Well, you see, it is not really rare that different people view differently the same phenomena. Basically, the difference is the following: ESI believes that the OHR should immediately abandon some of its powers and give up completely its Bonn powers by May 2004, while the ICG generally believes that the powers of the international community should be reduced gradually and only when the institutions of BiH are qualified enough so that they do not need the international assistance any more. There is nothing wrong with these two opposite views. A thesis related to the need for the urgent withdrawal of the international community from BiH have been present since the arrival of the first American soldiers within IFOR. There have always been those, who wanted only to somehow stop the war, prevent the flow of refugees to their countries, not dwelling too much on the causes, course and consequences of the conflict, and to use effectively such basically minimal engagement for their own political promotion. On the other hand, there are those who have requested a decisive involvement of the international community, non-acceptance of the conditions created by the war, uncompromising settlement of accounts with crimes, and for BiH to reach the level of qualification, which will exclude a possibility of the crisis repetition.

ESI believes that BiH has a sufficiently capacity so that together with existing institutions and starting from the present foundations can continue a democratic development on its own without the assistance of the international community. They are so convinced of the accurateness of their analysis that they have determined May 2004 as a deadline when Bonn powers should cease to exist in their second discussion on this topic, i.e. in the open letter to the OHR. Next time, they will perhaps suggest the exact time and date when that should take place. However, the international engagement in state building cannot be viewed as a timetable. To determine when the OHR should withdraw or give up the only efficient powers it has, should and can only be done – through the existence of an internal BiH mechanism that would make the OHR powers unnecessary. The ICG believes that mechanisms for removal of predictable obstructions in BiH still do not exist, that they cannot be established without the mediation of the international community, that the current state of the BiH institutions' development is, to a great extent, a reflection of the conditions established by the war, and this state cannot be a starting point for the independent democratic development.