

Deutsche Welle Radio, transcript

Still there is a debate on Ashdown

A debate on the nature of governance by the High Representative to Bosnia-Herzegovina was opened on Wednesday in the foreign policy committee of the European Parliament.

Brussels, 10th of July (SENSE) – Is the manner in which the international community governs Bosnia problematic? Does this style of governance by the OHR also produce uneasiness in Europe? Judging by the discussions which were led in the European Parliament on Wednesday afternoon, this seems to be the case.

Ashdown's adviser for political affairs, Ed Llewellyn, rejected the conclusions recently published by the European Stability Initiative (ESI), which were the overture for the parliamentary debate, in which governance of Bosnia was compared to British rule in colonial India. The authors of the ESI report call the governance regime in Bosnia "liberal colonialism", and paint a picture of a country in which benevolent autocrats with unlimited powers rule by decree.

Llewellyn pointed out two major differences: The EU does not take money out of Bosnia, but directs it there, and the OHR has been set up with the consent of Bosnia-Herzegovina. These differences are of course of a substantive nature, and there could be no dispute on that.

Still, the head of the Committee for South Eastern Europe, Doris Pack, insisted that this does not explain the way Bosnia-Herzegovina is governed. She described her personal fears, that many people in that country fear to participate in political life, or to criticize OHR and the High Representative, for fear of being removed from the public sphere by decree. Her question was - does this help to build democracy?

Who controls the controllers? To whom is the High Representative accountable? This interested one EU representative. He agreed that the High Representative issues political decisions, but considered it problematic for democracy if these decisions became administrative or when they were directed against individuals.

Llewellyn reminded the Committee that the High Representative is first and foremost accountable to the Peace Implementation Council (PIC), which is made up of democratic countries. Considering the "decrees", Ashdown's adviser said that the High Representative "thinks deeply" about every decision and brings them "very scrupulously" and never without significant analysis and proof. As an example, he cited the blacklist of people who have been barred entrance into the EU, or whose bank accounts have been frozen.

How could somebody removed by decree by this or any previous High Representative return to political life; how could such a person rehabilitate himself? – was the question of a number of parliamentarians from Bosnia-Herzegovina who attended the debate before the European Parliament.

Llewellyn gave the example of Dragan Cavic, who had returned to political life. Of course, such persons could appeal to the European Court of Human Rights, seeing as Bosnia is a member of the Council of Europe. Llewellyn said that, inside OHR, they are aware of the democratic deficiencies in the role of the High Representative, but things are now the way they are. "OHR will not and does not need to stay forever in Bosnia, but it will stay a few years longer", said Llewellyn. He also said that the High Representative is willing to invite for discussions those whose financial assets were frozen due to their support for Radovan Karadzic, and hear their objections.

However, yesterday's debate did not resolve the question of whether the main problem was the breadth of the High Representative's powers, as some people are suggesting, or if the problem lies in the way these powers are used, as some BiH parliamentarians believed.

The representatives of the BiH government asserted that their relations with the Office of the High Representative involved more partnership than had been the case earlier. Osman Topcagic, Director of the Directorate for European Integration, said that the ministries and departments of the BiH government are making adequate use of the services of the OHR.

Topcagic also asserted that the BiH government had independently and without the help of the OHR or any other international organisation, responded to the Questionnaire for the Feasibility Study. "In that way, Bosnia-Herzegovina has shown that it is fully capable and equipped for such work", said Topcagic. The representative of the EU Commission, who followed the debate, confirmed that effort and its results.

The debate in the European Parliament continues today.

Ines Sabalic