

Dani, 1 August 2003

REPORT OF THE ICG: ALL PARADOXES OF LORD ASHDOWN

PADDY AND THE RECOVERY OF THE WRITTEN OFFs

The International Crisis Group issued another authoritative and thorough review of the current situation in the political scene of BiH. The title *Nationalistic Governments of Bosnia and Herzegovina: Paddy Ashdown and Paradoxes of the State Building*, brings a very exhaustive and, to a great extent, accurate diagnosis of the conditions in BiH after the last elections. Contrary to the recently published analysis of the ESI on maharaja Ashdown, which the ICG calls “deceiving and mean”, Mark Wheeler and his team show much more understanding for the High Representative and his game with “nationalists who accept reforms”. This does not mean that they are not aware of the high risk of the OHR’s game with “the written offs”.

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If an organization operates with 90 highly educated officials on five continents, and if it is headed by people like former President of Finland, Marthy Ahtisaary, and the former Australian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Gareth Evans – it must be listened to. Former diplomats, businessmen and influential media representatives have tried to promote their influence and analysis of the crises around the world, and BiH is one of the first places where they have established their presence. Therefore, it is not surprising that they self-confidently deal with finesses of BiH political games, including those behind the scenes. However, what is surprising to a certain extent is a consistent defense of the OHR policy after the last year elections, although Ashdown’s marriage of convenience with the election winners is called paradoxical in their analysis. “Being far from a catastrophe, the return of nationalists to the power actually released the High Representative from the limitation of “partnership” and deprived the citizens of BiH of deception that internationals can or should confer holy orders on their leaders” the report stated. “In order to withdraw from this country, the OHR will first have to dig deeper into its structures. In order to give up using Bonn powers, they must be used more intensively. In order for BiH politicians to get used to taking responsibility for their country, the High Representative will have to call upon their promises for which he had to squeeze them out. In order to embed the rule of law, ensure a democratic rule and development and release BiH from fears and obsessions, the High Representative will have to violate from time to time legality, transparency and democracy. This will not always look nice. But neither the war nor mistakes of the international community looked nice and they made such measures necessary”, the report’s conclusion stated.

Ashdown and Seven Personnel Merry-Go-Rounds

In order to avoid confusion, none of the parties either in power or in opposition, is spared from sharp criticism and a lucid estimate of possibilities – seven key political actors refer to the trefoil SDA-HDZ-SDS, entity circus artists SBIH and PDP, and Social-democrats SDP of **Zlatko Lagumdžija** and SNSD of **Milorad Dodik**. The analysis of the SDA of course begins with the legendary “beer” paradigm of **Sulejman Tihic** and then it states that even the biggest “reformed” Bosniak party is “biased by the burden of the previous religiosity and silent clericalism of their leaders, their war time acceptance of the wider Islamic world and eager race in getting rich both during and after the war”.

Their cooperation with the SDS in the RS has been also detected, although the SDA does not want to call it a coalition since “it cooperates via PDP”, noting that this will not go smoothly as “Serb parties stick to the Dayton Agreement as a source of the existence of their entity”, while the SDA is in favor of adopting a State Constitution that will eliminate entities and cantons. **“The SDA is not a monolith, and Tihic is certainly not Izetbegovic”**, the ICG made a summary of the change. The HDZ members, headed by Dragan Covic, have sworn to the ICG that they have given up the idea of the third entity and that they are even ready to give up the cantonal / county organization of the Federation. **“The biggest problem with the new HDZ is that its leaders negate that the HDZ is new at all”**, the report stated.

“Among three big nationalist parties, the SDS has changed the least” the Report stated while humorously calling this Party – no more no less Bosnian Baas Party! Which does not mean that Dragan Covic and his namesake Kalinic have grown their moustache after iftar with Sulejman Tihic. “This party continues to oppose everything that could endanger its biggest achievement – Republika Srpska. The SDS is now in love with the Dayton Agreement: both as an international act which recognized the borders of the entity created by genocide and as an constitutional wall behind which it hides”, the ICG stated its diagnosis while finding out that even an anonymous official from this party is ready to declare that **Radovan Karadzic** humiliates himself – and in this way the RS – by hiding in the wilderness as an “hunted beast”. The report also states a number of “reform-oriented” developments of the party, which created the state using a knife and automatic rifle, but it also states irrefutably: “No one should take these signs of common sense wrongly as a fundamental change. This party is still the biggest obstacle to the creation of stable BiH.” The SBIH and PDP, as parties equally willing and competent to get incorporated in the Alliance for Change and in the Parliamentary majority together with the three-pronged spear SDA-HDZ-SDS, can be simply explained as: “Power is our program” and the SDP and SNSD are characterized as “opposition up to the hilt”.

You Bulldozer, what are you doing,? “Ashdown was everywhere: on TV, in press, in trams, on market places, in shops, in the homes of returnees and in the mountains’ walks. None of the previous High Representatives was so obviously committed nor in such haste to do big things. None of them wanted so much to get in touch with masses or to show clearly who has the final say”, the ICG described the manner in which Lord Ashdown put the shadow even on pre-election campaigns, while pushing its nation-building and pro-

European program and priorities “Job, Justice and Reforms”, which of course was not without effects: “Ashdown has used its speaker’s platform and his powers achieving significant but not decisive results. He set up priorities – rule of law, economic reform, responsibility of public officials, rationalization of the governments’ administrative apparatus – and he stuck to them; although he used the advantages of misfortunes such as Orao case and the spying affair in the RS in order to expand his agenda. He helped the creation of and used the advantages of up-to-then unprecedented degree of compliance among the previously rebellious “noblemen” holding the principal positions in other international organizations and ambassadors of great powers that were once divided in factions.”

While positively describing the OHR’s approach to important reform issues, such as VAT and the creation of basic preconditions for the military integration within BiH, the ICG does not miss an opportunity to emphasize a key trap of Ashdown’s pact with existing nationalists who tolerate his reforms. “Instead of working on the futile search for “moderates”, he tried to adapt himself to the logic of BiH multiethnic nucleus and initial mistake of the international community that hurried to organize elections that were too early and confirmed the power and democratic legitimacy of criminal parties that led the war. This is a highly risky strategy: not only because it intends to achieve the very unlikely transformation by normalizing nationalists, but also because it is mainly motivated by a need to announce a victory and leave. On the other hand, it is too late to prohibit these parties or to appoint new people. To win over the nationalists to take the responsibility for reforms is perhaps the only solution and the sweetest revenge. The problem is that nationalists are again in the position to block the implementation, and the OHR could be tempted to allow this – not only because it cannot really run the country but because too much political capital has been used in order to win over nationalists for reform. Therefore, Lord Ashdown may have less maneuvering space than he thinks. It would be very difficult to label again nationalists as hopeless obstructionists if it turns out that “Jobs and Justice” and other reform sketches are not more than convincing slides.”

Weaknesses of the Council of Ministers have been also emphasized and they additionally aggravate the situation. The High Representative may issue orders but cannot implement reforms. As the ICG warns, Ashdown and his team will not be able to pretend endlessly that everything is fine with the nationalists’ governments. However, with regard to comments given in liberal media, in which Ashdown is very often and very drastically accused as an accomplice in the election debacle of the Alliance, responsible for the victory of nationalists and called upon to cancel the elections and “prevent a new war and downfall of BiH”, the ICG reacts very sharply: “Although a perfect illustration of the dependency mentality of successfully colonized, such commentators exaggerated the danger. They failed to notice that the election had passed without a serious incident. They refused to admit that the peoples had made a choice themselves – either by voting or abstention. They also failed to notice what is missing in their picture of Bosnia returning back to the politics of early 90s. Domestic nationalists may still drag mortgages from that time, but the regional framework is cleaned from grabbers. Franjo Tudjman went to the God for truth and Slobodan Milosevic to the court for war crimes. Croatia and Serbia are different countries. There is no JNA. There is no inflammatory media or general national hysteria that they incited on behalf of their masters”. Truth is that this report does not intend to give a premature prognosis of the success (failure) of Ashdown’s “cunning

strategy”. However, to a certain extent it does clarify why Paddy has “recovered” those, which Wolfgang Petritsch has written off with a great effort. Unfortunately, we will pay for his mistakes, as it has been the case so far.