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ESI and OHR

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By Josip Blazevic

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The public in Bosnia and Herzegovina is still talking about the recently published report by ESI which attempted to prove that OHR has got too much power in their hands. That report also caused a lot of different polemics that we were able to hear or read. But the thing that worries me in all those discussions is how this report done by ESI's leading executives was presented to the public, i. e. misused for daily political purposes. If you read this report carefully and thoroughly you'll notice that the target of this report is not the High Representative Paddy Ashdown himself, as some would like to present to the public (at the end, that was also confirmed by one of the authors of this report), but the Office of the High Representative as such. Nevertheless, politicians that are, on the personal level, not in a good relationship with High Representative Ashdown, used this report to try to screw out vicissitude of Ashdown and/or to prove needlessness of the existence of the institution of Office of the High Representative in Bosnia and Herzegovina. How much damage the later mentioned above can produce can probably be best illustrated with the fact that says that in this country there will be no progress whatsoever as long as Radovan Karadzic is at large; who, by the way, still has the most influential position on political scene of the RS. Or, while among Bosniaks there are still politically very active factions who are promoting an Islamic state. Or, again, while the most influential political establishment among Bosnian Croats has still not given up the idea of the third entity.

The 13 pages report made by Gerald Knaus and Felix Martin didn't really go deep down to the BH problem. Their analysis doesn't even touch all the specifics and complexities of our society so they couldn't really give us a correct answer on the question if OHR has too much of the power or not. Therefore, the above mentioned analysis is not complete even though it brings three conclusions: the case of every dismissed official must be reviewed, any dismissal power needs to be accompanied by precise rules explaining the emergency conditions under which OHR may even consider such a step and all the principles of good governance that apply to domestic institutions should also apply to OHR: transparency, public access to information, and a clear set of procedures available to the public, which should be seriously considered. At the same time, the basis of the problem of peacekeeping and state building in Bosnia and Herzegovina is not mirrored in the power that OHR has got, as the ESI presents.

The problem lays in the fact that OHR employees do not hold themselves responsible for not putting enough pressure on local authorities to get rid of the crucial problems: like too much power in the entities, slow return of Bosniaks and Croats to RS and majorisation of Croats in Federation of BiH that, again, makes relations in BiH be more the conflict between Serbs from the RS and Bosniaks from the Federation while, at the same time, Croats working on their individualisation in Western Herzegovina that are cankering the foundations of the state of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Because of all that the state of Bosnia and Herzegovina is completely blocked and, as such, presents a serious threat to the stability of the whole region. The OHR, with all the power that it has can make progress in BiH. The problem is: they are actually not using that power enough.