

OFFICE OF THE HEAD OF MISSION

Press and Public Information Unit

Blic, 19 December 2011
p. 1, 11

Interview with Ambassador Dimitrios Kypreos, Head of the OSCE Mission to Serbia

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(Translation from printed edition)

“Significant reforms in sector of judiciary, minority rights protection, in the media have been made, but the process has not been finished yet and there is still a lot of work to do. Knowing the people and political leadership in Belgrade, I am convinced that Serbia is introducing reforms not only because of its intention to become EU member but primarily because that it in its interest to become advanced democracy”, Dimitrios Kypreos, the OSCE Ambassador to Serbia says in his interview with *Blic* asked to comment whether the reform process would be endangered by stopping Serbia at Brussels’ door.

Ambassador Kypreos assures that the EU enlargement process has not been slowed down or stalled. After the EU candidate status slipped away from Serbia a few days ago, [Ambassador] says he hopes that “Serbia and the EU will soon reach an agreement with positive results”.

“The discussion in Serbia on the EU and the necessary reforms sometimes gives the impression that everything ends in October, with the European Commission’s report. However, this is not true, because political decisions are reached in December by the European Council among the leaders of the EU member states. The Council considers the political issues, such are good-neighbourly relations, assesses stability and security and the respect of the international community’s presence and enabling of its activities... Those are also the issues important for the decision-making process regarding the candidate status. I think Serbia is capable of responding to the demands of the European Council, because both citizens and the authorities want to be a factor of peace in the region”.

Q: Two days ago you awarded Rodoljub Sabic, Sasa Jankovic and Nevena Petrusic. What did you want to draw the attention to?

“The OSCE Mission traditionally grants “Person of the Year” award. Last year, it was given to a journalist who was threatened due to her investigative work, and with this we supported all the journalists facing such threats. This year, we thought it was time to draw the attention to independent institutions. They are necessary, even in the most advanced democracies, because they point to whether a democracy is functioning, and whether it serves the interests of the citizens. Independent bodies are needed now more than ever.

Q: Are independent institutions jeopardized?

“I do not have concrete proofs that the authorities are preventing them in their work, but I think they need support”.

Q: This year the Pride Parade was not held in Belgrade due to threats with violence. Does this mean that rights of sexual minorities are jeopardized?

“I got an impression from the discussion on the Parade in Serbian media as if the international community supports certain sexual orientation. Of course, this is not true. We support the freedom of speech and the right to assembly and the Parade issue concerns only those basic rights. Each citizen’s opinion should be respected and everyone must have the right to express their opinion. We would have been happier if the Parade had taken place, because everybody has the right to assemble and express their opinion and nobody should prevent them from doing so.

Q: Thanks to the OSCE, the Faculty of Economy in Subotica has opened its department in the south of Serbia. What else should be done for better relations between nationalities?

“Organization of direct elections for majority of nineteen National Minority Councils minorities in June last year was a huge step not only for Serbia but for the whole Southeast Europe. And the case of Subotica is the next big step, cooperation of two big minorities was organized, one from the north, and one from the south of Serbia. It is very important that one third of students are of Serbian nationality, meaning that the project is not linked to specific interests of national minorities. Moreover, the studies will be linked with local enterprises, which is a modern concept of study. This project would not have been possible without Ministers for education and protection of human rights, Zarko Obradovic and Milan Markovic respectively, as well as huge engagement by the Dean of Subotica faculty and the ambassadors of the USA and the Great Britain.

Dialogue creates atmosphere of trust

Q: What is your opinion about the dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina?

“Dialogue cannot harm anybody. Everything can be discussed without cancelling anything. An atmosphere of trust and better understanding is being created. Progress has already been achieved, for example, regarding the [recognition of university] diplomas, because it will open a perspective for young people and enable them to professionally express themselves. Also, OSCE Mission enabled a co-operation between journalists from Belgrade and Pristina who investigate organized crime. They have achieved excellent results.

Sandzak and extremists

Q: Sandzak was also always in focus of your attention. What is your opinion of the stability in that region?

“I have an impression that sometimes there is a wrong image about the people living there as fanatic extremists. I have come to know them as very practical people who want safe future, stable income and future for themselves and their families. In Sandzak, the issue is clearly about economic development, and if that issue would be solved, all other issues would also be solved.

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