

Head of the OSCE Mission in Kosovo, Ambassador Jean-Claude Schlumberger interview to RTK 2 Razgovor

***Moderator:** Dear audience good evening and welcome to RTK2 program. You are watching Razgovor show and our guest tonight is Ambassador Jean-Claude Schlumberger, Head of the OSCE Mission in Kosovo. Mister Ambassador good evening and welcome to RTK2.*

***Ambassador Schlumberger:** Dobro večer (good evening), I am very happy to be here.*

***Moderator:** How big is the OSCE role in the integration of the north, given that assistance and support of the OSCE was necessary to organize local and parliamentary elections in this part of Kosovo?*

Ambassador Schlumberger: First of all I would like to remind that the OSCE has been present in the north since quite a long time, since the beginning of the Mission, through its regional centers and office in Mitrovica/Mitrovicë North and our different offices in other municipalities and that we have implemented many activities related to the civil society, youth, media and local leaders in the north. Now, with the Brussels agreement and the progress in dialogue, of course the OSCE has met a new role. You have mentioned already elections, facilitation of the elections in the northern municipalities, and it was the first activity that we had to do and it is also written in the Brussels agreement, so we have organized, facilitated I would say, this working group between representatives of Prishtinë/Priština and Belgrade in Brussels to agree on modalities of elections, implementation of elections, and despite some problems at the beginning, finally it was successful, the process itself, and this contributed to the establishment of the new municipalities in the north. So, that was very positive. After that in June, I would also remind that we have also facilitated elections for the Assembly of Kosovo, which allowed the presence of representatives of the Serb community in the central institutions. Now, in the north deriving from the Brussels agreement we are having some implementation activities which are related first to municipalities, we are providing trainings, workshops, for the members of the municipal assemblies, we have also organized some exchanges with other municipalities, for example from the municipality of Novo Brdo/NovoBërdë with municipalities in the north, we are working on the international standards in the field of human rights, women's rights, we are also working on gender issues, we are helping to establish some women's caucuses, in the field of security we help the work of local community safety councils. We have also an important role in the integration of the police in the north and together with other stakeholders,

first we were part of the working group to assess their needs and then we provided trainings and we are having good and trustful relations with all components of the Kosovo Police in the north. And also we are preparing to have some actions in the field of judiciary based on the agreement from February and there we also have a role to play.

Moderator: *What is the assessment of Kosovo's EU journey? How close at this moment Kosovo is to the EU and white Schengen list, based on your assessment?*

Ambassador Schlumberger: This naturally the EU itself and its member states are in better position than me as representative of the OSCE to speak about it. I am an observer and participant in some processes and yes I would say there was a good progress made and it has been clearly showed by the progressing the Stabilization and Association Agreement which is now, I suppose on the way to be sign in the coming months. So that is positive, nevertheless there are also some other things to be done, regulated and the EU Commission Report shows that in some well know fields, democratic governance, media freedom and professionalism of the media, in the field of judiciary and corruption there are still some open issues and I have to say that we OSCE through some of our activities support work in the same way as the EU does and I think this is very important for Kosovo.

Moderator: *Unresolved property issues still burden relations within Kosovo. Initially it was HABITAT and now Kosovo Property Agency; however the assessment is that they do not resolve cases of usurped properties swiftly enough. How to ensure mechanisms that would give back usurped properties to their owners?*

Ambassador Schlumberger: Yes, these property issues are important. I want to make it clear the OSCE does not deal with commercial issues with the issues of privatization process. We are focused on private properties, in particular on private properties of communities in numerical minority. This has been a focus for quite long time and we are monitoring these issues. I must say that most of the cases are legally resolved; for most of the claims there has been decisions from the Kosovo Property Agency or from the justice, so that legitimate owners have their rights recognized. What is not working is when these properties are re-occupied even when sometimes first illegal occupiers have been out; there have been cases of reoccupations. In these cases, we have issued report recently about that, and it is clear that in this case it is not working, there is not enough cooperation between the Kosovo Police and the Kosovo Property Agency and the judiciary to allow real implementation of these decisions. This is something that really needs to be re-addressed and we are giving recommendations in this area to different stakeholders.

Moderator: *Is this one of the reasons why returns' process is not progressing as wanted?*

Ambassador Schlumberger: It is one of the reasons; I would not say it is one of the major reasons, but it contributes to the weak number of returns. Because of course it is concern, there are other issues, naturally there is, I would say, general context of distrust maybe, security concerns which make that returnees are hesitating often. It is very important that returnees have the support of the local community when they come back, of municipal, local institutions, you know that they are always taking part in these go and see visits, when some people come and see if there are and to find if circumstances are adequate for return. So naturally it is part of the problem, the issue of properties, yes it is.

Moderator: *How realistic is it to expect that financial means and an environment for the return of displaced to towns/cities would be provided?*

Ambassador Schlumberger: Yes, funding is important. When I met the Minister for Communities and Returns he told me that he thought that his budget was not big enough to address this aspect. It means that we need funds to deliver proper housing for those who return, to also make some grants for economic activities, I must say that most of the returnees areas are not in towns, they are mostly in rural or semi-rural areas, so they also need money to have equipment, agricultural equipment, like tractors and things like that, and it is important but it does not mean that we have to wait to have the money before pushing the process, because the process must go anyway and we have to find support of the international community organizations or also private charity organizations.

Moderator: *Late last year, you were one of the organizers of the regional gathering with return as its topic. One could say that this was a serious step ahead in the cooperation between official Belgrade and Prishtinë/Priština on the issue of return.*

Ambassador Schlumberger: Yes, I think this meeting in Skopje, in November was an important moment because it allowed to have around the same table representatives at the political level, representatives from Belgrade, Prishtinë/Priština, Skopje and Podgorica, who wanted to speak seriously about durable solutions for the returnees displaced from Kosovo. And I have noticed at this meeting a really strong willingness from all of them to work, to progress in this area. So, they have adopted a common statement, a common communique that has been made public, in which are some possible solutions in this area, meaning that these displaced persons should have a choice to come back here or to settle and integrate in the places where they are now. So these are two options, we are working closely with the UNHCR and the EU on this initiative because they are also major stakeholders on the issue of displaced persons. Naturally there has been a standstill due to some political developments but now that we have a minister again, Minister for Communities and Returns here in

Prishtinë/Priština, Mr. Jevtić I hope that we will have some new steps in the coming period.

Moderator: *We are witnessing more frequent attacks against Serbs and their properties, in particular returns sites; can this be linked to the current political moment or ...*

Ambassador Schlumberger: Yes, you know that we are monitoring regularly these incidents, let me call it ethnically motivated or having perceptions that they are ethnically motivated incidents. We do it all over the year, on a monthly basis. The general conclusion that I will draw is that there is not a regular increase of these incidents, but on the contrary a decrease in the regular monitoring for the last two to three years. But there is certain increase at the moments of political tensions. There are two specific episodes, at the beginning of 2013 when we had desecration of graveyards, and this was naturally very bad, and this was the moment when the figures of incidents grew, same after this football game in Belgrade last October. After this incident there were a lot of bad incidents here, also in Kosovo. I would say that time to time there is a certain increase but the general trend is going down, the problem is that most of these incidents happen at places where Serb community is very isolated and does not have good relations with other communities. It means that it leaves a very strong perception of threats, which I can understand and we are truly working with local institutions to have them having good reactions every time in these cases. To have reactions appropriate to these incidents, to condemn them, to have judiciary to follow up and that these incidents do not remain unpunished. Often robberies, attacks against houses, sometime abandoned houses, but also sometimes unfortunately against some persons.

Moderator: *Statistics shows that over the last two weeks three attacks against returnees were recorded. What kind of message this sends to those thinking whether to return or not?*

Ambassador Schlumberger: Well the message, it is a complex process and it is very important as I said to work with institutions and the general population, that is why it is important to establish local security councils, at the municipalities there are two levels, municipal safety councils and but also at the level of villages local community safety councils where you have representatives of different communities, Kosovo police to build trustful relations and to ensure there is more prevention of this kind of incidents, but also to work on education and to convey the message to the young generations.

Moderator: *Kosovo Assembly members are ahead of deliberating very important legal acts that could maybe be interpreted in the context whether ruling majority will in fact have majority at the parliament to have them voted. I am primarily referring to the Law that should allow establishment of the Special Court for war crimes. How important it is for Kosovo to fulfill this obligation taken from the international community?*

Ambassador Schlumberger: Yes, once again the OSCE is not involved in this process as you know. It is related to the Council of Europe and the EU and we are following these developments. I must say I think it is very necessary this court to be established, first as you mentioned it is an international obligation but also I think this would be a good opportunity to have things cleared. There are still families who are still wondering what happened and if something happened and if clarity can be given to that it would lead to the success of Kosovo and can help to inter-community relations and reconciliation. Yes, in this way we support this process.

Moderator: *One could say that beginning of talks in Brussels was in fact a turning point in relations between official Prishtinë/Priština and Belgrade.*

Ambassador Schlumberger: Yes, I think it was a considerable step. I remember when I arrived here to take my function as the Head of the OSCE Mission in Kosovo in October 2012, at this time there were some technical discussions taking place, but when the real political dialogue was engaged and this agreement in Brussels was signed, I think a very important step was done. Of course things are not easy and we will always have some political issues, you can see there are some areas lagging behind and are not progressing as quick as we hope, but let's look from the positive side that all these sectors that I mentioned, municipalities, police, justice, civil protection corps and others which are already dealt with in the framework of this dialogue or technical agreements it is already a lot, politicians, relations between the politicians, leaders from Prishtinë/Priština and Belgrade have completely changed since they discussed the needs, they gather in Europe and have discussions and that is a big change. We have to be optimistic as it is an important thing that we have the adhesion of the whole population for this process, on both parts.

Moderator: *This year Serbia is chairing the OSCE, how beneficial this can be for Kosovo at this moment, so that some important questions can come faster on the OSCE agenda?*

Ambassador Schlumberger: Yes, you know this Chairmanship is annual. Every year one of the participating states takes over the responsibility to be the representative of the 57 participating states in the OSCE and this year it is Serbia. This does not change basically the context, I mean the rules in the OSCE stay the same, it is a consensus based organization. The mandates of the Missions do not change, and it stays for the Mission in Kosovo, but also for our sister Missions, disregard of the fact it is Serbia or some other country. It does not change things. And I hope that it would be an opportunity to address some issues, let's say in the

spirit of dialogue, which is part of the values of the OSCE, and I hope that in this way we get some progress.

Moderator: *In Macedonia (FYRoM) happened what happened, several persons got killed in Kumanovo, how does the OSCE perceive this entire situation? Are you concerned over these latest events in FYROM?*

Ambassador Schlumberger: Yes, of course we are concerned for the stability of southern neighbor, of course, but also for the general situation in the region. These are indeed very concerning and unfortunate events. Naturally our Mission in Skopje has been very engaged in this issue, it is part of their mandate to deal with especially inter-ethnic issues, and our Mission has played a direct role as a facilitator in some very difficult moments, especially to obtain surrendering of some of these armed groups. Naturally, our Mission is mobilized and we are trying to help them in different ways as we are very close to them.

Moderator: *Could the situation in Ukraine, when we speak about tense areas, be reflected in Kosovo in the context of extending the Mission in Kosovo, and fear that Russia could use its influence when it comes to deciding on this matter?*

Ambassador Schlumberger: Well, it is clear that the Ukraine crisis has taken primary role at the OSCE, and that all, not all but a lot of energy is directed towards Ukraine. Because the OSCE is the only international presence to be there, on the field there, sometimes there are dangerous situations, and that our presence and numbers there are growing and soon it will be the biggest Mission of the OSCE anywhere. So it means also that this Mission needs means to work being it financial or logistics or human resources. We as Mission, we have given our help, sending some of our staff members for the short term, but also some of them being recruited there, because some of them fulfilled good criteria to be members there, we have also been sending some cars to help with this and it is possible that in the future this burden so to say will lead to maybe taking some more resources in our Mission. But any way, I would say that decrease of the means for our Mission is a normal phenomenon during the years as long as we are, I would say, as you are performing in Kosovo, we are just supporting, and we can see there is some progress in different sectors and naturally we are handing over. We are concentrating now on some specific sectors and regularly there is a decrease of our presence over the time. As I discussed about that with different leaders and stakeholders, since I have been here, we can see that there are still some sectors where our support is welcome and useful and of course we are ready to give it.

Moderator: *From the perspective as a Head of the OSCE Mission in Kosovo, how would you assess freedom of media?*

Ambassador Schlumberger: Well, there are some indicators which are not ours but come from some specialized groups such as reports you have read, a recent report from Freedom House which ranks Kosovo as partly free regarding the media, if I remember well 97 on the scale of 191, somewhere in the middle, because there are still some issues. As you know the OSCE Mission since the beginning of its presence here is working with the media, you know how we contributed to the creation of media here and now recently we had a conference, a roundtable for the Day of Freedom of the Media and yes it was clearly said that there are still some problems, in particular political interference, with some financial issues which are important for the sustainability of the media outlets and institutions. But also there are a lot of threats towards journalists, figures are not very good, we have noticed too many threats, against different journalists. But I must say that there are also journalists who are very professional and do their job and address these threats against them.

Moderator: *Can OSCE be of assistance in helping public broadcaster, the RTK2, program in Serbian language, to cover the entire territory of Kosovo with its signal?*

Ambassador Schlumberger: Yes, we are really involved in this process, to support as much as possible. It must go both ways, it is clear that we are working or helping media outlets to have cable operators agreeing to must carry provision which would allow your channel RTK2, to be broadcasted normally in the north but in the same way also there is a need that TV channels from the north have also the same possibility to be broadcasted in the south. This is important and I think that we are in a good process and that we can have some good results in not that far future, according to the last information that we have when we spoke with cable operators.

Moderator: *The OSCE role in Kosovo has changed between 1999 to this date, what are the challenges you are expecting in the future?*

Ambassador Schlumberger: Yes, it is proper to the OSCE, in general for different Missions, that each Mission as I said has its own mandate and we have our mandate since 1999, but it is clear that the implementation of the mandate changes in accordance with the changes of the situation, locally and generally. It has been the case for us. When I look how the Mission was working in the first years after its deployment and now, yes there has been a difference, there was an evolution, we are, I think that we can say that our aim is to focus on several

specific sectors, local governance, because we have worked a lot at the central level, helping build institutions, but now at the local, municipal level, at the level of performance, we are working and since we have a chance to have a presence all across Kosovo, this field presence we can be of help for that. Then protection and promotion of the rights of communities, it is something very important for the future steps, including naturally things such as cultural heritage and other community rights which must be respected, media, we have talked about the media before, these are some points where I think our action is still needed with stronger focus. And of course there are some other areas where we think for instance police, you know that we have been nurturing, I would say, the Kosovo Police and especially that the Kosovo Academy we supported since the beginning and now we can have a lot to support for things that do not go well and we have much more specialized and focused actions than this heavy presence before. And that is the trend which I think will become general.

Moderator: *Mister Ambassador thank you very much for your time given to RTK2 and our audience.*

Ambassador Schlumberger: It was a pleasure.

Moderator: *Dear audience, thank you for your attention and stay with RTK2. Good buy.*