

Interview for *Blic* daily, published on 27 November 2006

Hans Ola Urstad, Head of the OSCE Mission in Belgrade

Serbia is yet to receive investments

You must solve the problem of Mladic and conclude cooperation with the Hague Tribunal. True investments are yet to come.

Serbia has made significant progress in the past six years. There is a big difference between the country I first came in and Serbia nowadays. When I first came here, there were no banks which worked well, no one used credit cards, there were no proper supermarkets, and petrol was sold in plastic bottles in the street. Many positive things happened since then, although there are major setbacks occasionally – says Hans Ola Urstad, Head of the OSCE Mission in Belgrade, after six years of working in Serbia.]

Ivana Cvetkovic

Still, he can't help pointing out to the major obstacle that Serbia must remove on its road - resolving the issue of remaining war crimes indictees.

HoM: I will tell you what you have already heard hundreds of times before. Issue of remaining war crimes indictees must be solved. When I say this, I refer to Ratko Mladic in the first place. This is the key issue.

Blic: How would you assess the process of adjustment of domestic legislation with the EU standards?

HoM: Serbia has been making progress in harmonising domestic laws with European standards, although this process is not running absolutely smoothly. Law preparation and adoption, as it is now, must be streamlined and better co-ordinated, so that it could meet the requirements that Serbia has been facing and will have to face in the coming years. Preparing a law is important, but its implementation is crucial. For example, Law on Ombudsman has been adopted in Serbia, but even six months after this your country still doesn't have an Ombudsman. This is a great drawback. It's also

necessary that good laws, such as those on Public Prosecution, High Judicial Council should be adopted urgently. The trouble is that Serbia is now in the pre-election period, so adoption of laws will be postponed.

Blic: OSCE has been engaged with state administration reform. Which areas gave best results?

HoM: Though it's difficult to single out one institution, I would still say that the central bank and financial institutions have done a great job. This contributes to improved investment climate in Serbia. Significant reforms are being conducted in the military sector, as well as in the police sector, though they have not reached to where we would have wished them to be.

Blic: Are you satisfied with your communication with the representatives of authorities?

HoM: I am. In any country in transition, OSCE has a difficult job and we are not always welcome. In Serbia, we have good cooperation at all levels, starting from the President, Prime Minister, Ministries, Parliament and we are always welcome. We work on projects in Serbia which deal with the rule of law, law enforcement, democratization, media, economy and environment, and we can help.

Blic: To what extent are Serbian authorities open for your criticism and advice?

HoM: It depends. We were not successful in the field of broadcasting so far. We would like to see different laws in this field. As for other fields, we were more successful. We work with various ministries on a great number of laws, amendments, and our advice is usually taken into account, as we are helping you to establish standards as close as possible to the best we have in the OSCE area.

Blic: Europe has forwarded significant help and donations to Serbia.

HoM: Although a lot assistance has been provided so far, it is still moderate in comparison with assistance normally associated with EU membership. Assistance is huge, in particular for EU member countries, like f.i. Poland today. If you go back to the past a little bit, you will see how this assistance

was used by Ireland, Spain and Portugal - countries with strong economies today. That's also the case with Serbia – assistance has only started to arrive, in my opinion.

Blic: What are the main obstacles to a more profitable economic cooperation and greater presence of European companies in Serbia?

HoM: One name is enough to describe the main obstacle – Ratko Mladic. You have to remove this obstacle from the road, and then extradite all the remaining indictees. But, it is exactly Mladic who is blocking many things and that's why he should be sent to the Hague tomorrow, or, if possible, even today.

The thing I like the most here is the people

Blic: What do you say to your friends about Serbia? What is Serbia's biggest problem, and what is its greatest advantage?

HoM: I am trying to give an objective picture of Serbia to my friends. Besides the climate, what I like best in Serbia are its people. I like the nature of hilly parts of Serbia that I traveled through from A to Z.

Blic: You ride a motorbike in your spare time. Where did you last go to?

HoM: I travel through Serbia on my bike almost every weekend. That's my hobby. Most of the time I ride alone, sometimes with a friend. I often go to Sumadija, but as the weather was cold last weekend, I drove only to Avala and back.

Blic: How do you spend your spare time in Belgrade?

HoM: I have several hobbies in addition to motorbiking. I play the guitar and sing. I like cooking as well. I like eating fish and fishing. I ski. In the past years I skied in Kopaonik. For exercise, I swim. I also often walk in the city.

Blic: Could you single out the most pleasant moment you had while in Belgrade?

HoM: The most pleasant moment was when I delivered grants awarded by the Norwegian Government to the best students. Even after this, I met young people throughout Serbia who were awarded these grants, who approached me to say hello and thanks.

Blic: When you go back to Norway for your vacations, do you bring presents from Serbia to your friends?

HoM: It happens, of course, like embroidery, Pirot carpets and other typical presents from Serbia. I also have numerous paintings by the Serbian painters that I either bought myself, or got them as present.