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

By Nemanja Vlačo

**The state must make the rules of the game**

In Serbia a lot of progress was achieved in critical, sectors, but there is more work to be done. When I arrived in September 2009, there were tensions, there was political pressure on several fronts and sensitive areas of southern Serbia and Sandzak were under tension. I now think that the situation is different, the elections that took place in a very smooth way are behind us and Serbia experienced a very democratic shift of parties in power – states in an interview with *Blic*, Dimitrios Kypreos, the outgoing Head of the OSCE Mission to Serbia.

**What is your assessment of the general human rights and media freedom situation in Serbia?**

- I would say that significant progress was achieved with regards to human rights, especially in protection of human rights thanks to direct elections of the National Minority Councils held in June 2010. With regards to media freedom, the situation is more complex, but not even close to the one from before 2000. It has much improved. We have more-than-less privatization in the media market, but this market is not like any other, because it has to do with the right of the citizens to be informed. Therefore, the state has to contribute to it by making appropriate rules of the game. Regarding the implementation of the Media Strategy, we have already made contact with the new Minister Bratislav Petkovic and we expect good co-operation.

**To what degree is Kosovo an obstacle to Serbia and when do you expect the Belgrade-Pristina dialogue to be continued?**

The issue of Kosovo is one of the political conditions that the EU placed on Serbia within the process of accession. We know that the up-to-now dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina produced positive results that brought solutions for every day needs of the citizens. The dialogue is a part of good neighbourly relations, which are also among the

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pre-conditions that the EU places before any country that wishes to become its member. The dialogue in any form is what we need in the region of South East Europe.

**When do you expect Serbia to get the date for the start of negotiations for EU membership?**

I can only reply to this as a citizen of Europe, because I represent the OSCE which has 56 participating states, twice as much as the EU. The Union is now in the critical phase of redefining itself because of the debt crisis. The EU spends the majority of its energy in finding solutions to the crisis and the establishment of an important structure that could change the whole outlook of the EU. My logic tells me that these efforts will be a priority in the EU dynamics in the upcoming period.

**Q: Some of the main problems that Serbia is facing on its road toward the EU are judicial reform and the fight against organized crime. What is your assessment of the progress in these areas?**

A: When judicial reform started in December 2009, with an assessment of the work of judges and prosecutors, everyone supported it, including the international community. During the process of reform, mistakes were made, and it was concluded that some things should be changed. Within one month, the revision of the review of the election of the prosecutors was concluded, and in May 2012 it was completed also for the judges.

Since the very beginning we received information that there were large problems in the functioning of courts, because, if you put under a question mark one third of the judiciary and it stops functioning, the system becomes paralyzed, as it is impossible to work with two thirds of judges and prosecutors who were placed in an uncertain situation. The existing problem has actually increased.

**Q: What do you suggest?**

A: It is necessary to create the conditions needed for all judges and prosecutors to begin a productive and useful dialogue with the leadership, be it political or administrative, but as soon as possible, and based on these confidence-building measures the solutions should be found. The associations are not satisfied and there is a climate of distrust between some of the members and the leadership. Long-term solutions are just fine, but now we need a short-term solution, a pill that will affect the drop of patient's temperature, because fever can kill him.

(Box)

**Regional Co-operation**

**Q: Do you believe that after the election of President Tomislav Nikolic regional co-operation has become stagnant, and what actions would you recommend to Serbia in order to improve contacts in the region?**

A: I do not believe that regional co-operation depends exclusively on a certain personality, with the president, to be more specific. Regional co-operation is a structural need of our entire region, which cannot move forward without it, and all countries in the region realize that. It is a prerequisite for any path that leads to Europe, especially the one leading to the EU.