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Interview: Peter Balazs, former Minister of Foreign Affairs of Hungary

We want the entire Balkans to join the EU at the same time



Former Minister of Foreign Affairs of Hungary, Peter Balazs, who was the appointed Hungarian Commissioner until the end of the mandate of the Commissioner Romano Prodi, was recently in Ohrid, where he gave a lecture at the School for Young Leaders, which is for the second time organized by President George Ivanov. This experienced diplomat and professor at the Central European University (CEU) leads a special department dealing with EU enlargement.

As a politician or professor, what was important to tell the young leaders in Ohrid?

- As a former Foreign Minister I tried to provide information for the outside world. My contribution was to help to understand the place of Macedonia in the world, in the Western Balkans and in Europe. My focus was on EU enlargement and I discussed some problems we faced with in the past and some in the future that are related to the enlargement process.

How did they understand the idea of Europe?

- They are young people who are very well selected and I have the impression they have a very good understanding of the world and a realistic picture of where Macedonia is today.

We are a bit older than these young leaders and I wonder whether we know better now what the idea of Europe is and whether they differ between the Western and Eastern Europe. Previously there were clear divisions, but where are we now in 2011?

- Europe and European integration were a peace project after the Second World War. It still is today, but it is more focused on regional governance. We are trying to achieve something that exists in the world - to establish a rule among states at the global level.

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States are too small and even Germany itself is too small to cope with the global processes such as energy, environment, monetary issues and the market. The global world is not under control, so it is necessary to find a balance. Therefore, the EU is a great attempt and even more than just that, because we have mutual rules. We were tested through the last financial crisis and I think the biggest challenge for Europe is to stabilize its foundation - the eurozone.

Europe should not hesitate

For us, the Macedonians, it is still a dream to become an EU member. You were the EU Commissioner under Romano Prodi. What should Macedonia do to finally cross the threshold of the European Union?

- There are two issues: one is whether Macedonia is ready for EU membership and the second one is whether the EU is ready for a new round of enlargement. Currently, none of us is ready. Macedonia will need more time to fulfill all the norms and regulations, since all its institutions have to be at the European level. The EU norms were created by the achievements of the richest European countries. Hungary is somewhere halfway and I can say it was difficult for the country to meet all the EU requirements regardless of the traditions of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and the developed legal system. Therefore, it will be even harder for the countries such as Macedonia, Albania or Bosnia-Herzegovina. It will take time. On the other hand, the EU is not ready for expansion. The EU is not ready to involve itself with the most competitive partner - Turkey. The EU hesitates, instead of the possibility to take Turkey in. The second problem is the Western Balkans, an interesting region of seven countries. Croatia is already quite close to its membership and most of these countries are relatively small and already inside the EU, i.e. surrounded by EU members. We need a bold decision, a big leap towards the future rather than spending time on European laws or individual approaches to Serbia or any other country. We need the entire region. The CEU, in cooperation with the European Commission, supports the approach that all the countries should be admitted on the same day. It will prevent tensions that exist today such as "I'm better", "I progressed more", which is not good for the region. One thing is to meet all the conditions, but another is to have a stable region. We are working on new solutions that will be similar to those of the large expansion.

Political will can resolve the Kosovo knot

What will happen in such a scenario?

- First, the issue of money does not matter, because the entire Western Balkans has a population almost like Romania. So it all comes down to readiness and political will. There is no war in the region and hence no major reasons for the Balkans to be kept outside the EU. Even the issue of Kosovo could be resolved if all these countries were taken together, although it is not only about Kosovo, but EU member states which fear their separatists, such as Romania, Slovakia and Spain. Then you need to stabilize the eurozone, to form the new budget and to elect a new European Parliament and a new

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European Commission in 2014. Only after this date we can do something. There was an interesting Greek idea to do something for the 100th anniversary of the First World War. It is a good year and you should strive towards that goal and to prepare for action.

But Greece is in a serious financial trouble and who knows whether it still has it in mind.

- It is not up to Greece but the EU to resolve the issue.

Is the name issue which is Macedonia facing also a sovereignty issue?

- The issue of sovereignty is very important and self-determination for the country as Macedonia is a major issue for the people. We are who we are, we have a state, government, president. It is good, but at the same time there were 24 new states established in the region with the dissolution of Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia and the USSR. There have never been so many countries in Europe since the Middle Ages. You should not confuse the issue of sovereignty with self-determination and culture, because there is a gap between those two issues. You should use the opportunity to use your language, culture, to have its own government, but our forces should be united with other countries, because no country can build a railway without being associated with its neighbors. No country can eliminate pollution if there is no cooperation with others. The same rule applies to sovereignty.

Berlusconi's brother Orban

How do European leaders see the moves of the Hungarian government on the issue of media freedom and the Constitution, because they are still issues of sovereignty?

- The EU is a family with 27 children. Today the Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban was compared with Berlusconi and Sarkozy, the populist men who use the same rhetoric and do similar things. Maybe Berlusconi is the closest Orban's brother.



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