Interview: Gerd Wagner, Senior Deputy High Representative

He is married, has three children, a daughter born in Belgrade 1973, and two sons (one 17 and the other 20). About his present job he says: 'I feel that we are needed here. The OHR is accepted well and I have the feeling that we can do a useful job here. No one thinks that anything can be done in Bosnia without the leadership and without the support we are providing.'

Carlos Westendorp was already criticised by Americans because there was no proper leadership and consultations?

I think that such criticism was careless. There were a lot of meetings here with regard to the ambassadorial issue, there were a lot of serious consultations on all three sides and we didn't impose any solutions. It would be stupid and naďve to expect the Presidency members alone, or Prlic, Zivalj and Bozanovic to reach an agreement.

Impression is that the criticism was with reference to the lack of consultations with the American partner?

We included all the members of the Contact Group. Maybe the Americans had expected special treatment. We thought that we covered the American view by involving the American Embassy, the same as we did with all other members of the Contact Group. I have no reason to assume that that was the wrong approach.

As far as the deadlines are concerned, the American approach is quite contradictory. On one hand, they say that we should have left it up to the parties themselves to decide on the

issue of ambassadors, which would have taken a long time. On the other hand, they say that we should be very strict and impose sanctions in case the Citizenship Law is not adopted.

There is an opinion that this measure to cancel the relations with the ambassadors is actually pressure on the Bosniak side?

I have read [Wednesday] Oslobodjenje comment with great interest. A number of statements in it were accurate. The intention was not to punish the Bosniak side, because we want this issue resolved. The persons who were suspended are not there only in the interest of the Bosniak nation, but are representing the interests of the whole of BiH.

Nevertheless, isn't it too daring to propose that Pale chooses the ambassador to Washington?

We can't have only one option, i.e. that the three-member Presidency appoints the ambassadors in Washington, Bonn, or in any other capital, and this is what caused concern in the US too. I doubt that Zubak and Krajisnik will agree with Izetbegovic appointing the ambassadors both in New York and Washington.

How do you comment on the position of the Bosniak side that your office did not act in line with the Constitution, because there is no proposal on representation of "others" among the ambassadorial posts?

We would be happy if Zubak, Krajisnik, and Izetbegovic nominate a representative of the "others". This is clear: no one said that Krajisnik must nominate a Serb, Zubak a Croat, and Izetbegovic a Bosniak.

If no solution is reached with regard to ambassadors, what is the next step?

We are so close to reaching an agreement that I refuse to consider the possibility that this agreement will not be

reached. I don’t think that this is the time when one should think about raising the level of sanctions. Izetbegovic is meeting Tudjman in Split today, Holbrooke is here tomorrow, so these issues will be discussed.

What do you expect from Holbrooke’s and Gelbard’s mission?

Holbrooke is well-known. I think that Dayton is his responsibility in a way. It’s good that he has the opportunity to come personally and see what is happening. There must be concentrated efforts of all those interested and we appreciate serious American involvement. The American voice was always heard and at this point it is impossible to foresee to what extent progress will be made this time. These are bilateral discussions, but I am sure that we will be intensively briefed by the US after a few days.

Two important things happened since you have arrived to Sarajevo less than a month ago: joint police was established in Mostar, and the Agreement on Organisation of Central Bosnian Canton Joint Police was signed on Tuesday. Will the deadlines be honoured, and if not, what will you do then?

As far as the police is concerned, progress is very slow, but I am glad to say that there is progress. I am quite sure that we do need joint police, particularly in these two mixed cantons which are crucial for the success of the Federation, in order to make them safe for return of refugees, for which public safety is the most important thing. I am glad that this agreement is signed and I shall go to Travnik myself next week.

It is a good thing that what happened in Jajce made a lot of people act, it mobilised all those who are interested to enable the return of refugees. Maybe the unfortunate event in Jajce could have some positive consequences in such a way.

German Foreign Minister Kinkel suspended the aid for Jajce.

The responses of the German Foreign Minister, our office, and international organisations are all alike: we have all condemned that act and this is a serious warning that things cannot go on like that. I expect a positive outcome in the area and I am convinced that, as soon as we have concrete results in the Canton in relation to the refugees issue, the German Foreign Ministry will take that into account.

The agreement signed on Tuesday says, and this is what the Federation President and Vice-president have also agreed to, as well as the Canton Governor Ivan Saric and the Canton Deputy Minister of Internal Affairs Fabijan Trbara, that the expelled Bosniaks should return by the end of next week. I hope that this will be honoured.

What does the OHR propose as a solution for the Citizenship Law?

I myself am very encouraged because I see that a lot of effort has been put into solving this issue. I am not sure that agreement will be reached on every article of the law. As far as the principle on issuing of citizenship is concerned, the BiH citizenship and entity citizenship always go hand in hand. There cannot be a BiH citizenship without simultaneously having the entity citizenship.

The fundamental problem here is who has the right to issue citizenship, because BiH is the only internationally recognised body. There is a fear, as Mr. Silajdzic said, that, if the entities are allowed to issue citizenship on their own, we could have 150,000 or 200,000 new Serbs in BiH from the so-called republic of Serb krajina [sic!] or Slavonia, who have fled to Bosnia and Herzegovina during the war in Croatia, which would create a serious imbalance.

There should be no differences between the state and entity citizenship laws and they must be harmonised. There is only one principle for BiH as a whole. We cannot have different

criteria for each entity.

How can this problem be solved?

If they ask us for help, which they will probably do, someone will have to solve that. That will probably be this office, but we shall also have to consult the European Venetian Commission that was established by the Council of Europe in order to solve this kind of legal issue. The people of BiH have a right to a clear Citizenship Law and we are always ready to do that, but with the consultation of European experts.

Isn’t the situation clear-cut there? The state of BiH is internationally recognised, and the entities are a part of that state and cannot act on their own. When is the solution expected?

In the next few days. They cannot go on like this for forever.

Does the Serb side have to agree with such an understanding?

I hope so. That is the only way in my opinion. If the sides can’t agree, then someone else will have to do it for them.

If they do not agree, what are the penalties?

One of the proposals is to not allow travel to those who are blocking the agreement, but this is still under consideration.

Your predecessor, Mr. Michael Steiner, was very popular. We can’t help comparing you because you’re also a German. How will you cope with that?

There are no problems there. Steiner is Steiner, and Wagner is Wagner. I know that he was very popular, but I come with a great experience. I have the feeling that the people have accepted me and I also have the advantage to be speaking your language.

You have talked to all the important politicians since you arrived. What do you think of them?

I can tell you what my general impression is. I think that there is a new spirit of pragmatism, which is represented more by some than the others. I wish to work with these people. It’s easier for me to work with people who are willing to be co-operative and who are ready to compromise.