

Interview: Carlos Westendorp, the High Representative "Corruption is Normal Practice"

The High Representative Carlos Westendorp will have to make some huge decisions in 1998, and also to implement the authority given in Bonn, because the International Community wishes to speed up the implementation of the Peace Agreement. It was rather obvious during the visits of British Prime-Minister Blair, US President Clinton, German Councillor Kohl... Everyone expects results, and Westendorp is the one to achieve them, despite the obstacles he will surely face.

Mr. Westendorp, it is holiday time, the New Year is coming. What will be the tasks of the International Community in BiH in the next year, that is, what are the matters and priorities to be resolved?

AN OPTIMIST WITH REASON

The goals of the International Community in BiH match the goals of the people in BiH. We have to make a joint effort, we have to work together to create a stable peace. This country must begin again to turn to coexistence, prosperity and integration in Europe. I think we will succeed in that. We must not fail again, because we must not allow another conflict in BiH, neither you, nor the International Community. We are determined to avoid this and we will remain as long as necessary to achieve this. But I am an optimist. I do not think it will take too long, because I can see the signs of fast progress. It has not been achieved yet, but we are not too far from it. It can be seen, especially in conversations with young people. Many of the young people believe that there are monopolies of authority and power that can hardly be changed. I told them it is not so. Some day, you will have the right to vote, free media, and the right to choose between different ideologies. Then, you will be able to change what you do not like.

You said you are an optimist. Based on your experience so far, can you tell us which problems represent the biggest obstacle to the fulfilment of your optimistic prognosis?

The main problems are coming from the resistance of parties and authorities to accept each other, because they believe that joint life is a threat to their communities. Political parties in BiH are mainly single-ethnic, and this is because everyone thinks they must protect and defend themselves from others. This is the problem. There is no ideological confrontation, there are no conservatives to oppose liberals, or liberals to oppose democrats etc. Here, the Croats are against Bosniaks, Bosniaks are against Serbs... And this is what is wrong. Something must be changed here.

PROTECTORATE ON HOLD

At the conference of the Steering Board for the DPA Implementation, held on December 9 And 10 in Bonn, you received additional authority. How will this work in practice, and how will you actually implement your arbitration decisions in the field, in the event that they are not acceptable to the representatives of the joint institutions or the entities?

I am ready to use my authorities in an acceptable manner. This means that the sides will be given the opportunity to reach a solution by themselves. In the event they cannot do that, I will certainly not impose something absurd on either of the sides. If I see there is a groundless blockade of the process, in such cases I will impose solutions. I can give you various examples - when it comes to the Law on Customs Tariffs of BiH, the CoM was not able to make an agreement, I imposed it, and it will become law on January 10. As for the registration plates, we achieved a reasonable, compromise, neutral solution, without national symbols and marks. If the sides cannot agree about it, the proposal will be adopted and implemented. In the field, it will be done by IPTF and SFOR, and the cars without the new plates will not be able to drive in traffic. There is no agreement about the joint currency and its

design. I authorised the Central Bank Governor to try to reach a solution with the sides within a month. If they cannot agree, or if the process is blocked, the Governor will say after a month: this is your new currency, take it or leave it. I am sure that everyone will accept, because everybody needs money.

Before the Bonn conference, the public speculated a lot about the establishment of a protectorate over BiH. Officially, a protectorate was not established, but the speculations remained, and some are mentioning January 1998 as a possible start date?

I always say that a protectorate is not an option on which the DPA could be based, and I think this is right. Bosnia is in the heart of Europe, and it is much better that the local authorities make their own decisions. I said in Bonn that a protectorate was not necessary, for now. I think it will not be necessary. But of course, if there is no progress, which I do not believe, not in January but within three-four months, I will be the first to say to the International Community: This does not work, let's try something else.

KRAJISNIK'S MISTAKES

Recently, BiH was visited by a high-level American delegation, led by the President, Bill Clinton. The day after, our country was visited by the German Councillor Kohl. As the High Representative, what is your opinion about these visits?

It is clear that a visit to soldiers in the field is normal at Christmas time, but these visits are not always at the highest level. President Clinton and Councillor Kohl clearly show and prove the readiness and obligation of the International Community, and particularly two of its most important representatives, regarding the speed of the peace process. It is clear. I was always saying that there was a common determination of all countries, and it was shown in Bonn, that the processes in BiH should be given a new impulse in the forthcoming period.

BiH Presidency Member, Momcilo Krajisnik, was not present at the National Theatre in Sarajevo, where President Clinton addressed the citizens of BiH. Do you perhaps have something to say about it?

Mr. Krajisnik, as well as the people who think like him, are responsible for the situation in the RS. If their ideology is the independence of RS, as it is, and which I do not support, but which exists, they should be acting much differently than they do now. If I were in his shoes, how would I act? I would be co-operative regarding relations with the International Community, I would obtain its support and assistance, I would bring my people to a position even better than the one of the citizens in the BiH Federation, and then, in a normal, democratic country, I would ask for self-determination. But he is doing completely the opposite. Why – I do not know. It is something in the area of psychology, or even psychiatry.

PUNISHMENT FOR THE SDS

Regardless of the fact that hard-liners from the Pale circle are guiding the RS to misery, the people of this entity are still supporting them. Why is that so and what can you do to show the people from RS that they are making a mistake?

It is actually about several people who are preventing the RS population approaching prosperity and having a normal life and safety. What is their message to the people? They say: The international Community will never give you any support. The International Community does not like us and we will have to resist to the end. When you listen to such messages systematically, for years, then you simply do not have a choice and you resist. So the problem is not in the people, but in the leaders, and how can you punish the leaders and without punishing the people? I think the only way is to open the media, even with the use of force. It is ugly to democratise a country using force, but where you have such abnormal mentality in the leadership, then you have to do this. And what happened? The citizens of RS punished the leading party. They had a majority in Parliament before and now they have half the number of representatives they had before. So the system works. I am convinced that once we have the new Parliament and the Government, people will receive every assistance from the International Community, and if this is the case, the people will understand that their former leadership was lying to them.

There were once some discussions about replacement of the people in the joint institutions of BiH who obstruct the

implementation of the Peace Agreement. Do you have the mandate for such action, and is there a legal procedure that has to be followed in such cases?

It is part of the regulations and procedures for the work of the BiH Presidency. That means if someone is incapable physically, that is if one is ill, or mentally, because he does not want to go forward, then he must be replaced. Who can do this?... I cannot, but the voters can. The thing that I can do is to tell such person that he is out of the game. You do not fulfil your obligations, you are against the Constitution. Now, let us hold elections for the empty seat and choose another person. I do not think such measures will be necessary. I hope Mr. Krajisnik will be co-operative, especially when he receives instructions from the newly-formed Parliament, which, I trust, will be smarter than the former one.

NO ONE GOES ON THE STREET

Next year, 1998, has already been pronounced the year of return of refugees to their homes. However, with the existing law regulations, it will be practically impossible to carry this out. What do you intend to do?

We tried to put both entities under the maximum pressure with the intention of modifying their laws in accordance with Annex 7 of the DPA, in order to enable the return of refugees to their pre-war homes. In that sense, the RS is more regressive and without the political will, so that we will have to put pressure on the new Government to solve this problem. BiH Federation has the advantage, but because of internal political reasons and because of the defence reflex of their clients who are members of single-ethnic parties, we still have the problem. They believe that the necessary changes in the Law will throw the current residents out into the street, which is not true. Namely, there are amendments, firstly to give these people enough time, and secondly to find them secondary accommodation. But many people own two apartments which are not of their own, but they are the permanent members of the establishment. It has to be changed, otherwise, the International Community will act austere against the local authorities with all its powers, including the abolishing of the economic and military assistance they currently have. It has to be changed and we will not tolerate this situation any longer.

The CAFAO reports caused your severe reaction, and one of the Bonn conference conclusions is establishment of an anti-corruption team in your Office. What is the purpose of all this?

Corruption is a natural tendency of people who have some kind of authority, and not so large incomes. To have the authority and not to have the income, if there is no control, can mean the great possibility that you will put some money in your own pocket. We have a similar thing, it is not only the case in BiH. However, we have commissions, systems and people who deal with this kind of control so the cases of corruption are much more limited. It is impossible to extinguish corruption in BiH, because, after all, we cannot do that in the countries we came from. What we wish is to limit it, and reduce it, so to say, to reasonable measures. As for the anti-corruption team, it will not be anything like the group of Elliot Ness, or something like that. We will have a small team of experts, prosecutors and judges, three-four, not more, who will offer technical assistance and overview different activities, mainly regarding the budget, customs, incomes, and it will be done with the assistance of CAFAO and the Parliament. The Parliament commissions must be informed. There is also the problem of the justice system which is not well developed. Corruption must also be included in the Criminal Law. Therefore there are various activities that we have to do in the next months with regard to reducing corruption to a normal level.

Speculations about departure

Just after the Bonn conference, speculations appeared in the Croatian press that you want to leave the duty of the High Representative, and that, on the insistence of the USA, Jacques Klein will replace you?

The story is completely groundless and there is no need for a comment. It is absolutely absurd, and it cannot be. Firstly, I will finish my work here because I have the obligation and the wish to finish it. Secondly, the Americans are fully supporting me, as well as my deputy Klein.

Waiting for a smarter parliament

I hope that the new RS Parliament will be smarter than the previous one. If you had a smarter Parliament, the representatives would say: Why not accept the joint currency that is reasonable, why not accept the registration plates, passports, why not meet in some other place, and not always to make a farce about going to the Museum or to Lukavica, which is absolutely abnormal. I think that no normal parliament would accept something like this.

On the other hand, it is not logical to discuss irrational matters. I can understand discussions over different interests, but I cannot understand them fighting over absurd and irrational things such as the size of the letters on the passports. It is unacceptable.

Arrests according to the mandate

SFOR acted in accordance with its mandate, in Prijedor, as well as in Vitez, and there is no doubt that it will continue in such a manner in the future. These will not be isolated cases, there will be more of them. Of course, I was always saying that the indicted war criminals must get to the Hague. If they do not do that voluntarily, if their governments do not extradite them, then it should be done by the only one who is capable of it, and that is the international troops.

The Ceausescu model

If you go to Gorazde, that is close to some places in the RS, you will see this city is recovering. Moving towards prosperity. At the same time, in Foca, for example or Visegrad, the situation is similar to Romania fifty years ago, during the reign of Ceausescu and his wife, or even worse. What the RS is now has to be changed, and if they do not do that by themselves, we will have to do it.

Message to Bosnians and Herzegovinians

Do you have some New Years message that you would like to address to the citizens of BiH at the end of our conversation?

You have to be cautious and careful with your authorities. You must try and think well in order to recognise those who serve your interests. These interests match with words like democracy, economic recovery, education, a good public service... On the other hand, those who say that they will defend you from the others, from imagined enemies, are giving you a false message, which is not good for anyone.