

Interview: Gerd Wagner, Senior Deputy High Representative”I have already asked for cancelling of suspensions of BiH ambassadorial offices”

‘I have already sent a letter to country members of the IC in which I demanded cancelling of the suspension of BiH ambassadorial offices. The letter was sent today and I expect that, at the very beginning of the next week, some of the ambassadors have pleasure to enjoy contacts which will be re-establish after, for them, rather quiet weekend,’ HR Senior Deputy Wagner said. ‘The new Steiner’ as some people call him looks very tired. In clear Bosnian he explained that he slept almost four hours and that there will be a lot of meetings by the end of working day.

The US pressure

How do you explain the fact that the agreement on allocation of ambassadorial posts was reached only after the US intervention?

Holbrooke and Gelbard are tough persons who have a strong support of the US Administration. Theirs and efforts of the OHR are tightly co-ordinated as always, so the agreement was reached. It would be a nonsense to work differently. One of my priorities is to preserve and build such relations...

Haven’t the Americans actually taken the glory for themselves after the OHR efforts?

All the time they have underlined close relations with the OHR. We have been together during the talks all the time, at some point we were sitting for 16 hours at the meeting without breaks, and I haven’t noticed, for a single moment, that things were developing as such that the Americans were leading the way, and we following their steps. I am very glad that it’s like this.

After the embassies issue, we are facing new challenges - the problems of citizenship and passports. What will you do with that regard?

The CoM in co-operation with the OHR have been working on these issues for a long time. We have suggested a text with solutions and now we are waiting for reactions, although there are other open issues

Such as?

One of them is related to a status of BiH citizenship and entities. The OHR position is clear – there is only one citizenship – citizenship of BiH. Conditions for gaining citizenship of the Federation, for example, should not be opposite with provisions for entering the BiH citizenship. This is our position which we will strongly support.

How much time you think will pass until the agreement is reached with regard to the issues of the Citizenship and Passport?

At the beginning of the next weekend, we will propose a clear text to the CoM and they will have to decide. We will be pleased if they accept it. If some of them refuse it, and others don’t, we will again, unfortunately, consider further measures. I cannot tell you what kind of measures that will be, but we will not allow some of the issues to be ‘discussed’ for forever. We are ready to undertake all necessary measures against those who do not co-operate.

Two questions with regard to this: what do you offer in the text and what are the sanctions for non-co-operation?

Passports for all BiH citizens must be decently designed. The issue what will be on the cover page is still open and we will still have to talk about it. I cannot give you a description, but I will tell you that BiH passport must be designed as a passport of any other European country. We cannot allow that BiH passports look funny which would humiliate their holders. As for the sanctions, it is still too early to talk about them. Let’s see first what will the CoM agree on, and then we will know what to do.

A design of the flag

Another Sintra deadline is expiring - a design of the flag. Does the Office do anything about it?

We have our own ideas regarding the design of the flag and we have talked about that with BiH Presidency. However, we have realised that BiH authorities are not ready to talk about it yet. This is the issue which could be solved. However, our position is that the symbols which would bother or disturb any of the parties should not be put on the flag. Let's be normal and neutral as much as possible and do not allow the flag to be an insult.

What is the OHR suggestion of the flag?

Again, let's give a chance to the local authorities to represent their own proposal. I do not want to go any further to say - gentlemen, this is how your flag will be designed. We are not governors here. If BiH authorities cannot agree we will represent our solution.

Within the last several days, we have been working hard on the issues of citizenship and passports, and it will be a major step forward when we complete our job.

What are the problems that you are focused at when BiH as a state is concerned?

One of the most important issues is the return of refugees. That doesn't only concern the issue of arrival to BiH, but also the issue of their safety, employment, accommodation ... How can people return if there are no answers to above questions. This Office have focused at that issue and it will work a lot on it.

If people ask me - what have happened in Jajce - I will tell them that it is bad and that we strongly condemned it. But this proves that there is a will and readiness of people to return and they do return. However, unfortunately, there are not such examples in the RS. People do not dare to return there. On the other hand - in the central Bosnia, things are developing in the right direction. People have understood that they can live together.

You have mentioned events in the Federation. How would you judge the situation in this entity?

Very often, many actions, does not matter of what kind, determinate nationalistic tendencies and ambitions. This is something that I can understand, this country must pass through these phases, but it can last for forever. I don't want to say that you should forget you nationality. You should have a wider perspective - what is useful, for example.

You have mentioned Jajce. What measures will you undertake in order not to have such incident repeated?

One of the most important measures surely considers establishment of the new joint police forces. The example of the Neretva canton is very good and even better if we take into consideration the fact that that area is very difficult for having the joint police forces. IPTF representatives have told me that things are developing in the right direction there. If we can achieve that in other cantons - primarily central Bosnian one - that would be a major achievement not only for security of people, but for gaining trust in the local leadership. Our office together with other international organisations will constantly be focused at this issue in other cantons too, and I will travel to Travnik and probably to Jajce on Tuesday where we will tell them that they are responsible by acceptance of the agreement reached on last Tuesday at this Office.

How do you judge the situation in the Serb entity?

Finally something is happening there. It seems that things are moving towards more pluralistic and probably more democratic situation. We don't think that domination of national parties for longer term would be 'healthy'. We are concerned because of SDS control in the RS and we want to encourage those who are fed up with stories about their own nation and its glory past. Instead, people there should be concerned about their future and existence. A few days ago in a letter which I sent to the head of OSCE I supported the possibility of scheduling the pre-term elections in the RS. Besides, these days the joint IPTF and SFOR forces organised action against special police forces in that region, and the IC have offered a concrete financial aid to the RS which was refused by the Prime Minister of this entity, because he obviously wants more money. The aid was planned for children and schooling system and people there should know that. There are obvious problems with media in the RS. I would like to stress that we are very active with regard to this issue. Our aim is to establish network of radio and TV stations which will cover the whole RS by mid August. Besides, we are very active in our attempts to provide opposition leaders to address people over controlled media in that part of BiH.

Do you still consider possibility of closing down SRT?

Such possibility is included by the Sintra Declaration. We watch the SRT programme carefully and I cannot tell you when we will decide to undertake such measures, but be sure that we carefully watch programme of this TV station.