

Interview: Robert Farrand, Brcko Supervisor “The Federation is Also to Blame”

During his latest visit to the liberated parts of Brcko, Vecernje Novine journalist asked Mr. Farrand for an interview, and he said ‘No problems, you can ask me whatever you want.’

Mr. Farrand, 60 days have passed since you were appointed as the Brcko Supervisor. Do the Federation and the RS side co-operate with you?

I see the last two months as a period of introducing the procedure and the first phase of tasks that lay ahead. We have established a procedure for refugee return, and introduced it to the public on April 24, and now we are carrying out the process of voters’ registration for the September elections. At the beginning there were some problems with regard to freedom of movement, but we are doing our best to establish it fully in the forthcoming period. The co-operation with the local authorities was necessary in order to implement the issues above, and I see that progress was made although there were certain problems.

The general impression is that too much precious time was spent on some procedures and issues, and according to the situation on the ground, you cannot say that there were concrete results.

I don’t agree with you. First of all, the IPTF office was established and now the RS police patrols together with IPTF. This is only the beginning of a process which will yield results in the following months. I would also like to underline the Sintra Conference. In Article 7 of the Sintra Declaration, it says, I quote: ‘The Steering Board in Sintra especially demands from the Bosnian authorities to stop with mutual accusations, as well as accusations against the international community of the problems that are before them, and to work together constructively and to offer each other reconciliation for their own good.’ I think that this commentary is the best description of certain problems I faced too. I also think that a very important thing that your readers should know is that the international community will not be weakened or will change its position towards some political leaders or opposition. One makes a big mistake for being with those who think they can stop this process which we have entered or that they will achieve something while waiting for us to leave. I am here to implement it. This is my mandate. I am here to encourage implementation of the DPA in and around Brcko.

You have a huge responsibility since the most of civilised European and other countries are involved in this process. If we take into consideration that there are different interests in Brcko – from political, economic, geo-strategic interests to the necessity for helping those who used to live in Brcko or they still live there – when you make decisions regarding some delicate issues, do you have absolute power or do you have to consult your superiors?

I think it’s a normal and usual way when people make decisions – to make them through dialogue and agreements, and not to simply exercise their power. Anyway, I have heard a lot about my, so called, power or need to change regulations which have been already established, but our aim is to establish a long-term society here which will be based on multi-ethnic principles and which will be able to stand on its feet tomorrow. And in order to make any achievement we need to talk and negotiate and find the real path, I repeat, to achieve what we really want. That means, if laws which entered into force are in line with the DPA, we should leave them as they are. And, to cut the story short: everything we do – we do it in an transparent way, and the best thing to do is to read the DPA all over again, because everything is said clearly there.

The winter is coming and about 30,000 refugees from Brcko need to return to their homes. As you said, a lot of things were done at the legal and political level, but not a single refugee from Brcko has returned yet. What is your comment on that?

I don’t agree with you that the international community is slowing the process down. I must tell you that it was very difficult to talk with the Federation representatives about the process of return to Brcko and the problem of accepting RS documentation once people return to Brcko. I think that we solved these problems for now and that 35 families will return in the ZOS, to the village of Stari Rasadnik. Then 29 families will return to Ulice and 10 to Gornji Vuksic. That means that we hold meetings with Return Commissions every other week and the process of

return is being carried out. I am using this opportunity to encourage the returnees to go back to Brod and Omerbegovaca as soon as possible.

Did you have power to influence the OSCE decision which is obviously against Bosniaks and Croats, whereas the Serbs had a chance to settle down even more voters than expected?

With all due respect I must tell you that I don't agree with your claims since it is not what actually happened. Firstly, the Federation takes responsibility for non-establishment of the Commission on its part. This problem has not happened only in Brcko but also in other 17 municipalities. I am sorry to say that the Federation authorities should have solved this problem, instead of deciding not to do it. I don't accept your criticism of the OSCE decision if it's not based on facts.

Then I would ask you this, if you allow me: The Arbitration should include the whole of Brcko municipality. Why wasn't the OSCE decision based on that fact?

The area of supervision is located south from the IEBL and it is not possible simply to ignore the line. The line follows the former front line. The existence of the line was accepted by signing the DPA and my office was established on that basis. That means, it depends on the Arbitration Tribunal's decision which will be made on March 15, 1998, what will happen to that line in the end. I am here to implement the Arbitration decision, and not act as a judge.

The returnees have set two conditions for their return: freedom of movement and not to have the RS insignia on their documents. If the September elections are held, is there anybody who will be able to provide or ban the issues above?

I can only tell you that returnees must respect RS law if they want to live there. One of the laws is possession of RS documents. That was one of the issues we couldn't agree with Bosniak side. I have tried and I think I succeeded in finding a reasonable compromise. We have a little card printed half in English and the other half will be combined with the RS ID. That way the holders of this ID will not see the RS insignia on it. I have to tell you that the majority I have talked with about this idea are rather satisfied with it. It is written on the ID that it is valid only during the process of Arbitration and implementation of the DPA in the Brcko area, and until the final decision on Brcko. People can do whatever they want with this ID, but the returnees definitely have to accept the RS documents.

Mr. Farrand we can carry the RS documents before and during the Arbitration. Do you expect us to carry them after the Arbitration decision and in that way recognise the RS authority?

If all of your problems could have been solved without the international supervision, that would have been the best way to do it. But it seems that some of the issues we discuss now couldn't be discussed at the time and here I turn again to the Sinta Declaration: if people want to solve their problems, then they should address the international community. We are here to work clearly and openly in order to help people in BiH.

It is up to you to decide - I will protect the people who have the legal right to return to Brcko. I will help as much as I can to provide them the security, but no-one is able to guarantee it. We can only promise to do the best we can. It is up to you whether you will return or not, but you shouldn't forget: You should register first if you want to vote - Farrand said in clear Bosnian.