

Article about Carlos Westendorp, High Representative: "Diplomat Rules Bosnia With a Strong Hand"

SARAJEVO, Bosnia-Herzegovina, April 9 – The Spanish diplomat Carlos Westendorp, the top international official charged with carrying out the Bosnian peace agreement, was in the Presidential palace in Zagreb recently listening to a windy lecture by Croatian President Franjo Tudjman on European history and the Islamic threat to Western civilization.

The President, Franjo Tudjman, who led his country in fighting the Muslims and the Serbs, told Mr. Westendorp that history will place him alongside Franco as "a savior of Western civilization."

Mr. Westendorp, 61, a bitter opponent of the Spanish dictator, who died in 1975, said: "One of the merits of democracy is that we got rid of saviors. We don't want anyone to take care of us. We can take care of ourselves."

Mr. Westendorp is fighting a new battle in Bosnia, one that is often lost in the incremental steps that elate European technocrats and goes unnoticed by most everyone else. With the blessing of Washington, he now rules Bosnia by fiat and is determined to shatter the monolithic grip on power by the Serbian, Croatian and Muslim nationalist parties that waged the war and control the three partitioned entities.

Nationalist Bosnian Serb newspapers, including Serb Oslobodenje and Javnost, refer angrily to Mr. Westendorp as "the dictator" and complain of "colonial domination by the West." The Muslim-led government says that Mr. Westendorp has forced it to comply with demands of the Dayton peace accords, such as the return of Serbian and Croatian refugees to Sarajevo, while not putting equal pressure on the Bosnian Serbs.

The recent heavy-handed intervention by Mr. Westendorp, the High Representative, has transformed the post, once largely ceremonial, into that of a governor general who runs a protectorate that has been promised more than \$5 billion in international aid.

In the last few weeks, decisions on a host of issues as diverse as media licensing, housing and tariff laws and the design for a common flag, have poured out of his office, which is staffed by 212 international bureaucrats in downtown Sarajevo.

The nondescript office block, now nicknamed "The Presidency," has dismissed elected officials who obstructed peace efforts, appointed international administrators in disputed towns such as Brcko and Srebrenica, designed a new common currency, common license plates, common passports and a national emblem. It is drafting municipal statutes, reforming election laws and attempting to find the money and training to create a new multi-ethnic border police.

Mr. Westendorp has strayed beyond Bosnia. A week ago he threatened Croatia with international sanctions unless it permitted the return of some 500,000 ethnic Serbs driven from the country during the war. He is also working to find the financial support to unite Serbian, Croatian and Muslim Socialist parties to challenge the ruling nationalists and has pushed for the arrest of Bosnian war criminals.

The draconian measures, endorsed in a conference last December in Bonn by the six nations — the United States, France, Germany, Italy, Great Britain and Russia — that oversee the Bosnian peace effort, have inched the three factions closer together, although few of the three million displaced people and refugees have returned to their homes.

The continued failure to build a country where different ethnic groups can break down the walls of partition and live as neighbors, Mr. Westendorp believes, "is a recipe for another war," one that is most likely to be triggered by the Muslim-led government in Sarajevo, which he said now has the most powerful army of the three factions.

The goal of a united Bosnia is one critics contend is impossible to achieve so soon after the war. Mr. Westendorp concedes wryly that it is "almost impossible."

The decision by international administrators to take over the governing of Bosnia has also raised troubling questions about how the state will work without continued infusions of outside aid and direct international supervision. The peace agreement signed in Dayton in 1995 has so far stopped the fighting but done little to restore cooperation and trust.

"We have become deeply involved in the functioning of the state," said Christian Clages, the head of the political department. "We may not run essential functions from start to finish, but at all levels we must monitor to make sure the work is being done. We have an unprecedented amount of control on the legislative and executive branches of government. We do not know, however, how we will exit, how we will not perpetuate Bosnia's culture of dependency."

Mr. Westendorp sat early one morning in his home in Sarajevo, with its empty drawers, sparse furniture and barren bookshelves, in blue monogrammed pajamas and a wraparound kimono. His 3-year-old son, Lucas, visiting from Madrid with his mother, Amaya de Miguel, 37, watched cartoons. In the basement a half dozen bodyguards, all plainclothes members of the Spanish Civil Guard, put their stubby MP5 assault rifles under their coats and ordered Mr. Westendorp's armored Audi to pull up to the front gate.

Mr. Westendorp, who was the last Foreign Minister in the Socialist government of Felipe Gonzalez, would at first appear to be an unlikely warrior. He has the well-tailored, impeccable look of a seasoned diplomat and is endowed with a quiet, old-world charm and the disarming modesty of one who is used to humoring dull dinner companions.

He grew up, however, chafing under a regime that fused conservative Catholicism and Spanish nationalism, one headed by a general who was escorted into cathedrals under a canopy held by prelates. When Mr. Westendorp, the son of an army officer who was imprisoned by the Republican government during the civil war, joined the Socialist Party as a diplomat 30 years ago, it was a clandestine organization.

"Bosnia suffers from the same phenomena we experienced in Spain," he said. "The church bears a large responsibility for the war. The Bosnians are the same people. They are all Slavs. Religious identity is simply the *raison d'être* for these nationalist leaders to hold onto power, like animals who cling to their turf. We need to build a new set of values, new traditions, new political parties to present competing ideas and culture to overcome these nationalist movements."

The political transformation in Bosnia began last June when Mr. Westendorp took over from Carl Bildt, the former Swedish Prime Minister, as High Representative. Mr. Bildt, deeply frustrated by his inability to move the three Bosnian leaderships, lobbied hard to broaden the powers of the High Representative's office. It was Mr. Westendorp who reaped the benefits.

British soldiers from the NATO-led peacekeeping force occupied the Bosnian Serb city of Banja Luka in July, taking over all public buildings and handing them to Biljana Plavsic, the Bosnian Serb President and chief rival of the hardliners based in Pale. After the intervention, which saw the local police disarmed, a British officer sat in Ms. Plavsic's office answering her phone.

Next came the arrests of war-crimes suspects by peacekeepers and the forced dissolution of the Bosnian Serb special police units, the main prop that enriched and empowered the Bosnian Serb nationalists in their stronghold of Pale.

Mr. Westendorp has lately begun to deliver deadlines and ultimatums to erode the partition. He has told the Sarajevo Government, which seized the apartments of tens of thousands of ethnic Croats and Serbs after the war, that it has until the end of the year to return 20,000 people to their homes.

He has informed the Bosnian Serbs and ethnic Croats that continued aid will depend on the return of those who were expelled. He has also threatened to ban Bosnian officials from running in the September elections if they refuse to carry out the steps mandated by the Dayton accords.

License plates, flags, passports and tariff laws can be rammed down the throats of the nationalists. But the idea of returning refugees to their homes throughout Bosnia challenges the bedrock of the power of the ethnic leaders who base their ideology on the protection of their group from the others.

Mr. Westendorp, despite the daunting task before him, brings to his job a missionary zeal that flashes into full view

the moment he speaks of Franco's Spain.

"I walked out of the presidential palace in Zagreb, past all the flags and the guards in their ornate uniforms, that smell of totalitarian power," he said. "I knew where I was. I remembered how it was when our television signed off at night, always playing the national anthem while we looked at Franco's image. I have a special distaste for nationalist one-party states."