

Večernji list: Interview with High Representative Christian Schmidt

Interviewer: Zoran Krešić

Večernji list: What are you going to do with the Federation President Marinko Čavara? He announced appointments to the Constitutional Court, but this did not leave a good impression on the American Embassy?!

Christian Schmidt: There is a German saying used in the military jargon, but it can be applied to this case, too. It goes: "Prussians don't shoot back instantly". True, I am pretty much surprised that nothing has happened on this front for three years. Mr Čavara now needs to be left alone to do his job. However, I have not seen him do it constructively. In the next weeks we will talk to each other. I am not keen now to "cut heads". Actually, I wish the heads to start working. That's what they are paid for, not to make blockages. Everyone has got their chance. Mr Čavara has his, too.

Večernji list: You gave the politicians six weeks to agree on the electoral reform, but they still do nothing?!

Christian Schmidt: I called them to do their job, to do what is expected of them. You see, they say the High Representative cannot do. But those gentlemen have a duty to do their job and answer certain questions. When we talked, I was a little loud, that's true, but in any case I'm interested in what it will be, what their ideas will be and what solutions they will offer.

Večernji list: What is on your "menu" in terms of this reform? There was a lot of speculation among the public, but in fact no one has officially confirmed what else you plan to do?!

Christian Schmidt: That's because I don't participate in these games that are being played here. Sometimes it seems to me that some people in BiH know more about me than I do. It is true that we must solve the blockages, especially in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina. I think that, after the elections, considering that they will go to Brussels again then, as agreed with the President of the European Council, Mr. Charles Michel, and discuss accession to the European Union. These things must be resolved. To be perfectly clear, destructive behavior is not part of the political game. I wanted to send this message clearly. Likewise, an equally important part of this is that it is not only the three constituent peoples that decide on BiH and what will be going on here. There are the others, too. This is a very important question. I got the impression that the three leading parties from all three ethnic communities make bigger differences between themselves than the population itself.

Večernji list: What about the Croats in BiH, how to help them?

Christian Schmidt: The number of Croats in Bosnia and Herzegovina is decreasing. In a way, this is also a consequence of the success of the Republic of Croatia. If someone doesn't have a job in Mostar, then he goes to work in Dubrovnik. The majority of Croats have dual citizenship of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia, and thus are also citizens of the European Union. Croatia will introduce the euro at the beginning of next year, and I hope that they will soon have Schengen as well. Of course, that is attractive to young people, and one cannot blame them for that. What I would criticize in a certain way here in Bosnia and Herzegovina is a political and social issue. And that is how to achieve that people, regardless of whether they are Croats, Bosniaks or Serbs, see their future here, in this country. We have to try to get out of this contradictory logic, which is "if you won't fulfill what I need, then I won't do this other thing for you". The number of Croats in BiH is much smaller than members of other communities, but according to the Dayton Agreement, which is the basis of my work, this community also has the right to political responsibility and representation. That's why we have no choice but to take that slightly uncomfortable step or take the uncomfortable path to distinguish expectations from reality. To distinguish claims from reality and to simply go down that road of agreement.

Večernji list: Now you are using diplomatic vocabulary?!

Christian Schmidt: I expected that the question would be raised as to what I meant by this, and I say that we

have arrived exactly where we need to be. And that is precisely constructive thinking. This is what I expect from politicians. Of course I didn't tell them – something has to happen in six weeks. I gave them a period of time and during that period we should discuss possibilities and solutions. Večernji list: Croats feel frustrated anyway, they are tense and in fear that after the next elections the Bosniaks could completely push them out of power, literally eliminate them. First of all, it refers to the House of Peoples. Can we tell them not to be in fear? Christian Schmidt: You can certainly say that. In the House of Peoples, the number of representatives is always equal in any case. I think that the people, actually – Croats and Bosniaks, expect their politicians to cooperate and find a way to overcome these problems. That's actually my expectation and the direction I want to take. So, I'm simply trying to encourage politicians to try, and those intentions are often misunderstood. Well, I'm still trying and I will keep on trying. All Croats in BiH, throughout the country, can rightly claim their place in the country, state and institutions. And that right should be made available to them.

Večernji list: What will happen after six weeks, will you impose a decision on electoral and constitutional reforms or will you give in again under pressure?

Christian Schmidt: First, those six weeks do not exactly mean that something will happen when the six weeks are up. It is a purely political measure, so to speak, that something must be done. What exactly it will be, we will see. Everything depends on what will happen in the coming period. They accused me of only dealing with the "Ljubić" case. Of course, other judgments must be implemented. But I think that it must be done by the joint power of politically responsible persons here. Where we can help, we will. When it comes to pressure, pressure comes from all sides in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and people, from all ethnic groups, tell me – Mr. Schmidt, just continue where you started. I tell them that I will continue to do so and I thank them for their trust. It cannot be said about me that I succumb to pressure and give in. But I will not be part of the election campaign. The local politicians, all of them, have made mistakes on that issue. I'm a little disappointed that the topics that are current are being reduced. I have not yet heard anyone, for example, say – let us in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina make an agreement to get things started. In those six weeks, I want to bring them there just in order to get an answer to this question. And not that anyone can leave such a meeting and say – I won or lost. This is absolutely not the case here.

Večernji list: How did you see the threats, I don't even want to name those things that started 30 years ago in BiH, personal threats and insults you received following the announcements regarding the issuance of the decision, all the way to the announcements about secession from the country?

Christian Schmidt: I "have survived" it, but that question should be directed at all those people who are having such positions and viewpoints. I have been a politician for 30 years, and, believe me, one experiences all kinds of things during such period of time. Sometimes individuals overreact in the frenzy of political discussions and political discourse. At the end of the day, why are we all here, myself included?! We did not come here to do some voluntary work, but to prevent the things that happened after the collapse of Tito's Yugoslavia from happening again. So, that all those murders and crimes that happened during that time would never happen again. Sometimes I would really like to talk to those persons who ask such kind of questions and inquire which kind of goal they want to achieve and what their direction is? Okay, you take history and historical events as your foundation, but what is your future, what do you see there? There are a lot of younger people who look at these things in the same way. Anyone who comes to this region in any way should not be "made of sugar". I have weathered a few storms, and I will weather this one too.

Večernji list: You have just mentioned the future, where do you see the future of BiH and its Dayton Peace Agreement?

Christian Schmidt: It is important that the Dayton Agreement remains because it is still the foundation for Bosnia and Herzegovina. Not all provisions of the Dayton Agreement have been fulfilled. For example, Annex VII and the return of people to their homes of origin. In my opinion, we do not need Dayton II. I think we rather need changes to the Constitution that would come from the people themselves. For a number of years, the European Union has had a hard time accepting that BiH is not like other countries. Of course, I remember very well those questions when Croatia or Slovenia acquired the EU membership. In Slovenia, the question of the protection of minorities was raised, but that issue did not have the same weight as it has in BiH, where this issue is constantly being raised. The situation that we have in Bosnia and Herzegovina is simply something that the EU is unfamiliar with. When I returned home after the referendum in Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1992, and when there was a blockade organized by the Serbs, I had a conversation with Otto von Habsburg. At that time, we talked about the fact that the issue of

majority and minority is not the issue here in BiH, but that we have three communities, three constituent peoples in this country, and that this issue is much more complex than the issue of having simply minority and majority or the issue of the protection of minority groups. For this reason, a conference will not help us, either on Brijuni or in Dayton. I think we have to finish the job here with the help of the European spirit. It does not mean that I will refrain from using my powers. By the time we get there, I will be using them for sure. And then they told me – why did not you pass the entire Electoral Law. But wait, that really is a task for the elected officials in Bosnia and Herzegovina. We sat together with Bakir Izetbegović, Dragan Čović and others, and it was clear that a way forward could be found. I think that it is up to elected officials to do that part of the work.

Večernji list: Do you expect Mr. Dodik to recognize you as a legal and legitimate High Representative?

Christian Schmidt: I personally respect Mr. Dodik, and it is probably embarrassing that I have to constantly reiterate that we have known each other for a very long time and that we have done a lot of good things for Bosnia and Herzegovina together. When you keep telling a story that it is in no way grounded in reality and keep repeating it, then you start to believe in that story yourself. Maybe this is the case with Dodik. In any case, I remain open to any conversation, but he should not under any circumstances think that there will be no reaction from my side to any attempt to leave the Dayton BiH. It seems to me that he does take note when I recommend something to him. At one point, he said that we should have a glass of plum brandy together, and that bottle is still open. We will drink it only when the work is done.

Večernji list: Does the Ukrainian crisis have a security threatening or destabilizing potential for Bosnia and Herzegovina?

Christian Schmidt: I was very glad when BiH, in the UN General Assembly, condemned this aggression of Mr. Putin on Ukraine. One thing should be clear. This is an area of safety for people. We are not going to allow some kind of a troublesome zone to be established where he can do whatever he wants and play his games. We are currently having a discussion about the role of NATO. I certainly think that BiH citizens, when they see that NATO has their backs, feel safe. In any case, I am advocating that even though the country is not a member of NATO, it should be seen as a country that is moving towards the Eurozone and it should be treated as such. When it comes to your specific question, there are some links, but we will not leave BiH in the lurch.

Večernji list: How do you perceive the attitude of the Republic of Croatia towards BiH and yourself, especially that of Prime Minister Plenković and President Milanović?

Christian Schmidt: Now I have to be a diplomat! So far, I have not been able to establish that President Milanović is inclined to hold differentiated talks. It is no secret that I very often had intensive discussions with Mr. Plenković, as I also had had other Croatian Prime Ministers and politicians, Mate Granić and Sanader, and that they have a constructive role in the European Union. But that means I only talk to Croats. But sometimes I have to explain what I think they meant in Zagreb when they commented or said something. Imagine how it sounds when, for example, President Milanović, the president of EU the country member, conditions the membership of Finland or Sweden in NATO upon amendments to the Election Law of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

People from several capitals in Europe called me, asking for an explanation of what he had in mind and what he was talking about. It is actually a massive disservice to Croats in Bosnia and Herzegovina. But, here, I would diplomatically say that I do not have time to read Mr. Milanović's day-to-day statements.