

Dnevni avaz: Interview with PDHR David M. Robinson

By Sead Numanović

Dnevni avaz: What is your view of the cross that has been put up on Zlatiste?

David M. Robinson: It's a grotesque misuse of a religious symbol and a cheap political stunt designed to provoke a reaction in anticipation of the elections. Is this really what most people want? I hope they will see through this charade and respond moderately and through appropriate authorities. Everyone should be allowed to honor their dead with dignity in an appropriate location, but this cross is neither dignified nor honorable. It is, in fact, shameful.

Dnevni avaz: What will be your priorities as PDHR?

David M. Robinson: My priorities are those of the OHR. This means, first and foremost, ensuring full compliance with the Dayton Agreement, but also working on important elements of that Agreement, such as the rule of law and the functionality of the structures and institutions that enable this country and its citizens to get back to work and to build a better future.

Dnevni avaz: Do you expect the PIC to strengthen the OHR's engagement after a sort of "silent killing" of this institution that we witnessed over the past few years?

David M. Robinson: I disagree with your claim that the OHR has not played its role over the last few years. What is true is that some eight years ago the PIC Steering Board asked the institution to change the way in which it operates in comparison to the immediate post-war years. Lately, we have been more focused on local actors. We are trying to help them

with decision-making, implementation of legislation, and we are also here to remind them of the obligations to fully respect the Dayton Agreement while advancing towards membership of the EU and NATO.

Let me also remind you that the OHR recently played a key role in resolving long-standing disputes over the appointment of judges of the Constitutional Court of the FBiH and, by extension, improving the functionality of many institutions in the Federation. We have also taken action or provided legal advice on other important issues such as state property, the question of residency and the implementation of the Constitutional Court decision on Mostar. Many would want us to work instead of elected politicians, but this is not going to happen, because it is the responsibility of governments and parliaments to take this country forward – that is why citizens elect them. I understand that citizens are frustrated and would like the International Community and the OHR to do more as used to be the case, but this is not a sustainable approach. What does or does not happen is going to be determined by who the voters of this country elect on 12 October. I urge you to look very carefully at the performance of the parties over the last four years when making your choice while of course looking at the concrete solutions they offer to solve key problems such as unemployment and corruption.

Dnevni avaz: It is increasingly evident and dangerous how much BiH is falling behind on its reform path. Numerous reforms made mostly thanks to the engagement (not pressure or imposing) by the OHR are now being dismantled. It is also increasingly evident that it will not be possible to untangle the acute crisis in BiH without a stronger engagement of the OHR. Will it come to that?

David M. Robinson: I agree with you that we have witnessed a chronic inability over the last few years to resolve outstanding issues such as the 5+2 agenda, the implementation

of the Constitutional Court's ruling on Mostar, the registration of defence property or implementing reforms to make the Federation more functional. These are all issues that the International Community wants to see addressed with a new urgency and a new seriousness following the elections in addition to seeing the country advance in terms of Euro-Atlantic integration and the steps that are required to get the country back to work.

But even more important are the many unresolved demands from ordinary citizens. The last fifteen months were marked by expressions of popular discontent with the way politics is conducted in Bosnia and Herzegovina; we have had a year of citizens stepping into the vacuum left by politicians, followed by a terrible natural disaster. Can politics continue as usual after the elections? Absolutely not! We expect the approach to politics in this country to change fundamentally after the elections, and to become more accountable and responsive to citizens' real needs rather than the slogans they have been subjected to.

When it comes to the role of the international community, let me say that the mandate of the High Representative remains unchanged, even though we have adopted an approach that is less prescriptive than in the past, one that is focused on cooperation and mediation. The objective is still the same: to ensure that BiH becomes firmly anchored on the path of EU and Euro-Atlantic integration with institutions, political parties and politicians fully respecting the Peace Agreement.

Dnevni avaz: Will the OHR continue to work on solving the problems in Mostar? What is your approach, proposal or plan? Will you continue to work with parties you previously declared guilty of failing to reach an agreement on Mostar (SDA-HDZ)?

David M. Robinson: Implementing the ruling of the Constitutional Court on Mostar is a Dayton obligation, but the onus remains on the political parties, especially SDA and HDZ

BiH, to negotiate in good faith and adopt the necessary changes so that Mostarians can enjoy their basic right to elect their local representatives.

The time for political games has long passed and resolving this issue will be a priority after the elections.

The importance of Mostar goes far beyond the boundaries of the City. Mostar is the regional centre of Herzegovina region and it needs to start playing this role more effectively. It can only do this if it implements the Court's ruling, enables citizens to enjoy their most basic right to elect their local officials and then turns decisively towards development and job creation.

Dnevni avaz: Does the OHR have its favourites at the general elections? Do you expect that citizens will choose change on 12 October, or rather elect the same old worn-out faces of nationalism?

David M. Robinson: Our only favourites are the citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina. We wish to see a substantive election campaign that focuses on the real issues instead on the old and tired nationalist phrases of the last 20 years. What we need is a campaign that is not marked, as in the past, by challenges to the constitutional order of the country, negative rhetoric and personal attacks against other candidates. Voters don't want this. They want a campaign of hope, and not fear. They want to hear from their candidates how they will ensure new jobs in their local community, better access to good health care and more education opportunities for their kids. They are tired of the posturing of politicians who portray themselves as protectors of their people, when in actual fact they are only interested in keeping their hold on power and money. The time has come for Bosnia and Herzegovina to make a break with the past and start working seriously to build a better future. I have not been here long, but this is what I sense the ordinary citizens of this country want.

When I watched the February protests in Bosnia and Herzegovina, I was particularly moved by a banner that read: "I am neither Bosniak, nor Serb, nor Croat. I am unemployed". (Ja nisam ni Bošnjak, ni Srbin, ni Hrvat. Ja sam nezaposlen.) This simple message illustrates the whole tragedy of a political ruling class that has failed its citizens. Democracy should not have a ruling class. They need leaders who govern, who answer the legitimate needs of their people. The elections in October offer a chance to shift the current approach. However, which party inspires them with hope and confidence instead of fear is a decision for the voters to make. It's an important choice, which citizens should make by asking the candidates hard questions. The voters, not the politicians, are in charge. The power of the ballot box is huge, it is in the hands of the ordinary people of this country, and I urge them to use it to deliver a better future for them and their children.

Dnevni avaz: When it comes to Brčko, at what stage is the supervision now?

David M. Robinson: The functions of the Brcko Supervisor were suspended in August 2012 following consultations between the Supervisor and the Steering Board of the Peace Implementation Council. In my role as Brcko Supervisor, I intend to follow the practice of my two predecessors of not intervening in the day-to-day life of the District. I believe that the District's institutions have so far shown that they have the capacity to assume full governance in the District.

Having said this, I continue to follow developments in Brcko and also intend to provide the Chair of the Arbitration Tribunal with occasional updates on the situation in the District. The Arbitration Tribunal for Brcko also remains in place and the parties to the arbitration, as well as Brcko District, have the ability to bring cases to it, as we saw in 2007 with a dispute over taxation.

Dnevni avaz: Do you fear further and bigger obstructions by

Russia through the PIC?

David M. Robinson: Russia has made repeatedly clear that it fully respects the Dayton Peace Agreement, which includes the mandate of the High Representative. For many years, Russia has played a constructive role in the PIC Steering Board and I expect that we will continue to work together for the benefit of Bosnia and Herzegovina and its citizens.

Dnevni avaz: How do you respond to recent comments by the Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov directed against the OHR?

David M. Robinson: The High Representative is focused on the full implementation of the civilian aspects of the Dayton Peace Agreement in line with his mandate, as confirmed by the UN Security Council. All the members of the Peace Implementation Council agree that the OHR should close – but when the conditions have been fulfilled, the local institutions are functioning effectively, and the country is clearly on the EU path. When this time has come is for PIC Steering Board to decide. To reach this goal more quickly, politicians in Bosnia and Herzegovina must reach the tough compromises needed to move the country forward. Regular challenges to the sovereignty of the state, repeated calls for a referendum that would violate the Dayton Constitution and undermining the state institutions, including the Constitutional Court, will not hasten OHR's departure but quite the opposite, will be responsible for prolonging OHR's mandate .

Dnevni avaz: Can you please elaborate your statement made on Wednesday: "The International Community remains committed to helping Bosnia and Herzegovina and its people recover from conflict, and we will continue working until that commitment is fulfilled?"

David M. Robinson: I think my statement speaks for itself. We are committed to Bosnia and Herzegovina's success as a single,

sovereign country, which we hope to see join both the EU and NATO. We are working to safeguard the country's internal stability, and to promote political and economic reform. And we will not give up until this goal is achieved. Some politicians believe they can wait us out, that the International Community will give up on Bosnia and Herzegovina. We will not, we will be here as long as it takes to see the job completed, but it is the politicians you choose to elect who will determine how long it takes and how difficult the path will be . That is why it is so important that voters cast their ballots on 12 October. My message is simple: You are responsible for your future. Your vote is your voice. Use it.