

Dnevni list: Interview with PDHR Tamir Waser



By Antun Mrkonjić

Dnevni list: Everybody agrees more or less that the recent social unrests have been a very sharp warning to authorities. However, there are fewer and fewer citizens in the streets. Do you agree with the claims of some observers that the protestors have in fact been broken and disunited by the ruling elites? What do you expect until election, will there be new massive unrests?

Tamir Waser: Without a doubt, we have convinced ourselves and seen a clear dissatisfaction of citizens with the economic situation, extremely widespread corruption, crime, in simple terms, with very difficult living and poverty in the country. These are the things I have seen in my two and a half years I have been in BiH. People on all sides are looking for ways how to exert pressure on the authorities and make them behave responsibly, i.e. how to live better. I would say that the numbers of the protesters are not the real reflection or picture of the dissatisfaction in the country. It is encouraging that the protesters have managed, after all, to achieve some goals. Namely, some cantonal assemblies have suspended certain privileges and allowances, i.e. what was called „white bread“. I think politicians should not and must not turn a deaf ear to the clear demands of the protesters in an election year.

Dnevni list: Individual political leaders and experts believe

that setting the BiH Presidency building on fire was in fact a criminal act of terrorism, and even a coup. Would such an act be treated as an act of terrorism in the US?

Tamir Waser: As the High Representative emphasized, setting fire to the Presidency building and to the buildings of the cantonal and municipal authorities was not a coup. It should be made clear which laws are applicable in such serious cases. It is obviously up to the prosecutors and the police to assess and examine all facts in order to find an answer to the question what really happened and what was the real intention and who may have planned and coordinated things. After determining all facts, it is clear that prosecutors should then decide what to do next and how the case is going to be treated further legally.

Dnevni list: In BiH it is primarily SIPA that fights terrorism. This police agency, under some interpretations, is in charge of securing state institution buildings inside. How do you comment on the claims of the Ministry of Security that the Director of SIPA refused to send a special unit to protect the BiH Presidency?

Tamir Waser: I must say openly that what we witnessed several years ago in the attack on the American Embassy in Sarajevo and also during the protests before the BiH Parliament with regard to the JMBG, unfortunately, clearly indicates a lack of coordination between police agencies and institutions in the country. In my judgment, it should be seen now what options there are for the police agencies to establish better and more effective cooperation and efficient mutual support in crisis situations, and not only then. This is particularly true of practical police engagement. I think this coordination can be raised to a considerably higher level even using the current legislation. I think, in this context, we need specific operational discussions and plans. When I say this, I want to reject clearly any prolonged debate on who should react, when and who is responsible for a swift reaction.

Dnevni list: Another attempt of Commissioner Štefan Füle to help local leaders on the Sejdić-Finci case has failed. In your opinion, which are the forces that refuse to agree, those that request separate electoral areas or those forces that panically advocate a centralistic structure in the FBiH and BiH?

Tamir Waser: I was not part of these negotiations and it is impossible for me to judge and assess the behavior and views of any negotiating party or political party.

Dnevni list: Some circles in Sarajevo accuse Štefan Füle of helping Croats create their own entity through the Sejdić-Finci case. Do you recognize such a conspiracy of Commissioner Fuele?

Tamir Waser: I think European Commissioner Stefan Füle put in great and unselfish efforts to facilitate the talks between the political actors in BiH concerning European questions and ensuring a sufficient number of votes in the BiH Parliament in order to reach a solution and adopt constitutional reforms. Still, I believe the key is to get enough hands in the parliament and I think they should now go even beyond what is strictly required by the „Sejdic-Finci“ case and agree an arrangement which could satisfy the requirements and wishes of all sides in this process. Also, I do not believe there was a special proposal which came directly from the EU, so that the political parties should find a way themselves and reach a compromise.

Dnevni list: People say that you are very well informed about the situation in Mostar, as well as that in the FBiH and BiH as the state. Do you have a new proposal for Mostar? How do you see the organization of that city?

Tamir Waser: In Mostar, we see a problem of unaccountable officials who act in an extremely irresponsible way in addressing the problems of citizens who elected them. The City

is covered in garbage; children cannot get to schools. In addition, there was no police commissioner selected in the Canton, which had a drastic impact on the 7th of February, during acts of violence. Let me be blunt: two biggest parties – HDZ BiH and SDA – must leave aside the unacceptable rhetoric they currently use, make more efforts, take greater responsibility and focus on identifying solutions for the implementation of the Constitutional Court decision. This problem has to be finally resolved, as the Constitutional Court decision is binding. There is the framework document still on the table and some parties accepted it; it is still open for all new proposals that could be helpful in reaching agreement. The HDZ of BiH and the SDA have particular responsibility and if they have some different proposals – their proposals are welcome, we are certainly ready to consider all options that introduce quality. Of course, it goes without saying that all this has to be in line with the Constitutional Court decision.

Dnevni List: For how long will Mostar be treated as some special case? Why are some preventing it from being a normal town that applies the same electoral rules as all other towns in BiH? Do not you think it is politically incorrect and inconsistent?

Tamir Waser: Mostar is such town because of the arrangements in the Federation Constitution and it also has a heritage of the Canton with special status. The situation will remain as it is until such time as the Federation Constitution is changed, and in my opinion, such development is inevitable – the sooner, the better. It is only then that it will be possible to consider and change the status of Mostar.

Dnevni List: The parliamentary debate on the “recommendations” on constitutional changes produced by a legal team at the request of the US Embassy in BiH has still not been initiated. It is finally clear that the tense relations between Bosniaks

and Croats in the FBiH must be resolved. Why do you think there is so much fear in reorganizing the Federation, although everybody sees that it is expensive and inefficient?

Tamir Waser: It seems to me that nobody is denying the need for constitutional reform in the Federation. I am under impression that there is a consensus on this issue or at least I have never heard claims that this situation is good and that it does not need to be changed. Still, some parties have the fear of losing the means and instruments that they use to demonstrate their power and it is difficult to give up different privileges. In order to obstruct the reform, those elites deliberately transfer all pressing issues to the ethnic domain in order to frighten the people, in stead of coming up with some better proposals for an overall set of changes that would strategically and profoundly re-organize the cumbersome and expensive Federation. I believe that all political parties, if they are responsible, have the obligation to participate and give their contribution to the inevitable reform. I personally wish this discussion would start even before the parliamentary elections in BiH. I must and wish to be an optimist and I believe the political parties represented in the Parliament will reach acceptable agreement.

Dnevni list: Will America, which is a promoter of "recommendations" for constitutional rearrangement of the FBiH, require political actors and parties to respond to the reform offer?

Tamir Waser: The response is expected and wanted by citizens in the Federation of BiH. They, undoubtedly, primarily require deliberations with a view to solving the issue of costly and slow administration in the Federation.

Dnevni list: How do you comment on the Resolution of the European Parliament, which states, among others, that centralism and separatism are equally bad options for BiH?

Tamir Waser: You know, much has been said about the resolution. It is quite long and covers a wide range of important issues. For example, it speaks about corruption, economic development, administration downsizing, reform of the Federation, rights of LGBT community and the like. If we consider the resolution as a whole, it can be easily noticed that, in fact, it speaks about what the international community has been warning for a long time. Therefore, reforms are needed in order for BiH to become stable, multinational developed country which is committed to the EU.

Dnevni list: Bad and unsuccessful talks on the Sejdić-Finci case have somehow pushed aside the problems of state and military property. Milorad Dodik blocked the road of BiH towards NATO. The US in a way “punished” him by stopping any communication. Are there any indications that the communication will be reestablished?

Tamir Waser: I would like to remind that the OHR wanted sincerely to help in solving very important issues of state and military property. As it is known, some parties insist that state and military property be solved in a package. The OHR's position is clear – any solution that is possibly agreed upon must be in line with the decision of the Constitutional Court of BiH. It can also be done in a package or separately, too; it does not matter; we are still willing to assist local leaders. It is only important that the decision of the Constitutional Court of BiH is being respected.