

Interview: Christian Schwarz-Schilling, High Representative for BiH: "Conflicts in BiH Resume"

BiH urgently needs institutional changes and reduction of bureaucracy in order to get closer to the EU, says EU High Representative CHRISTIAN SCHWARZ-SCHILLING, adding:

BOSNIA MUST BE WHOLE

We will prevent RS secession

Single police necessary

The agony of forming new governments in BiH lasted more than three months. When nearly no-one expected it, in the early days of 2007, leaders of major parties agreed on the final distribution of ministerial positions, although misunderstandings between Bosniak and Croat parties continued, while Serbs continue to threaten with a referendum to secede. No-one seems to expect political stability.

Different to previous agreements when positions were agreed between parties, which represented the peoples at the same time, this time, the basis for agreement was belonging to one of the constituent peoples only. So, the negotiations led to the situation where new governments were formed, albeit in principle.

For the first time in its short but tumultuous history, BiH parties organized an election without international assistance and, with great efforts, reached an agreement on how to share power.

Internal conflicts

The power-sharing agreement was made by seven parties, which will distribute ministerial positions between them. Since the final agreement is not made yet, we only know at this time which ministries will belong to which peoples. Bosniaks will have four ministries – Foreign Affairs, Security, Defense and Human Rights and Refugees.

Divided Croats fight for the Ministries of Justice, Finance, and Transport and Communications. Their problem gets worse if the power struggle is joined by the party «Radom za boljitak», which, with the two HDZs, makes up the Croat bloc in the Parliament.

The Alliance of Independent Social Democrats, apart from the position of the Chairman of the Council of Ministers, will most probably get the Ministry of Civil Affairs, while the other Serb party – Mladen Ivanić's Party of Democratic Progress – will «take» the Ministry of Foreign Trade and Economic Relations.

Christian Schwarz-Schilling, EU High Representative for BiH, told the NT that he was satisfied with the agreement, because the people were already frustrated over the prolonged government formation.

Such solutions are exclusively within the competency of elected BiH leaders and it is encouraging that they made an agreement with minimal international intervention. The program all parties adopted consider EU integration to be a key issue, and all coalition partners committed themselves to work on meeting the conditions and criteria for signing the SAA.

Still, Schwarz-Schilling's optimism is unjustified, says Slavo Kukić, political analyst and professor at Mostar University.

A detailed analysis shows clearly that the agreement they made is only distribution of ministerial positions according to the

ethnic criterion and that the PM Designate will be Nikola Špirić of the SNSD. This does not tell us anything, because it is evident that there is no agreement on the distribution of positions to parties. This is particularly the case with Croat parties, which will have a hard time agreeing to distribution of positions. When this is taken into consideration, a question arises when the conditions will be created for the formation of the Council of Ministers at all.

Internal conflicts do not only trouble Croats, but Bosniaks, too, whose representatives – SDA and Party of BiH – with assistance of American Ambassador Douglas McElhaney, signed a coalition agreement. Deputy president of the SNSD, Krstan Simić told our newspaper that this development was expected:

In the past three months, voters have become nervous. They recognized the responsibility of this party for the delays in government forming. SDA and SBiH have obstructed government formation to show that BiH cannot function alone and that the High Representative should stay on. Still, they saw that voters would understand their responsibility and made an agreement. I believe Croats will make an agreement and all parties will give their high-quality candidates to resolve the most important issues – police reform, constitutional reform and Hague cooperation.

Opposing views

These three issues were the greatest points of contention for the previous set of politicians. While Bosniaks, with the help of Schwarz-Schilling, demanded single police structure, the abolition of Republika Srpska and a unitary BiH, Serbs continued to think about separation.

In connection to that, Schwarz-Schilling emphasises that the international community will not tolerate unilateral decisions:

There can be no question of a referendum on secession from

Bosnia and Herzegovina by any entity of BiH.

It is a recognised independent state whose territorial integrity is guaranteed by the Dayton Peace Agreement, and no part of this agreement can be changed unilaterally.

I expect the constitutional reform process, which should simplify the functioning of BiH and reduce the costs of state administration, to be taken forward in the coming months. Such solution must be based on consensus among all citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina and their political representatives.

On the other hand, Krstić is saying that the Serb side will not renounce RS:

It is possible to come to a solution that will simplify the functioning of BiH with both entities, the only thing we need is for negotiators to be realistic. It is in the interest of RS to have efficient state institutions. Because of the last war, we must create a state structure that will not work to the detriment of other ethnicities.

In the opinion of our collocutors, Croats are watching stealthily this quiet conflict between the opposing Serb and Bosniak sides, hoping for the establishment of a third entity, an idea supported in Mostar newspapers by the RS Prime Minister Milorad Dodik.

By focusing on the issue of a new entity for Croats, Dodik is trying to reduce the pressure of Bosniak circles to abolish RS –Kukić concluded, adding the following:

To insist on abolition is equally damaging as talking about referendum, because it is an attack on the Constitution of BiH, However, I think that the entity organisation is not good, because it “cements” ethnic regrouping of population. Furthermore, I do not think that a centralised state, as proposed by the Bosniaks, is a good idea. This idea originates from the same ethnic-based interests, and in that case BiH

would be a country of only one people – Bosniaks.

Despite the fact that police reform is one of the most important items in the signed agreement, differences in opinion are so great that it is very unlikely it will be implemented, Kukić believes. The same opinion is confirmed by Krstić as well:

The offered solution for police reform is excellent for a centralised country like Croatia or Macedonia , but it cannot be applied in a complex system. It would automatically imply a reorganisation of prosecutor's offices, which would weaken RS, and we cannot allow that.

The question that inevitably arises is how much will the new government truly contribute to creating a European atmosphere in BiH, according to analysts.

The reality is much grimmer than the politicians present it. As long as the only sign of recognition in BiH is ethnic affiliation, any ideas about normal social relations have slim chances of becoming a reality –Kukić says, concluding the following:

We live in an environment that is characteristic of pre-political societies. Parties and people who are responsible for everything that happened to us during the 1990s are still in power, and it is difficult to create a European atmosphere with such people. For all these reasons, I believe that in the next four years, while the newly established structures are in power, BiH will continue to lag behind even more, in economic terms and in other spheres as well.

Solution – decentralised BiH

Political analyst Slavo Kukić sees the solution for problems troubling BiH only in a federal and decentralised state, which must have a clear pyramid of power:

- Several regions should be established, which would be ethnically based. Only such BiH, with regions that would ensure the element of protection of national interests, managed at the state level, can be a society free of fears and ethnic frustrations. This is the way for peoples in BiH to focus on everyday life – reducing unemployment rate, which is now at 50%, increasing GDP and working towards Europeisation.