

Interview: Christian Schwarz-Schilling, the High Representative for BiH: "Sanader Could Help To Resolve Problems in BiH"

The High Representative Christian Schwarz-Schilling is travelling to Zagreb today, where he will meet with highest government officials of the Republic of Croatia. This visit and other current issues, like constitutional reform, the conflict between religious leaders and problems in the functioning of Mostar authorities, were discussed in an interview with the German diplomat, in the midst of his preparations for visit to the Croatian capital.

Vecernji List: With whom will you meet in Zagreb and what will be the main topic of these talks?

SCHILLING: Meetings are planned with the Speaker of the Croatian Parliament, Vladimir Šeks, Croatian Minister of Culture Biškupić, and the Prime Minister, Ivo Sanader. He helped me a lot when I worked as a mediator, in situations when representatives of the Croat people would not show up for a scheduled meeting. Sanader would then use his influence with them and they would eventually turn up for the meetings. I have had long and lasting cooperation with Prime Minister Sanader and I am happy that both of us are in such important positions now. This will be my first official visit to Zagreb in the capacity of the High Representative, but of course the two of us have met many times earlier. I must say that he has done a great job with regard to transforming HDZ into a centre-oriented party, a party that has distanced itself from

some extreme positions. I believe this has greatly contributed to peace in the entire region, and to Croatia's European road. Many wondered whether Sanader would be a successful Prime Minister, but he has demonstrated that he is very efficient, in addition to being so nice. I have already talked with him in Mostar, and we also met in Rome at the meeting of European people's parties several weeks ago.

Vecernji List: Do you have some concrete expectations when it comes to Prime Minister Sanader, will you, perhaps, convey some messages to Croatian authorities with regard to influence of Zagreb authorities to events in BiH?

SCHILLING: First I want to say that the purpose of my mandate is to see that the BiH authorities assume full responsibility for their actions. They are the ones who must resolve problems. I am not the Prime Minister or Minister of Foreign Affairs. I am the High Representative, but not the kind that gives directives, but a High Representative who provides advice, tries to persuade and explain to people the consequences of their actions or inactions. I will tell Prime Minister Sanader what I think he should support or initiate, and I expect the same feedback from him, to tell me what he thinks I should do. We will also talk about the role of the Catholic Church and the Bishop, Constitutional reform and situation in Mostar. I believe there are matters regarding the situation in BiH where Prime Minister Sanader could help, and I will tell him that.

Vecernji List: You mentioned the role of the Church. Two days ago you talked with representatives of religious communities in BiH about their mutual misunderstandings. What was your message to them?

SCHILLING: Religion is something that can play a very important role in BiH when it comes to re-establishing trust. Religious leaders should not constantly assert their differing opinions on certain issues in the media. I will tell you a

story that can be compared with this controversy, taking place through the media between Cardinal Vinko Puljić and reis Mustafa Cerić. When I worked as the Minister of Telecommunications in the German Government, one minister from our cabinet publicly commented in the media a statement made by another minister. Chancellor Helmut Kohl then asked both of them when they spoke last on the telephone. He then asked them: "Do you want to receive my instructions through the media in the future, or should we talk about it personally?" In the end he said: "We have a minister for telecommunications and I think he would be much happier if you used telephone more often." Kohl also told them that next time they would suffer serious consequences if they talked to the media, instead of discussing their problems personally. Such a thing never happened again afterwards. When I met with the Inter-Religious Council of BiH, they told me how, in fact, they share the same opinion on majority of issues. My response was that I had been reading quite the contrary information in the media. So I told them that if it is indeed the case that they agree on most matters, they should say that publicly as well. If you choose to publicly speak out only about issues on which you disagree, then citizens will get a wrong impression, while some politicians might even like it, and then you would be responsible for what happens.

Vecernji List: Mostar's authorities are not functioning again, and your Office drew attention to this fact. What specific steps do you intend to take?

SCHILLING: We will fully focus on the situation in Mostar. However, there is no other way than for the representatives of city authorities to take full responsibility for their work. I will make that quite clear to the persons responsible and the public in the coming weeks. If someone wants to see this city destroyed, if a constructive proposal cannot be reached, if they want a divided city and administration, they will have a very negative reputation in the pre-election period. I will

make it very clear to the public that they are not meeting the obligations they assumed as elected officials. I will certainly not hesitate to say this, and I will make it very clear to them with my actions that they have come to an end. Citizens are suffering the consequences of such work and no one is strong enough to bear such a heavy burden on their shoulders. The months ahead of us will be crucial in that regard.

SANADER AND SCHILLING

"Wartime friends"

Vecernji List: Your friendship with Prime Minister Sanader dates back from the war years?

SCHILLING: He is an old friend of mine, since 1993, when he was the Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs. We talked a lot during the war. We were together at the Split Conference, during the decisive negotiations between Tuđman and Izetbegović. Sanader then helped to move things in the right direction, and he also helped me a lot when I was a mediator in BiH.

AMENDMENTS IN THE BiH PARLIAMENT BEFORE ELECTIONS

Constitutional changes after the elections

Vecernji List: The question of Constitutional reform has come into the focus again. Do you think it is realistic to expect a new debate on Constitutional amendments in the BiH Parliament before the October elections?

SCHILLING: I do not believe the entire package of Constitutional amendments could succeed now. However, some parts of the package, some specific matters, such as human

rights, harmonisation of BiH Constitution with demands of the Council of Europe, harmonisation of the Election Law of BiH, could be adopted before elections. I will make a point of that when I address the BiH Parliament next week. I will emphasise what must be done by the summer, despite the fact that the package of Constitutional amendments was not adopted. However, in my opinion Constitutional reform will take place after elections in October this year.