

# **A guest commentator Openly on Thursdays: Avis Benes, a Spokesperson of OHR Mostar “Mostar – a half full or half empty glass”**

In January 1996, when I came to Mostar for the first time, this city was an embodiment of divided Berlin. Today, even the option of Mostar as the capital of the BiH Federation is being discussed, and during his last visit to Mostar, the HR stated that he supports this option in principle. Is it possible? And where is Mostar, at this moment, in terms of unification and implementation of the Dayton Peace Agreement? This question can be viewed from two angles, which are different and which at the same time match the facts- is the glass with the same amount of liquid half full or half empty?

## **Black and white views**

Those who watch the situation through the view of a half-full glass will say that, according to the national composition of its inhabitants, Mostar is one of the most multi-ethnic cities in BiH, the security situation is not different from that of other BiH cities, the joint Police Force has been established, real progress in the implementation of Property Laws was achieved during the last year and a half, many people have overcome their mental barriers and are not focused on the heritage of the past, people are communicating in a normal way, especially young people. The City has the joint City Administration, which has achieved considerable results and ensured assistance in numerous projects, there is a joint water supply and transport company, and the process of establishing the joint Public Utilities Company is on-going. TV outlets from both parts of the

city have joint projects and the establishment of the bigger Fed TV Informational-Technical Center in the Mostar Central Zone is in process.

Those, who are more skeptical and more inclined to the theory of the half-empty glass, would say that parallelism is still very much present, that Mostar has an Interim and not a Permanent Statute of the City, that the City Administration is full of cracks and that it has not been completely unified yet, that the Municipalities are behaving according to a national principle, that officials in Municipal Housing Offices are threatened, that illegal construction is in full swing, that there is a University Dzemal Bijedic and a Mostar University and they cooperate with reluctance. That the issue of vital national interest is being abused to a large extent by all sides, that the social situation has reached its critical point, that there is no real Mostar public opinion, that most media become biased in moments of crises, masques of professionalism fall down and it becomes very obvious who controls them.

## **The capital of the Federation**

Witnesses of Dayton say that even at that time the International Community tried to establish Mostar as the BiH Federation capital. However, they gave up this idea due to the strong opposition of one side. However, there are provisions in the DPA by which it has been stressed that Mostar has a special constitutional status compared with other cities. Nowadays, these provisions are being respected only partially. It is obvious that the relation between the Federation and Mostar is ambivalent, and sometimes, perhaps, because both sides do not realize how much the very success of the BiH Federation breaks up on 'the Mostar issue'.

It is a paradox that the IC is the one expressing theoretical support for the different constitutional position of Mostar, and that, apart from a few individuals, domestic structures have

not recognized this idea enough. It is important that Mostar has people with a long-term vision, and, so far, there have been only a few of them. However, their existence is discouraging (they misquote A. Benes, the original says encouraging). The process of constitutional change is underway at the moment, and OHR cannot stress enough the importance and significance of that historical moment for BiH. These reforms will inevitably reflect on the organization of Mostar as well.

## **The HDZ is not the only culprit**

Unfortunately some parties have started from 'hibernation' rather late. The HDZ is one of them, and its vote is also very important for the destiny of Mostar, and the whole state. Still, it would be wrong to say that the HDZ is the only one that believes that boycotting and walking out of sessions is the solution to the problem. There are other parties and politicians in Mostar, whose concept of the future is rather limited. With the vision, which will not be based only on a national principle, Mostar has a chance to be even more than some people can imagine. After all, it is an answer to the question whether the glass is half full or half empty and which direction Mostar has taken: both options are in play, and the direction depends on the people who lead this city, and the citizens, who will be able to recognize and articulate their vision of the future of this city.