Brcko town is becoming a part of the world”Phoenix upon the Brka River”

Not even the threats of the finance ministers of both Entities, in which they accused the District of impoverishing their budgets through the import of petroleum products, can remove the brightness from the faces of people of all nationalities and religious backgrounds, to whom the Mayor in his seasonal statement wished “compromise, consensus and tolerance”.

Brcko, January – “Today I am proud of being a Brcko citizen”, said the OSCE Democratization Officer in Brcko, Krasin Himirski, from Bulgaria, on the last day of the past year, at the reception hosted by District officials. The conversation was held in Hotel “Grand”, which was known as “Posavina” before the latest war; when purchased by the oil company “Despotovic” from Bijeljina, the hotel was almost a ruin.

“Despotovic” operates in the District and is one of the five hundred branch offices or enterprises newly opened in the District in the course of the last several months. It had leased a small petrol station on a desolate agricultural field, which reminiscent of the time “of the socialistic construction, reconstruction and labor class revolution”.

Two Hundred Million for the Market

Nevertheless, Brcko has great plans for the future. American USAID experts, together with the OHR, are devising plans for the development of the town and its economic revitalization. Deputy High Representative for BiH and Supervisor of Brcko,

American Ambassador Henry Lee Clarke, in his seasonal statement to Brcko citizens stated that they may be satisfied with the efficiency of the fully reorganized and independent judiciary, the rehiring of all public employees from the former three municipalities into one single apparatus of the District, the return of more than 1600 apartments to their former users, and with the awarding of the right to construction and reconstruction of the famous Arizona Market to private entrepreneurs, through a public tender worth over 200 million convertible marks.

Mayor Sinisa Kisic, his deputy Ivan Krndelj and President of the Assembly Mirsad Djapo stressed that the Brcko District cash box is full and that the money would be transferred to next year's budget. The major portion of the revenues come from customs duties and taxes collected at the Sava Bridge border crossing, which connects BiH, that is, Brcko, with Croatia.

Finance Ministers of both Entities are currently accusing the District authorities of attracting importers to their border crossing with Croatia – the Sava Bridge – allegedly by disloyal low tax rates, and they thereby "deprived" the Entity budgets of about one hundred million convertible marks. Supervisor Clarke and his OHR Brcko office provided a detailed response to these accusations, in which they stated that the District exercises its right to apply the law of either Entity; this time the law of Republika Srpska, with which the contract was executed under which the RS Custom Service administers the border crossing at the Sava Bridge in Brcko. The OHR points out that the import of heating oil has been posing a problem in BiH since 1996, and it has not been known where it goes and is sold as petroleum at gas stations; and it is not this area to be worried about this issue but the financial police in the Entities. We will write on this issue from Brcko on another occasion.

In contrast to previous years, an atmosphere for better life has been created in the town. It can be seen in every corner. For example, one can see people's bright faces in the municipal building. There are no long queues and kindness reigns everywhere. There is a beautiful, multicolored, festive garland above the doors of the office of the Croatian member of the District Government. It is obvious that people are aware of the new equality and the fact that Brcko belongs to them; and that as Bosniaks, Croats or Serbs, Jews or others they have the same rights.

Even the seasonal statement of the Brcko Municipality Mayor, Sinisa Kisic, contains words not mentioned in previous practice: along with success in personal lives, he wished the citizens an abundance of compromise, consensus and tolerance. Since the multiethnic municipality, instead of the three national ones, has been established, these words have gained meaning, even at the latest District Assembly session held at the end of the year, when the names of 205 streets in the town upon the Brka were changed.

Thus the most important street in the town, beside the hotel *"Ravena"* or *"Galeb",* just next door to the Srpska Varos quarter, bordering the road to the Sava Bridge, was named the Boulevard of Peace instead of the Boulevard of General Dragoslav Mihailovic Draza. The main square in the town is named Youth Square instead of Bosko Peric Pesa Square. The Street that was named after Serb liberators (of Brcko) shall be Bosna Srebrna Street, which is an integral part of the diocese of the Bishops' conference of BiH Vrhbosna that was formed three years ago.

The street that was named after Draza's duke Stevan Damjanovic Leka and was also known as Mosa Pijade Street before the war shall become Ribnikar Street.

Worries after the Target

Twenty two pupils of second and third grade of Brcko high schools were awarded scholarships by AYUS, and they will attend school for six months in the American city of Phoenix. Maja Gajic, Emir Imamovic. Jelena Kosutic, Mirza Terzic, Bojana Lugonja, Enida Ibrasimovic, Nenad Maksimovic, Emina Omerovic, Jelena Radisa, Jovana Kojic, Sladjana Skenderovic, Jasmin Spahic, Sinisa Jovanovic, Davorin Mijatovic, Rada Markovic, Amir Softic, Mirzet Alimovski, Dino Imamovic, Mirza Ibrasimovic and Andrea Kapur along with two other colleagues are to set off from Budapest to the USA on Orthodox Christmas. Nothing is accidental here, even the selection of the city of Phoenix to cooperate with the Brcko District. This is how the piece of news published in the magazine “Most” reads:

“The representatives of the three associations of war veterans and invalids met in December in the Brcko District Government building. The aim of their meeting was to reach an agreement on the resolution of issues of common interest to each category of invalids in the District. The meeting was assessed as very successful”.

Yesterday’s angry rivals were together sitting around the same table. Nowadays, instead of looking through a gun-sight, they have a common worry: how to survive the consequences of the suffering and to stand firmly on the ground, together with its town upon Brka which is slowly rising.