

Interview: Matthias Sonn, Senior Deputy High Representative in BiH"It is sad that we have not established a good dialogue with Bishop Peric"

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Matthias Sonn, Senior Deputy High Representative in BiH, has been performing this duty since October last year, and he is one of relevant interlocutors on OHR's work in BiH. Sonn is a diplomat and lawyer who has more than 15 years of experience at the German Foreign Office. He spent some of these 15 years working abroad: Port-of-Spain, Washington, Accra and Ankara.

Dnevni List: Mr. Sonn, do You agree with the judgment of Gareth Evans, the ICG President, given two weeks ago, when he stated: 'if the IC left the institutions that it has been building since 1995, everything would, simply, collapse' and 'that the Dayton structures are working against the goals envisaged by Dayton'. Do you believe that the time for a new conference on BiH has come?

MS: Regarding the ICG report I can tell you the following: everybody is aware as to why the International Community, including the OHR, is present in this country. Everybody is aware which are the goals of our presence, and everybody should be aware that the DPA is not a static element but a process. It is a framework agreement intending to develop this country since the end of the war in order to make it ready to become a part of the existing European integration.

The Dayton structures are flexible enough to make such a process possible. The answer to your question whether we need a new conference is: No, we do not need it.

Houses of Peoples are a better solution than Constitutional-Legal Commissions

Dnevni List: Do you believe that a consistent implementation of the Constitutional Court decision on the Constituency of Peoples in BiH is possible if instead of Houses of Peoples they introduce Constitutional-Legal Commissions that the OHR proposes. Will, in this way, BiH remain divided in two parts and will it be to the detriment of the people smallest in number?

MS: Constituency and equality of all three peoples in BiH will be a result of constitutional changes that have been underway in BiH. It has nothing to do with the issue of two Entities. The important thing, with regard to this issue, is that the protection of rights of all three constitutive peoples is equally strong in all areas. This is what the BiH Constitutional Court has decided, and for this reason it has to be implemented. This is what the Parliaments of both entities have to adopt. This is what the High Representative wants to achieve by getting involved in these processes.

Dnevni List: Do you believe that Constitutional-legal Commissions are a better solution than Houses of Peoples in the Parliaments of both entities?

MS: Absolutely not. The important thing is that there are equally strong protection mechanisms in both entities. We understand that the Croats are the people smallest in number in BiH, and as such they deserve protection and support. It has been the IC stand since the very beginning.

RS and Croat self-rule are not the same

Dnevni List: How do you comment on the visit of the RS authorities to the Russian Duma? Would it be the same if a delegation of the Croat self-rule would pay an official visit, let's say to the American Congress. Do you believe that they were discussing an integrated, undivided BiH or that it was an introductory talk for 'new shuffling of cards'?

MS: Of course it would not be the same. The Government of the RS is the Government of one of the legitimate Entities in BiH. However, their visit paid to another country does not divert us from the fact that the international relations in BiH go through the BiH Council of Ministers, and for this reason I am convinced that the RS Government is well aware of the range and possibilities of their visits to other countries. Certainly, I would not ascribe any conspiracy theory to this visit.

The question might be posed in a slightly different way, and it would be: 'Could Entity Governments spend their time in a better way, resolving some urgent issues that refer to the welfare of their citizens?' This question refers to their political efficiency.

Dnevni List: However, the fact, that the RS authorities went to Russia without the knowledge and approval of the BiH Ministry of Foreign Affairs, remains?

MS: I will tell you only one thing: No matter what the Entities' Governments do, they cannot deal with the foreign affairs of BiH as a state. Russia just like the UK, France, and Germany, is a member of the Peace Implementation Steering Board and was present when the DPA was signed and Russia is equally involved in the peace process in BiH. I repeat once again that there was no any conspiracy theory in this mission.

Problems in dialogue with Mostar Bishop

Dnevni List: A few days ago on a TV show of Federation TV an anonymous representative of the OHR Anti-Corruption team stated many serious accusations against 'Croherz' company. Allegedly, it is about criminal activities amounting to dozens of million of US \$. Could Tell us something more about this case, which you are familiar with, I believe?

MS: I cannot give you more information about it. I can say that 'Croherz' is one of the Hercegovacka Bank shareholders and for this reason it is an important element in the plan to rob the clients of Hercegovacka Bank.

It would, roughly, function in the following way: the shareholders and companies were granted loans from the bank and by these loans they paid back shares of the bank. For this reason the bank had to be put under the control of the Provisional Administration, and the violence that took place during the introduction of the Provisional Administration, was not caused by this Administration. Violence resulted from organized protests. People who have nothing to hide do not behave in this way.

Dnevni List: How do you comment on the HR's statement on the so-called language of hatred and 'protection of war and other crimes' stated by Bishop Peric? In general, as far as I know, you have not succeeded in establishing a constructive dialogue with the Church in BiH, and if I am not mistaken, you are a graduate in Theology too?

MS: My duty is not to judge what the HR says and his statement rather speaks for itself. However, I have to say that the Church in this country is not monolithic.

There are a lot of Church representatives in this country that we have established a very fruitful dialogue with and who, actually, advocate real issues for the benefit of Catholics in this country. It is very sad that the Mostar Bishop is not among them.

Dnevni List: Over 4000 Bosniaks have returned to Stolac, and almost 6000 Serbs have returned to Drvar, and these places are still being mentioned as "black holes" of the BiH Federation. On the other hand, fewer than 1000 Croats and a rather more Bosniaks have returned to the RS. How do you comment on these figures?

MS: It is true that the number of Croat returnees to the RS is really small. Truth is also that the RS authorities did not stick to their obligation to support the return. However, it is also true that a strong Croat political interest was working against the return of the Croats after 1996.

It was a use of one kind of rhetoric, and, in practice, it was implementing of ethnic segregation. These are the problems that you learn about when you talk with the representatives of the Catholic Church in BiH, who are doing a lot on the return of the Croats to Central Bosnia and whose efforts were faced with tremendous resistance from the hard-liners of the Croat policy.

The IC policy envisaged by the DPA, as well as by the Peace Implementation Council, will remain the same. All those who are refugees and displaced persons, as a result of the war, have a right to return and they will be encouraged. It remains one of the main reasons that we are here.

BiH cannot exist without Croats

Dnevni List: The HR Petritsch stated in Brussels that ‘the issue of the Croats in the BiH Federation should be solved as soon as possible’. However, in public, you have an impression that this problem is not being solved in the right way. Your comment, please?

MS: Participating in the process of the constitutional reforms is characterized by a one-sided refusal of the HDZ to participate in this process. In democracy when elected representatives do not represent the people who elected them, other people do it instead of them. I will stress another thing, that took place a few days ago and which is very interesting: four representatives from the HDZ Caucus in the House of Representatives of the BiH Parliament talked with the HR in Sarajevo and they clearly stated that they do not represent interests of the party, but of the people who elected them. It is a step ahead for the Croats in BiH. I say once again that BiH cannot exist without the Croats, their protection has been and will be guaranteed.

Participating in the process of the constitutional reforms is characterized by a one-sided refusal of the HDZ to participate in this process. In democracy when elected representatives do not represent the people who elected them, other people will do it instead of them. There are many representatives of the Catholic Church in this country that we have established a very fruitful dialogue with. It is very sad that Mostar Bishop is not among them.