

Interview: Carlos Westendorp, the High Representative "Decision on apartments must be implemented gradually"

Who do you see responsible for the previous events in the RS – the SDS, the Radicals?

I do not know, I think those are mostly the Radicals.

What do you intend to do about it?

Except for removal of the RS Presidency, I have no intention to flame up the situation additionally, or to give the pretext to the hard-liners, in fight with moderates in the RS, who are co-operating with the International Community in order to make better living for ordinary people, while the hard-liners are accusing them for being traitors, because it is "this International Community who bombards their brethren". This is a very light propaganda. I am trying to keep the situation under control, the Government is working and is taking the necessary measures security measures, so I do not have to do anything dramatic.

Such is suspension of the Radical Party, for instance?

This is a big step and I think the Radicals are expecting it. They would do whatever they could in order to provoke me to ban their party. They wrote me two disgusting letters, so I was tempted to reply by putting one Konvertible Marka in the envelope and send them. But my associates advised me not to pay attention to these letters. That is what I do. But, if the

Radicals continue with their provocation, and if they keep behaving completely undemocratic, it is going to be my obligation to ban their party.

Persuade me that I am wrong, but all that you say leads to a conclusion that the Radicals might have blackmailed you. Because of those who are co-operating with the International Community, you must not reply to the hard-liners.

No, I am not blackmailed! The radical elements will disappear from the scene. Poplasen is history already. He may say he is the President as much as he likes, but he is simply "a dead meat". Seselj will disappear too, as well as Milosevic. Their positions will be occupied by moderate politicians. When this takes place, the situation in the RS and in this whole Balkans region will dramatically improve. When it comes to the future of these areas, I am optimistic.

Do you support the offer that the SDS takes part in the RS Government?

Hm, I would not like to interfere too much with interior politics of this country. But one thing is certain, there is more pluralism in the RS than in the Federation...

I beg your pardon? You mean the number of parties?

Yes.

What does the maths got to do with democracy? Especially when everybody thinks the same.

No they do not.

Yes they do.

How do they think?

For instance, how many Bosniaks returned to Brcko?

Wait and see how many of them will return soon.

Well, this is being repeatedly said for years.

But this is not only the problem of Serbs, this is also a Bosniak problem. Bosniak leaders have a lot of responsibility in this country. And I told them this: You are the majority, you want to integrate this country. You are not going to succeed unless you include Bosnian Serbs and Croats in this process. If you keep going with these nationalist messages...

Are you trying to say that Bosniak leaders are responsible that Bosniaks are not returning to Brcko or Srebrenica, or Banja Luka?

All leaders are responsible. I do not talk about specific cases, but the situation in general. And if you insist, I do not think Bosniak leaders are to blame for there is no return to Brcko, but they are for some other places. And I also have a lot of examples for that. I already replaced some Bosniaks who obstruct our duties. Nationalism has to be replaced with something else, and this will take place. Not in the close future maybe, but this is inevitable. There is definitely more pluralism in the RS than in the Federation. Dodik's party is potentially multiethnic, social-democratic...

The real problems

Maybe tomorrow, but today this is not so...

Yes, because they are in such environment. If they would become multiethnic, they would be considered traitors, but wait and you will see. Socialists and social-democrats will be multiethnic. Let me ask you, is the SDA multiethnic?

It is more than Dodik's party.

I am sure that mono-ethnic parties are the one responsible for the situation in this country. I can understand why it is so. They say they are the only one who will defend the interests of certain groups. That is why people vote for them. And they

should actually defend from them. All the time, we are fighting here for some symbols, and nobody mentions employment, social security, or health care. These are the real problems. The Federation is not functioning. Bosniaks and Croats work separately in parallel institutions.

Does this mean you would install a protectorate for BiH too, as well as for Kosovo?

It is too late for that now. I think the protectorate should have been installed at the beginning of resolving of this problem. Now, it is too late. But, you asked me about the SDS and I did not answer. So, political parties can change. The SDA too can change. The thing which is necessary is related to the inner-party democracy and co-operation with the International Community. Some people in the SDS told us they are ready to co-operate with us. We told them we had the opportunity to see how does it look like. We do not want co-operation with a party led by Krajisnik. So, if you show me you can take care of the business, fine. If you agree with "Sloga" you are going to enter the Government and work, and if you designate actual ministers who would work instead of controlling the processes, that is fine. But, you will be under strict supervision. For now, they are acting rather well, but this is because they are looking for the way to enter the authorities.

Could you comment on speculations that the International Community is supporting "the deal" which would make Sarovic President, and Dodik Premier of the RS?

This would be a perfect "deal" and I would support it. And not only me, but also the International Community and donors.

One of the key issues today is your decision on apartments, especially the permanent residential permits. How do you intend to implement it, gradually or hastily?

This decision has to be implemented gradually. We do not want

people on the streets, we do not want to make problems that people do not have alternative accommodation and that political parties count their points on this. Therefore, we will be pragmatic. You have the legal framework, the permanent permits were something completely unnatural. Now it is necessary that authorities work seriously on resolving of this problem, and it will no longer exist. Up to date, this law was also used in many occasions in order to prevent people to return. The decision is here, and it must be implemented, and we are ready to co-operate with local authorities. We do not want the things to be done immediately, over a night. We do not the people to find themselves on the streets. This is not a protectorate so that I can control these bureaucrats, who perfected their skills to dissolve, confuse and complicate the things. They are terrible! I mean, you could not imagine dimensions of their intelligence!

Donors' assistance

Is the International Community going to help Bosnian authorities financially to resolve these problems?

Yes, money is necessary for this and it is going to be collected at the upcoming donors conference. I do not know how much money will be allocated for these purposes, but this issue is also covered.

When will the donors conference be held?

It is still not known. As you know, certain conditions need to be fulfilled. Should this happen, the donors conference will be held by the end of May, maybe on 20 or 21 of May. Which conditions are those? One of them is that the joint institutions work – this is already the case, permanent residential permits were revoked, the RS needs to have the Budget. If this does not happen, they are not going to get the money, the law on the media has to be implemented and we are already putting the pressure on Croats who are the problem in

this case...

Izetbegovic's idea

Hold on, let us return to the issues of flats and returns. What is your opinion on Bosniak member of the BiH Presidency Izetbegovic's idea on return of 2.000 people at the time?

We support this idea, but we are sceptical. According to our experience, such things do not work. At least, it was the case so far. You know, everybody as some arguments, some problems... I know Mr. Izetbegovic has got a long list of people who want to return. Then, I visit Mr. Jelavic and he gives me his paper with new ideas, problems and remarks. If I was to talk to the people from the RS, they would tell me that they cannot do anything now, due to NATO strikes on FRY... So, there are always arguments for not doing something. And the only thing that we can do is to stick to our plan of refugee return. If the three presidents agree, I would be glad to assist the implementation of their agreement. However, my experience tells me it is very hard for them to accord about a practical agreement. I will tell you something you do not know. I am thoroughly preparing for a meeting. I go over there and I say what I have to say, and then they say: Yes, this Modrica, this is really a problem. Horrible! Disastrous! But what about Bunski Bunski? Hold on, what do you mean, what is it this Bunski Bunski now? For God's sake, what is it, where is it and what kind of problem is over there...

So that means sanctions...

Sanctions are always there as the final answer. But before that, we are expecting the donors conference, and I hope I will be able to persuade the donors to allocate the resources for BiH. When this happens, then we will say – here is the money, all you need to do now is earn it.

Reform of the Council of Ministers

The Madrid Declaration decided that the reform of the Council of Ministers should have taken part by April. Now, it is May already and nothing has been done.

It is about two aspects of this problem – rotation of the chairmen and increase of the number of ministries. For now, this is not the one of fundamental issues, although we will return to this problem. We decided to reconstruct the Ministry of Civilian affairs, because the previous Minister, Spasoje Albijanic, did a very bad job. The new minister is totally different. I would say this is the best minister at the Council of Ministers. Of course, there is a necessity for reconstruction of the CoM, but I do not see that as an urgent task. It is more urgent that this ministry is operating. Reform of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is much more urgent. I believe the ministries of finances and justice will have to be included in the CoM, but for now, this is not an urgent matter.