

Interview: Jacques Klein, Deputy HR in BiH "I Will Believe Jelavic That He Cares About the Croats in Bosnia When He Displays It"

We talked to the Deputy HR, Jacques Klein, on Saturday afternoon in his Sarajevo office. He announced to us that he would meet the Croat Presidency member, Ante Jelavic, the following day and that he hoped that on that occasion he would be officially acquainted with the proposals for the improvement of the Croats' position in BiH. Our discussion was interrupted by telephone calls and consultations with Milorad Dodik on the "Poplasen issue". The dismissed president wanted to have a public appearance on SRT that night which was, namely, denied. From Klein's tone, we concluded that Dodik's resignation is ancient past. Dodik has won, Poplasen is definitely out of the game, and, when the "Serb bats and hay-forks" were mentioned, Klein laughed.

Poplasen is an ordinary citizen

"As for me, Poplasen is now an ordinary citizen, and private persons do not address the people via TV at prime time, and especially not after having made extremist invitations to attack the IC members. We are aware that both Dodik and B. Plavsic are Serb nationalists, but they were at least constructively engaged with us in solving the Pale problem. Dodik has cleared up much and has made investments possible, introduced customs fees, initiated rather serious changes in the legislation and for all that he should be given credit. Ever since he came, Poplasen has done whatever he could to undermine the democratic process by using legal methods and wasting his time. The Brcko Award should be loaded onto his back and had there not been Dodik, as confirmed by the Arbiter Roberts Owen, his decision would have been considerably different. We know that Poplasen receives his instructions straight from Belgrade."

Did you fear that the BiH Croats would support the Serbs in any way?

There was a humorous statement the other day. We from the IC have again created something very constructive - the alliance between the Croats and the Serbs and, whatever this may be created for, is probably good. It is just a pity that it had to start this way. I am joking, we did not fear the Croat response. The Serbs fear that, should they be divided, Banja Luka will succumb to the influence from Zagreb, and the eastern part of RS will be under a too big influence of Belgrade. However, these are not our intentions. We are aware that this is their main vein and it was not our intention to cut it.

Were you surprised with the meetings of Ante Jelavic with the Croatian opposition parties?

Those meetings are a good sign. I am aware that the BiH Croats are in a difficult position but, as we have said, and now even President Tudjman said that, it is not the time for a third entity now and there is no place for it. The Croat population is nervous, they feel marginalised, but this can be solved only through co-operation with the IC. Through a co-operation we can create legislation and administrative structure which will protect them. However, it is not true that the Croats do not have any rights or powers. President Jelavic has the power of veto and the right of veto also exists in the Government. What is true is that before the war two thirds of Croats lived in Central Bosnia and that is the population we are losing. This happens for two reasons: first, because there is no reconstruction or economic security, while the second reason is hidden in certain HDZ elements. I admire Zubak and Jelavic for their attempts to think of ways to protect the Croats in Bosnia and to stop the endless divisions which take place because of personal or party interests. For this reason I consider the contacts between Jelavic and the opposition as a very useful practice.

Herzegovina is not all there is

Jelavic claims that he cares about the Croats in Central Bosnia.

Words are cheap. He has to display that to me, help me find the Croats who want to return to Central Bosnia, he must say and show publicly that it is not only Herzegovina that matters.

Are you not the author of the idea of a third entity?

That is wrong and taken out of the context. What I said is that I know that many Croats would like the Croats to

have their own entity but, unfortunately, they had signed the Federation before Dayton and now it is too late. I am always misquoted, but now it is not important any more because President Tudjman himself discarded the idea of a third entity. However, there are other ways to protect the Croats and we must negotiate about those ways. This refers to creating Croat institutions such as schools, time on television, etc.

Would the IC accept changes of the DA, such as the cantonisation of the RS, with the purpose of establishing a balance?

I have carefully considered the idea of re-cantonisation. President Tudjman often raised the question of the possibility of re-cantonisation, i.e. creation of one-national cantons so that the Croats can be the majority at least in some parts. This is under consideration, but it is questionable how lasting such a solution would be and how many new issues it would open. However, we will have to find some solution in which people would feel safe.

Jelavic said that a third entity is the ultimate option. However, other changes requested, such as the cantonisation of the RS, would imply changes of the DA. To what extent can the DA be changed?

We are willing to investigate all the options which can convince the Croats that they will not be a marginalised minority. BiH cannot exist without Croats and Serbs. I am prepared to listen and read what President Jelavic intends to offer me and then we shall see what can be done. I think that something must be done. Croats are not returning to the RS or Central Bosnia.

Even if the changes proposed would imply changes of Dayton?

We should first see what the Croat leadership has to offer to us.

Serb reply

What could the Serb reply to the proposal on re-cantonisation be?

At the moment they are too much preoccupied with Brcko and finding replacement for Poplasen. The only point because of which I always criticise Dodik is the return of refugees. However, I often cannot understand why Sarajevo does not support Dodik more strongly. Sometimes it seems to me that they would rather support Serb hard-liners.

You have met with President Tudjman. Do you know his view of the talks between the BiH Croat leadership and the opposition?

We have not talked about that but I know that President Tudjman believes that the presence of the Croats in BiH must be preserved. He is, I think, disappointed with the internal Croat conflicts and divisions because he wants a consensus. With his statement against a third entity he sent an important message – do not waste time on a solution which cannot be permanent. Spend it on something constructive. This also pushed forward the efforts of all party leaders to achieve a single doctrine about the future of Croats in BiH. However, it seems to me that Croats continue to fight against one another. Namely, there are three schools: the first one is that of the leadership in Sarajevo – Jadranko Prlic, Neven Tomic and other reasonable politicians from Bosnia who understand what the Croat role in BiH should be. In the centre, there is a more aggressive contingent, the HVO, and at the third end are Herzegovinians who have lost the battle but do not see it and still have dreams about annexation to Croatia and things like that. I am trying to tell them that should they become a part of Croatia they would be just like a Governor in West Virginia, without any power. You have a huge power here. It is in Croatia's interest too if Herzegovina remains in BiH. It is always in the interest of a state to have an influential minority in another state.

There have been some large-scale announcements of a change in the American policy towards BiH. Some claim that the Administration plans to take a harsher attitude...

Gelbard is not harsh enough? He has always seemed harsh to me. It is absolutely incorrect. I have not heard or seen any paper anywhere that says that the American policy towards BiH should be reviewed or changed. If we are "too light", where are they going to find those harsh people?

Some others claim that America will give up and accept the trade with Milosevic by which parts of BiH would be exchanged for parts of Kosovo...

The only influence that Kosovo has on BiH is the 10,000 refugees who have arrived in BiH, and that is all. There have been some public suggestions by Lord Owen and unfortunately also by Carl Bildt which no one believes.

I Have Not Changed My Mind on the Kosovo Issue

It is well known that the US Administration intended to send you to Kosovo last autumn. You did not accept that. Have you reconsidered the idea in the meantime?

No, I have not. I think there is still a lot to be done here. To be honest, I had the same opinion when they wanted to shift me from Eastern Slavonia to Sarajevo in March 1997. I did not want to leave the picture incomplete. Then the State Secretary called me in June again and said that she really needed me on the ground, in Sarajevo, along with Special Envoy Robert Gelbard and the then new Ambassador to BiH, Richard Kauzlarich. I think that, since then, we have made a significant progress in the process – in the resolving of the problems of Pale and SRT, and we hope that BiH will be admitted to the Council of Europe as soon as some time this year. We should not criticise the American policy in this region, we can only wonder if we, personally, have done our best to realise it. The things are going ahead for the better after all. Remember what sort of resistance there was against the introduction of KM, and now it is the strongest currency in the region. There will be a small inauguration ceremony in Vienna on 26 March of KM as a convertible currency in Austria, Germany and Switzerland. We have achieved a lot with the Agreement on Special Relations and the Agreement on the Use of the Port of Ploče and Neum. I was promised in Sarajevo that the ASR will be adopted and ratified as soon as some time this week.

Bosniacs Cannot Be An Island

Do you think that Alija Izetbegovic, i.e. the Bosniac leadership, could accept the division into three entities if it would be possible for Croats and Bosniacs to reach an agreement on the territorial demarcation?

Bosniacs are divided, just like Croats. Most of them want BiH as a state which will join Europe. Bosniacs cannot afford to be an isolated island if they want a pluralistic, multi-ethnic state or if they want domination on the Balkans. They need a concept of a Bosnian state. Some politicians obviously wonder why they, as the majority, cannot rule and why they had to agree to all those compromises. They did agree and now they have to live with it! We are co-operating with constructive persons who believe in the two entities and some sort of a central state that can control taxes and borders. Dayton does not help us there because it granted too much power to entities. Dayton is an instrument which made the killing stop but it has not stopped the war.

State Secretary Albright Has Not Called Me Yet

So far, no one has told me officially that I am leaving – neither the US State Secretary nor Mr. Carlos Westendorp. Hopefully, the State Secretary might call me and tell me some nice news, but it has not yet happened. Those rumours are a bit premature.

So, you will stay here until summer, which is when your mandate expires?

Yes, that is, until a time when the State Secretary tells me to go somewhere else.

Your departure is mentioned in the context of the stories that the US Administration is not too pleased with the work of the US diplomats (Gelbard, Kauzlarich, Klein) involved in the peace process in the region.

That is not exactly what the story published on the Voice of America says, i.e. this theory only refers to some of the said diplomats, not all of them. However, I think it is completely inappropriate. I was in Washington two weeks ago, and no one told me that what we are doing is wrong – on the contrary. They said to me that BiH is no longer the major problem, now it is Kosovo – but that they respect very much what we have achieved so far.

Dodik Stays

What if Poplasen initiates protests?

Poplasen, like any other citizen, has the right to demonstrate, but as far as I can tell, he does not seem to enjoy significant support in the RS.

How come that he received confidence from the Assembly?

None of the Serb politicians, in such a situation, could say that they were against another Serb, so even those who had wanted to drive him out long before that, had to support him in public.

You do not think that Sloga took the side of the hard-line wing?

No, not at all. Sloga still supports Dodik. He is still the only individual who has certain authority and credibility in the RS.

How will the crisis in the RS be resolved?

There are mutual negotiations in progress at the moment on who could take over Poplasen's position, they are trading with ministries, etc. In the meantime, there is no crisis in the Government. Dodik is the Prime Minister, it is crucial to find someone who will perform the duty of RS President until the elections.

Vice President Mirko Sarovic, the name that is mentioned most often, is from the SDS. How do you intend to act towards the SDS?

I always hoped that the SDS would break apart after the fall of Pale and the end of Krajisnik's mandate. They did lose a lot of people, there have been some moves away from Krajisnik's policy but, unfortunately, there was Poplasen on the other side of the scale with the mentality of the old regime. He has never learned the lesson, not even now.

When will Zivko Radisic return to the Presidency?

I had a lengthy meeting with Radisic the other day and I told him that I did not like his action, but that I understood him and hoped that the Serbs will return to the institutions once the talks on Brcko start. All the sides should meet with Owen to talk about annexes to the arbitration decision which will not change the sense of the final decision. It will take us a week or two to organise this meeting.