

Interview: Hanns H. Schumacher, Senior Deputy HR “The winner does not take it all”

Mr. Schumacher, how do you assess the general elections in BiH?

I think we can say they were positive. There is a clear erosion of support for the strong mono-ethnic parties. The SDS lost five seats in the National Assembly, and a similar thing happened in the Federation to the SDA and the HDZ. That gives us hope for the future. The elections have significantly strengthened the opposition, but it has to solidify itself in the upcoming period. This is one of the reasons why High Representative Carlos Westendorp and OSCE Mission Chief Robert Barry have decided that the representation in the parliaments can no longer be based on the slogan, ‘The winner takes it all.’ The leading majority parties will no longer decide on their own who the delegates in the House of Peoples of the State Parliament will be. This will be decided according to the results all parties on the cantonal and Entity levels have achieved in general. This means that the SDA and the HDZ, who have the majority in all cantonal assemblies, could theoretically decide about their delegates in the House of Peoples, but they will have to take into account the results achieved by the other political parties in the Federation, so several seats will have to go to the New Croat Initiative and the Croat Christian-Democratic Union, and not to the HDZ only. The same goes for the SDA, which has to allocate several seats in the House of Peoples to the SDP, the Democratic-National Union and other parties. Of course, we also will not be satisfied in the RS if only SDS delegates are in the House of Peoples. This is not possible, for it is not based on the constitution of the RS National Assembly. We can still see mono-ethnic parties hold a very strong position, but it is weakening.

What do you think about the opposition in the Federation?

You can judge on the opposition only when it starts to govern. Therefore, let us wait until the opposition takes over power in the Federation.

Is there a need for the existence of the Alternative Council of Ministers, considering the fact that the opposition won many more votes than in the last elections?

An alternative cabinet exists in many western democracies, especially in Great Britain. A shadow government is always manned by the opposition. For any government, regardless of whether in Bosnia, Germany or Great Britain, it is always good to have an strong opposition. In that context, I support the idea that the parties that currently form the Alternative Council of Ministers should carry on with this tradition. I am ready to improve cooperation with the Alternative Council of Ministers in order to hear their opinion about political issues that are being solved at the state level.

The first informal meeting of the BiH Presidency was held without any problems?

This meeting was encouraging because it was held in a simple way and because the new Presidency members met very early and agreed on the ceremony of taking over their duties. I think this meeting cleared a very important matter: the building in Marijin Dvor will be the permanent seat of the BiH joint institutions, as stated in the Bonn and the Luxembourg documents. This means that the plenary sessions of the CoM, the Parliament and the Presidency will be held in the Marijin Dvor building. When the European Union project is implemented, which means equipping and refurbishing all offices that have been reconstructed, the offices of the CoM Secretary General, the Parliamentary Secretariat, and the cabinet of the Serb presidency member Zivko Radisic including his staff will be located there. This will be the end of the habit to hold meetings in the National Museum and in Lukavica.

Is the first session of the newly elected BiH Parliament going to be held in the new building?

The BiH Parliament could hold a session in this very building tomorrow if necessary. Of course, we need at least 24 hours in order to put chairs in the conference room, and the rest of the furniture will arrive in two months. The EU assured us that the conference room will be finished by the end of the year.

What is the situation in the RS like?

I think that neither the “Sloga” Coalition nor we need to be discouraged by the election results. Poplasen won and

we have to respect that. We have made it clear that we respect the election results, but we also have to look at them from the point of view that the "Sloga" coalition has won more seats in the Parliament than it had before. Now it is like a game of chess. Poplasen has to make the first move and propose a government mandator. We encourage and call on the parties of the "Sloga Coalition" (Plavsic, Radisic and his colleague Ilic, and Dodik) to stick together and preserve the Coalition they signed. For, nothing can happen against the will of "Sloga", and this should be the guideline for the future policy in the RS. Until the new prime minister is elected, Dodik's government will stay in power.

When will the new RS Prime Minister be elected?

I do not want to speculate with names. We should wait.

Was Dragan Cavic's removal a warning to Poplasen and all other officials who work against Dayton?

The HR's decision to remove Dragan Cavic, designated president of the parliamentary SDS fraction, shows our insistence that the newly elected officials must respect the Dayton Agreement. Cavic's statements on threats to the international community are clearly offensive and unacceptable and are not in accordance with the principles that he agreed to abide by when he registered for the elections. No one should be surprised that Carlos Westendorp took this decision.

Could this act be considered a warning to hard-liners across the political landscape?

No. Please, take this as a warning to all those who wish to challenge the High Representative in his intention to implement the Dayton Peace Agreement.

Talking about Dayton, we recently saw a similar provocation in Tasovcici, where one man lost his life.

I truly hope that the people who simply want to return to their homes will be able to do so freely. Regarding Tasovcici, IPTF has taken measures and removed the Capljina Chief of Police, Buntic. IPTF demanded from the Minister of Internal Affairs, Valentin Coric, who still holds this position, to remove Buntic from his post immediately. In addition, a criminal investigation and disciplinary measures were initiated. Apart from that, Sir Martin Garrod organized a meeting in Mostar at which representatives of both sides agreed how to keep the situation in Tasovcici under control, and to continue with returns. I think that the good will shown by both parties at this meeting is encouraging.

Should Ivan Prskalo still become Deputy Mayor of Mostar after this event?

The public fight that Ivan Prskalo started earlier with representatives of the international community does not help solving all the numerous problems in Mostar. When it comes to the new leadership in Mostar, I would still recommend to wait for the meeting of the local politicians there, who should decide who will remain in office and who not.

Before the elections, HDZ leaders committed themselves to Dayton. The situation is now different?

Although a returnee lost his life before politicians came to an agreement, I am still encouraged by the good faith shown by both sides in Tasovcici, as well as by all the assurances given by HDZ representatives after the incident. I see a clear intention to calm down the situation in Tasovcici, as well as active support for continuing returns. We have experienced this already in Vitez with Bosniak returns to Ahmici and Gacice. I think it is important to show Croats that the international community works by the principle of equal rights. The examples of returns to Vitez, Busovaca, Brajkovici and Bukovica show that we take both Bosniak and Croat interests into account. I wish to convey to everybody that they should have confidence in both sides and actively support the process of return. Now, after the elections, we are on the threshold: we can no longer micromanage 20,30 families in individual municipalities, as this absorbs the energy of the international community in an irresponsible way. We need a clear commitment from the highest leaders that they are in favor of return. On the other hand, the international community has to improve its models of cooperation. I would like to point out that so far, return has happened successfully in the Vrbas Valley, between Bugojno, Jajce and Gornji Vakuf, where there is excellent cooperation between SFOR troops and the authorities for civilian implementation. This blueprint should also be applied in other areas of the Federation and in the Republika Srpska. In that regard, I expect better cooperation in the future.