

Interview: Carlos Westendorp, the High Representative in BiH "Krajisnik is a political dinosaur"

Lots of energy and money were spent in preparation for the elections. Has it been worth it, considering, among other things, your own statements that this year's elections will not change much?

It is too early to know the results. But I am convinced that the results will be good, if you consider the direction I am referring to. You know what elections are. This is a country of citizens and all citizens are equal before the law, regardless of their ethnic or religious orientation. But this will last, and it cannot be changed in a year or two. That is why we have more pluralism in these elections. The Croats have a new party – the New Croat Initiative (NCI), which competes with other ethnic parties. In the Federation, amongst Bosniaks, I am sure that the SDP and the UBSD will win twice as many votes than in the last elections. There is a very healthy competition between the SDA and the CUD Coalition and the Opposition. We will have a real opposition, and that is good. And finally, the "Sloga" coalition will win many more votes in the RS. "Sloga" is more moderate than the Radicals or the SDS. You see, this is a good result, but it is not a revolution. The situation in this country will not change overnight. According to public polling, conducted by an American firm a month ago, most Bosnians answered they are not interested in ethnic division, and that they are interested mostly in work, economic reforms, social security, privatisation and the possibility of return to their homes. But answering the question whether they would vote for a person who is not in their ethnic group, 80% of them answered they would not. You see, there is a paradox that needs to be overcome. For, it is too early to expect some other answer when these ethnic groups were fighting each other two years ago. Trust needs to be created, and, as the International Crisis Group called this in their last report, "ethnic safety". That is the basic thing. To create ethnic safety actually means that if you are a minority, you have to be sure the police will protect you, or that judges will be fair, even if they are not in the same ethnic group. The solution is to make reforms of the police and legal system. But this has to be done simultaneously and very promptly. At the same time, we have to exert pressure for the return of minorities now. Because, three years further on, everyone will hesitate to return from Germany, Australia or some other country, because they are already engaged in some activity over there. This pressure has to be put on now, and this is one of our biggest priorities.

Should the opposition win more votes, what are their chances to influence the work of the Parliament more?

The fact that the Opposition could win more seats in the Parliament is good for the work of this body, as long as the Opposition follows DPA implementation. I trust, Lagumdžija, Beslagić and Tokić are following this path and that competition will develop in the right direction. There will be no more strong monopoly from the SDA amongst Bosniaks. There will be much more competition, and competition of political parties leads to internal democratisation. Whenever you have a party that has a monopoly, there is always a tendency to become something more than a party itself, to become something like a movement. The governing party and the coalition must become more democratic, and less of a movement. In my opinion, this is the best result of winning more votes in the opposition.

What are the NCI chances?

According to public polling, they will win about 15% – 20% in Central Bosnia and Posavina, but less in Herzegovina, where the HDZ has the majority. This polling gives less or equal votes to Zubak as Lagumdžija and Beslagić will win together in the Federation, that is about 15%-20%, maybe something less.

Do you dare to predict the new structure of the BiH Presidency?

This depends on voters. But, according to this polling, which I think can be trusted, Izetbegović will be the Bosniak member of the Presidency, this is clear. For he is still a charismatic leader, so this is logical. The Opposition did not offer a strong candidate for they knew they do not have a chance against Izetbegović. When it comes to the Serb Presidency member, I hope Radisić will win rather than Krajisnik. Why? Because Krajisnik is hopeless. We cannot work with a person of his mentality. He represents the past. He is a dinosaur. I personally like him, but politically,

he is not the person for Bosnia.

Krajsnik does not have the influence in the whole RS, only in the eastern part?

Yes, but he is very well-known. Radisic is a very reasonable person, he is honest and has nothing to do with corruption. He is not an ultra-nationalist. These are arguments that tell us he can be trusted and that he can be a good partner. When it comes to Croats, I think it is good there is competition between Zubak and Jelavic. But I believe the HDZ is stronger than the new party. I think Jelavic will win, according to this public polling. If you ask me if he is going to work constructively, I would answer I think he would. Maybe I am wrong.

Maybe the NCI's existence forced the HDZ to hold much stronger pre-electoral campaign?

In the programmes of both parties, and for the first time in the HDZ programme, it says that they wish Croats to return to Central Bosnia and Posavina. None of Croat leaders said this before. The fact is that HDZ hardliners were opposing each time we tried to return Croats to these areas. We talked to these Croats, and they wish to return, but they are afraid. The thing that Jelavic must do is to overcome the resistance of local hard-liners, because there are lot of them in his party. And he knows this too. We will work with both Zubak's and Jelavic's party in order to return confidence to the Croat community. They must be understood, they are a minority: they feel isolated, they feel they were expelled from Central Bosnia and Posavina. We also have to bring trust back to Sarajevo. Croats are coming to Sarajevo more and more, but do not have their own schools. We have to help them, for they are a constituent nation here.

What about areas where Croats are a majority, Mostar, for example, or Eastern Herzegovina?

Mostar is a difficult problem. It is now a divided town, despite there being some improvements in the situation. The Mayor and his deputy are working together. Orucevic is a good mayor, while Prskalo's qualities are not suitable for such a big challenge. I hope that Jelavic and the HDZ, if they win, if not I then hope Zubak, will find the right person to solve the Mostar problem. The present situation is like in Western movies, you have two cowboys on the two sides of the road, and they are looking at each other and pulling out their guns. This has to be overcome. The return of Bosniaks to West Mostar is absolutely fundamental. But so is the reverse: Bosniaks have already left Croat apartments in the eastern side, so that Croats can return there. Croats do not dare to return because their hardliners ban this. We have to apply all pressures we can in order to make Mostar a multi-ethnic town. Of course, on the eastern side, the majority will be Bosniaks and Serbs, and Croats will be in the Western side. But, this is not a problem. The problem is that Mostar has to be re-united. Otherwise, this is an explosive situation.