Interview: Carlos Westendorp, the High Representative”Cut by half the number of soldiers’ booklets

The International Community wants to help all the nations in both entities – the RS and Federation, with a promise that one builds a better life with confidence – the responsibilities of BiH and those of the entities are clearly and certainly stated in the Dayton Agreement which is above all the Laws in this area

SARAJEVO, July 30th – Carlos Westendorp, High Representative of the United Nations for BiH, received our Editor in Chief, Tomo Maric, and a journalist, Milenko Sajic, at his office in Sarajevo and gave an exclusive interview on the occasion of the fifty-fifth anniversary of the “Glas Srpski”. Not even one question directed to Mr. Westendorp remained unanswered nor did he make any “fences” for any topic that was discussed during the almost two-hour conversation.

The arrest of war criminals will be one of the High Representative’s priorities in the forthcoming period. This “forthcoming period” could be an extendable formula, but Carlos Westendorp might do all that is in his power to make this period shorter. He stressed more than once the importance of arresting war criminals, above all Radovan Karadzic.

I do not think this is primarily SFOR’s obligation. I respect what was written as their authorisation in the case of arrest of war criminals. There are also other authorities that have the right and obligation to deal with this problem. Therefore, I want to be very precise about this. SFOR’s authorisations are very clear. However, there are other countries or

organisations that are capable and ready to arrest certain war criminals.

Westendorp says that a meeting of the Peace Implementation Council will be held in Madrid in mid December. The meeting will be held at ministerial level and will discuss tasks for the future period.
But it can already be said that refugee return and privatisation will be among the most important tasks.

When it comes to the elections for the BiH Presidency, there is much speculation about the possibility of "electoral engineering" that would enable the election of "suitable" members for this body. Croats, or more precisely, the HDZ are afraid that the International Community might vote for the Croat member of the Presidency – Kresimir Zubak.

The International Community has the obligation of neutrality in these processes. Both parties, the HDZ and the NHI, declared themselves for Dayton implementation, and that they are democratic parties. We have to trust their word, and it remains to be seen how dedicated they will be. The problem is that in some places with a Croat majority, local leaders are obstructing the process. Therefore it is necessary for Zubak and Jelavic to understand they have to replace those who obstruct the peace process. This is very clear and it is not aimed against Croats. We understand the problems of this people. We realise they are a minority, so we wish to protect them just as all other people. This does not mean we shall tolerate behaviour that aims towards separation, segregation, preventing the people coming to their homes, like recent problems in Vitez, or this man in Orasje, that made me say to Jelavic that we cannot work with such people. I trust those who say they will co-operate in the DPA implementation are honest. But those who do not wish this have to be replaced, regardless of the level of office they hold.

The draft Law on Privatisation was recently adopted at the

state level. Along with it, it was published that OHR will establish an independent commission, which will monitor this process and ensure its regularity.

I am just preparing to establish this commission. The task is urgent, for announcements in the press give us reason to believe that this is the right move. Three or four people will make up this commission, and the public already knows its purpose. Besides, we believe the number and the value of soldiers' foreign currency booklets, presented to Federation soldiers, have been overestimated. It is about nine billion DEM, and our assessments show the true value is about half of this amount. If this was done for political reasons, those who do it have to be aware that money given to soldiers is being taken from other people – ordinary people. The privatisation that has been done for example with hotels in Neum, that are the property of the Zenica Steel Factory employees, and the privatisation of some enterprises in Sarajevo, I think should be revised by this commission. Everything that was not done in accordance with the law we shall have to abolish.

Who is going to do that, the commission?

No. The commission is a body of the Office of the High Representative. It has no authorisation. If its members estimate that some procedure in this area was carried out illegally, I shall consider it and I will not hesitate to cancel it.

When will the revision process start?

First of all, all these cases are very well known, but we need more information and discussions with the authorities.

That means after the elections?

No, why? The revision process can start even now. Of course the whole process will take time, but it is not connected with the elections. Therefore, as soon as the commission is

constituted, it will begin considering the cases. We shall afterwards recommend to the entities what they should do, and if they do not carry this out, I shall act without hesitation.

Why has the establishment of the commission been delayed? Is it true that some circles at the International Community did not agree with your idea on its establishment, that they demanded the privatisation process should be conducted without control, undisturbed?

There were some obstacles and misunderstandings in the beginning, some concerns that this would be another bureaucratic body, which has an ambition to take away the jurisdiction from similar entity institutions, that they will prevent privatisation, etc. We have discussed this very carefully and found a mutual basis for collaboration, so now the commission can start. It has to happen this week. The Steering Board session will be held here on September 8. The commission has to start working by this date.

Is it true that the Americans, above all, resisted its establishment, and that they demanded no hampering of 'the market forces'?

We have discussed this not only with Americans, but also with other members of the International Community. The privatisation process was the biggest problem to engage the financial experts. They believed this country needs privatisation and were proposing to conduct it as soon as possible. However, we focused our attention on the social and political repercussions of this process, if it is not conducted in an appropriate manner. This country has several different nations; it went through war; so privatisation is not only a financial matter. That is why we met with financial experts and achieved, I would say, a happy agreement. I hope the people in BiH will not lose by the privatisation process. Should this happen, I would resign my post. This could also happen not only through privatisation, but also because of

other things.

Apart from the privatisation of soldiers' booklets, the problem of communication aggression is also present in the Federation. The presence of RTS and HRT is problematic, as well as the installation of base stations for foreign mobile phones.

Of course. Those are not individual problems. But, speaking of mobile phones, we are currently negotiating the integration of mobile telephones into one system. It is absurd to have different systems here. Although negotiations are very slow, we hope we will achieve agreement very soon. When it comes to transmitters, the Independent Media Commission (IMC) is considering two possibilities. The first one is that the re-broadcasting of programming should be based on principles of press freedom, during the elections and after this period. We monitored the HRT programme and determined they are not neutral and do not respect the rules of the IMC. After the negotiations the IMC had with the HRT General Manager, the quality of pre-electoral campaign coverage improved significantly. The net problem is ownership over the transmitters. The question is how many of them are owned by RTV BHB, and how many by "Erotel". I think we shall also agree very soon about this too.

Can we expect the IMC will determine the same rules for all media in BiH, that are using BiH territory and transmitters for re-broadcasting their programme?

You cannot enforce the regulations only against those who use satellites. The IMC has authority to act and mechanisms to implement the regulations regarding everyone else, from regulations on transmitters to frequency allocation.

You were engaged a lot in customs-system restructuring. Are you satisfied with the results achieved in this field?

The people who work there are very competent. I would say the

problem is not owing to them, but to those who interfere with the customs policy from outside. Unknown people or organisations – I can't point a finger at any one person or party – interfere with this business, and we have reason to say that the problem of bribing is very present at border crossings. In order to suppress this we need co-operation not only from customs and political authorities, but also the neighbouring countries. This means agreements with Belgrade and Zagreb. We need this in order to compare customs declarations here with what was shipped from abroad. The circle, which prevents bribing, is narrowing. The International Community believes this is one of the essential problems because a lot of money is being lost or ends in private hands.

Do you intend to prolong the deadline for the application of those who wish to return to Sarajevo?

I have not discussed this with my associates these days. But they recently informed me that after the meeting with Mirza Hajric, they received information that progress has been achieved in returns to apartments, which were occupied by people who already have other apartments or houses. But still, we need the data, the figures, who lived in such apartments before the war, who lives there now, who are those people, what do they do. If we see a certain progress here, we could be more relaxed when it comes to the deadline, but if not…

PLOCE HARBOUR

The Ploce agreement is a matter concerning two states, Croatia and BiH. Discussions about this are being conducted under American sponsorship, and now Jacques Klein also takes part in negotiations, on the behalf of OHR. I think the solution of this problem can be found in the experiences of other European countries. That is why we asked Europeans to give us their information and experiences of cases like Hamburg, Amsterdam… We think resolving this matter is important for both

countries. If Brcko and Ploce are open, the traffic can freely develop, the country can breath freely. Hence, we understand the significance of this matter. When Jacques Klein and I visited President Tudjman in Zagreb, we expressed our interest in this problem and stressed the necessity to speed up the whole process. I think the achievement of final agreement will require lot of time and pressures. I do not think the whole matter will be solved so quickly.