

Interview: Robert W. Farrand, Supervisor for Brcko"Half-way to the Arbitration"

The Brcko area, which is of vital importance to the life of the RS, has been a hot subject since the Dayton Agreement was signed to this day. About the destiny of this town and about the future of its citizens we talked with Mr. Robert W. Farrand, Supervisor for the Brcko area, who agreed to give an exclusive interview for our newspapers after he met the RS President, Ms. Biljana Plavsic, on Thursday, August 6. Mr. Farrand has explained a lot of unclear things regarding certain problems which he faces during his work, and at the same time he emphasised what has to be done in the Arbitration process, and even he said that it is at the half-way point.

Mr. Farrand, how do you assess the situation in Brcko, from the latest Arbitration Award until today?

On the basis of the Supplemental Arbitration Award, dated March 15 this year, both sides have certain obligations. If we quote the Arbitration Award, these obligations are related to the "significant new achievements" which are particularly related to the process of the return of refugees which has to show significant results, the functioning of the multi-ethnic administration, freedom of movement and fulfilling of obligations from the previous Arbitration Award. Truly, the greatest burden has fallen on the RS, which has to show all those "significant new achievements", but also a significant burden has fallen on the BiH Federation, which is obliged to help in the sense of providing the two-way return of the population which currently lives in Brcko, and whose homes are located on BiH Federation territory. Of course, my task is to implement the Dayton Peace Accords and Arbitration Award, and now when we are only at the half-way point, it cannot be said that there were no significant new achievements. There are a lot of things which have to be done in the next seven months, in order to get to the point where we can say that the significant new achievements were achieved.

Could you tell us, do you find discrepancies between provisions of the Arbitration Award and the Dayton Agreement in decisions which you implement in your job?

No! I've never had such difficulties. I've never had a problem regarding the difference between the spirit and the letter of the Dayton Agreement and Supplemental Arbitration Award.

During the establishment of the multi-ethnic administration, Serb employees were laid off in the Brcko Municipality. How do you see this problem?

There are certain misunderstandings, misinformation about what happened when Serbs were laid off so that Bosniaks and Croats could be employed in the multi-ethnic administration in Brcko. One of misunderstandings was that those laid off were thrown out on the street, without salaries or any kind of compensation and left to their fate. But, on the contrary, that didn't happen, a careful agreement was reached between representatives of the Trade Union who are responsible for the workers in this Municipality and the RS Government, and on the basis of that agreement the problem of salaries was resolved, so they will be paid until a satisfactory job is found for them. I was a witness to the signing of this Agreement. The RS Government has put in a lot of effort in order to retrain those people for other jobs, such as computer training, so that they are qualified to find a good new job in the future.

The proportion of employees in the multi-ethnic administration and police should be 52-48, of course that is the proportion of Serbs and non-Serbs. Does it reflect the situation on the ground?

No! That doesn't give the current picture of the situation on the ground. That is the proportion according to the number of registered voters and voters who participated in the elections in 1997, in Brcko. It also includes the voters who don't live in the Brcko area, but who used to live there before the war and who want to return there. If we were following the statistics from 1991, then the number of Serbs would make only 20 %, and according to the situation on the ground now, it would make 95 %. Taking into account the registered voters, we came to this proportion, that is 52.2 %.

If we take up the situation in Drvar where such proportions haven't been respected, do you think that Serbs are harmed then?

I have to admit that I am not well informed about the details of the situation on the ground in Drvar. However, in other parts of BiH, when it is about forming a multi-ethnic administration, the model of Brcko should be followed. Nothing is perfect in this world, but I think that this method of establishing multi-ethnic government institutions is pretty successful.

There has been a lot of talk about the problem of marking houses for returnees in Brcko. What has really happened?

First of all, in no way did it come to the prohibition of house marking. I suspended the house marking temporarily, for a couple of hours! The verb to suspend is different from the verb to prohibit. I will explain with pleasure to your readers several things related to the house marking in the Brcko area. We have been marking houses in the Brcko municipality for 12 – 14 months already, without any incidents. It is only a technical process and is related to the marking of destroyed and unoccupied houses. That process is not related to houses which are occupied by any means.

The fact that now we suddenly have certain difficulties lately is the result of politicising of this problem. We have a game with the fears of DPs and refugees in Brcko who are in somebody else's houses till now, in this pre-election period. This is a problem which actually doesn't exist. It is a problem which was created, and by which people manipulate for their own political reasons. That is a reflection of the wish of individuals who intend to hinder a much more important process on which we work in Brcko. In such a way they just take our attention away from things we are currently working on, and that is the improvement in the economy, revitalisation of industry, as well as opening new jobs for unemployed people in Brcko, those who live in terribly difficult conditions. Therefore, all this is just a waste of time.

Could the people who create those problems be named?

No! I don't think it is necessary, because your readers realise whose interest lies in that kind of hindering of the Government's efforts to improve the standard of DPs in Brcko. So, it relates to all those people who didn't have a positive programme for the population in Brcko, nor do they have it now, nor will they have it in future, except to support fears and contribute to those people feeling extremely vulnerable, and who are extremely vulnerable, according to the situation now. Anyway, it is important to go back to the essential task which is in front of us.

I just had several extremely positive talks with representatives of the authorities of the RS. I found more proof of putting in even more effort in order to improve the life of people who currently live in Brcko and those who will return there in the next few months.

Unresolved political status

Brcko is one the most important issues for the RS. Many consider that, in case of an unfavorable decision for the RS, the DPA would be disrupted? What is your point of view about that issue?

Brcko is the area under Supervision because the political status of the town could not be resolved in Dayton. Essentially, there's no problem between the Arbitration Award and the DPA because the problem of Brcko has not been resolved. That is why the Supervisor has been appointed.

Establishment of political pluralism

What can you tell us about the Order you have recently issued and according to which replacement due to party affiliation is forbidden. The word is that this Order emerged after the division within the HDZ?

The answer is very simple. The IC is present here, among other things, to establish political pluralism, in order to establish different political points of view, and not to think the same way. I am aware that there are certain politicians in Brcko who would like to leave one party and go to another because they don't feel "comfortable" in that party. If they have been appointed to some political function, there is no reason for them to lose that position just because they have changed their party. If that represents a problem in nationalistic parties, then it is simply so.

As far as “evil tongues” are concerned, they say what they say, the period of pre-election is always full of different things and this Order only helps to preserve stability and balance.

We would like the town to be electrified before the winter, to improve the water supply system a great deal, as well as the conditions in “Dom Zdravlja” and the local hospital, and the same works for schools. Those are basic elements of the infrastructure necessary in order to have Brcko in bloom, in order to attract investors, create new jobs, which would altogether, like a chain reaction, improve the standard of life. Those are essential things which are to be clarified, and those are the most important things and all misunderstandings in relation to the house marking are unessential.

In that context, what kind of cooperation do you have with the current RS authorities and can you tell us what it was like with the previous RS Government?

That is the easiest question you have asked me. The cooperation with the previous RS Government was very close to zero. They were able to smile and say “Yes”, sign a contract or agreement and to do nothing. Nine out of ten months were lost working with that Government, and that time cost us a great deal as well. The time for work on these present jobs, the time we are spending in order to put the town on its own feet.

The new RS Government has serious plans. It works under very difficult conditions with limited resources for funding, which it is trying to distribute somehow differently so as to have the entire system functioning better. I will tell the readers several important details about it again.

108 million DM has been pledged to Brcko, out of which 85 million DM are already assigned to a specific project, and are already spent, while 40% of funds have been used for the improvement of life in the very town, which is approximately 35 million DM. Large numbers of contracts with RS contractors have been signed, which means that new jobs are created. USAID created 142 jobs and provided loans for seven companies in Brcko, while CARE International created 70 new jobs with various micro-loans. A larger number of similar contracts is expected to be signed, and a couple of weeks ago, a Trade Fair took place in the OHR where 32 contractors from the RS had the opportunity to meet various firms which fund the works on certain projects, that is meet with the providers of funds for the forthcoming projects.

RS Prime Minister Milorad Dodik has recently met with the President of the Arbitration Tribunal for the Dispute on the IEBL in the area of Brcko, Roberts Owen, after which the possibility for making the Final Award at the beginning of the next year was announced.

We will see!

Do you think that the conditions for the passing of the Final Award are created?

We have five more months ahead of us. I am an implementer and not a judge.

Will the RS be able to meet all requirements set in the Arbitration Award by that time?

Of course, everything is possible.

What will this pre-election period be like in comparison with last year’s, and do you expect greater participation of the Bosnian Croats in the next elections?

Yes, I hope that a greater number of Croats will participate in the next elections because they put themselves into a very inconvenient situation in the last elections. Due to the boycott which took place in Herzeg-Bosna, the Croats in the Posavina suffered. In the Brcko area, which is under Supervision, there are villages which were predominantly populated by the Croats before the war and they are to return now. We expect their larger participation because maybe the New Croatian Initiative can offer a new option which the blind following of the HDZ did not offer, and that was the thing that damaged them.

The call to vote goes out in broader terms towards everybody. I hope that everybody will choose a political party and vote for those candidates who care about their economic interests and put them over ethnic divisions. It is clear that ethnic division does not lead anywhere.

The recent murder of the young Bosniak in Brcko was resolved very fast by the Police. Are you satisfied with the

work of that police force and is it about a political murder?

The investigation monitored by IPTF is underway. We still do not have the motive for that crime and therefore I would not like to comment on this case. But, I am satisfied with the speed at which the Police reacted and apprehended suspects.

That is the beginning of the process which will be continued in order to reach a verdict.