

Interview: Carlos Westendorp, the High Representative in BiH "The solution for Bosnia is to change the authorities"

At a time when the political and security situation in the Balkans is getting more and more complicated, when international diplomats are constantly going between Sarajevo, Zagreb, Belgrade and Brussels, when the Bosnian capital, Sarajevo, is hosting on a daily basis reputable foreign representatives, who always meet the High Representative, Carlos Westendorp as well, he has found reason enough for his first official visit to Slovenia.

A BiH state delegation recently visited Ljubljana. Is there any connection between these two visits?

Certainly it is not a coincidence that both Izetbegovic and myself decided to visit Ljubljana. Slovenia is one of the main countries for establishing a lasting peace in the region. I found out at the last meeting I had with Premier Drnovsek in Sarajevo that Ljubljana is well informed about the situation in Bosnia. I plan to exchange opinions and standpoints with the Slovenian authorities during this visit and I'm sure that I will return to Sarajevo enriched with a new understanding.

How much can Slovenia contribute to strengthening the peace process in Bosnia and in the region?

Ljubljana is the best example for Belgrade, Zagreb and Sarajevo on how one state, with a developed democracy and market economy, can get closer and join the European Union without any big obstacles. This path should be followed by Bosnia and other states in the region. That is why Slovenia,

as a first neighbour, can help a lot in the stabilisation of political and economic circumstances in BiH.

In your opinion, what is the influence of the neighbouring countries on the situation in BiH?

It happens quite often that FRY and Croatia do not respect the Dayton agreement. Recently, for example, we had to tell Tudjman that his speech at the HDZ gathering was not in line with Dayton. We have to remind him constantly that Serbs who were expelled from Krajina and Eastern Slavonia have the right to return. We have the same kind of problems with Milosevic, who is behaving like he does not care much about Europe and its opinion. According to the latest information, he is trying to destabilise Dodik's Government. This is very dangerous even for FRY because it would be against the interests of its citizens. They would like to see FRY becoming a member of the IMF, World Bank and other institutions, since only such politics can guarantee them normal living conditions.

Do you believe that the Kosovo crisis could make your work in BiH much more difficult?

Milosevic has awoken the monsters of nationalism in Bosnia. Now he is fighting against the same problems in Kosovo. The only path to peace is by introducing a democratic dialogue and the autonomy for Kosovo. Otherwise, the only alternatives are genocide or an independent state of Kosovo. If Milosevic chooses war, the whole region would feel the severe consequences of such a decision. The problems of large movements of the population would reappear, this time in FRY. Security and national and social issues in Macedonia and Albania would only deepen. The war would also have a negative impact on Bosnia. I'm very concerned about the situation in Kosovo.

Going back to Bosnia. What chances do you give the ruling parties before the September election?

I have always said that the problem of Bosnia is that the leaders who started the war are still in power. Therefore the only solution for Bosnia would be that its people change their leaders at the elections. But people don't have sufficient information to do that. Also, the alternative parties are not united. We would like to ensure more pluralism before the September elections, specially through free and independent media. There are some other options as well, for example, OSCE Election rules, which guarantee punishment of parties which do not act in accordance with the Dayton agreement. I want to state publicly that we have certain problems in convincing the International Community to finance our election media campaign. My forecast of the results of September elections is not optimistic. The parties currently at large will win. That is why I hope these parties will democratise internally. If HDZ and SDA will not do that, their voters will walk away sooner or later. Somewhat different is the situation in Republika Srpska. During its rule, SDS did not bring normal living conditions to the people. On the other hand, the new Government has already done more for improving such conditions than the former leadership did during its whole mandate. I hope that some important actions, which they are carrying out against corruption, will be fruitful, and that the perpetrators will be publicly named. For this reason, I hope that SDS will be backed by significantly less people. Also, the 'healthy' component of this party, which is aware of the mistakes, has started to depart. Gradually, SDS could completely disappear from the political scene.

According to Dayton, Bosnia is a completely asymmetric state with two entities and three constitutional peoples. The Federation is cantonised, while RS is centralised with absurd local self-rule. Can such a state survive?

You are right. Dayton Bosnia is quite a strange creature. Beside what you have just mentioned, we have three armies. We are here to make this creature alive and capable of living on

its own. I think this is possible, otherwise we would not be in Sarajevo. I'm confident that the songs of the mermaids from Belgrade and Zagreb are quieter and quieter, and the European melodies louder and louder. What we are doing is called making a path for BiH to get where Slovenia already stands; in front of the EU doors.

In Belgrade, the Dinar was devaluated. RS is in the common currency system with FRY. Is the International Community aware of the fact that by giving financial support to Dodik it also helps Milosevic, since nearly all US Dollars and German Marks end up in the treasuries of the FRY National Bank.

In this modern world, you cannot stop the German Mark travelling. Everybody knows that the Yugoslav economy is sinking deeper and deeper, while the RS economy is showing some signs of revitalisation. The Yugoslav Dinar was devaluated to 80%, but the Konvertibilna Marka which will be shortly introduced by Dodik, will not follow that path, since it is soundly tied to the German Mark – the exchange rate being one to one. The Yugoslav Dinar will soon become a Museum piece in Bosnia, because one will prefer to have Konvertibilna Marka rather than a worthless piece of paper.