

Interview: Jacques Paul Klein, Principal Deputy HR “Zagreb must clearly say to Herzegovinians that they are a part of BiH”

Right after the press briefing ended, we talked to Jacques Klein at the American Embassy. For Vecernji List, Klein talked about the reasons for his visit to Zagreb and the situation in BiH.

When you visited Zagreb two months ago, as one of the main problems, you stressed difficulties of establishing local authorities, and distinguished Croats, that is the HDZ BiH as the “generator” of the problem. Is there any progress in that sense?

These things are going relatively well, but there are still places with no progress, such as Srebrenica. We do not know how to return the Mayor, Moslem, and the City Council, consisting of Moslems, in a situation when this town is still, so to say, occupied by Serbs. But there are no more than 10 places like this.

An example of a heavy case is Drvar, where the Serb Mayor is about to arrive. His deputy is a Croat, and the city is full of Croats. It is a question of how to establish local authorities in these circumstances. I think it is possible, but requires time and money.

Party “Bosses”

Situations like the one in Livno, where we have problems with establishing the joint police, are very difficult because, despite what is said in Sarajevo and Zagreb, in the majority

of such places you have an entrenched leadership. These are party "bosses" that have some personal aims. They are hiding under the mask of nationalism in order to achieve their personal aims, and not the aims of the people that they represent or the aims of Sarajevo and Zagreb. Individuals are always the problem here, and it is all "garnished" with a lot of criminal activities.

Recently, there have been many talks about parallel institutions in Herceg-Bosna. How strong are these institutions actually, and how much do they obstruct you in your business?

They are still very visible and they are also one of the most important reasons why I came to talk to President Tudjman. Regardless of all historical reasons, it has to be accepted that Herzegovina is now a part of BiH. I can understand their concern that they will be marginalised in the Federation, I can even understand their nationalism, but they need to understand us, and the leadership in Zagreb must clearly say to them that they are now in BiH and that they have to co-operate with the International Community. They have to realise that only then will they be completely protected and safe. Isolation is not the solution.

Tudjman promised me nothing

Do you see a solution to this problem by changing the leadership of the HDZ BiH?

I hope the Party convention will make a new leadership. I stress that the Federation Forum in Mostar, the day before yesterday, was especially positive. I know many Croat leaders in Herzegovina and elsewhere in BiH that can understand these things and who wish a change for the better. When you are a minority, you are frightened and insecure, you then gladly vote for a party that will protect your interests. I would like to say to this party that, if they want a future, if they want the population to be protected, then they must start co-operating with the IC in building the BiH State. This state

cannot survive without Croats.

Did President Tudjman offer you any guarantee that the things you just mentioned will go in a positive direction?

No, he did not give me any guarantees. We have discussed and exchanged opinions. I told him what I had to tell him and gave him time to think. He usually sends his return information via his ministers or via Mr. Sarinic. I expect to receive answers to my questions in a couple of days. Some things are already being resolved. The draft law that will regulate refugee return will soon be before the Congress. I think such moves are especially positive.

There are some suggestions to draw new Canton borders in BiH, and to create new, ethnically clean cantons. What do you think about that?

Many important things are happening on the Canton level. If you are the majority in the Canton, your rights are quite well protected, but in BiH, there is almost no possibility to draw the inter-canton borders to make the ethnic scene completely clean. BiH was a multi-ethnic community before the war, and I don't see why it could not be again. I am not naïve, but there are many people of goodwill that want BiH to become a real state.

160,000 refugees returned

Return of refugees is a great problem, and there are places where, for example, Croats cannot return. In what way will those problems be resolved?

This is true, but I have to say that people return. No matter how difficult the situation in Drvar is, 109 Serb families have returned in the past week. At the same time, we take expelled Croats by buses to their towns. I would gladly show you a map on which you could see the return of 160,000. The problem is the safety of return, possibility of employment and

money needed for the repair of family houses. These three conditions are very difficult to fulfil.

I have to stress that this is the first time since we have been dealing with this problem, that we have a concrete plan. A young British diplomat, who was with us not long ago, made an adequate plan of return. It happened in the past two weeks. The problems, and the money needed for the project are stressed, as well as the institutions that deal with it... I informed President Tudjman about this plan today.

You mentioned relations between Croatia and the RS, why is it so important for you?

I think that very positive things took place there. We only have now to open the border at the Sava River. It is nice that the European Union is ready to ensure the money for reparation of bridges at the Sava River, but before that we have to show that this border is open, that people and goods are crossing it with no obstacles. Then the money will come. Beginning in July, new passports will also be printed, which will be recognised by the Croatian State. People in RS felt trapped travelling with documents of the former Yugoslavia which are not recognised anywhere. Freedom of movement will be a great step forward.

We are co-operating with Serbs better now

It became clear recently why Prime Minister Dodik was welcomed in Washington and Mrs. Plavsic in Paris. It should be said that the RS became more open for co-operation than the leadership in Herzegovina. And it seems quite senseless to me, for it should be vice versa.