Interview: Jacques Paul Klein, Principal Deputy HR “I don’t care about the ethnic picture”

Jacques Paul Klein, American General and former UN Administrator in Eastern Slavonia, was appointed Deputy High Representative to BiH a few months ago. With several very sharp, not exactly diplomatic media appearances, he gained the reputation of someone who is not satisfied with the role of an observer only of the political events around here.

REPORTER: What is your assessment of the recently held Conference on Refugee Return to Sarajevo? Have the representatives of all three national communities in BiH shown a sufficient degree of co-operation and understanding of the problem?

KLEIN: No they haven’t. If Sarajevo is the capital and controls the police, and if the refugees cannot return there, how do you expect them to return to some smaller villages? That means – if Sarajevo is the capital, then Serbs, Croats and others must be present in that city. Otherwise, that is a false representation of the country, which then disappears. And now a good example – Brcko. The majority of the inhabitants in Brcko are Serbs. Most of them come from Sarajevo. One third would like to go home, one third does not know what to do, and one third will never know. And all of them were terrified by Pale and held like some sort of political prisoners of Pale. Sarajevo has the reason for Moslems to return to Brcko, and the Serbs from Brcko should return to Sarajevo. And that is what we have tried to say at the Conference. Either you are going to take this seriously or wait for the balance. The next thing we should do after that

Conference, which opened this question, is to identify the means, and we might have a donors' conference in a month or two, because you and me know that many obstacles can be overcome with money. But the basic problem related to refugee return is their safety. In other words, is the local police professional? When and if I return, will there be a job for me? What the hell I am going to do when I return? Is there any money available for the reconstruction? But we have to continue with this.

REPORTER: What is your opinion on the theories which have been circulating from the time of the Conference, that the ethnic picture of Brcko will be significantly changed by the planned return of the Sarajevo Serbs from Brcko to Sarajevo, but there will be very little change to the picture of Sarajevo?

KLEIN: I don't care about the ethnic picture. I am interested in whether the people want to return or not. That attitude of mine makes me different from the great majority of people. I am always interested in what is enabled for every individual and not for some general political theory. I think that Sarajevo can be a model. One place cannot be the seat of the State Government and not represent a multiethnic society as should. I am not fooling myself. We will never succeed in getting the pre-war Sarajevo back. But there should be measures of security for the Serbs and Croats who want to return to Sarajevo.

REPORTER: A new Government of the RS has been formed. It is still early for a more concrete assessment of its work. However, what do you think – to what extent has PM Dodik distanced himself from the isolated way of thinking, and what is the degree of his readiness to fulfill verbal promises given to the IC?

KLEIN: Firstly, the regime in Pale succeed in bringing the RS to the edge of historic suicide. They have sacrificed the Serb people. All that they have achieved here is unemployment, lack

of international help, etc. For example, why did a million letters and packages sit in Sarajevo for two damned years, instead of reaching RS citizens. Because people from Pale did not allow that. Personally, I don't have much appreciation for leaders who wrap their private goals in some sort of national interests. Why did only 3% of international help come to the RS? Due to bad leadership. Why is there no "Equip and Train" programme? Because you had a bad leadership. Why didn't RS become part of anything that is worthwhile? Due to the leadership. I am really surprised that some people still follow such leaders. You ask me what this Government has done so far. The mail is here. In a few weeks the JAT will introduce the line for BL. Tomorrow morning we are going to sign the agreement relating to railway traffic. We hope to have a telephone line in a month. Such things do not disparage the authority of RS at all. When it comes to the refugees living in RS, they should be allowed to do whatever they feel like – and that is return to their homes. I believe that the IC will start working on it very soon. Those people were forced to leave their houses, because no one could have imagined that the thing that happened would happen. It takes some time to programme the return and to find a way for bringing these people back. This is basically only the beginning of the work of the new Government, but the fact is that President Milosevic sent a telegram of support to the new Government, then the Russian Federation, the Contact Group and the EU. All of them are saying this is the legitimate Government which co-operates with the IC.

REPORTER: It is very noticeable that Milorad Dodik has overshadowed Biljana Plavsic in the political sense. Will the support of the western world, including America, be directed only towards him in future? Can it be said that the political "expiration date" of the RS President has arrived in the eyes of Washington and Brussels?

KLEIN: That is not true. Neither the West nor Russian

Federation feel like that. We will co-operate with them. Both of them support the DA, realise the democratic changes and fight against corruption. I think you will see that the two of them make a good team.

REPORTER: Some political opinion in RS and Serbia considers Milorad Dodik as Slobodan Milosevic's man. Does support for Dodik mean support for Milosevic in an indirect way, and does the IC still consider him as "the main peace factor in the Balkans", as claimed by the state media in Serbia?

KLEIN: Last time I heard that Ivanic was Milosevic's man, it was four weeks ago. Let's try analysing all these suspicions. I would say that Milosevic played a very constructive part in RS. His socialists supported the new Government whenever there was a need for that. Milosevic's Government sent a telegram of support to the new Government. He has his own agenda to some extent. He wants a functioning RS to exist, he wants Serb unity. He has enough problems in Kosovo and Montenegro, and he doesn't want to have any problems here. However, I think that the IC owes him some gratitude for the positive role that he played when the new Government was being formed.

REPORTER: A prolonged status quo in Kosovo was interrupted by the appearance of the Liberation Army of Kosovo. How do you explain the uncertain position of the American Government regarding the LAK? On one hand the LAK is not yet on the Government's list of terrorist organisations, and on the other hand, the USA Government supports the negotiable, unenforcible option of Ibrahim Rugova?

KLEIN: I cannot speak on behalf of the American Government, because I am an official of an international organisation. But as far as I understand the position of the American Government and the field of human rights, the negating of the autonomous status of Kosovo is the problem that has to be resolved, and repression is not the answer to the problem. 90 % of the population living there is Albanian, and Milosevic will not be

able to keep things under control in that way for very long. So it means that constructive work with constructive elements is probably the more logical policy.

REPORTER: Not so long ago, you had the role of transitional UN Administrator for Eastern Slavonia. The UNTAES mandate is completed. Do you consider it successful and have you heard anything about an increased departure of Serbs from the region?

KLEIN: I heard that the Croats have just brought some law by which refugees are forced to leave certain apartments by March. The IC believe that the peace-keeping forces had to withdraw after the expiration of the mandate. The success of the mission reflects in several things. Firstly, no one got killed. Secondly, by stabilising Eastern Slavonia, we enabled Belgrade and Zagreb to establish diplomatic relations.

If Milosevic hadn't been thinking so much on a national basis, we could have carried out that process even better. If he had accepted demilitarisation of the boundary zone, we would have had more success with it. We agreed that four administrative posts in Zagreb should be held by Serbs. Two deputy "Zupans" should also be of Serb ethnic background. There are about 2,800 Serbs in the police force. We also agreed that those Serbs that had integrated into the Croatian state and legal system should receive salaries on a regular basis. The same goes for PTT, agriculture and other public services. This means that the local population should be divided into two categories. One consisting of Serb families who have been living there for 300 to 400 years. These will not leave, as they have invested too much.

Tragic is the position of refugees who fled from Western Slavonia, because they have already experienced one crime. They do not know where to go – they cannot go back to where they came from, and they have been told that they are not wanted there. This is a problem that needs to be resolved.

Croats will pay dearly if they leave, because the IC monitors what is going on there. Their chances of being admitted into European institutions will become rather slim if they opt to disregard agreements that they have reached with the IC. This has been stated clearly and loudly to the Croats. They currently hover somewhere in between. For, if you are a European country, you are, by definition, a multiethnic country, you need to protect the rights of minorities and respect agreements that you have with the IC. I do not know the exact number of people that have left the region, but I am working to find it, and that will be soon.

REPORTER: According to representatives of the IC, one of the priorities in BiH this year will be to arrest war crime indictees. The most popular are Karadzic and Mladic. Are you aware of their current places of residence or possible movements outside these, a sort of "house arrest"?

KLEIN: Frankly speaking, I do not follow this at all. According to the DA, it is the responsibility of the respective entities to take care of the question of war crimes. I have to thank the Croats for delivering the Vitez group. Some of them have already been released, which means that, if one goes to the Hague and there is insufficient evidence against one, one can also come back. Karadzic's presence in the RS is just like an albatross that hovers above everything that we wish to do and that undermines all our efforts. If he really believes that he is innocent and if he wants to protect his position, the best thing he can do now is to go to the Hague. There, he would be able to do much more for the RS before international lawyers, rather than by continuing to hide here. I do not know about his whereabouts or about SFOR plans, because that is not my job. However, regarding the Pale regime, I think that we have managed to do three important things: we have undermined their political platform, we have taken their hands out of people's pockets and, most embarrassing for them, they have lost the safety

factor that they have had so far.

REPORTER: How is your co-operation with Carlos Westendorp, given the fact that the second Deputy, Hanns Schumacher, recently gave a statement to the "Frankfurter Algemaine Zeitung" saying that "he had a hard time trying to mediate between you two, since you were two completely different people".

KLEIN: That is not true at all. At the time Schumacher gave this statement he had been in office for no longer than two weeks and he just could not know what was going on. I work with Carlos Westendorp, I follow his instructions and I think that all of us working in this office have good relations. He designs policy and we implement it. Also, you just cannot believe everything that you read in newspapers. I have been here for almost three years and I have met a number of those people that I would describe as creative journalists, but some of them really have bordered on science-fiction.

REPORTER: How far have you got in the process of preparing the common BiH passport, flag, currency and licence plates?

KLEIN: We have done a lot. It takes about six months to order the paper needed for printing the banknotes. The paper was ordered in November, which means that we will get it sometime in April. The design of the common licence plates has already been determined. Even the Metropolitan has stated that he likes it. As soon as an agreement has been reached with the factories that will manufacture such licence plates, the work will start. We have had only 4,000 licence plates manufactured so far, that contain neutral insignia which provides for anonymity. Today, I had an opportunity to present to President Plavsic and Prime Minister Dodik the design of the new flag. Today at noon, New York Time, a new BiH flag will be raised in front of the United Nations building. A torch on behalf of BiH was flown to Japan yesterday in order to make it possible for the flag to reach the Olympic Games on time. As for the common

passport question, as you already know, there were three options after we left Vienna. Since then there has been a lot of criticism. There are many petitions by local people on my desk claiming that it is impossible to divide a passport with only one binding. Why do you force us again to accept ethnic divisions, the war has already divided us. There are many different proposals, and I would like it if this could also be done in the next 30 days. The Serbs from the RS need a BiH passport to enter Croatia. They should not be forced to buy passports in the BiH Federation in order to be able to travel.

The fact that we have common currency, licence plates and flag is a great step forward. We attended a meeting of the European Council in Strasbourg and discussed the question of BiH membership of this body. For the Council it’s no longer a question of “if” but rather of “when”. This “when” means when BiH has got all the necessary state symbols that I have been talking about.