

Interview: Matthias Sonn, Senior Deputy HR" Bosnia and Herzegovina is not possible unless Croats are in it, too: Everyone in the IC is aware of that!"

“Matthias Sonn is a high official of the international community, a diplomat with good manners, experience and an accentuated sensibility for the problems of displaced persons. It should not be surprising, considering his family history, namely the fact that his parents were displaced after the World War II. Although he has not been in Sarajevo for much too long, he believes in the people here and a better future for all the citizens of B&H. In the light of the dramatic political turnabouts, referring primarily to the status of Croats in B&H, he reiterated several times that all the rights of the Croat people will be protected to the maximum.

Ambassador Sonn replied to the questions from the Hrvatska rijec journalist with a notable diplomatic detachment and implicit distance. Still, all of his answers testify clearly enough that the IC, the OHR in particular, will uncompromisingly start the projects of economic and political reforms in the course of this year.

Q: Do you think a heterogeneous party coalition, such as the Alliance for Changes, can ensure a long-term and stable functioning of the executive authority in the B&H Federation?

A: Long-term and stable authority depends very much on a number of various factors. In the first place, it depends on the stability of parliamentary majority and the quality of the work of the executive authorities. Having in mind the two mentioned elements, I am sure that the party alliance in question is offering us a fair chance to take a step forward concerning many of the issues which have been requiring energetic work of all partners in the B&H authorities for a long time now. I must add that the earlier work did not lead to progress. The previous political leadership did not have a responsible attitude to the citizens of B&H. Speaking about the heterogeneous nature of the parties in the Alliance, one should stress that the differences among those parties are not that big when looked at in the context of the necessary activities in this country. Concrete measures are already on the table and they refer to various but entangled realms, primarily the economic reforms, suppression of corruption and a number of measures that will contribute to the rule of law in B&H. All those issues, in the light of their mutual communication, do not seem disputable to me. I repeat, what was missing earlier is readiness to a quality work. On the other hand, I think everyone is aware of the fact that, on the grounds of the political ambiance prevailing in B&H at present time one cannot provide guarantees that a political agreement would last forever.

Q: Could you please comment on the speculations regarding the negotiations on the establishment of the executive authority, referring to conflicts among the so called small parties, including the parties with the Croat prefix, on the one hand, and between the SDP and the Party for B&H on the other. The latter, allegedly, do not respect their partners.

A: Some of the information or those speculations, as you said, reached the OHR. It is about some segments which clearly illustrate the fact that even as little time as five days is a long period of time in the political life of B&H. However, I do not think that the information I have is enough for me to be able to confidently speak or comment on those alleged conflicts.

Q: How will the OHR react to possible disobedience in the Croat-majority cantons, and possible forming of a third entity?

A: As for your question, I must be really cruel but sincere and say that the public is the last we would wish to know as to what we have in mind in the case of such behaviour.

Q: Will the IC allow members of one constituent people to perform the highest duties in the entity and the state, which would be the first such case in the Dayton B&H? I am asking you this because the announced Law on the Council of Ministers foresees a longer mandate and abolishment of the rotation principle for the post of the Chairman.

A: There are many speculations regarding that issue, since it is natural for people to raise different initiatives. However, I have to say categorically that, regardless of what you have heard, there are no pre-conditions for that law to be passed after all. By answering to the question if the representatives of one same people will simultaneously perform the highest duties in the country, I have to say that I do not believe in such a possibility. If you look at the structures of the State Parliament, the B&H Presidency, the B&H Federation Parliament, if you look at the ethnic affiliation of the officials, starting from the Chairman to the Secretary, it will be clear to you that there is no wish for a reduction of rights to one people.

Q: Do you believe that the announced Agreements on Special Relations with the neighbouring states will remain 'a dead letter' or is it possible that special relations will be established with only one state?

A: We see the establishing of special relations as a constituent part of the Dayton Agreement, which is, essentially, the only possible thing. We are very much in favour of the establishing of good and quality relations with the neighbours. Will it remain 'a dead letter'? Well, it will depend on those who will be leading the political relations. Those agreements contain a big potential and they can be very useful. I have the cultural and economic relations in mind, above all. It is very important in all this for one to respect the fact that B&H is a state and that entities and peoples cannot separately decide about it, because it is simply about the constitutional structure of B&H.

Q: Croats are not represented in the newly formed government of the smaller B&H entity. Can you comment on this fact in the light of the policy of the international community, but also of the HDZ that seems not to have paid a special attention to the election results in the RS?

A: The entity government, that is to say the RS Government, is not composed proportionally in ethnic terms, however, that Government was composed according to the mechanisms in the RS National Assembly. If you allude that someone will be prevented from returning because of that, then I have to make myself clear and say that we do not know of compromises in that regard. We will secure to all who want it, to return to their homes from which they were driven away. Regardless of the fact that it might be difficult and regardless of the previous experiences, rest assured that we will not give in.

Q: The HR announced that the economic reforms will be the major task of the IC in 2001. Also, during the previous years the economic stabilisation was announced, but there has been no significant progress. What could make this year different from the previous ones?

A: It seems to me that I have already answered a large part of this question. It has been clear for a long time as to what has to be done in the realm of economy. Unfortunately, the political parties have not concentrated enough on the issues of economic stabilisation. It had been like that until the HR came to the scene with the whole package of the laws and measures for creation of the proper economic frame. I am sure that these laws, as well as the new ones which are still under preparation, will be in force during 2001 and that they will be applied to the benefit of the BiH citizens. At the same time we shall run a big campaign against corruption and misadministration. We shall persist in our intention to create an integrated economic space. Also, we shall initiate a more intensive process of the privatisation of the public companies. The other transition countries are a good example, and they show that everything can function efficiently if we work hard. Simply, B&H is falling behind and we should all exert a great energy in order to keep the pace.

Q: A part of the Croat public is afraid of the regional approach in terms of the admission to the EU. To what extent are these fears justified?

A: They are not grounded on the realistic facts. I declare under full responsibility that each country in the region will join the EU individually, when it is ready, that is, when it fulfills the conditions for the admission to the EU.

It is important to persuade all the elements of the Croat community in B&H that the whole IC, especially the OHR, are really aware of the fact that BiH is not possible without Croats.