

Interview with High Representative for Vecernji list

How serious is the present situation in BiH, particularly having in mind the absence of Election Law provisions for government formation, and the sharp pre-election rhetoric?

Unfortunately, general political trends in BiH are worrying. Functionality is a huge concern, when state-level institutions are intentionally blocked and are working under severe pressure. There is also a certain spillover of dysfunctionality to the Federation BiH level, due to issues being held hostage by the narrow interests of individual parties. For example, it is unbelievable that the Federation is unable to properly tax the profits of betting stations in the way it is done throughout Europe, since this would be a lot of revenue that could be used to improve services for the citizens.

Equally worrying is the lack of constructive political dialogue in the country. This is a parliamentary system, which means parties in a coalition need to work together for the government to achieve results. Instead, we have relative stagnation, which forces people to leave BiH. I think this stagnation and the exodus of young people that goes with it is directly attributable to the fact that many of the key political actors focus disproportionately on ethno-national issues, rather than on working with other groups and parties to govern effectively and address real problems.

As seen in many different instances around the country, if there is political will and a sense of responsibility towards the citizens on the part of political elites, then a range of possible compromise solutions exists. On the other hand, if the main parties are not willing to step back from maximalist and unilateral demands and negotiate in good faith, then we get blockades, division and stagnation. This is tragic.

Is it realistic to expect the OHR to use its authority to get involved in the election process, including the government formation, and in which circumstances?

I will not comment on hypothetical scenarios, especially with regards to my mandate. All I can say is that my mandate remains unchanged, including Bonn powers. That is also the reason for the international community not to impose solutions any more, as it has done in the past.

When and how do you expect post-election authorities in BiH to be formed?

The entire international community expects swift and smooth implementation of election results. The last thing this country needs is further set-backs or delays on its Euro-Atlantic path. The entire international community is here to help Bosnia and Herzegovina, but the first impulse and action must come from the domestic authorities. There are legal deadlines, for example for the House of Peoples, but the government formation is a political issue, the issue of the formation of different coalitions.

Croats fear that new election fiddling is under way and the denial of their will as voters in the government formation process; how do you view this situation?

Why would only Croats be afraid? Many people are afraid of manipulations. However, the elections must be free and fair, without manipulation from any party. This is one of the foundations of a democratic society. I appeal to the political parties and individual candidates to contribute to that.

Secondly, this country is what it is. It neither an exclusively civic state nor an exclusively ethnic state. It is a combination of both. Having this in mind, it is impossible to create a perfect system, which would 100 percent satisfy all political appetites of ethnic or civic parties on all sides.

I understand some political parties are pushing for this debate because it politically suits them in satisfying their interests. But we need to be intellectually honest. The fact is that the Bosnian Croats, in terms of political representation, are in a relatively good position. They are in control of a few cantons, represented in the institutions of FBiH and BiH, hold important positions in sectors like the financial, banking or energy sector and so on and have the power to block parliamentary decisions that threatens their interests. All in all, their political and other representatives definitely have a great influence in the FBiH and BiH. There is an elaborate study by the respectable Konrad Adenauer Foundation on that. But that does not mean that things cannot be improved further.

The line between the political struggle of certain political parties, which want more power for themselves and the real interest of the people they represent has become completely blurred.

Having said all this, some principles of minimum representation have been abused. The cases of Gorazde and Western Herzegovina have often been put forward. But the fact remains that the election to the Presidency of BiH, the so called Komsic issue, is a difficult issue to resolve insofar as it highlights the need to reconcile the ethnic and civic principles, respecting the ECHR decision in the Sejdic-Finci case and the multi-ethnic character of BiH.

My position is clear, the decision of the BiH Constitutional Court and the ECHR needs to be implemented. There is a need for a solution because the people in BiH deserve functioning authorities after the elections.

You are the international community's High Representative. Is there a united position of the "international community" today which would bind and direct your actions?

When it comes to things that matter in Bosnia and Herzegovina, we are united on the fundamentals. This has not changed since the very beginning. I am talking here about full support to the territorial integrity and sovereignty of BiH and support to the country to become an efficient and successful country. We also agree that the BiH politicians should take more responsibility for the country and many international observers are disappointed with the lack of progress.

Recently your predecessors had a dramatic reaction to the announced territorial exchange between Serbia and Kosovo. Is that a realistic danger for BiH?

These are people with extensive foreign policy experience and a deep knowledge of the region, especially of BiH, so their voices should be heard. Let me say upfront that drawing any parallels between BiH and Kosovo is a futile task, since there are no parallels, neither in the legal or the political sense. This is yet another media spin by the RS leadership. However cheap and dangerous, it only sows uncertainty and fear, and hinders the economic development of this country.

BiH has been a recognized, sovereign state since 1992 when it was admitted into the UN. Later, in 1995, the entities emerged under the Peace Agreement as part of a new arrangement of the country's internal structure. Bosnia and Herzegovina is an internationally recognized state whose sovereignty and territorial integrity is guaranteed by the Dayton Peace Agreement, BiH Constitution and international law. I will keep repeating this: under the Peace Agreement, the entities have no right to secede, and exist only by virtue of the Constitution of BiH.

Any talk to the contrary is in vain and serves only as a distraction from real issues.

The OHR is "stuck" in BiH. Is the existence of such institution justified today, especially given that you haven't used your authority in a while?

Many things are being done in the background to help move this country forward. The OHR is not only about using the Bonn powers. Over the years, the role of the international community in BiH has evolved and changed considerably. Our approach right after the war was more prescriptive and more intrusive. This could not go on forever and at one point, some ten plus years ago, the international community decided to hand over the helm to domestic politicians. This marked the beginning of the era of local ownership. The times when the international community was doing the job instead of elected or appointed local officials are gone. If elected officials want to work so that the country can join the EU, as most claim, then they need to focus away from divisive issues and contribute to the necessary reforms.

In retrospective, I must say that the leadership of this country fails to take in the full grasp of the opportunity offered to them by the international community. They need to speed up the necessary reforms and bring the country closer to the European Union.

In your opinion, what should be the BiH authorities' priorities after the elections? Naturally, if the government is formed at all.

It is my sincere hope that after the elections, we will have in power coalitions of politicians who are willing to provide what citizens really need. It would be ideal to have new governing coalitions focusing on providing political stability, security and safety, more jobs, better salaries, and full respect for the rule of law and the fight against

corruption.

I do not think voters want miracles. They just want a normal state with prosperity and stability so they do not have to watch their children leave for work in Germany or Austria. Those countries are happy to have them, although it is a great loss for BiH. If someone would deliver along the abovementioned lines, I am sure the economy would pick up more forcefully and people would not have to leave their country.

The key lies in economic development and the rule of law. And the rule of law stands above all. Priority above all other priorities.