

Dnevni List: Interview with PDHR Tamir Waser



By: Sanja Bjelica-Šagovnović

Dnevni List: You met with several political leaders in Mostar, including representatives of HDZ and SDA. What did they tell you – is there any agreement in sight and will Mostar have its elections?

Tamir Waser: Mostar should have elections this year. It has been over a year and a half since the elections should have taken place in Mostar and more than five years since the citizens of Mostar had the opportunity to elect their representatives. This issue has been discussed for over a year now and Mostar citizens should finally have the elections in October this year. Unfortunately, I have not heard anything new today (interviewer's remark: yesterday).

Dnevni List: How come we will have elections this year, when you said that you have not heard anything new?

Tamir Waser: There is still time. According to the rules, everything that is needed for elections to take place should be done 90 days before the elections, meaning we have the deadline that expires by the end of July. We still have the framework document, endorsed by six political parties, at the table and it still represents good basis for finding a solution for Mostar. I have enough experience in BiH to know that very often a deal is made at the very last moment, so I believe there is hope that in the next six to eight weeks

there may be a solution identified that can be adopted and implemented.

Dnevni List: Does it mean that the OHR will intensify its engagements with the parties in Mostar, maybe even exert some pressure in order to come to the solution?

Tamir Waser: OHR is always ready to meet with anybody who offers a constructive proposal. There are different functions that the City cannot perform due to the absence of City Council, so in the forthcoming period issues, such as adoption of the Budget, should underline the need for the functional City Council that should address the problems that have been accumulated in Mostar. I will discuss this issue with the PIC members in the course of this week.

Dnevni List: Will the OHR do something concrete?

Tamir Waser: Our efforts so far have resulted in the framework agreement that serves as the basis for a possible solution. Our role can be to help in understanding the importance of this. This issue is seen as a political conflict at the political scene of BiH. However, I think it is important to understand that there are many problems due to the absence of the City Council – it is impossible to have new investments, job creation process is being hindered etc. Everywhere I go in BiH, I hear that the employment is the number one issue, and the same situation is in Mostar. It is highly important that politicians who have their representatives in the Parliamentary Assembly of BiH leave aside their maximalist demands and try to reach a compromise that will benefit all citizens regardless of their ethnicity, in order to improve living conditions in Mostar.

Dnevni List: You mentioned the Parliament of BiH where there was HDZ's proposal of amendments to the Election Law that was adopted in the House of Peoples but it did not pass the House of Representatives. What is your opinion on this proposal?

Tamir Waser: The problem of the proposal was in a manner in which its enactment was attempted. It was clear from the beginning that the proposal was unacceptable to the Bosniak representatives and the HDZ came up with this proposal without any attempt to offer some compromise. It was disappointing to see that the party that always speaks about the problem of outvoting actually offers a concept that would mean some sort of outvoting for the other group. That was pointless in the context of what they claim would be a way in which the system would operate and in terms of ensuring equal rights for all communities and groups. The main point now is to focus on the fact that there is the Law, so it is necessary to see how this Law can be amended to meet the criteria required for its adoption.

Dnevni List: Will the Steering Board of the Peace Implementation Council discuss Mostar again this week?

Tamir Waser: The PIC Steering Board will discuss this issue again, although there is lot of frustration among the PIC members by the lack of progress because we are talking about the Constitutional Court decision that was issued four years ago, and we have not had progress on the ground.

Dnevni list: How will the people in Mostar force the political parties to agree?

Tamir Waser: The citizens must not allow the politicians to scare them. The rhetoric that we hear, which says that if we go in one direction that would lead to catastrophe, is exaggeration and politicians use that in order to play the fear card and to count on the situation staying as it is, which would suit them best. I have spoken to people from both banks and the people on both sides are frustrated. They have to find a way to make their voices heard and let the politicians know that this situation cannot continue. The politicians in this country are experts in behaving as though they have no responsibility towards the citizens who elected

them and to accuse others for the situation being bad.

Dnevni list: The HDZ and SDA advocated that Mostar should be resolved in a “package” with some other issues, like the “Sejdić – Finci” case and two cantons, Herzegovina-Neretva Canton and Central Bosnia Canton. What do you think of that?

Tamir Waser: I have had questions on that package, in particular since it was proposed that the situation from one city be copied in the other. I had certain dilemmas about that and certain concerns. The politicians in BiH love their packages and dealing with things in packages. I have nothing against two problems being dealt with together, but I think that Mostar must not become a hostage of some proposals that come in such packages.

Dnevni list: Will the international community allow a divided Mostar, because there has been some information that things are headed that way?

Tamir Waser: The division of Mostar would be a huge step back. When the talks at the level of political parties started in 2012, all parties that were represented in the Federation Parliament accepted the principles for Mostar, and one of those principles states that Mostar must remain a single city, in which certain competences will be at a level below the level of the city, but it is insisted that Mostar be a single city. Although such a scenario would suit the two parties that we have mentioned, I don't think there is support from the other political parties to go in that direction. Such a move would imply amending the Federation Constitution and the Cantonal Constitution, and I do not think there are enough parties that would support such a development.

Dnevni list: And the international community?

Tamir Waser: The international community believes that that would be a step back and something that would not be beneficial for the citizens, and it simply does not see that

as the right direction to take.

Dnevni list: The international community in BiH says that it will support everything that the two sides agree on, and there is fear that is precisely what the two parties in Mostar the two parties are negotiating?

Tamir Waser: The international community supports agreement, but within the law and institutions. If they can ensure support for such a solution in a legal way, the international community would support that. However, those who advocate such ideas do not have sufficient support to do that in a legal way and it is not worth wasting our time on that.

Dnevni list: Since you mention the lower level in Mostar, what does that refer to, are those municipalities?

Tamir Waser: What I had in mind are city areas that are outlined in the framework document. It is possible to talk about some additional competences that that would include.

Dnevni list: BiH has been hit by a great catastrophe in the past days. How do you assess the response of the BiH authorities to this situation?

Tamir Waser: The images we have seen these days are terrible and we fully sympathize with the people who have lost their dearest and their homes. In this period, we also saw something great – citizens from all areas came to the rescue of those in need. This is an exact opposite of what the politicians claim that living together in BiH is not possible because there is no trust between different ethnicities and various religious communities. We have seen exceptional gestures of help, from the citizens and Civil Defense, Armed Forces, but also local leaders across BiH who have undertaken everything to help their citizens. However, this is just a beginning, because what follows next is much harder. A great number of people will have nowhere to return in the next couple of months. The consequences will be far-reaching in many areas, in

agriculture, in economy, etc. We all know the situation with the budgets in this country and it is likely that, because of the floods, we will see increased expenses in various areas, and reduction of business activity in agriculture and the economy.

These floods showed why the institutions are important. When the citizens say – I don't want to go out and vote – I think they need to remember these situations and see why it is important who represents them.

Many international organizations have offered help and I believe that this will continue. When it comes to natural disasters, you always have people who try to make personal gains and we have had such situations here. I hope the institutions will do everything to punish them.

Dnevni list: Can we expect any major international assistance to Bosnia and Herzegovina, because it is clear we cannot make it on our own?

Tamir Waser: A large number of organizations have already provided assistance to the flooded areas. Another part is the assistance of international institutions such as the IMF which needs to provide assistance to overcome the fiscal consequences that arose in this situation. I do not want to speculate, but this situation will have such consequences when it comes to BiH's international obligations, and the IMF should make the final judgment on this.