

F.A.Z.: Interview with High Representative Christian Schmidt

Interviewed by: Michael Martens

F.A.Z.: Mr. Schmidt, it is nothing new that you, in your capacity of the High Representative of the international community in Bosnia and Herzegovina, like many of your predecessors, are in conflict with Milorad Dodik. But it is certainly news that Dodik, as the President of the Republika Srpska in Bosnia and Herzegovina, has now announced that he will have you arrested and deported if you enter the territory of his Republika. How will you react?

Christian Schmidt: In such cases of political madness, it is good to remain calm and perform one's duties and tasks. Of course, I will not exclude the Republika Srpska from the area of my responsibilities because of that. I owe that to the people who live there. Unfortunately, this part of Bosnia and Herzegovina is moving more and more towards an autocracy in which the rule of law is no longer a standard.

F.A.Z.: Do you have scheduled appointments in the Republic of Srpska in the coming days?

Christian Schmidt: Indeed, in the coming days and weeks I really have scheduled appointments there, especially in Banja Luka, but also in other cities. I will honor those appointments, and Mr. Dodik should not continue with his self-centered follies because he will be the only one who will really be in a crisis because of this.

F.A.Z.: With his rhetoric, Dodik has, in truth, put himself in a situation where he has to make a move: if you come to Banja Luka and they do not arrest you, his supporters will no longer have a reputation with his supporters as a man of his word.

Christian Schmidt: And then his supporters will find out that he does not always do what he says – and that he does not bring anything good to his country.

F.A.Z.: Is Dodik, as the RS President, even authorized to order its police to arrest you?

Christian Schmidt: Notwithstanding the fact that I am a subject of the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations and I therefore certainly have immunity: Dodik has no authority to order the arrest as he is not authorized to issue orders to the police. The Prosecutor's Office will have to clarify that first. Well, Dodik had already tried to file a report against me in Republika Srpska, and the wise Prosecutor's Office in Banja Luka, acting cautiously, inevitably forwarded that case to the Prosecutor's Office of Bosnia and Herzegovina in Sarajevo; I have not had any contacts with the Prosecutor's Office ever since. Last but not least, Dodik's behavior is a slap in the face to the EU, which is trying to improve the rule of law in Bosnia and Herzegovina. He is delusional if he thinks that special rights or special rules apply to him. That is why Mr. Dodik should be ready for some rather unpleasant times for him.

F.A.Z.: You recently said that the option of replacing Dodik, for which you theoretically have the authority, remains on the table. But many doubt that you could do it, since you do not have executive powers. Dodik could simply ignore you. How do you intend, in case of any doubts, to implement the removal?

Christian Schmidt: I usually do not speak in advance about my considerations. Admittedly, there is already an ongoing investigation against Mr. Dodik – so the fact that the Prosecutor's Office is interested in him is not anything new. Moreover, we will see how the international community treats someone who, with his actions, strongly attacks the European path of Bosnia and Herzegovina and at the same time acts as a close ally of Vladimir Putin.

F.A.Z.: Would you have the support of Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic for the action against Dodik?

Christian Schmidt: We will see if Dodik's announcement will be a product of his fantasy or if there will be more to follow. If there is more, then it will become very serious. I am not ready to negotiate a compromise at all – the law of the Dayton Peace Agreement must be implemented. We will consider it within the international community.

F.A.Z.: Dodik also announced that, should you make a decision on the controversial distribution of the state property of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Republika Srpska will announce its independence on the same night. What will happen then?

Christian Schmidt: This is the strange way in which Mr. Dodik defines law: Law is what I benefit from. This will not make him successful in Europe. The issue of state ownership of Bosnia and Herzegovina has been waiting for a solution for almost 30 years, since the breakup of Yugoslavia. Part of my job is to move the apportionment issue from this impasse. I suspect that Dodik's determination to defend every square meter of state property that does not belong to him also has something to do with the large debt he has accumulated for the Republika Srpska. It is about the fair distribution of state property. This requires a state law. It would be conceivable, for example, to transfer ownership to a joint agency with a fair distribution of its revenues. You just have to be willing to engage in dialogue. Everyone else in Bosnia and Herzegovina is ready, except Mr. Dodik.

F.A.Z.: In the event of a conflict, the Republika Srpska could be divided into two parts in the Brčko District of Bosnia and Herzegovina, on the border with Croatia; these two parts would no longer be interconnected. Some are asking for the stationing of a contingent of the European military mission - EUFOR in Brčko, in order to be ready in case of escalation.

Christian Schmidt: Lately, we have been closely following the situation in Brčko and discussed these issues. I do not see that we need to prepare for a military operation at this point in time.