

Glas Srpske: Interview with Principal Deputy High Representative



By Željka Domazet

Both the OHR and EU as well as the wider international community share the same goals, and that is to see a stable, democratic, multiethnic BiH, which respects the rights of its citizens, is economically strong and on its way to the EU.

These were the words of the Deputy High Representative in BiH Tamir Waser, in his interview to Glas Srpske, the first he gave to a media outlet in BiH after he took office in the OHR. He stressed that BiH had still not met all the requirements for the closure of the OHR, and that the question when that would happen could best be answered by the leaders in BiH.

Glas Srpske: What was the message you received when you took office in the OHR? What is your priority in that position?

Tamir Waser: The priorities are those that have always been the priorities of the OHR. That is primarily ensuring the compliance with the Dayton Agreement, and improving parts of that Agreement, like the rule of law, good governance, efficient structures and institutions.

Glas Srpske: When it comes to those areas, where does BiH stand?

Tamir Waser: BiH has been standing still for a few years now. Little progress has been made. It lags more and more behind

the countries of the region when it comes to its road to the EU and NATO. The situation in BiH is marked by constant political disagreements and lack of progress on issues that are important for the citizens.

Glas Srpske: How do you assess the current political situation in BiH and what is the main obstacle to reaching a compromise, which is the only thing it can be based on?

Tamir Waser: The main problem is that the leaders say that they share the same interest when they say that they want the country to move towards Europe, but they do not act in that way. They are much more focused on issues that they disagree on, where they are divided and they seem to insist on those issues, instead of focusing on what they agree on and using that to move forward.

Glas Srpske: Where in BiH do politicians reach agreements fast?

Tamir Waser: They agree fast when it comes to issues that are related to their personal interests, and not the interests of BiH citizens. The Law on Conflict of Interest is a classic example of that. The international community expressed some serious concerns with regard to that, because there are some clear international standards, which have been ignored in BiH. The politicians govern themselves, instead of forming independent bodies for that purpose.

Glas Srpske: The next session of the PIC Steering Board should be held in December. What will it be about?

Tamir Waser: It will focus on the general situation in BiH. There has been no progress since the last PIC. The key focus will be on challenges facing you in 2014, having in mind that it is the election year. We will welcome every progress in the implementation of the Sejdić-Finci decision, and we have also spoken about the issue of Mostar as it would certainly be a "crime" if the citizens of Mostar were once more deprived of

the possibility to vote for their local authorities. Unfortunately, we will also have to talk about the fact that nothing has been done on the implementation of the decisions of the BiH Constitutional Court which require amendments in the Election Law in line with changes of place names.

Glas Srpske: What is the current situation with regard to meeting the requirements for the closure of the OHR?

Tamir Waser: When it comes to objectives, two remain. No progress has been made with respect to the so-called state property and defense, military property. As for the other condition, there is still concern about the efficient operation of the political environment, in accordance with the Dayton Agreement.

Glas Srpske: Where is Dayton Agreement being undermined in BiH, if at all?

Tamir Waser: Over 80 decisions of the BiH Constitutional Court have not been implemented, although they are final and binding, and that is where the Dayton Agreement has been breached. When we hear continued statements questioning the territorial integrity and sovereignty of the country, that is where the Dayton Agreement is being breached. When we see that returnees are not allowed to live normally, that is where the Dayton Agreement is being breached. When BiH fails to meet international obligations, like the Sejdić-Finci decision, that is where BiH fails to act in line with its responsibilities from the Dayton Agreement.

Glas Srpske: How can BiH be a democratic country if it has the OHR as a foreign body?

Tamir Waser: That is a very convenient excuse, to blame the OHR for the failure of politicians to comply with the democratic principles. If decisions are not made and compromises are not reached in institutions, I don't see how the OHR is preventing them from doing so. We helped compromise

be reached in the case of the appointment of judges to the FBiH Constitutional Court, we worked a lot on the compromise in Mostar, and I cannot accept that the OHR prevents elected officials from doing their work.

Glas Srpske: Is there a possibility that the decision on the closure of the OHR be made in the spring session of the PIC?

Tamir Waser: I cannot give you an answer to that question; instead it would have to come from BiH leaders. Are they capable of achieving something that is completely clear, and that would enable the PIC Steering Board to make that decision?

Glas Srpske: There is a reinforced presence of the EU in BiH. Where is the place of the OHR there?

Tamir Waser: Both the OHR and EU as well as the wider international community share the same goals, and that is to see a stable, democratic, multiethnic BiH, which respects the rights of its citizens, is economically strong and on the way to the EU. BiH is trying to create divisions in the international community, in order to move the focus away from the fact that there has been no progress in the country. There are no divisions. We have the same goals, we work together and that is a fact. It is necessary that the local leaders find solutions for BiH, that is their responsibility.

Glas Srpske: Who, in your opinion, poses the biggest obstacles to reaching a compromise?

Tamir Waser: We could give you different names for different issues. I think we spend most time on that and on disagreements and differences, instead of looking for common ground.