Interview: Carlos Westendorp, High Representative in BiHI Do Not Know Where Karadzic is Hiding””

In the country which faces so many difficulties that for their solution it needs the IC, Dayton and SFOR, the first thing that the High Representative for the implementation of peace, Carlos Westendorp, learnt in the local language was “nema problema” (no problem). “When one is an optimist, then one can say that”, he explained to us in his Brussels office. “One can because it is obvious that the situation is improving, painfully slowly, but still improving.”

Why so slowly?

Because the leadership still uses nationalistic messages. A compromise between civilised people is possible only if the other side is respected. Bit by bit, because they are not blind or stupid, people see that the other one does not always have to be an enemy. People change standpoints and they will also have to change the leadership. Most of the leaders were in a war at a time and one cannot expect from them to make effort in calming the situation down or in stabilisation. People expect a turning towards the subjects regarding social security, work, existence, education. And this is a basis on which the opposition parties get stronger. Extreme nationalism is dangerous. On the other hand, nationalism in, so to say, moderate quantities, is constructive if one wants to preserve one’s cultural identity, language, religion, way of life. As such, it is positive for every community which is not monolithic and uniform. Problems arise when one thinks that he is the main one and the only one.

Mostar – a tense city

You have a really great power in BiH.

I sometimes make decisions instead of the leadership which finds it easier if someone else, like me, makes compromises instead of them. Thus we have obtained the licence plates, Konvertible Mark, especially popular in the areas with weaker currencies. Croatian Kuna is relatively solid, although not as strong as the German Mark, but I still believe that people will gradually accept the BiH money.

It is true that I have a great power. Sometimes the people from the IC accuse me that I do not make enough decisions by myself and I reply to them that the authorities, the job of which is to make decision, however exist. One must do all this in a very moderate and balanced manner, because satisfaction of one side inevitably makes the other side dissatisfied. And now the anthem is in turn. It will be without words, just like our Spanish anthem, or the new German one, and later on the people of BiH will maybe add a text do it. I sincerely hope that it will not be my job.

Then you will perhaps be the EU Foreign Minister? Would you like to do that job?

To be honest, I do not know. It would be no easier than this one because BiH is gradually solving its problems. True, after this job all other jobs indeed seem easy.

What is the situation in Mostar these days?

Mostar is a tense city. People used to live together without any great difficulties and now it is like the Wild West, everyone on one's own side of the road and ready to draw a gun. It is complicated for the IC to give help in such a situation. If he help one side only, the other side protests. And, there are criteria for help. We do not want to send our money to the areas where the "hard-liners" are. Who will

invest in the eastern part of the RS, which is full of war criminals? Therefore, we help the environments which want to be normal, which accept co-operation and welcome returnees. In the Croat areas the positive examples are Drvar, where two thousand Serbs have returned, and Stolac. The problem is created by the fact that the Croats who want to return to their homes in Central Bosnia are prevented from doing so by the Croat authorities there. Unfortunately, the idea of an ethnically pure Herzegovina is still anchored in many heads. People would like to return to the Posavina corridor and Central Bosnia, but their leadership does not allow it.

Last year 40,000 people returned in BiH

You are not soft in the estimates of the Bosniac leadership either?

It is understandable that Bosniacs are those who are pleading the most for a unified state, but when we ask them to make a sort of political sacrifice to the benefit of the other ethnic groups, they become very, very hard. As you can see, all the people in BiH are difficult, but for different reasons.

Last year you had a year of refugees, this year the emphasis is placed on the return of minorities. How is it progressing?

Last year some 40,000 people returned. It is a significant number, but still too little compared to the number of people who are still away from their homes. We will do all in our power to ensure a safe environment for them, in which the democratic behaviour of the police, judiciary and municipal authorities is of a great importance.

The Croatian public followed very attentively the disagreements regarding the appointments of the generals.

What is being done with the Croats is also done with the Bosniacs and the Serbs. Senior officers, according to the Constitution, are appointed by the BiH Presidency and not by

the entities. I emphasise that we are not against the Croats (or the Serbs, or the Bosniacs), but against the politicising of the army. I think that the problem is close to being resolved.

What about the borders?

We have the maps and we say: the border is provisory until the sides achieve agreement, and then we will abide by the agreement. I am happy that the Croatian Foreign Minister, Mate Granic, gave the information about the opportunity to open the road Trebinje – Dubrovnik. It is good that the people cross borders more and more. In that way the peace is strengthened.

Danger of the expansion of the Kosovo conflict

Can Kosovo influence on the stability of the processes in BiH?

If the conflict expands, it can make a serious influence. Everything that goes on in the wider region reflects on Bosnia. Serious economic consequences and the new wave of refugees are only a part of the scenario. The most important political damage would be radicalisation, especially of the Bosnian Serbs.

How long do you think SFOR will remain in the BiH area?

At least two years in the present composition, while some ten thousand soldiers and less will be sufficient for new, different tasks of a solidified peace. Then we will cope with new problems, different from the present ones, such as social riots.

What about war criminals? Last year you were giving Karadzic a month before he surrenders to the Hague.

I was a bad prophet and poorly informed. I counted with the fact that the RS had got a new Government and a new Minister of Interior, who is supposed to supervise the entire police force, and with the fact that Mr Karadzic did not have the

inflow of customs, taxes and, of course, smuggling any more. True, he is less and less protected, but the things turned out as they did. I do not even know where he is. Some criminals have been caught and I think that he will also end up like that. However, I do not dare give prognoses any more.

The issue of succession

Your Office is also in charge of the succession issues. The Mediator, Mr. Watts, is doing a huge job, but without results.

It is a complex job above all. Because of his patience he is called Mr Hard-working. The latest option that he has proposed is a good one because it organises things in such a way that property, which is known and regulated, is divided without too much theorising. It is a practical approach, the countries have divided their international obligations, debts, and it is now right to divide their property as well. In this domain the FR Yugoslavia has always represented the major problem and obstruction, the other successors achieved agreements. A solution which remains is also arbitration and it is a good solution, but what if Yugoslavia objects, after all that, that it has been damaged by the arbitration? As for the idea on freezing the negotiations, it is to the benefit of Belgrade, which supervises the bulk of the property, all except the gold in the Basel Bank.

You do a tough job. Have you ever asked yourself why on earth you need all this?

I knew it would be difficult. I left an extremely comfortable place, a nice flat and a family in New York and replaced them with all this. I knew what I was going into, but sometimes one has to do difficult things too. Modern life, when you are surrounded by comfort, is frustrating in itself. No, I do not have any regrets. Quite the opposite.

How to make the Croats in BiH happy

How do you co-operate with the Croats?

Not very easily, but… I have met many Croats, most of them are not difficult. The main problem are some Bosnian Croats, mostly from Herzegovina, those who hold and draw the strings of power. They use messages which say that Croats have no future in BiH, that they are a minority, not only in Central Bosnia, that the IC does not like them and treats them inadequately. This is about treatment. When you are a "difficult" person and I am mild towards you, we do not solve anything. If I strike back by also being difficult, then you explain it to people – you see how they treat us.

I have a million-dollar question and it is: How can one make the Croats in BiH happy?

Croats are hard working, they have their culture, they can be influential in BiH. Bosnia needs Croats because it will not bee the same without Croats, it will not be Bosnia. Therefore, the only way for the development of the country is to give people a chance to develop and to feel comfortable in their country. This means that Croats in, for example, Sarajevo, find a Catholic Church there, as well as schools and that they are equal to others. This, unfortunately, does not always happen.