

Interview: Carlos Westendorp, the High Representative in BiH

The Bonn meeting was a turning point in the attitude of the IC towards the peace process in Bosnia – I do not think that a protectorate is necessary – I believe that anything agreed between all sides is better than anything imposed from the outside, says Carlos Westendorp, optimistically predicting that according to the ‘Bosnian Calendar’ real normalisation will begin by the next elections

A day after the PIC meeting in Bonn, HR Westendorp ‘dropped by’ his Brussels Office in order to ask, as he said, ‘poor Sir Arthur Watts’ for a ‘little more patience’. Westendorp’s assessment is that the Bonn meeting represents a turning point in the attitude of the IC towards the peace process in Bosnia, and stability in the Balkans. He also said that after Bonn, fast development and progress on all fronts are expected, including the one that ‘poor Sir Arthur Watts’ deals with.

We remind the High Representative, at the beginning of our conversation, that there were many ‘turning points’, that is, the ‘key sessions’ of the same Council in Rome, Geneva, Moscow, Florence, Paris, London, and, finally, Sintra ... Therefore, we ask, why should it be different after Bonn? Westendorp says:

As we Spanish like to say for bull fighting, I feel that this is the moment of truth, that is the moment when the bull has to be slain. In the last four months, we have had a certain intensity of development. Not only in the area of the joint institutions, which are meeting and working, but also in the movement of people: buses going to Banja Luka Trade Fair from all parts of BiH; thousands of Croats visited cemeteries in the RS in the past month; the airport in Banja Luka was opened; lots of things were done about TV; the job on police reconstruction is proceeding well; refugees started to return to places where their ethnic group is a minority. Of course, all of this is not going with the necessary speed, but the situation is getting better.

Simultaneously, a debate is in progress about the extension of the international troops’ mandate, and step-by-step a consensus is growing that some presence is necessary, in a different magnitude. Therefore, the next six months are the key ones. We have to use this readiness to keep SFOR in the same setup until June, in order to improve the situation. We will never be as strong as now militarily. We will also never have the support of the public as much as now. If the Western public do not see some significant improvement, I am afraid that it could result in a very strong movement for disengagement. And the end of next year is also very important, because we will have elections, and we have to use all the advantages of the international presence. We have the opportunity to remove the problems, as they were observed by Gonzales’ Commission in FRY, before the elections in Bosnia. To ensure a good electoral law, equal access to the media, and other pre-conditions of free elections, are necessary. If we do not do this now, I am afraid that we will fall into a blocked stalemate.

Do You think that there is enough political will in the IC to keep on with this?

Of course, there is some doubt. I found it not so much among leaders as among some high officials of certain countries. They say to me: ‘we were in Dayton, we were in Bosnia ... the situation is too complicated, it would never function ...’ This suspicion is our biggest enemy. In order to stop it from growing and expanding, we have to do all that we can in the next six months.

THE KEY OF RS STABILITY IN MILOSEVIC’S HANDS

What is your opinion regarding Croatia and FRY in the Dayton process?

The co-operation of both countries has an essential importance, but the problems are different. The problems of the RS and its relations with Milosevic are different to the problems of Croats, who have the problem of identity, and they are afraid that they will remain a minority in the framework of the Federation. Relations with Croatia have improved. They delivered the war criminals, they removed the hard-liners in Mostar ... Milosevic has less influence on Krajisnik and Pale. But the key to RS stability is in his hands. Nine members of the new RS Parliament, with

whom I talked and by whom I am assured they wish to co-operate, are now the key for the survival of the RS. They can do a lot in order to implement the new order in the Parliament. Therefore, I appeal to Milosevic to help stabilise the situation. All nine Serb representatives are key figures.

From one 'turning point' to another, the documents of the Council grow larger and larger. The Bonn document is a record one: 40 pages. Who will read it?

It is the same with documents as with laws. Who reads the laws except for lawyers and judges? The important thing is that in the Bonn documents, the policy was defined, and that is why they are so big. They consist of all that should be done in the next six months. Some things may be finished in certain terms of a month or two. Some cannot. You cannot set a date to achieve 'multi-ethnicity', which is for me one of the main aims. It requires a change of mentality and recovery of trust. But, take the economy for example. There is no economy in BiH. No central economy, no central institutions, no money in the budget, no system of revenue resources ... All of this must be done in the next six months, and we can do it. Or, preparations for the elections. We had the opportunity to see how the mono-national parties are trained in manipulating the elections. Therefore, we need full supervision by the OSCE, a democratic control over media, it is necessary to support the development of multi-ethnic parties. If we can finish all of this by the next elections, I hope that this could represent the beginning of the real normalisation process in BiH.

How do you think you can ensure respect for the Bonn calendar? What will be the consequences of disregarding the deadlines?

The consequences will be horrifying. I do not like to think about them. Because, as I told you before, the IC might disengage ...

But isn't it just the thing that many of those who have the deadlines before them wish? To disengage the IC, and be left to do their own free will?

Someone of them, indeed, are obstructing the peace process, because they think time is working for them. Especially the 'independents'. That is, those who wish independence or unity with some other country. They think that the IC will get tired and give up on Dayton and Bosnia, and then they can easily declare independence or 'anschluss'. But they are wrong. They will never get such an opportunity. Because, they are not strong enough to do anything in that sense ...

“POOR SIR ARTHUR WATTS”

In the next room, infinite discussions on succession are taking place. For how long do you intend to offer your mediating services to the participants?

The patience of poor Sir Arthur Watts is limitless, although I have heard that he lost it for a moment, with full justification. I completely agree with him, and all I will ask from him is to be patient for a little longer. Because the next meeting of the Council in June or July the next year will be much harsher than this one. I think that this subject should be included in the negotiations about the normalisation of relations between FRY and the IC. Because, there are some matters regarding the succession negotiations relating to the outer wall of sanctions.

They are not strong enough compared to who? Compared to NATO forces or other forces in BiH. Who is going to stop them?

They will be stopped by those who want the opposite, that is, domination. Besides, the IC will never be completely disengaged. There will be a military supervision, enabled to react promptly, in the case, for example, of massive movements of troops. That is clear. Even if the troops are in Hungary (which I did not understand: why in Hungary and not in Bosnia?) they will be able to react fast if there are any problems. Therefore I think that the 'independents' option is not real. Nor is domination an option, although I can still see its signs in Bosnia.

For example?

This domination means nostalgia for the old Republic of BiH, theoretically multi-ethnic, but in essence Bosniak-dominated. This is why the old structures of Republic of BiH are being dismantled slowly and with delay, and this is

why the conception of the entities is not recognised in the areas covered by the Dayton Agreement. Our task is to terminate both tendencies, which if they continue, might risk the outbreak of another war.

Are you satisfied with the authority given by the PIC in Bonn?

According to my interpretation, the authority I have been given is what I have had so far. It would require a new agreement, some new Dayton to change this. Maybe the Dayton was not brave enough to say: "the High Representative is the protector, and will have the executive and legislative authorities for the period." They did not choose that model. Now, two years later, and after everything that has been achieved, I do not think a protectorate is necessary. I really believe that everything agreed between the sides in Bosnia is far better than anything imposed by external forces.

What happened in Bonn was unanimous and strong support for the existing authority of the High Representative. This is a clear sign that the IC is unified in backing the HR. This was not the case before. In the beginning, the Europeans wanted a strong HR. Russians, too. But Americans were hesitating back then. The situation changed: now everybody wants the implementation process to be accelerated, that's why they support the authority which would enable the HR to achieve it.

How do you intend to use your authority?

Very economically. I won't be using it too frequently, for when you grab some weapon too frequently... its effects decrease. I will only use it as a means of dissuasion. Obstruction, blockades, failure to carry out duties... will not be tolerated anymore. So: if you do not agree, do not worry: I will do it for you. If you don't agree systematically, worry not again: I will liberate you from this duty.

NATO WAS PREPARING KARADZIC'S "ESCAPE TO THE HAGUE"

In the PIC document there is again urgent insistence on the arrest of those indicted for war crimes and their transport to the Tribunal. It is not, however, being said who would do this?

There is a general consensus that it must be done, but this is not enough. My personal opinion is that this is not only legally, morally and ethically necessary, but also practically. Take Karadzic for example. He and his partners in power really do have control over the black economy in the RS. He has also kept political control. We have proof that Karadzic formulated a strategy of resistance for the SDS, following the recent parliament elections. He has to be sent to the Hague. I do not believe that he would surrender of his own free will, even though some NATO officials told me that they have been waiting for him to show up at the airport two times already, where a plane for the Hague was waiting for him. Still, it was obviously a false alarm, or a false promise.... I am certain that there are a lot of ways for this to be done without too large a risk or damage. I cannot even imagine that international forces might withdraw from Bosnia, and Karadzic and the rest of the indictees be left to walk free. And I am sure, sooner or later, this will be done.

There are a lot of obvious candidates for dismissal . When do you intend to relieve them of their burdens?

Should they continue to act as they do now, or so clumsy as some of them acted this Wednesday in Bonn, after an accepted period - say in two or three weeks - I will have to tell them: "Please, back off. We'll find somebody else to do this for you". Not only for the Serb side. There are dangerous people elsewhere, on other sides. They need to be removed. It would be ideal if they were removed by their own people.

For the last couple of weeks, when speaking about the protectorate or widened mandate of the HR, you were always emphasising: "Not yet". Does that mean that you keep such options in reserve?

I have all the options open. The only thing I do not see as an option is the so-called exit strategy. That is out of the question. Should there be no real progress in six months, I will inform the next Conference of the PIC that this could not drag on further and that we have to work differently. This option, therefore, is still open. But, for now, I believe that this new approach can provide us with progress. On the contrary, if nothing or too little is achieved, we would have to think about a different approach, which could, naturally, include executive and legal power of the HR. Nobody in the IC will tolerate stalemate.

The HR is the main interpreter of the letter and spirit of the DPA. Is it true, as Milutinovic claims, that there is nothing in the DPA which would oblige FRY to arrest and bring to the Tribunal those indicted for war crimes?

This is not a matter of interpretation, but simple reading. Everything was clearly written in Article IX of the DPA and was repeated several times in various Annexes. All of this was signed by President Milosevic. This is one of the questions that Milosevic will have to sort out. This question has its place on the list of demands of the IC when it comes to the IC conditioning its cooperation with the FRY. This is one of the main issues on the list. There are, actually, two lists: one, comprising demands, the second, comprising rewards. If I were to negotiate this with him, I would be doing it in installments: "you do this, you get this..." and in the same manner we would reach the end of the list.

On several occasions you emphasised that the "mono-ethnic" parties were one of the biggest problems in Bosnia. How do you think this can be changed?

There is certain progress to the advantage of opposition parties which are potentially multi-ethnic. International organizations and party foundations in Europe should support such parties, not only financially, but also in the domain of logistics, organisation, and technically... Another possibility would be a change in the election law. There are many technical ways to support the multi-ethnicity of political parties. The idea of the Serb Civic Council, for example, says that the Constitution of entities should include an idea that all three constitutive peoples and the rest... are not constitutive on the level of the whole of BiH, but that they are constitutive in each of the entities. We have to contribute to the political move from the field of ethnic orientation to the field of ideology, just as in all normal democratic countries.

The SDS has lost its political monopoly in the RS. Are there some similar tendencies in other ethnic groups?

There is less pluralism in the Federation, but more multi-ethnicity than in RS. In RS there are more parties, but all of them are mono-ethnic.

Do you see a possibility of a multi-ethnic coalition in the new RS parliament?

I don't know if this will be possible. Maybe it's too early to come to any conclusions at this moment. One possibility is a coalition of the SDS, Radicals and for example Milosevic's Socialists. This would be very dangerous for the Dayton process. Another possibility would be a so-called big coalition with a technocratic government, which would be good.

What do you think about the American idea that SFOR be replaced with a strong international police force?

One of the ideas for the period following June 1998 is that there should be fewer soldiers and more specialized policemen, like Civil guard in Spain, French Gendarmerie or Italian Carabinieri. This is just one of the possibilities. The problem, however, is how to provide a sufficient number of policemen which would replace the troops. It is very questionable whether the countries would be willing to send a number of their highly qualified policemen to Bosnia, for they are, unfortunately, needed back home. Otherwise, I believe that such police forces would be very useful.

Do you believe that forces to replace SFOR should have a determined "expiry date", i.e. a date of withdrawal from Bosnia?

Should there be extended presence, which I do believe, I think that it would be better not to determine deadlines, but only goals. Depending on these goals, the number of troops should be occasionally revised and adjusted according to developments. For this is not about maths. It is impossible to foresee reliably what will happen. This Wednesday, in Bonn, Izetbegovic was talking about another 10 years. Who knows, this might be possible, too.

ELECTION DEMONSTRATION IN BONN

Since the FRY and RS representatives walked out from the PIC Conference before the final document was adopted, does this mean that the document is not obligatory for them?

No, the document is equally obligatory. Even if they had stayed and agreed with the document, this would not be a

guarantee that they would respect it. They have signed many documents so far, but it never bothered them not to respect them.

I see this incident as twofold. The demonstration by Milosevic's representatives, naturally, has to be interpreted in the light of elections, as an attempt to show that the authorities, regarding the inner questions, are as firm as their political opponents. Kosovo, beyond any doubt, is an internal Serb question, but is also a question of legitimate concern to the IC. Dayton does not refer only to Bosnia, but regional stability, and Kosovo is one of the key elements for this stability. That's why we want to help the Yugoslav authorities to solve that problem.

As for Krajisnik, the same obstructions that we're already accustomed to are in question. This was used to "build a case", for Karadzic instructed them to do so. He told them: "You have to use Bonn to create a problem", and they did it. Karadzic's spirit is still present in such meetings and that's just another reason why I want to see him in the Hague as soon as possible.