

Interview: Jacques Paul Klein, Principal Deputy High Representative "Tudjman helped us a lot when he disempowered the hard-liners in Mostar"

In my recent discussion with President Tudjman, I informed him of the International Community's standpoint on the Croatian proposal regarding special relations between Republic of Croatia and the BiH Federation, and he explained to me the reasons for such an initiative. I think Zagreb tried to send a message to Bosnian Croats that they have someone who thinks about them; however the proposal overcame the framework of Dayton.

When it was confirmed that US General Jacques Paul Klein was being appointed as Senior Deputy HR for the DPA implementation in BiH, journalist circles commented that the game of non-co-operative politicians was over. It was said that Klein would establish order very soon, even using "arm-twisting" methods. However, in the past three and a half months that this energetic American has been BiH, he has been learning about the problems and assuring all sides about the necessity for co-operation. When he saw that his assurance would not help him to accomplish his mandate successfully, that is to implement Dayton, he announced that, at the next meeting of the Peace Implementation Council, which is to be held in Bonn next month, he will ask for wider powers. During the one-and-half hour conversation in his Sarajevo office, he gladly presented us with his idea of solving the problem of BiH licence plates. This satisfied American diplomat, in a cloud of Cuban cigar smoke, said that only seven letters would be used on the licence plates, along with numbers!

When I presented this proposal to Krajisnik, he told me: 'I don't see any Cyrillic around here.', and I replied that along with an 'A', there were six more letters that were the same in Cyrillic or Roman Script," said Klein humorously, and determinedly added that such plates would be printed and distributed to the people, whether Krajisnik liked it or not!

Apart from the current Bosnian situation, we also discussed the matter of the Croatian proposal with the Deputy HR and former key UNTAES member.

Krajisnik would like to have Cyrillic

Mr Klein, what is the standpoint of the International Community regarding the Croatian proposal on Special Parallel Relations between the Republic of Croatia and the BiH Federation?

Of course that Croatia has the right to establish special relations with the BiH Federation. It was written in Dayton. Also, Yugoslavia has the right to establish special relations with Republika Srpska. However, Dayton specified the nature and type of such relations. The Croatian proposal goes far beyond what was written in Dayton. I also think there were too many discussions about divisions, and that we should concentrate on DPA implementation. One of the reasons why such an initiative was offered, is surely because the Croats who live in BiH feel like a minority; they feel they will not have an equal education, the approach to state positions, ie that they will not be able to function like equal citizens of BiH. Therefore, it is imperative for the BiH Government to send clear signals to the Croat population, that they are as equal as any other citizens of this state. One such signal may be to open up Sarajevo, and to return Croats to this town, because there is a logical question - if the Capital does not restore its multi-ethnic make-up, how will this happen in villages? I think that Zagreb tried to send a message to Bosnian Croats that they have someone who thinks about them. This means that the Croatian Government made a positive contribution to stabilisation by suggesting to Croats that they remain here. But, as I have already said, the proposal overreached the framework of Dayton. President Izetbegovic presented his draft proposal to President Tudjman, soon the Presidency and the Government will do the same, and we will have negotiations.

The key for the Danube valley

You surely follow the progress of reintegration of the Croatian Danube valley. Are you satisfied with the results, and what is your standpoint on the expiry of the UNTAES mandate?

Firstly, the mission was successful. UN needs success in the Danube region. Now, it is a question of whether the Croatian Government will act in accordance with the agreement they signed. As you already know, the OSCE mission is coming, about 250 people, who will observe very thoroughly if the agreement is respected. If the Croatian Government violates the agreement, they will be sanctioned for years. Therefore, it is important, as I have already told Mr Tudjman, to respect the agreement. Croatia now has 3-5 percent population of Serbs. This is the price to pay to be in a multi-ethnic Europe. This is reality. I hope that the mission will be successfully accomplished, which means that the Serbs must reintegrate into Croatia. The Croatian Government must allow them respect for their culture and religion, while the Serbs must understand that, if they want to live in Croatia, they are Croatian citizens. This is the key!

Holy Dayton

Suppose the Croatian proposal is accepted by two BiH Presidency members and the Council of Ministers, would that make the Croatian initiative acceptable?

No! Even if the proposal was accepted by all three Presidency members and all other institutions of the State, it would still be unacceptable, because it is in discord with Dayton. BiH Constitution, and the Dayton Agreement do not allow such relations. Such a proposal violates not only the Peace Agreement, but also International legislature.

The Croatian Government is calling upon the Washington Agreement to apply this initiative.

Everybody knows that the recent agreement is the main agreement. What was transferred from the Washington agreement into the Dayton Agreement remains valid, everything else was annulled by Dayton.

You visited President Tudjman recently. Did you also present him with this standpoint of the International Community?

Yes, absolutely. I informed him of this standpoint of the International Community, and he explained to me the Croatian reasons for such an initiative. I also briefed him about the current problems that we are dealing with here, and these are the matters of the flag, the Coat of Arms, licence plates, passports, the situation in Mostar? President Tudjman helped us a lot by removing the hard-liners from the authorities in Mostar, which enables us to achieve much better results in the city.

The games of Pale

At the recent session of the Peace Implementation Council held in Sintra at the end of May, deadlines were established within which certain problems should have been resolved. The allocation of diplomatic posts was partially solved, while all other conclusions remained static. What are you going to do about it?

The problem is that one side delays the adoption of obligations and creates artificial objections to all that was put on the table, regardless of whether it was about passports or anything else. This means that we have a leadership in Pale which does not give support to the implementation process, and thus they still keep leading Serbs into an historical dead-end. Republika Srpska faces economic collapse, unemployment is huge, although the people deserve a much better future than their leadership can offer. Our Office is investigating various options for widening our powers, some sort of arbitrage with which we could act to give all sides deadlines within which they must solve certain problems, and if that does not happen, our Office will impose a valid decision for all sides. I think this is necessary if we want success. For example, I know that the people from RS are buying BiH passports for a very high price, and they are forced to do that because their leadership refuses to accept a compromise solution. Therefore, the Pale leadership is the one who is disabling the rights of its people! Moreover, they prevent them travelling outside RS; with this behaviour, the Pale authorities make the International Community reluctant to invest in that entity. We will have a meeting of the PIC Steering Board on December 10 in Bonn, and we will ask for wider powers if the Sintra conclusions are not carried out by that time.

Come on, what protectorate

Some analysts are 'translating' your demands for wider powers as an attempt to establish a

protectorate in BiH?

It should not be taken like that. A protectorate is a very ugly word. This would mean that the people down here are not capable of working by themselves. I think they can, they just need some assistance. Actually, the key problem is the Pale leadership. They do not show any interest in building a country. On the contrary, they use the strategy of delay, hoping that the International Community will get tired of this area and quit. I tried to convince them that this is not going to happen, and that international troops will remain here after their mandate expires next year. It will not be SFOR, but it will be a re-constructed force with some other name. Therefore, the strategy of Pale is a very bad one. They should also be completely clear that BiH is the first great challenge for NATO, and it is quite certain that this organisation will not allow itself a failure in this area, because if they cannot deal with these problems, then what can they deal with? Also, no other organisation came here other than for a period long enough to normalise the situation, and to make the state function normally. Dayton created two entities with individual authorities, but also a "State umbrella" that is constantly refused by Pale. For example, they permanently, and on purpose, keep confusing the functions of the entity and of the state flag. They propose the existence of two flags for BiH international presentation, although they know this is impossible. This is their strategy. So, therefore, we are forced to ask for expanded authority in order to make our mission successful, that is to implement the Dayton Peace Agreement. Bosniak and Croat officials agreed about the issues, but Pale are making a show of everything.

The lighthouse of hope

Among the 18 issues which your Office stressed must be implemented by the Bonn meeting, otherwise you will ask for wider authorities, there is also the establishment of a new municipality - Usora. I read in the Sarajevo press that you could draw the borderlines, in the event that the Arbitrage Federal Committee fails to solve the problem?

This is a very creative journalist, who, by the way, never interviewed me. But anyway, if our Office is asked for assistance, we would be glad to help.

At the recent session of the Political Committee of the European Council Parliament Assembly, you decided that membership in this organisation represented a "lighthouse of hope". You also suggested to Europe that it accept BiH in its family, explaining that this would make the fundamental fears of BiH disappear.

As soon BiH becomes a part of Europe, the sooner the fundamental tensions will become calm and quiet. Everyone has the right to his own religion, but it is not good that people return to a conservative form of religion. I trust that later on, as the state develops further, the people will think more about their economy, and less about nationalism or religion. The matter of BiH acceptance into the European Council is not an 'if', but 'when' However, in order to make this state a part of the oldest European institution, it is necessary to show at least the main characteristics of statehood, and these are the flag, the licence plates? After the New Year, the European Council will send one of their reporters to BiH to analyse and follow the situation, and based on his reports, the EC will make a decision. Therefore, it is quite clear that the acceptance of BiH into the European Council is fully in the hands of BiH authorities.

Mujahiddins near Maglaj

Do you know that in the village of Donja Bocina there are living about 300 Arabic Mujahaddins, imposing their way of life on this area. Besides which, they often buy several women, and some of them are suspected for murders of Croats in Travnik municipality?

I do not know what do you want from us. As I was informed, these people came here during the war; allegedly they became citizens of BiH, although I do not know how they managed that, because many people who want to become citizens of BiH are running into difficulties. As for the polygamy, I don't know what the law is here, but I will surely ask about this. If the law is violated, the Government has to intervene. Also, the International Community is very worried about the murders and other incidents in Travnik municipality. We made this clear to the local authorities and demanded a prompt investigation. The attack on the returnees in Travnik municipalities have long-term consequences. This must be stopped and we are working on this. The International police is also involved in the whole process. Such events do not show that Croats are welcome, and we expect different signals from local

authorities.

Your Office has been coping with the Federal Government for more than a year to change the Housing Law, which would return apartments to their refugee owners. A few days ago, the Government accepted only one of the demands of your office. Do you plan to resolve this matter? There are more than 200,000 people waiting for this solution, for Sarajevo only?

Not one person can be thrown out from an apartment or house before adequate accommodation is found. Solving this problem will be very complicated. For example, Brcko. We are trying to bring the Moslems back into Brcko; this procedure is on-going. However, the greatest number of Serbs in Brcko are from Sarajevo. One third surely wants to return, one third does not know, while one third does not wish to return. If those who wish to would return to Sarajevo, that would speed up the process of Moslem return to Brcko. Some people suggest we build other houses for Serbs in Brcko, with which I do not agree. Why should we have to built them houses, when they have their own apartments and houses in Sarajevo? Here, they say, there are no available apartments in Sarajevo, which is not true. We surveyed the situation, and we know there is free space. Here you have many families who took many apartments and houses. This is war profiteering, and it has to be dealt with. Also, there are many empty houses and apartments in Sarajevo that need to be repaired. We will invest in this project, and we will bring back all the former residents. We ded a similar thing back in Vukovar. We took some buildings by the Danube, made a list of who lived there, found those people, and asked – if we rebuild your apartment, are you ready to live with your former neighbours? 95% of them said – Yes! Then I went to Brussels with this information, and asked the European Union for the money for the reconstruction of these houses. They have been rebuilt, and the people returned. I will suggest the same model for Sarajevo. Along with this project, which will start the return to the Capital, we will insist on respect for the Dayton decision on return of all people to their homes. The return to Sarajevo is going to have to be approved by all those who wish to return. If that regulation cannot be implemented in the Capital, then where can it? Sarajevo has to be an example of multi-ethnicity, we made this clear to everybody. Bosniaks had large worldwide support for everything they had been through in the war, but, however, the war is over; we have to create a lawful state. Everyone has to fulfil their obligations, we cannot constantly call upon what happened during the war.

Corruption and embezzlement

What can you say about the issue of corruption and improper use of revenues in BiH. According to the CAFAO report, the state has been suffered a loss of 43 million DEM through customs tax embezzlement alone.

Information is leaking out from all political circles, with very individual standpoints and interests, that accuse individuals for embezzlement of the money from funds. We know that war produces corruption and a black-market, but now we have the peace, and everything should be put within legal frameworks. Our Office is not an initiator of revision – where the money from donors has gone – but I think it is good to have a control. Also this state has to make a forecast, which would be transparent, to know exactly how much money was received by a certain ministry, and not like it has been so far, where a few people make decisions about this behind closed doors.

It is certain that the International Community supports President Plavsic. However, the results of the local elections show that she has the trust of a very small part of the Serb population. Her stand is only in Bosanska Krajina.

She is a Serb nationalist, but she knows that the Serb people need a leadership who will stand for its economic and political interests. She understands the whole situation much better than the leadership from Pale. While Pale leadership has their own arrangements for the ‘common’ people, President Plavsic fights against corruption and unemployment. She agreed to take part in the democratisation process, and we are willing to co-operate with her. She agreed about reform of the media. You know that the TV programme for RS is broadcasting from Banja Luka. We have facilitated equal treatment for all parties who participate in the forthcoming elections in the entity. I don’t think there will be much progress in the Parliamentary elections. It should be remembered that the SDS has the organisation, the money and the people. It will take time to build a new political structure.