Interview: Jaques Paul Klein, Deputy HR”Croatia Will Soon Be Rewarded for Its Positive in NATO Operation”

“Do you have any KM?”
“How am I supposed to have any, I work for a Zagreb paper?!”
“Yes, but you live here. Listen, first time I see you with one KM, I will have your picture put onto it. Besides, KM has already become the strongest currency in the region. This morning, the exchange rate was 1:12.5 in proportion to Serb Dinar or 1:4 to Kuna. I am glad that the Splitska Bank will start exchanging it in June. I have been trying to persuade the Croatian Government all the time to exchange Kuna for KM in the Republic of Croatia because it will have a positive impact on the economy.”

This was the start of the informal part of the interview with Westendorp’s Senior Deputy Jacques Klein who is always obliging to journalists and ready to make a joke. However, by this remark, Klein, in his own way, reproached all those who are not making efforts to reinforce the “domestic” currency. The smile disappeared from his face as soon as we posed the first “formal” question.

Mr. Klein, how does the Kosovo crisis reflect on BiH?

We have been lucky so far. We were worried about what would happen in the RS because there were radical leaders who were trying to “inflame the atmosphere”. We went to the RS with SFOR Commander Montgomery Meigs and other representatives of international organisations, we asked them to remain calm and told them that they were not enemies, but that Milosevic was, and that we would keep assisting them because they are a part

of BiH. We understand their sympathies because 20% of them have relatives in Serbia.

Still, there were some riots?

We discovered that those were financed. Serbs got DM 10 to 20 each to participate in the demonstrations.

I do not know what Gelbard stated

Can political points that Croatia has scored compensate for its economic damages?

Yes, that is important for Croatia. The Republic of Croatia was invited to Brussels straight away, and then became part of the NATO Conference in Washington. That was because it supports NATO. Croatia is a state on the front-line and I think that it will soon be rewarded for its current positive role.

Are the NATO strikes on the FRY the reason why the relations between Croatia and the USA have thawed?

Yes, I think so because Croatia is now, for the first time, involved into the issue which is not just a bilateral issue between the USA and the Republic of Croatia. This is the chance for Croatia to show that it can be a serious partner in solving global problems.

Maybe those relations were a bit spoiled by Gelbard's statement in which he accused Croat generals?

I do not know enough about that. When I ask someone about something he stated, he tells me that he did not say it that way. That is why I would rather not comment.

Will, on account of all this, the USA support the acceptance of Croatia in the Partnership for Peace, NATO…?

I do not know when it comes to NATO, but it certainly will

when it comes to other European institutions. Ambassador Montgomery has been working very hard to really build good relations between the USA and Croatia because it is a natural relation also because of the large number of Croats in America. I am glad that the good relations which were established in the past between Ministers of Defence are continuing.

Too many people are drawing boundaries

Can a new emigration of Serbs from the FRY to Croatia take place due to the growing poverty in the FRY, which would lead towards the destabilisation of Croatia?

No. We had 12,000 Serbs who came from the FRY to the RS, including many young men who were drafted by the army and who did not want to be part of that. This has been the only movement of Serbs so far.

Will the FRY attempt to drag Croatia in the war through Prevlaka?

Last week an incident occurred which has been solved. I think that the group in the FRY have their hands full and do not have time for new adventures. This one was more than enough for them.

In your opinion, what will the end of the Kosovo crisis be like?

I believe that it is clear to everybody that Milosevic is not the solution. He is the problem. He has never questioned in the past nine years whether he should sell the interests of the Serb people or not in order to survive. Milosevic led those people into a historical dead-end. He did that in Croatia, in BiH and now he is doing that in Kosovo.

Will a division such as the one I saw in an American newspaper perhaps take place eventually: Kosovo will be annexed to

Albania, the Serb entity in BiH to Yugoslavia and the Federation to Croatia?

No. Then I would be left without my job (laughs). There are too many people going around drawing boundaries. They forget that they are drawing boundaries among people, thus creating a huge quantity of poverty.

However, there are such boundaries which have to be drawn, e.g. between Croatia and BiH.

When Croatia and BiH became members of the UN, none of them got a map with clearly designated borders. We have old maps according to which the commissions are working. 90% of that work has been completed. One such meeting was held yesterday in Banja Luka. When the experts hand over the borders to the politicians, they will resolve the remaining 10%. Then we will make a satellite shot and after that BiH will for the first time have internationally recognised borders.

SDA is playing senseless games

These days intensive discussions are being held in the Republic of Croatia on the election law, particularly on the way in which Diaspora will be voting. Tudjman is trying to reach a consensus with the opposition. What do you think about that?

That is a good sign. When it comes to the citizens from Diaspora, they finally need to decide where their political loyalty is. Of course, I understand the sympathies for the motherland and fear because of the history. I know that Croat(ian)s were “purged” bureaucratically during the history in different ways. For instance, passports and visas were easily issued in order to “purge” them from anti-communists. It is just for that reason that a big number of Croat(ian)s are abroad. And many of them were not welcome in the former SFRY. Naturally, at the beginning they most of all wished to set up the state of Croatia, but now they have to say: “We

have done our part of work, and now we may be Australians, Canadians, Americans and cultivate love for the country". It is just those living in a certain country who should pass that country's laws.

One of those laws – Customs Law – is a current one. Is it a good solution for the Republic of Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina?

Croatia is the forth biggest business partner of BiH. We need now to destroy the obstacles made by the war now and open up as soon as possible the Ploce port that will be bringing money. BiH will have the sea which will enable it to breath economically. Regardless of what is going on, these two countries will be leaning on each other and fair relations should be arranged as soon as possible. In that sense I think that those laws on borders are good ones.

Economic experts are claiming that the new customs regime will destroy the economy in the Federation.

I heard the same arguments in Zagreb about the economy in Croatia.

Can you explain your statement about "the third entity" in BiH?

I have been misquoted for a hundred times. Croats do feel threatened since their number, from 20%, that was the number of Croats from before the war, went down to 7% only. They are presenting arguments and asking why others can have a flag and other symbols, and they cannot. Croats got associated with Bosniaks in the Federation before Dayton, and the same Dayton gave the Croats in BiH much bigger powers than they themselves thought they could get. Please, can you tell me any country in the world in which 7% of people have got that much political and economic power.

Why are Bosniaks so resistant to the special relations between

Croatia and the Federation?

Within the SDA politicians are playing games. They do not want to sign so that they could not be accused of betrayal of BiH. That is a nonsense. BiH needs Croatia in order to be able to economically breath at all. The problem is that we do not have politicians to explain to the people what they themselves believe in.

Is the information that you are leaving soon true?

I will wait for the decision to be made by my State Secretary. I am always interested in challenge.

Arkan requested a 1.7 million DM bribe

Which task seems harder to you – the one in BiH or the one in Slavonia?

In Eastern Slavonia I had 22,000 Croatian soldiers opposite 18,000 armed Serbs, plus Arkan's murderers. The question was how to keep them apart and demilitarise the Serbs, take over Djeletovci so that they do not blow them up, how to chase away the criminals. Arkan requested a 1.7 million DM bribe to leave Slavonia. I sad that it was out of question but that we would certainly force his people to leave the area. Here in BiH the mandate is completely different. We are trying to establish trust among the people. Therefore, the mandates in Slavonia and BiH are completely different and incomparable.