

Interview Part Two: Carlos Westendorp, High Representative in BiH "Croats are good people who can be difficult sometimes"

In today's issue we bring you the second part of the interview with Carlos Westendorp, the High Representative of the International Community in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Last year was proclaimed the year of return, but still people are not returning to their homes in planned numbers and deadlines. Why?

It was a good slogan – the year of return. And I used it often to mobilize the spirit, and it maybe functioned half way. The goal of UNHCR was to return 50 000 people in six months, we returned 40 000 in a year's time, members of minority nations. This and next year will be very significant for return of displaced persons and refugees. We have made a return plan but we cannot 100% guarantee its implementation, but we will do everything in our power to make it work. If we lose these two years for return of people, in three, four years everyone would say: no way that I am returning, I'm staying right where I am. And ethnic cleansing is a bad solution for this country. Living together is still the best solution. Maybe not in the same proportion as before the war, but people who live together have to see each other as equal citizens.

Do you hold it possible in BiH?

It will take a lot of time, effort and money, but also the democratization of police, judiciary that will have to be

independent, media that will not harass other nations and – economic reconstruction. Those are great tasks in future.

Fatigue of donors

But there are more and more announcements that there will be a reduction of IC donors' aid for BiH?

It is clear that it has come to the point of donors' fatigue. People do not like tax payers' money to be spent. But we always assure the donors that war is much more expensive. I hope that at the next donors' conference for BiH we will reach our goal of a billion US dollars of aid. But I have to admit that this will not last forever. At some point, these donations have to grow into loans, and loans, as you know, have to be paid back. And if there is no economic reconstruction in this country, loans will not be paid back, so the economic reform and reconstruction is one of our priorities alongside with the privatization implementation.

Do you think it possible that in the next two years BiH will become economically self-sustainable, which is a prerequisite for the IC departure?

Not in two years. But in two years, we believe we will have a successful privatization behind us, a reform of the banking system with the banks that will not go bankrupt, and the private business alongside is necessary. Therefore, a lot of things can be done during that time, but not all.

How when, for example, not one factory is working in the city of Sarajevo?

I think two of them are.

Yes, with very poor salaries or none at all.

That is correct, salaries are minimal.

Joint institutions

How do you assess the functioning of the joint institutions in BiH?

They could function much better. They have just started working. Last year, for example, they did not even have a unified location, so one time they held a session in Lukavica, next time in the Museum of the city of Sarajevo. The Council of Ministers also did not have a structure. The chairman changed every week. Now there is a joint building in the reconstruction of which the EU invested a lot of money. We are trying to reorganize the Council of Ministers so that it is on suitable premises with all the necessary accompanying services, so that they can work better. Besides, there are good people in the BiH Presidency and the Council of Ministers. There is a Serb member of the Presidency who can be worked with and he replaced the old dinosaur Krajisnik. There is Mr. Jelavic too, a young and active person whom we can cooperate with, although he has difficult people, difficult nation. Croats are good people that can be difficult sometimes. Central institutions could and should work better. That is one of the basic prerequisites for BiH, for its membership in the Council of Europe, which is, in my opinion, a good idea.

I do not believe in the division

You have mentioned Mr. Jelavic. Does that mean that you are satisfied with the cooperation with him?

Fifty – fifty. It is not because of him, but the difficulties in some parts of Herzegovina. But, we must be pragmatic and see how we can review and overcome all the difficulties that are in our way. We can cooperate with many Croats in this country, at that with the ones who truly believe in Bosnia. Since Bosnia, without Croats, without Serbs and without Bosniacs cannot be a functioning state. I honestly do not believe in the division of this country.

This is why I am interested to know how strong, in your opinion, the influence of Zagreb on the politics of Jelavic in BiH is?

It is difficult to say, as I know that Zagreb has and has always had a great influence on Bosnian Croats. But I also know that there is pluralism in Zagreb and that not everybody thinks the same way. Even within HDZ there are different tendencies. But there is also a strong opposition. So that this kind of pluralistic influence is, in my view, quite good. Whenever there is a problem, we manage to achieve a good cooperation and relations with Zagreb, with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, with the Presidency and we usually succeed in solving the problem. Jelavic is the head of a party that is as troublesome as any other, but the problem is that this party has difficult people. The question is who will have more influence: ordinary, normal people or the "difficult" ones. I think that Herzegovina people are known in the Republic of Croatia as "difficult" people, historically and tradition-wise. If this is so, we have to accept it and see how to convey to all those people that the cooperation within this region is the only and the best acceptable solution. I have always said that the advantage of RC over FRY is that they want to be a part of Western Europe, because this is what its people want. And this is where the solution is. And Milosevic and Seselj send out a message to the people that the Serbs want to isolate themselves from all the European and the world's trends.

There are solutions

How do you see the future of BiH? Are the ideas of the division still current?

I can see them here in the country and abroad, in foreign countries. Those who are abroad and think about divisions are common people who have never been in Bosnia and some say that we should go for the division of the country as that would be

the best solution for the IC to leave.

Who says that?

Some days ago Herald Tribune published an article in that style. Some time ago, Lord Owen also suggested such a solution, but I do not believe that this idea of his is good. These people do not understand that Bosnia needs time. One should not be impatient here. War requires time for the wounds to heal. And the IC must stay, because if it leaves, there will be a war again, and war is much more expensive. But with time there will be solutions.

Why has there been an escalation about the border disputes between BiH and RC?

There should not have been the escalation. I think this is all a little bit exaggerated. The problem is that no one was ready to sit at a table and discuss the issue until it really became a problem. This is not a serious incident. Yet, this was a reason sufficient enough for the commission on border issues to start working. I do not believe they will solve all the problems, but they will at least discuss them, and if there is discussion there will be no conflicts. Discussion is the only civilised way to solve problems. I believe the problem will be solved, as a piece of land, i. e. a part of the disputable territory is not of vital interest to any of the parties. The only thing we must respect is the interest of the people living in that region.

Terrible letters

Was there, in your opinion, a danger of outbreak of an armed conflict near Martin Brod, considering the statement of President Tudjman?

We will not fight against President Tudjman.

Is that only related to Martin Brod?

We solved the issue by negotiations. I had very successful and fruitful talks with Mr. Granic and we must not exaggerate the problem.

You seem like a calm, tame person.

Yes? Ask my wife!

Yet, some people think of you as the sole ruler, especially when it comes to Croats.

That is one perception. I receive terrible letters from Associations of War Veterans, various petitions etc. I don't know what to do with it. I behave equally towards all the sides in BiH, not because I like it or because I have sadistic instincts, but because it is my job. I really believe that, if there is no balance in cultures, if Croats were to leave Bosnia and if Serbs were to leave it too, Muslims who would stay here would not be the normal people we would want to see here, so that there would be some kind of Gaza in Central Europe here. That's why the only solution is that these cultures live together and accept each other, and I am not thinking only of Bosnia-Herzegovina, but the entire region.

So, there is no fear of islamization of BiH?

Not if Croats and Serbs do not emigrate.