

# Oslobodjenje: Interview with High Representative Christian Schmidt



*Interviewed by: Vildana Selimbegović*

**Oslobodjenje:** Your last week's decision helped the Federation get a Government after eight years. However, reactions do not seem to quiet down, and there have been announcements of new protests. How do you comment on them?

**Christian Schmidt:** I do have the understanding for protests and demonstrations. However, I have to ask: what are they protesting against? I think that the protests should be against the fact that for four years there had been the Government with no democratic legitimacy, while the fact that Prime Minister Fadil Novalic was sentenced to four years in prison, in the first instance, did not make the situation any easier at all. The Federation Constitution does not provide a concrete answer as to how to act in such situations. Unfortunately, I did not see that anyone addressed these issues in any way during the last four years. The only decision that was issued for the purpose of functionality was my Decision of the 2<sup>nd</sup> of October. In essence, it should have happened much earlier, and if I had arrived a year or two earlier, I would certainly have done something about it.

So, we ended one blockade that was not good and then there was a question what to do about a new form of blockade that

emerged, and how to ensure the functionality of the Federation again. And then I said – let the Parliament decide. Who has the majority and where, is a matter of the Parliament and the election results. If someone is now criticizing how one group has been given priority over the other, allow me to ask which parties made up the previous Government, which did not function anymore. It was mostly the HDZ and the SDA. That is why I recommend that we do not lose our bearings in a question of which party has gained some benefit, but see if it is possible to work legitimately and enact the laws in a democratic way. Considering that all laws must go through the Parliament, I think it is very brave, and somewhat risky, to say that the Government must have a different composition than the one it has now, that is, to have a different majority in the Government than the one we have in the Parliament. Now those who have taken over the Government should make a move, they have taken extremely big responsibilities upon themselves.

**Oslobodjenje:** Milorad Dodik said that the RS would not respect a part of your Decision that pertains to vote buying and changes to the Criminal Code of Bosnia and Herzegovina?

**Christian Schmidt:** I have a very little chance to talk to Mr. Dodik. Yesterday, for example, I was thinking about whether or not it would be possible to introduce some kind of a mediator for our talks, and that the mediator could be Novak Đoković, but... All joke aside, this is the Law that defines electoral manipulation and election fraud as activities that entail criminal liability and sanctions. I am really interested in hearing how Mr. Dodik plans to explain that an election fraud in the RS should not be a criminal offense? The only thing I can say is that he should not underestimate my determination. I am not here for the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina only, but also for the RS and for the people who live there. I would much rather prefer that I did not have to make decisions, and that I do not need to do what they should be

doing. But, I want to say once again: we cannot leave aside the election theft, the protection of the Bosnian language and the Bosniaks in the RS. This is not directed specifically against Mr. Dodik, but Mr. Dodik must know that he is not completely alone in this world, and that not everyone can dance to his tune. He was elected to serve his people. The RS is inhabited by the three constituent peoples and the Others. The same as the Federation. And he should urgently be made aware that he cannot go his own way and make things for himself that are not within the framework of European standards. After all, he should see who are the persons I am talking to while he is absent from those talks. Maybe it would be better for him if he would be talking with me after all. Talking with me would certainly prevent a few surprises for him.

**Oslobodjenje:** Do these surprises include his threats of secession too?

**Christian Schmidt:** Definitely. That is not something he can do. He is not the one who interprets the Dayton Agreement, but he is the one who must respect it. And I can only recommend to him to have a look at what the Republic of Serbia has to say about it. Yesterday I also spoke with Ana Brnabic, I also spoke with Aleksandar Vučić, and, so far, I have not heard that Belgrade is questioning the territorial integrity of BiH in any way. This is just a reminder that it is not going to happen.

**Oslobodjenje:** You also met with Mr. Plenkovic in Mostar, and there have been accusations lately that he and the American Ambassador to Bosnia and Herzegovina, Mr. Murphy, are in command of your actions?

**Christian Schmidt:** My wife is the only person who would be entitled to tell me what I need to say, and she has never exercised that right. Of course, I talk to many people about Bosnia and Herzegovina – that goes without saying. But, I

think people should have noticed by now that, in the end, I make decisions on my own. Not everyone is 100% in favor of my decisions. The Croatian Prime Minister is among those people, and I do not even have to mention the Croatian President. However, I also have contact with Albin Kurti, for example, and we talk about various things. But, for the decisions I make, I have a responsibility to myself first, and then to the citizens. Allow me to say it this way: success has only one father, and a failure is usually an orphan – it does not belong to anyone. I hear that I allegedly spoke with Mr. Dodik about state property. I have to talk about this issue with everyone, but I did not speak with him about it, because he does not want to talk. I am not in constant contact with Mr. Čović either. In fact, I talk to everyone, sometimes politely, sometimes a little more intensely. In an attempt to move things from the deadlock, I spoke with Dragan Čović, Bakir Izetbegović, and Elmedin Konaković in Neum. In full mutual confidence. No one had the impression that someone wanted to “plant” something against someone or take advantage of the opportunity, although I am surprised sometimes when I read, on the following day, what I allegedly discussed with someone.

**Oslobodjenje:** The accusations in question come from the Bosniak right-wing spectrum: are you worried about the radicalization of Bosniaks? And who do you expect to react to the radicalization?

**Christian Schmidt:** Yes, it really worries me. I am aware that Bosniaks in Bosnia and Herzegovina have experienced and lived through so much and suffered a lot. I am also fine with the fact that some questions are raised very easily. But, that is exactly why we here, like all those who are backing up the Dayton Agreement, have to say that there is nothing secret in that Agreement. Bosniaks have an extremely important role, and I am here to give them a guarantee, to everyone in fact, that everyone can live the way he imagines and wants. Everything

needs to be discussed patiently. I also hear many reasonable voices. I do not want to single out anyone in particular, but I have to say that the conversations with reisu-l-ulema dr. Kavazović, and the things he says, are hope-inspiring and encouraging. We can have different opinions, but the main objective that people can live normally in peace always prevails. I share that opinion with the reisu-l-ulema.

**Oslobodjenje: The EU kept silent about your latest Decision, and your work is being criticized even in Germany: do you have the support?**

**Christian Schmidt:** I respect everyone who has a different opinion about a decision. When it comes to the concrete decisions from the last week, some had different recommendations, but no one questioned the possibility of the issuance of such decisions. I did not talk with Russia.

I was also supported by one of my predecessors, my good friend Miroslav Lajcak. The fact that there are different opinions, even in Germany, is part of democracy. In addition, I also demand some things. Not everyone is completely dedicated to understanding all events in the Federation each and every day. What am I doing right now? Well, I am trying to get the Federation, the RS, i.e. the entire BiH, moving again in terms and in the direction of the EU integration, to help with that. It must be clear to us all – the closer BiH gets to the EU, the lesser will be the need for any kind of intervention. Admittedly, this requires local politicians sitting down at the same table, talking and making decisions together. If someone says in Berlin that they could not even imagine that such decision would be possible in Germany, I have to say – I could not imagine it either. Because the Constitution there establishes that in case a Government cannot be formed, the Parliament must be dissolved and new elections must be held. I myself raised my hand and voted for such kind of decision on two occasions. Just sitting and waiting for four long years – that situation must be cut short and things must move on.

Politicians should react. That is why I am a little disappointed. I have now amended the Constitution, but this amendment will come into force only in a year time.

**Oslobodjenje:** Well, let them engage in the process of finding agreement.

**Christian Schmidt:** Yes, let them find a solution. Let them identify a solution that is different to mine, that is fine, because my solution will then no longer be valid; just let them come to agreement. I will not be in the least bit offended – I will be grateful instead.