

Transcript of Press Conference by Carlos Westendorp

Carlos Westendorp: Good Afternoon...

Alexandra Stiglmayer: I don't need to introduce the HR, I guess you all know him.

Carlos Westendorp: I have no special motive to be with you today. It's just that I have been absent from this meeting for a long time and I would like to renew my contacts and talk about anything you wish and answer questions. Perhaps I could start by saying that we are approaching an important moment, which is the next PIC in Madrid, on the 15th and 16th of December, and I hope that this PIC is going to set up the conditions for final facets of Dayton Implementation. This is why I think it is very important that the local authorities become much more involved in this conference than previously. I have written a letter to the different authorities; Members of Presidency, Council of Ministers, Presidents of the Entities, inviting them to send me ideas for this conference, and offering them to have constant contact to have a successful conference. You know that the elections went well and the results are being implemented. I am quite satisfied about how it is being carried out. We have the certainty that the new institutions are going to be cooperating with the international community. I was yesterday in the RS, attending the constitution of the RS Assembly. I have been having talks with all the political parties and with the new elected RS President, Nikola Poplasen. He is willing to cooperate with the IC in the benefit of his people and in the benefit of the RS and I, institutionally, tend to believe him, and the IC will judge him by his actions. The Assembly was constituted,

the decisions were taken democratically, and all political parties, supporting the solutions taken, made a great contribution for peace and I have to praise their behaviour. It is evident that we couldn't reach one important aim, which is to have one representative of the Coalition for United Bosnia in the chair, but there is still time for getting this position. And now, the next step is the constitution of the Government. You know that the IC's position is that we are going to respect whatever decision is taken democratically, but, the IC is not going to be able to cooperate with those who, in the very recent past, have proven that they are not willing, really, to cooperate with the IC and with implementing Dayton. This is very clear. Even if I could believe their statements, the IC members will hardly believe them, but just will watch their actions closely and see what they are going to do. So, the president of the Republic has ten days to propose, to nominate candidate for Prime Minister, and I have told him and he has promised me, to nominate a person who is likely to have the support of the majority of the Assembly. And this person, so far, is Dodik. We'll see if this is the case, and the new Government in RS is going to have to fulfill their obligations, and this the most important element of the support that all the political parties, mainly the non-serb parties are giving to a Sloga formation is that substance is what matters, return of refugees is what is important, mixed police, reform of judicial system, and so on, and so on, and we coincide totally with the Coalition members. So I am quite satisfied with the results, but, of course, Bosnia is a constant source of action so we have to keep vigilant in the coming days. Well this is, in a nutshell, the recent events, but I am open to your questions.

Mirza Lajtarevic, Radio Fern: Mr. Westendorp what about the liquidation of the National Bank. As I know, Mr. Dudley has a problem.

Carlos Westendorp: This is the first time I hear the name,

but, he may have problems, yes. I will see him and try to help him.

Alexandra Stiglmayer: We are still negotiating with Prime Minister Bicačević about the liquidation of the National Bank, so talks are ongoing, and we hope to see a solution very soon.

What about the privatization process in the Federation ?

Carlos Westendorp: In some cases it is going very slowly, in some other cases it is going too quickly. Well, you see, this is something that has to be closely monitored in some cases, for instance in the case of the apartments. In the case of some companies, it has to be revisited, revised, in compliance with the Framework Law on Privatization. There is a commission, also, to monitor the privatization process, and we really believe that this is going to be carried out in transparency, with no discrimination, and properly. But, the process still has not yet really started and we are worried because without a properly carried out privatization process, it is going to be difficult that businesses start becoming efficient and working. But in general I think the process is ongoing and we are hoping that this will start very quickly. In RS it has not yet started, and in the Federation it has already started, but in some cases it has to be revised. And referring, for instance, to one possible problem, which, you will know, it is the allocation for soldiers, we have come to an agreement about the amount, it was over-evaluated, and now this amount has been reduced, but, there is still no agreement within the two constituent peoples in the Federation. We are in negotiation and we hope that we can come to an agreement.

Vedran Perić, OBN: It seems that Dodik could be the best choice of the IC for the position of the PM of the RS. Is that correct? You think that Dodik should be the best choice for the RS for the seat of PM?

Carlos Westendorp: Well, he is of proven value. We have been

working with him during nine months, and, although we are not hundred percent satisfied with the performance of the previous government, we understand that it has not always been the PM's responsibility, in some cases, for instance in the property laws, he was ready to pass them quickly on to the Assembly, but it was one party within the coalition that prevented that to happen. So, we are quite satisfied, there has been progress in many cases, but the period has been too short. So we have to give him another opportunity to show that he is the right person for that job.

Vedran Peric, OBN: So, you are saying that Dodik could be the best choice for that seat. Also, Reuters says that you mentioned that there will be no financial help to the RS if the hard-liners are in power. And (SDS) Kalinic also yesterday stated that they don't want to see Dodik as the PM. So, if we link those three things, it seems that if the serbs, if they choose that Dodik will not be head of the Government, it means you will not give them financial help. Is that correct?

Carlos Westendorp: Well, we have to wait and see what are the democratic results of this formation of the Government. SDS, yesterday, made contrary statements to those they have been pronouncing in the previous days, that is to say, that they are ready to cooperate with Dayton. Yesterday, after being defeated, Kalinic was saying that his party would not participate in the Constitutional bodies of the Assembly, and that they would strongly criticize the Dodik government if they implement Dayton, which is a certain contradiction. Now what we have to see, is which is the reality of the party of the SDS. Is it the statements they made before, or the statements they are doing now? The IC believes that their true nature is the statements they are pronouncing now. So, this is the reason why, the IC is not ready to support a government with SDS and Radicals. Now the Dodik option, is an option which is supported by the majority of the Sloga members, and hopefully also by the Coalition parties, and in this case,

Dodik will be chosen as PM.

Mr. Westendorp, did you have any talks yesterday with the representatives of the CD Coalition and if you did can you give us some details about that.

Carlos Westendorp: I had yesterday, yes, many contacts with different political parties, and with the Coalition, all of them. Not only yesterday, I have been seeing them also at the last meeting of the Assembly. Their demands are very logic, and very moderate. It is the second party in the area and they demand a vice-chair, and some posts....they have demanded some posts in the new government. In any democracy, this would have been totally logical and even moderate. In the specific situation we are living, in which the Sloga coalition is having serious difficulties to form first the Assembly and then the Government, it is perhaps more important. This is a big effort we were demanding of them and I appreciate them for doing that, to concentrate on program, on substance, rather than on positions. And, I think this is what really matters. We have to consider that the Coalition members are in control of the Government because they are a very important support to the Government. Fifteen or sixteen members are fairly many. So, now there is the possibility of having a vice-chair, which is still open, and then, there is the possibility of the formation of a Sloga government with the external support of the Coalition members and we have to wait and see whether the new Government is really delivering what the Coalition members wish, which coincides exactly, hundred percent, with what the IC wishes. So I think, this is the only element I have been using them, nothing to do with the Sarajevo declaration, or with the lifting of the sanctions, because this was done on its own merits, because Mirza Hajric is doing a great job there, he has been making a great effort. We have now results, far from the 20,000 that is our target. He says not far, we say very far, but it depends, the bottle is half empty or half full. But, this is nothing to do, it's because many of these

problems were related to housing and construction and it's not logical that these sanctions are applied, especially when there is progress in that field, so, this was not the price.

There are number of points. First, in western Bosnia there are rumours that border signs have been arbitrarily moved, flags have been replaced with Croatian flags, also, the refugees we hear are not welcome to the transit center in Central Bosnia, and there is trouble with Bosnian refugee returns to that part of the country, there have been problems with the police departments there. What can be done, what is being done in this part of the country?

Carlos Westendorp: Excuse me, this part of?

In that part of the country, In Western Bosnia, basically. Croat majority.

Carlos Westendorp: As far as refugee return is concerned?

Refugee return, also there are rumours today that border signs have been removed, Bosnian flags have been replaced with Croatian flags....

Carlos Westendorp: Well, it's a matter of serious concern, to all of us, I think, because this is one of the flaws of the implementation of Dayton. You know how important it is for Dayton to work that the Federation works well...and the Federation is not yet working as it should be. There are many, many elements to believe that, one is that there are still parallel institutions working, and not the legal institutions, parallel financing, using of symbols which are not the agreed ones, although in many Cantons we have improved the situation. There are still one or two Cantons that need to be convinced. You know that one of the elements, that one of the elements that has been preventing that has been removed from the office by OSCE and myself, and we are going to put a lot of pressure on them to accept the symbols which are agreed. And I believe, I am still optimistic, and I think we can get that. Now, in

terms of refugee return, performance is very poor. Mostar is still not an open city, it's very far from being an open city, although the situation there has improved. The Bosniaks have...Orucevic has made efforts, he has dellocated some displaced persons and freed apartments for the Croats to come back. They have not yet done so, because they are prevented to do so by a part of the leadership of the HDZ, and very few Bosniaks have come back to their homes in West Mostar. So, now it is something which is our highest priority...to implement in the coming weeks and months, and we are going to use all the elements we have: flexibility in the economic support, pressure, and sometimes action, if our pressure is not followed by action. But we have to admit also that, another element of the Federation working is that all constituent peoples' identity and cultural rights and religious rights are recognized, are admitted, because the richness of this country is precisely the diversity of the constituent peoples, and that the Croats are convinced that the Federation is their home, and their institutions. And then this is why the other constituent group has also the responsibility of making them feel at home everywhere, and so it is a two-way attitude. But, I admit that this is one of the biggest...greatest preoccupations of my office, making the Federation Work.

Mirsad Fazlic, Vecernje Novine: Mr. Westendorp, I know that there are preparations in your office for the Madrid Conference. I'm curious is it possible to know in this moment what questions will be raised on that conference and what are your expectations from that conference.

Carlos Westendorp: Well, the issues are well known, I mean, we have to cover the same issues that have been covered already by previous conferences, which is the implementation of Dayton in several fields, refugee return, economic reconstruction, security, police, etc., etc. But, what is important to know is that the consolidation period finishes in December and a new period, which has not yet been defined, but the name is

coming. And, I'm looking for a good definition for that period, but I think it can be summed up by saying it should be a period of strengthening democracy in the country, strengthening the rule of law. Rule of law is the key issue for the coming two years. Period. And rule of law is the only way to provide ethnic security. People are not going to return to their homes if they feel insecure. And they feel insecure because they are not treated as citizens, they are treated differently, they are discriminated. Either by the police or/and by the judiciary. So the two main tasks and targets of this two year period, together with refugee return is the reform of the judiciary to make them independent and the reform of the police to make them democratic. And this is the main bulk of our job during the two coming years. And for that, for putting pressure in implementation in this crucial moment, these two years are going to be two years of difficulty, two years of turbulence, this is why SFOR presence is absolutely necessary.

Amra Kebo, Oslobodjenje. After these elections in general we are witnesses of a big pressure on different political parties, which are mostly minority. Meaning the KCD in the RS and SDP in the Federation. Could you comment the position of these two parties in these two assemblies.

Carlos Westendorp: You mean that these are under pressure, by whom?

KCD was under the pressure of IC, in the RS.

Carlos Westendorp: But pressure to cooperate with the constitution of a democratic government?

No, not to have deputy in the National Assembly.

Carlos Westendorp: And why the SDP?

The representative of the SDP yesterday wasn't present at the Federal parliament?

Carlos Westendorp: These are two different issues. What we have been saying in the constitution of the Federation Parliament and the Central Houses of Representatives is that for the first time, results of the elections should be taken into account, and instead of, "the winner takes all" method as it was previously. That is to say, the party who has won the majority in the elections is the only party represented in both parliaments, now it has to be in proportional representation. And this has been accepted by political parties and now there is a fair representation of all political parties in the parliament, which was exactly the aim of introducing pluralism in this country, and SDP has got a representation thanks to these actions. So, it was not pressure against SDP, it was pressure in favour of fair representation of all political parties, SDP of course included, which is the main party in the opposition. Now, the case of the Coalition for Bosnia, it is a party with 18 or 16 deputies, whose votes are absolutely crucial and vital for a Dayton friendly government in place in RS. And, I have not put pressure on them, the only thing I have told them, I have asked them and I think I convinced them, that more important than having specific positions, a vice-chair or some ministers, what is important is just to give the support to a government which will be an external support. In many countries it happened. Even in my own country, you know, the ruling party needs the votes of nationalist parties in Catalunya and in the Basque Country. Without them participating in the government. So this is not an abnormal situation, and the Coalition members understood that more important than positions, and the positions are very important, and I have referred to the vice-chair, I am hopeful that this vice-chair will be given to a member of the Coalition in the Assembly, but more important than that is program, substance and realisation, and they have the key to control the new government where they are delivering or not. So it was not pressure, it was just conviction, I hope.

Mr. Westendorp, can you just comment the situation that happened yesterday in the Federal parliament, that actually the chairperson is nominated, posted by CD Coalition and his deputy is posted by HDZ, and the secretary is also from the HDZ.

Carlos Westendorp: Where is it?

It happened yesterday in the HoP.

Carlos Westendorp: Please tell me again.

Chairperson of HoP is from CD Coalition, his deputy from HDZ, and the secretary is from HDZ.

Carlos Westendorp: Yes, I know what happened. I have been told this morning, I was coming from RS, you can't be everywhere. It was very unfortunate, because what we have asked is the position of secretary to be given to a member of the opposition, and I firmly believe that the member of the opposition had the possibility of getting that, had they been united. And unfortunately, and it's not the first time it happened, they didn't unite themselves, so they didn't get the position.

Mara Simikic, from BBC School of Journalism: Do you think that these two orders of Supervisor Farrand, of supervision area of Brcko, is one month too short period to find new accommodation for refugees, refugees from the Federation side, because they have declared that they don't want to come back to the Federation.

Carlos Westendorp: Who has declared that they do not want to come back?

The refugees who are accommodated in Brcko, Serbs.

Carlos Westendorp: Well I was with Amb. Farrand the day before yesterday and he has made an assessment about the situation, he is very much concerned about some lack of municipal

implementation, which is not yet carried out properly, there is not a fair multi-ethnic representation in some positions, and he is intending to make an order to fill this gap, and having a Bosniak in position of the secretary of the municipality. This is one element, and the other element is the refugee return you alluded to, which is not happening in the way we all wish. In fact, people are being prevented to go back to their homes by the hard-liners, and vice-versa, people are prevented to come to their homes in Brcko. And this is something that is going to be taken into account by the arbitrator when the moment comes, and the moment is very, very near. And finally, he has a problem, Bill Farrand, which is our own problem, which is how to revitalize the economic situation in Brcko. So these are the main problems we have ahead of us, and we have a very short time before the definitive ruling by the arbitrator. And of course, the arbitrator is going to be influenced only by facts, by how the situation is presented and how the different parties behave in order to take a just and fair decision. The time is very short, but there is still room for the parties to cooperate, in order to implement the decisions of the supervisor. You know that this is going to be one of the most important issues at the beginning of the year, and it is a vital decision for all constituent peoples in this country, and this is why all authorities should be cooperating with the supervisor, otherwise the results are not going to go in the direction these different authorities will wish.

Couple of moments ago you mentioned that the most important two issues that should be dealt in this country in the next two years. Will you be here in the next two years, or will you follow the situation in BH reading newspapers, El Mundo, or something like that?

Carlos Westendorp: Well I am sure that I will be here, but I don't know how permanently. But in any case, my commitment with Bosnia is still there, and I have this commitment until I

fulfill two years of my mandate, and I have not yet fulfilled them.

Alexandra Stiglmayer: So no more questions? O.K. then, thank you very much.

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