

VOA: Interview with High Representative Christian Schmidt



Interviewed by: Amina Bijelonja Muminovic

Voice of America: Croatian President Zoran Milanovic commented on the indictment against Milorad Dodik, saying that you are using your powers to protect yourself and that you should be dealing with the protection of the Croat people in Bosnia and Herzegovina. What are his claims referring to?

Christian Schmidt: Every president of a member state of the European Union, or other countries, deserves respect. I cannot say the same thing about every opinion I read. His claim is more confusing than logical to me. Out of respect for the President of the country and the institution, I will not comment on such statements.

Voice of America: Will you accept the request of the Canadian Genocide Research Institute (IGK) and sanction RSNA President Nenad Stevandic by banning him from holding any political office because he has been included in the American blacklist for encouraging the adoption of laws that do not comply with your Decisions? As stated in the criminal report, he also participated in war crimes and crimes against humanity during the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Christian Schmidt: I saw parts of the video showing Stevandic during the war in BiH, and I understand that the Canadian

Institute is asking for an explanation. I have no ability to establish the validity, authenticity and context of that video. His role during the war should be checked. He should not be delusional – justice equally applies to everyone, especially to public office holders. I spoke about these issues in Srebrenica, on July 11. We must jointly ensure that the perpetrators of criminal acts, war crimes, crimes against humanity or genocide cannot hold public office in Bosnia and Herzegovina. That measure should be applied to everyone and to anybody's conduct during the war, including Stevandic.

Voice of America: Do you intend to use the Bonn powers and introduce additional sanctions against Dodik and other politicians, if they continue their secessionist policy and with undermining the State?

Christian Schmidt: It is a very important topic. Unfortunately, Dodik does not see the true reality. I am extremely concerned about the seriousness of such work in the RS. If we misunderstand the Dayton Agreement, as Dodik does, then it is a deliberate misunderstanding. He must remain serious. Of course, Bosnia and Herzegovina is the holder of international competences, as stated in the Dayton. It is not the RS, FBiH nor the Brcko District, but they are all part of BiH and that should be his reference point. Denying the independence or attacking the independence of a constitutional court is unheard of. It is an attack on the Entity. In that way, Dodik does not accept, that is, he violates my position and the position of my office. That is contrary to international law. Although UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres clearly responded to the letter from BiH Presidency member Zeljka Cvijanovic regarding my election, Dodik does not recognize it. What is the reason for such theater and game playing? He can change the color of the wall he is looking at; paint it in a different color. The High Representative remains an institution of the international community with the aim of ensuring peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and I take that job

seriously. I want to say to Dodik and to his friends that they better explain the reality to him, in a friendly way, because he is making himself politically unbearable. This will lead to great difficulties. Dodik should not underestimate the determination of the International Community; he should not think that he can be so defiant all the time.

Voice of America: Although you imposed decisions and changed the FBiH Criminal Code in the area of “political corruption”, there is still no criminal liability? What is the reason for that?

Christian Schmidt: The State Prosecutor’s Office is responsible for the enforcement of the Criminal Code, and we will follow that very carefully.

Voice of America: The Government in the Herzegovina-Neretva Canton has entered its second round of a caretaker mandate. Do you intend to get yourself involved to unblock the formation of a new government, in a manner in which it was done at the BiH Federation level.

Christian Schmidt: The High Representative is here to regulate any non-existence of or impossibility to form a certain majority. It means that that people in that Canton need to complete many tasks. If I feel that that is only tactics, without following ideas and thoughts that the Canton or the State have to have priority, then certain political decisions can happen. It is not possible to get points for the EU, if the High Representative is asked or called upon to resolve the issue whenever there is any difficulty in the country. In the last two years, the High Representative demonstrated his readiness to take hard decisions.

Voice of America: Last month, the European Commission approved four projects for BiH worth 298 million Euros. All of them are in the Federation, and none in the RS. Is financial isolation a form of sanction and a possible removal from the political

scene of all politicians who deny the statehood of the country?

Christian Schmidt: I am interested in a strong BiH, and I want young people to stay in the country. These are young people with knowledge; they do not have to have friends in any political party. That is why the economic development must be promoted and supported. The financial sanctions directed against Dodik's government should not apply to people, but they should force Dodik to behave constructively. It is a strategy, and Germany has positioned itself very clearly on this issue – there is no money for projects in the RS. This can change when there is visible constructive cooperation, and, above all, if it is ensured that the funds will be used in accordance with the rule of law. Money given by EU citizens should not end up in the black pockets of individuals.

Voice of America: Regarding the femicide in Gradacac, you stated that authorities at all levels of government in Bosnia and Herzegovina must do more to prevent all forms of violence. Does the High Representative have the possibility to react and include femicide in the FBiH Criminal Code as a special form of violence?

Christian Schmidt: This issue affects people much harder than any kind of long political speeches. This is not only a question of legislation, but it also concerns changes in the society. Femicide is a problem and a danger in all countries of the world. The first step towards raising the awareness about this problem is to talk about it. It is good that there are non-governmental organizations doing this. Of course, the introduction of European standards also plays a big role. We should not allow that this issue is understood as an issue that only concerns women – it is the issue for all of us who live here. It is horrible what happened and what is being said in that setting. This is also a matter of a law that the representatives must enact in the parliament. It is not a crime that will be forgotten on the next day. The disaster we

experienced should become a more frequent theme in the sociological and political sense. All decision-makers must be given more possibilities, so that they can provide a better protection to women.