



HELSINKI COMMISSION HEARING

UNITED STATES COMMISSION ON
SECURITY AND COOPERATION IN EUROPE

Testimony :: Milan Trbojevic

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Advisor to the Prime Minister - Republika Srpska

Mr. Chairman, Mr. Co-Chairman,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I want to express my gratitude for your kind invitation, which gives me an opportunity to present to you the situation, problems, efforts and goals which the Government of the Republic of Srpska faces and foresees in regards to its rights and obligations embodied in the General Framework Agreement for Peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina (Dayton Peace Agreement - GFAP).

This will certainly be a quick overview due to our respect for your time, and due to a general inability to document innumerable facts, which should be considered during one short hearing.

I address you as a representative of the Government of the Republic of Srpska, which is one of the two entities of Bosnia-Herzegovina. The Prime Minister, Mr. Milorad Dodik, authorized me to address this esteemed gathering.

I am personally aware of the fact that Mr. Dodik, as a politician, had been dedicated to peace throughout the years of hostilities, which took place in the territory of the Former Yugoslavia. Following the signing of the General Framework Agreement for Peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Mr. Dodik did everything within his ability and through his personal engagement to influence the political mosaic in Bosnia-Herzegovina, and to steer the situation towards a lasting peace.

The Dayton Peace Agreement was, and has remained, the foundation for Mr. Milorad Dodik's political activity. The Government that he leads, all of us who are his aids, and all democratic forces in the Republic of Srpska have the Dayton Peace Agreement as a fundamental starting point.

The citizens of the Republic of Srpska, its Government, Prime Minister Dodik personally, and I myself express gratitude to the people of the United States and to its Government for the decisive aid in ceasing wartime hostilities and organizing the peace conference which was finalized by the signing of the General Framework Agreement for Peace in Bosnia-Herzegovina. I am convinced that the citizens of the Federation of Bosnia-Herzegovina and the District of Brcko share the same feeling of gratitude.

We are fully aware that it was the Dayton Peace Agreement which put a stop, first of all, to the hostilities of war, deaths of forcibly drafted youth, civilian suffering, and further destruction of the means of production and private property.

We hoped that the Dayton Peace Agreement also signaled the end of the policies based on nationalistic

supremacy and intolerance, which produce results only if imposed by force. Yet, lately there is plentiful evidence which signals that such policies are resurrecting, as well as are the politicians who represented them.

The Dayton Peace Agreement provided for the establishment of government institutions and bodies of the country of Bosnia-Herzegovina, as well as in both entities, the Republic of Srpska and the Federation of Bosnia-Herzegovina. We are convinced that through development and perfecting of both the entity-level and country-level institutions and bodies, and through their activities within their jurisdiction, freedom and civil rights of all citizens will be developed and perfected, and the overall relationships between the entities, and between the entities and the country-level government of Bosnia-Herzegovina will be improved. All of this will provide a basis for the fulfillment of the conditions necessary for inclusion of Bosnia-Herzegovina into the international community as a full-fledged member.

Unfortunately, there are many problems in the realization of the peace agreement and in the development of democracy. First of all, in this respect we want to emphasize the debilitating influence of the nationalistic parties - SDS, SDA and HDZ. Their coalition and activities after the first multi-party elections in Bosnia-Herzegovina in 1990 undoubtedly had significance in the development of the political situation that finalized in war. Today these parties and their leaders are repeating the policies that in one case lead to unitarization and centralization of Bosnia-Herzegovina, and in the other to its separatism and division. Consequences of such policies, among other matters, have further increased mistrust among citizens (these politicians propagate that the peace process isn't finished yet; they threaten to revise the peace agreement, etc.). All of this, logically, produces a feeling of insecurity among the citizens and negatively influences the process of refugee return.

We understand the refugee return to be in its essence the most important aspect of the peace agreement. In spite of total and sincere dedication of the Government of the Republic of Srpska to do all in its ability in this respect, the return of the refugees is objectively very difficult. To illustrate this I must mention that for tens of thousands of refugee and displaced families it is still impossible to return to the Republic of Croatia or to the Federation of Bosnia-Herzegovina because their property has been either totally or partially destroyed, or is still in the administrative process of rightful return, which has been taking a very long time. Many of these people currently reside in the homes of the refugees or displaced persons originally from the Republic of Srpska, and who thus have no place to which to return. The Government of the Republic of Srpska has signed an agreement on mutual efforts to provide conditions for the simultaneous return of refugees. This agreement is being implemented successfully. The current Kosovo situation is adding additional difficulties to refugee return and poses a threat of escalating into yet another war. The political situation in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia is also contributing negatively to refugee return. It is manifesting itself in very sharp political clashes with no visible possibilities for a democratic solution.

Another important factor that makes the return of refugees and displaced people difficult is Bosnia-Herzegovina's slow economic recovery. Also, the unfinished process of privatization that often forecasts abolishment of the few jobs which still exist in various enterprises.

I am very proud to announce at this point that the Parliament of the Republic of Srpska passed the new law on privatization of apartments previously owned by the state. Also, all necessary legislation has been passed for the privatization of property previously owned by the state, as well as the legislation on restitution of illegally confiscated property.

I wish to inform you also about the corrections to the Constitution of the Republic of Srpska, based on the Peace Treaty, which provided for elimination of all discriminatory clauses, and which placed the Constitution in accordance with the Constitution of the country of Bosnia-Herzegovina. During the last two years, the Government of the Republic of Srpska has, under the leadership of Prime Minister Dodik concluded many other important legislative tasks which secured protection from discrimination based on sex, race, religion or ethnicity. Working in cooperation with the experts from the international community, all legislation of the Republic of Srpska has been harmonized with the equivalent legislation in the Federation of Bosnia-Herzegovina and the country of Bosnia-Herzegovina. This work has been accomplished on the whole system, as well as in the areas of foreign relations, customs regulations, border patrol, and most of the taxation policy.

We are aware that it will be difficult to harmonize all points in regard to the contribution by the entities to the armed services, which would have a unitary character, mostly because of the painful war memories and the emotional burden such recent events carry. In this respect, we are of the opinion that demilitarization would be a more worthwhile course of action.

We wish to point out the many positive examples of inter-entity cooperation, such as the formation of a multi-ethnic government and police in the Brcko District, as well as the cooperation between the police and judicial bodies of the entities in curbing corruption.

What do we foresee for the future?

We all need time to adjust to the new relationships that we are establishing in accordance with the Dayton Peace Agreement. We are approaching the necessary level of trust and confidence in the rights and liberties guaranteed to the citizens of the other entity, or from a different level of administrative government.

For yet another period of time we will require the presence of international military and police forces, which will ensure that wrong and malicious policies and activities never develop sufficiently.

We need involvement of international experts for education of our human resources so that we can continue and successfully complete the reforms we had started in the economy, primarily in privatization, the legal code, judiciary, administration, local self-rule, and especially in the field of voting regulations, which should enable us to conduct elections on all levels in a free and democratic manner by ourselves.

We need financial support without which all of these plans couldn't be accomplished in any foreseeable future.

I hope that this short expose clearly shows that the Government of the Republic of Srpska, led by Prime Minister Milorad Dodik, seeks to secure a place in the modern world for Bosnia-Herzegovina and its citizens. It is a policy contrary to ethnic particularity, close-mindedness and isolation.

I ensure you that the Government of the Republic of Srpska is dedicated to steady, principal, long-term and complete implementation of the General Framework Agreement for Peace in Bosnia-Herzegovina. We consider such dedication our contribution to the struggle for a democratic and free society, and incorporation of Bosnia-Herzegovina into the economic and political currents of Europe and the world.

We also consider it our duty and legacy to future generations.

I hope that that our policies and our goals are worthy of your support.

Once again, Mr. Chairman, Mr. Co-Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen, I thank you kindly for your attention and support.