
Interview: Faris Nanic

Bosnia can serve as a bridge to the East, Islamic nations



Faris Nanic is General Secretary of the Bosnian ruling party branch SDA in Croatia, and head of the TWRA Press Agency in Zagreb. He was the spokesman of the Ministry of Defense in Sarajevo, and, until the recent Bosnian elections, Chief of Cabinet of Bosnian President Alija Izetbegovic. The interview was conducted by Elke Fimmen on Oct. 30, 1996 in Zagreb.

EIR: There is a huge controversy right now surrounding the Bosnian deputy minister of defense, Hasan Cengic. Could you please give us your views about the background and importance of this?

Nanic: First of all, there has been no official request from the American side to the Bosnian government, in any written form, to replace Mr. Cengic. The only remark that was made to President Izetbegovic by the American head of the "Equip and Train Program," James Pardew, was that pertaining to the slow implementation of the Defense Law and the Equip and Train Program, which concerned both the defense minister, Vladimir Soljic, who is a Croat, and Deputy Defense Minister Hasan Cengic. The alleged Iranian-terrorist connection, which was mainly put forward in the American press, the *Washington Post*, and the *New York Times*, has never been mentioned by the military officials.

So therefore, what I see, is an orchestrated campaign—which was started in the United States, against the collaborators, against President Izetbegovic, in order to compromise and attack, first of all, the Clinton administration, for working together with those who have alleged good connections with Iran and the fundamentalists—which is not proper for United States' interests in Bosnia.

But, I think that the whole campaign, which has unfortunately also been accepted here in Croatia and Bosnia by some of the media, has its pre-electoral function, and is time-limited, shall I say. The fact that the Republicans were trying, desperately, to do anything to Clinton's prospects in the forthcoming elections, and because, obviously, out of three strong points in the Clinton foreign policy—Northern Ireland, the Middle East, and Bosnia—the only one that has not been jeopardized, is Bosnia. That is, there is a logic behind the attack on Bosnia and Bosnian officials, to complicate the situation in Bosnia, to potentially even stop the program of equipping the Federation Army, which would weaken the military

balance, but also to attack Clinton for being involved with the people who are said to be connected with the Iranians and fundamentalists. So, I think that, mainly, this whole attack started against Mr. Clinton and his chances for winning the elections.

Mr. Cengic's connections to Iran are no deeper than his connections to Malaysia, Turkey, or Pakistan, or to any other friendly country that had been prepared to help to arm the Bosnians during the war—to defend themselves and to survive. As President Izetbegovic put it before the UN General Assembly: "You had the right to impose the arms embargo. We had the right to defend ourselves. I believe that our right to defend ourselves, was greater than your right to impose the embargo." He praised all of them, the individuals and the countries, that had the guts to help the Bosnians defend themselves, their sovereignty, and their territory, and survive.

EIR: You were also personally attacked in this connection, both in the *Washington Post* and the Croatian magazine *Globus*.

Nanic: Yes, I was mentioned in the *Washington Post* in the same context, for having Iranian, fundamentalist, or whatever, connections, organizing intelligence, counterintelligence, arms-smuggling through my office in Croatia—which is actually the same pattern. If President Izetbegovic, as a moral leader, is somehow untouchable, and you cannot attack him, what you do, to undermine his position, is, you attack his people, people around him. This is the only reason why I was attacked.

EIR: It is very interesting, that the paper in Croatia that attacked you and the TWRA Press Agency, published an exclusive analysis on the situation in Bosnia by Henry Kissinger.

Nanic: Henry Kissinger has been known for advocating the permanent ethnic division of Bosnia, and thus, for recognition of the results of genocide.

EIR: What would you want the United States government to do after the U.S. elections? What should the United States, which has determined the political setting with the Dayton Agreement, do, both in the interest of Bosnia and its own interest?

Nanic: I think that the United States should be very insistent in pressing all the signatories of the Dayton Agreement to fulfill their obligations. That is the first thing, because that is the only way to preserve Bosnia, as it was designed in Dayton.

Second, the United States should definitely resume its military presence in Bosnia—through NATO, in any possible way—for at least two years, until the next elections in 1998. We have these critical two years of political transition, which will be crucial for the survival of Bosnia. If the United States wants Bosnia to survive and avoid a possible new war, it has to remain present militarily.

And, it must use this military and political presence in Bosnia to launch all possible activities, including a broad reconstruction plan, a U.S.-led construction plan, to invest a lot of financial means into the Bosnian economy, to use all the existing resources to restart the engines of the Bosnian economy, thus providing a real basis for re-unifying and reintegrating the country. The United States has to be present politically, to resume its military presence, and, of course, to get deeply involved in economic reconstruction.

By political presence, I do not mean pressure on the Bosnian government, involving itself in Bosnian internal affairs, especially when it is not necessary, as was just the case with Mr. Cengic. By politically, I mean building up the ally-type relations with Bosnia. And that is possible; the Bosnian leadership and the Bosnian nation are ready for that. Of course, that does not mean ultimatums, as recently given by Mr. James Pardew, in the interview that he gave to the Bosnian State Television, in which he said: “The Bosnians have to choose either us or Iran.” This is an ultimatum, which does not mean anything. It is an outrage, it is a clear threat. I hope, that this threat does not reflect the attitude of the U.S. administration, but is just a clumsy statement given by a clumsy politician.

I think that the U.S. should use Bosnia as a certain bridge toward other countries, maybe even countries which now seem to be hostile.

EIR: There was recently a statement by Robert Frowick, the American who headed the commission of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe which oversaw the elections, who very strongly criticized the international community for not acting with the necessary speed for economic reconstruction. Could you tell us something more about the economic situation in Bosnia?

Nanic: The economic situation is improving from day to day, but not fast enough. Full reconstruction is the first prerequisite for the reintegration of the country, and a lasting and durable peace. Modest estimates, given publicly by Bosnian government sources, say that we have war damages in the amount of \$80 billion. The series of so-called pledging conferences have so far provided about \$1.8 billion in commitments, out of which only about \$500 million has been delivered so far. Just by comparing these figures, you can see how small this

reconstruction effort has been up till now. So, therefore, Mr. Frowick was quite right in pointing out the necessity for a bigger reconstruction effort to be undertaken.

But I do not think, that the approach applied so far will ever be successful. You cannot go all over the world just asking for money. You have to have a program for the reconstruction and modernization of the economy and infrastructure of a country. So, you need sort of a “Marshall”-like plan, if you may call it that, taking into consideration the development of the country, and the regional development, and the place of this region in the world. This would be a real engine of reconstruction for the country. So, I do not think that any further pledging conferences will do much more than they have done so far.

The United States, but also western Europe and the wealthy Islamic states, should be involved in something which will be done in true cooperation with the Bosnian government, which is called the overall program for economic reconstruction and development of the country.

EIR: That means that, basically, the World Bank approach, which has so far guided this whole program, is not functioning?

Nanic: It is not functioning the way it should be functioning, that is the main problem. The IMF [International Monetary Fund] and the World Bank are taking care only about minor necessities, or urgent necessities. The IMF program is leaning only toward something—which we have also seen in eastern Europe, South America, and some African countries—which will never bear fruit, in terms of economic development. There will be no development, if the approach of the IMF and the World Bank continues. So, we have to think about possible alternatives to the present program, and the present attitude of the international financial supranational institutions.

EIR: What is your view of the role of Bosnia today, and your vision for the future?

Nanic: At the present stage, I think Bosnia is important from a moral point of view, that the perpetrators of war crimes and of genocide have to be prosecuted and sentenced, punished for what they did. It would be a very dangerous precedent, if these war criminals were not prosecuted or extradited to the Court of Justice in The Hague. So that is the main, and maybe most important thing now. That is why Bosnia is very significant now.

Second, Bosnia, with its history, with its mixture of cultures, is presenting a case study, or something like an exhibit, of how societies in the world can and will have to function. This means every society, every country in the world will have to respect the basic principles that Bosnia represents. That it will be, that it must be possible, that people of various religious origins not only live side by side, but can cooperate for their joint development and future, for a better life. If the ethnic division in Bosnia is, for pragmatic political reasons,

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recognized and tolerated, this can also represent a very dangerous precedent for the future of mankind.

In the future, a stable and developed multicultural Bosnia can represent an ideal bridge between East and West and between the Islamic countries of the Middle East and Central Asia and western Europe. Bosnians have the two sides in common, they have somehow managed to merge two cultures, in both of them feeling very good, very comfortable. So, I think Bosnia can be used as a certain springboard for the western Europeans to find their way toward understanding and mutual cooperation with the countries in the East and, especially, the Muslim countries.

I would like to speak about one additional element of the present situation.

One of the basic requisites of the Dayton Agreement is the return of refugees and displaced persons to their homes. Unfortunately, no progress toward the return of refugees to the regions designated, has been made. It is quite clear, that the Republika Srpska authorities—actually the perpetrators of genocide, who we were forced to recognize as political partners in the Dayton Agreement, and we did so, under the presumption that the refugees can go back—have not been willing to do anything to advance this process. Therefore, I would like to repeat the words of my President, who said: “We have signed the Dayton Agreement as a whole. There is no Dayton Agreement, if there is a single point of the Dayton Agreement not fulfilled.”

That means, that the Dayton Agreement will be finished, is off, if, especially, this problem of the return of refugees is not implemented. The United States, as well as the rest of the international community, have to do much, much more to force the Serbs to allow not only the return of refugees, but to allow them to rebuild their homes again, to integrate themselves into public life, and to allow them a decent life and security in their homes, which unfortunately has not been the case.

The other problem we have, as far as the return of refugees has been concerned, is that we have the so-called pilot projects in the Federation territory. There have been two mainly Croat, and two mainly Muslim towns selected. These are Travnik and Bugojno, for the Muslim towns, and Jajce and Stolac, which are controlled by the Croats. In Travnik and Bugojno, we have about 300, or even about 400 Croat families which returned, whereas the Presidency of the Stolac municipality,

which is in exile, has finally announced, that they are breaking with the pilot project, because the Croat authorities are not doing anything to enable the Bosniak families to go back. So, we have problems not only in the territory of Republika Srpska, but also in the Federation territory, in which, of course, the situation is much, much better. But we have some isolated cases, which reflect the attitude of the Croat extremists in Bosnia.

EIR: Do you have any comment on the sending back of refugees by Germany, which in the case of Berlin and Bavaria is most extreme? It cannot be any good to send people back forcibly, given also that there is no economic reconstruction.

Nanic: Of course, the refugees will have to go back, and that is a principle that we have to support. We can only say to the German government and the German people, that we cannot express how grateful we are to Germany, that it had received more than 300,000 refugees, not only received, but really took care of them. However, we think that speedy and sudden decisions on the return of a large number of refugees to Bosnia, especially those from the territory of Republika Srpska, is counterproductive. A lot of these people do not have any place to go.

Second, they will represent a burden for the Bosnian government, if a large number of people appear in Bosnia, especially on Federation territory. A large number of refugees are Muslims, so we may risk more tension and friction with the Croats, because we will have to settle these people somewhere temporarily, and this can create frictions, with the Croat population accusing the Bosnian government of forcibly changing the demographic structure, and so on. Also, if there is no perspective for these people to get employment, to take care of themselves and their families, then I do not know what consequences this will also produce in terms of social security, in terms of social turmoil even.

But, we are quite aware of the large amount of money that Germany spent for the refugees from Bosnia. Again, I would like to express my gratitude and the gratitude of my people to Germany, which has actually done the most for the refugees. But I would like to convey my opinion, that Germany, or the German states, should reconsider their decision to forcibly and suddenly send back the refugees, without a clear picture of what these people will actually face, once they return to their country.