
HIGH EXPECTATIONS FROM SATTLER, NEW HEAD OF EU DELEGATION TO BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

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20.08.2019

European Western Balkans (19 August 2019)

In two weeks, Head of EU Delegation to Bosnia and Herzegovina Lars-Gunnar Wigemark is going to be replaced by Johann Sattler, experienced Austrian diplomat of which the public and analysts have high expectations, writes Aljazeera Balkans.

Through previous experience as Head of the Western Balkans Section of the Austrian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and currently as ambassador to Albania, Sattlers career was focused on the Western Balkans.

Therefore, the public and analysts have high expectations of Johann Sattler, Lars-Gunnar Wigemarks successor, writes Aljazeera Balkans.

Vedran Džihic, Senior Researcher at OIIP □ Austrian Institute for International Affairs and member of Balkans in Europe Policy Advisory Group (BiEPAG), points out that Sattler is someone with a lot of diplomatic experience but at the same time someone who did not have the usual path to holding the ambassador position in Albania.

He did begin his diplomatic career in 1996, but after several stops in Vienna, Washington and Brussels, he spent a long time outside diplomacy. From 2008 to 2013, he worked in Moscow in the media sector for the WAZ media group and the Axel Springer publishing house, explains Džihic for Aljazeera Balkans.

He says that as the ambassador of Austria to Albania, during the countrys turbulent years from 2016 to the present, Sattler has become one of the most respectable ambassadors and persons in Albanias crucial reform processes.

Džihic also notes that Sattler is coming to BiH fully informed and prepared for what awaits him.

I am sure he is not naive and has no illusions about what awaits him. The political situation is such that BiH can only be described as a captured state. Progress towards the EU is minimal and more formal. Apathy is greater than a few years ago. Assumptions for Sattler at the head of the EU Delegation are not good. Given the current EU enlargement policy and the trapped character of the political system in BiH, I am not optimistic that any individual, in any position in the country, can initiate substantive change on his own. But of course, individuals like Sattler can bring a fresh look to things, they can restart and initiate something new, explains Džihic for Aljazeera Balkans.

The goal, according to Džihic, should certainly be to open negotiations and accelerate EU membership negotiations over the next few years. In his opinion, this is not an impossible mission, but it is a very difficult one in which there are no guarantees of success.

For the new Head of the EU Delegation to BiH, according to analyst of the European Stability Initiative, Adnan Ćerimagic, the biggest challenge will be to maintain, reclaim and strengthen the impact the EU has in BiH. In the current circumstances, Ćerimagic says it will be a very difficult job, which will not only depend on what is happening in BiH but also in the EU.

Political analyst Ivana Marić points out that current High Representative Wagemark in Bosnia and Herzegovina will be remembered for its very active role in increasing excise duties on petrol.

The other thing Wagemark will be remembered, says Marić, is the agreement on the formation of the government, signed under his auspices by Bakir Izetbegović, Milorad Dodik and Dragan Čović.

Marić points out that the role of the EU Special Representative is not simple and that it is certainly not easy to get approval for more intensive action, but believes that Wigeramk could have done much more in the interests of BiH citizens, not just political elites in Bosnia and Herzegovina and the EU.

Report on the Rule of Law in Bosnia and Herzegovina

European Stability Initiative analyst Adnan Ćerimagic believes that to maintain, regain and strengthen its influence in BiH, the EU will need to restore the credibility of its assessments in BiH.

According to the Balkanbarometer, almost half of BiH citizens at the moment believe that the EU integration process for BiH is bad or neither good nor bad, and governments in BiH mostly do not use even that little financial and technical support the EU offers, says Ćerimagic, adding that the publication of the Priebe Report on the Rule of Law in BiH is announced for October.

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