



Zagreb's political scientist Davor Gienero assessed that Serbian Foreign Minister Ivan Mrkic acted with diplomatic wisdom and skill when he recently stated that Serbia's Counter Memorial, filed to the International Court of Justice in The Hague, would be withdrawn immediately after Croatia had dropped its case before the Court, thus removing the mistrust existing in the dispute.

Gienero said for "Dnevnik" that Mrkic's position reflected continuation of the policy of promoting the bilateral relationship and was completely along the lines of a slowly evolving process since Mrkic took the helm as the Serbian Foreign Minister that would eventually bring about an extrajudicial settlement.

According to him, Zagreb did not like to see the Memorial treated as a kind of package and, for political reasons, did not wish to make any reference to Serbia's Counter Memorial.

On the other hand, Gienero observed that both Croatian President Ivo Josipovic and Foreign Minister Vesna Pusic had lately been sounding an optimistic note that the dispute could be settled out of Court, that is, through political dialogue.

"And now, Minister Mrkic made a wise and skilful diplomatic statement, warranting in effect that as soon as Croatia drops its case, Serbia will withdraw its Counter Memorial. Thus, the pitfall of mistrust that has obviously been dogging the case has been removed," Gienero commented. In an article carried by a Novi Sad newspaper headlined "Mrkic wiser than Vuk Jeremic", this Zagreb-based political scientist was quoted as saying that the Croatian Memorial was filed at an "unfortunate period when serious people were no longer willing to take up public offices". He assessed that in such circumstances, "a rather frivolous person like Zvonimir Separovic happened to be the Croatian Minister of Justice, who initiated the proceeding that would subsequently prove to be a rather unfortunate one".

In his words, after the year 2000, the Ministry of Justice was taken over by Stjepan Ivanisevic, due to whom "the originally trivial case was turned into a serious document accepted also by the ICJ in The Hague".

"However, the document on which the incumbent President Ivo Josipovic had also worked, was not aimed at The Hague process itself but rather at having the case serve to resolve major bilateral issues with Serbia, which could not have been addressed earlier", Gienero said. Today, however, we had made serious progress in that regard, from exchanging information on missing persons and so on, said Gienero.

"This only reflects that the processes between the two states have started moving in the right direction, that is, that Croatia and Serbia are truly on the way of reaching the extrajudicial settlement that they intended to accomplish in court", said Gienero.

In Gienero's assessment, Croatia would drop the case as soon as it estimated that an extrajudicial settlement had actually been reached, which was likely in the next few months, i.e.

before the main hearing.

Commenting on the fears voiced by the President of the Serbian National Council, Milorad Pupovac, that Croatian politics still lacked a sufficient amount of energy to drop the case, the "Dnevnik" source said that he was convinced that the Croatian ruling coalition had full consensus over the Memorial issue.

"President Josipovic will commit himself to the effect that the Memorial be withdrawn, irrespective of the fact that his term runs out and the pending elections, because he is confident that his rating is incontestable", stated Gienero.

These positions are shared by Croatian Foreign Minister Vesna Pusic who will, moreover, be the player ready to take a serious political risk as well, in order to translate a good political decision into action, Gienero assessed.

"In fact, the only question that is difficult to answer at the moment is whether there is a sufficient amount of the needed stately courage on the part of Prime Minister Zoran Milanovic, for he is the one who will ultimately have to make the final decision. Nevertheless, I am convinced that the Croatian Government has enough political will and responsibility even to make moves that are not necessarily the most popular ones among the people, but are good for the development of regional relations", concluded Gienero.