

Interview with Sevim Dagdelen, Member of the Bundestag – Kosovo Online

- **Sevim Dagdelen is spokeswoman of the Left Party parliamentary group on the German Bundestag's Committee on Foreign Affairs**

You said recently that the Federal Intelligence Service established in 2005 that Hashim Thaci was connected to criminal organisations in Kosovo. Do you expect any politicians from Germany to be summoned to appear as witnesses in The Hague?

First of all, it is welcome that an indictment has been filed at the Kosovo Specialist Chambers in The Hague against Hashim Thaci, former commander of the Kosovo Liberation Army (UCK), Kadri Veseli, former head of the UCK intelligence service, and others for war crimes committed during NATO's war against Yugoslavia in 1999. Judicial scrutiny of the UCK's murders and the torture of Serbs and Roma carried out before NATO's eyes is long overdue.

It is and remains a scandal that the German government supported Hashim Thaci for so many years, despite being fully aware that Germany's foreign intelligence service, the Federal Intelligence Service, had described the former UCK commander as a link between "organised crime" and politics in a confidential report as early as 2005. In 2008, the former Chief Prosecutor of the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia in The Hague, Carla Del Ponte, made public Thaci's involvement in a criminal organ smuggling ring. We're talking about the murder of hundreds of people. Nonetheless, the German government continued its one-sided support for former UCK commanders instead of seeking to protect the Roma and Serbs in Kosovo and pressing for the almost 200,000 displaced Serbs and Roma to be able to return to Kosovo.

The UCK commanders and war criminals who acted as NATO's ground troops are not the only ones who should appear in the dock in The Hague; so should those in the NATO countries who were responsible for this aggression. For more than twenty years, there have been no consequences for the breach of international law for which NATO was responsible and for the backing which the NATO-led KFOR occupying forces provided for the UCK's leaders, despite knowing about their criminal actions. However, international law must apply to all.

Former US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright has said that she is concerned about the actions of Turkey's President Erdogan in Kosovo. What would you like to say on this subject?

There is every reason for concern about the Islamist-nationalist agenda and neo-Ottoman foreign policy pursued by the Turkish autocrat Erdogan. Madeleine Albright's policy of intervention and regime change paved the way for Erdogan in the Balkans and in Kosovo. Not only is the former US Secretary of State infamous for her assertion that the price of 500,000 children having died in Iraq as a result of US sanctions was worth it; as Secretary of State under President Bill Clinton, she also

bears a large share of the responsibility for NATO's war against Yugoslavia in 1999. At that time, she held talks each day on the way forward with her counterparts in the NATO member countries. According to Albright, Germany's foreign minister, Joschka Fischer, with whom she now has business links, sometimes watched football during this council of war and simply nodded everything through.

It was the war which first opened the door to Islamists in Kosovo. Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Turkey were partners who were warmly welcomed by NATO. It is impossible to foresee what the consequences of pushing forward this development will be, not only for Kosovo, but for peace and security in Europe as well. Those responsible must be brought to justice. It is telling that in 2019, on the twentieth anniversary of the secession, Clinton and Albright allowed themselves to be celebrated like rock stars in Pristina. These people have absolutely no sense of wrongdoing. They are counting on a culture of impunity as regards responsibility for this breach of international law and those killed in the war.

Are you still under police protection and have you received threats specifically from Kosovo? Do you know who is behind these threats?

I have been under police protection since the summer of 2016, when the Bundestag adopted a resolution on the Armenian genocide perpetrated by the Ottoman Empire. At that time, the Turkish government under President Erdogan launched a massive campaign of threats and intimidation against me and other Members of Parliament. I am still threatened by Turkish nationalists and Islamists today. If, as part of my parliamentary work, I criticise developments in Kosovo or, for example, welcome the war crime proceedings against Thaci, Kosovar ethnic nationalists jump on the bandwagon and attack me in the most vile manner, for example on social media. It all appears to be very highly orchestrated. However, I refuse to be intimidated by fascists, whether German, Turkish or Greater Albanian.

Is the EU pushing the Western Balkans into the arms of Russia and China?

If we look at how the European Union treats the countries in the Balkans, it resembles the United States' "backyard" policy towards South America. This kind of approach takes no interest in the autonomous development of these countries. The countries are promised EU accession or a privileged partnership in order to bind them to the EU in geostrategic terms, but there is not the slightest interest in development in these countries. It really is simply shameful that Chinese companies are now the ones working to develop the infrastructure in these countries as part of the new Silk Road initiative, "One Belt, One Road", while the European Union has so far inexcusably failed to support transport projects which would also benefit the region as a whole. Let's face it, it is ridiculous that people could travel faster by train from Belgrade to Thessaloniki and Istanbul 100 years ago than they can today.

A sea change is needed in Europe's policy towards the Balkans. The aim must be a dialogue on an equal footing and equal partnerships, rather than a "backyard"

approach. An approach based on extortion or drawing the region into NATO's confrontational policy towards Russia will result in the Balkans remaining a region where conflicts between great powers are played out.

Can Serbia join the EU even if it does not recognise Kosovo?

It is completely unacceptable to force Serbia to recognise Kosovo, in contravention of international law, as a precondition for an EU accession process. It is no secret that five EU Member States have not recognised Kosovo's statehood, proclaimed in 2008. Nor is Kosovo a member of the United Nations. The German government's position is that accession cannot take place unless Kosovo is recognised, and this position holds sway in the European Commission. It is remarkable how Serbia is being required to grovel in this context. If Serbia wants to join the EU, it has to recognise this breach of international law. That really is remarkable, coming from people who constantly invoke European values and claim that the rule of law is a priority for them.

Will Angela Merkel's departure affect German policy in the Balkans?

In practice, the anti-Serbian alignment of German foreign policy in the Balkans verges on being part of Germany's national ethos. And that's true across party lines: it was foreign minister Klaus Kinkel from the FDP, serving under Chancellor Helmut Kohl from the CDU, who said in 1992: "Serbia must be brought to its knees". It was Chancellor Gerhard Schröder from the SPD and his foreign minister Joschka Fischer from the Greens who, in 1999, sent German soldiers to war for the first time since the end of the Second World War and supported the bombing of Belgrade as part of NATO's illegal aggression against Yugoslavia. The secession of Kosovo in 2008 took place with the support of Chancellor Angela Merkel from the CDU and Vice-Chancellor Frank-Walter Steinmeier from the SPD. A change in who sits in the Chancellery is not enough; what is needed is a real change in policy so that the Balkan countries are no longer patronised and treated as Europe's backyard. A sea change is needed in Germany's policy towards the Balkans. It is high time to engage with each other on an equal footing, rather than Germany continuing to adopt an imperial air as it patronises the Balkan countries.