

Interview: Wolfgang Petritsch, the High Representative for BiH: “I Expect Full Implementation of the Decision on the Constituency of Peoples”

*11 weeks of intensive and hard work remain before I leave BiH * Your politicians have to be able to take difficult decisions*

The High Representative for BiH, Wolfgang Petritsch, will stay in the top position as the most prominent representative of the international community in our country, for another 11 weeks.

“More than two months of intensive and hard work are ahead of me. I will be very busy until the last minute of my stay here,” says the Austrian diplomat enigmatically as we talk to him at his residence located in Stari Grad.

Production work

The room in which we are sitting is simply furnished, with a tent in which his son Nikola is playing. Right behind the door, on a shelf, are three “Golden Eagle” statues, “the American Oscar for documentary film”, explains Petritsch. Petritsch won one of those eagles as the producer of a documentary film about Peter Sellars, the famous opera producer.

“I did it during my service in New York. It won around 10 prestigious international awards,” says Petritsch without concealing his pride.

He again spent a part of his time yesterday in consultations with his associates and BH politicians with the aim of solving one of the essential challenges before BiH – the implementation of the Decision on the Constituency of Peoples in BiH.

“I expect and demand full implementation of the Decision on the Constituency of Peoples, without rotten compromises. The road to this goes through political agreement, in which it is necessary to achieve compromise.”

DA: Compromise? That does not go hand in hand with the request for full implementation of the Decision.

WP: Unfortunately, that is what people will not or cannot understand. It is the principles that must be uncompromisingly implemented, but there are different ways in which this can be done. A political solution has to be found in that segment. That is the stage at which we are now.

Last Friday I had ten hours of very intense discussions with eight political party leaders. The HDZ, preoccupied with its own problems, did not participate, unfortunately. But, the way in which matters were discussed at the Friday meeting showed that people who are discussing it are very familiar with the problem. What I tried, and I hope I succeeded in doing, was to stop partisan rhetoric because we all know what each party thinks, and start dealing with the substance.

DA: Until when?

WP: I expect everything to be completed by the second half of March.

The Essence of Democracy

DA: That is quick.

WP: Significant progress was noted on Friday. However, as in any negotiation, nothing is agreed until everything is agreed. We will only know at the very end whether we have succeeded or not.

DA: It is a general impression that a full agreement will not be reached. It is believed that the BiH politicians will only solve one part, and that the rest of the decision will be imposed by you.

WP: We will use every day we have in order to come to an agreement. I requested that the party leaders meet and discuss this among themselves. I believe that one could expect the reaching of an agreement under Bosnian standards, but I also believe that it could and must happen. Negotiations such as these and finding a solution together are the essence and future of BiH. It is a multiethnic state, which means that a lot of things will have to be negotiated hard and solutions acceptable to all will have to be found. A lot of your analysts hold it against me that I did not impose the decision of the Constitutional Court. What would that mean? It would be an admission that the parties in BiH are unable to reach an agreement, that BiH is a hopeless case...

Everyone is dreaming about a magical solution, a Dayton II, a protectorate, this or that, which could solve all the problems. Such a thing does not exist. We have to come to terms with the fact that BiH is a multiethnic state, which will never change, and that it is the elected representatives of its citizens and peoples who have to find solutions. Your politicians are now becoming what politicians are throughout Europe – persons who are able to reach an agreement and take difficult decisions.

DA: It seems that you are avoiding a direct answer to this question.

WP: No. I am trying to show you how necessary what we are doing together with your politicians is. It does not look monumental. I know that you are impressed by strong leaders who take decisions easily, such as Tito, but that is not democracy. Democracy means talks, discussions, negotiations, listening to each other, a willingness to compromise and reach agreement. When I leave, I wish to leave as my legacy in BiH the understanding that democracy serves people, it does not manipulate them.

DA: So, just to remind you of the question, will you impose a Decision on constituency to the extent to which the BH politicians will be unable to reach an agreement?

WP: As always, I am trying to do everything to avoid imposition of a decision.

The Croat Question

DA: Ante Jelavic is still refusing to comply with your decision and step down from the post of President of HDZ BiH...

WP: This is basically a problem for the HDZ and its voters. It is clear to anyone who wishes to see the truth that the HDZ is not representing the Croats properly. This party has strong voter support, but it is representing its voters very badly. The HDZ is preoccupied with its own problems – links to crime, political problems... This party cannot even deal with an issue as important as the constituency [of BiH Croats] because it is too preoccupied with its internal problems.

The HDZ boycotted government institutions – and how did that end? They returned to the various parliaments in silence and got nothing in return. Even Jelavic himself publicly admitted that such a strategy was wrong.

DA: Will the HDZ be allowed to participate in the elections if Jelavic continues to be the head of the party?

WP: No. I understand that Jelavic is afraid of soon becoming a nobody – which is what would happen should he step down from the post of leader of the HDZ. However, that is selfish. Jelavic is taking care of his interests, not those of his voters.

Visa-free Regime

WP: A growing number of ordinary people, and politicians as well, are realizing that the visa regime is not a fate BiH is condemned to, but something for which there are reasons, and those reasons can be removed. This issue has began turning in your favor, primarily due to the steps that have been taken by the local politicians who decided to introduce order into the field of personal identification documents through the CIPS project. Romanian and Bulgarian citizens no longer require visas for Europe, and I think that BiH could soon be in the same situation. The faster CIPS is implemented, the closer you are to a visa-free regime. This act is not some arbitrary decision, but a result of developments in BiH; reliable personal documents, safe borders, the necessary laws on immigration, asylum...

This could happen by the end of the year, by 2003, or in a few years' time, but the decision is primarily up to you and your politicians.

Arrest of War Criminals

DA: SFOR has taken action to arrest Radovan Karadzic. How do you see those activities? It seems that they are a failure.

WP: I don't think so. This is a hunt for war criminals which has been going on for some time now. Personally, I am very glad that I encouraged the international community to speed this process up, and that some of the important countries are beginning to take this problem more seriously. I have also observed a growing conviction amongst the people that they have chosen the wrong people as their leaders. This realisation is coming slowly, but surely. Of course, there is still a degree of spite and defiance, but the conviction is spreading.

BiH is not Daytonland

WP: I think that people here are too obsessed by Dayton. It is very important, it stopped the war, but BiH need not only be Daytonland because of that, but it should be a normal European state. That is why, over a year ago, I launched the slogan : "From Dayton to Europe".

You need not be preoccupied by talk of Dayton Two or Dayton Plus... Bosnia needs to become a European state. This task is simple and easy, and conforms with the Dayton Agreement. When I came here I wasn't sure of it, but now I am convinced that it can be done, despite all the difficulties.