

Interview: Wolfgang Petritsch, the High Representative for BiH "Third entity would be the worst solution for Croats"

In less than half a year Wolfgang Petritsch will be leaving his current post and will be replaced by Lord Paddy Ashdown. Until that moment arrives he has an important episode ahead of him with the forthcoming constitutional changes. The outcome of the changes will reflect on his image the moment he leaves the post of HR.

WP: I get an impression that my image with the Croats is too negative when compared with the respect I have for the people, the love I have for Croat(ian)s in BiH and Croatia, for both this country and Croatia, especially the Croatian coast. On the other hand, that image of mine is similar with the Bosniaks and Serbs too. But, when talking to ordinary people, Croats, Bosniaks and Serbs, I see sympathies and understandings for what I do. I believe it is them, more than politicians and journalists, who have a feeling for the right moves I make.

There is no BiH without Croats

VL: When you leave the post of HR and return to Austria in June, will you feel guilt for not doing enough for the Croats, who are the smallest, in numbers, people in BiH?

WP: On the contrary, I would say that I realized from the start that the situation in BiH is the most difficult when it comes to the smallest people. That is why I advocated

solutions that would take care of their interests from the very beginning. It is clear to me that there is no BiH without Croats. At places where I took some strong and radical measures, I did so in order to distinguish the small group of people who were involved in illegal and unlawful activities from the majority of Croats who simply want a decent life. That is how I acted in the case of Ante Jelavic and Hercegovacka Banka. But, I also must point out that my activities in the Hercegovacka Banka were not targeted against the Croats, but against a small group who were abusing their position in order to profit at the expense of ordinary people. How come that it was only a few persons from the HDZ pinnacle that got rich? Why are they so rich, and the majority of Croats are poor?

VL: Who are the people you are talking about? You mentioned some dates, for instance January 15th, when the results of the investigation and names in the Hercegovacka Banka case will be made public. Isn't this process taking too long?

WP: It is a very complicated issue, a very complicated investigation. More than a million documents had to be translated, computers had to be repaired which were later reconstructed in the US, which was also time consuming. But, we are expecting raising of indictments very soon. And like I said before, small depositors and account holders are getting their money, which already took place in December last year. My aim is to create a possibility where the Hercegovacka Banka will start working again and become a reputable bank that functions in accordance with European standards. And those who committed criminal acts will end up in prison.

Cooperation gives better results

VL: What is in your opinion the key problem in solving the Croat issue in BiH?

WP: I think that the key issue is definitely the fact that we

have to establish such a democratic system in which every Croat could realize his/her vital national interests and individual rights. I fully support Croat representatives within the Alliance who are working in that direction. They are active in the constitutional reforms which will be implemented in the next few weeks. That positive trend, which benefits the Croats, was clearly demonstrated when the HDZ returned to the Federation Parliament and took part in the Mrakovica meeting together with the other most important parties in the country. If you recall, their boycott did not result in anything. They also got nothing from me because I insisted that they had to represent the people who elected them. They also started to realize that Zubak, Krizanovic or other Croat representatives within the Alliance are getting more for being cooperative.

VL: Do you have any contacts with the HDZ nowadays?

WP: Absolutely. Allow me to explain that I have nothing against any democratic political party, but I am against politicians who break the law and act illegally. They could be either Bosniaks, Serbs or Croats. And that is why I had good contacts with the HDZ during my tenure at this function. Some people from the HDZ understand that what I do for the Croats here is very positive and significant.

VL: The Mrakovica meeting gathered eight political parties, including the nationalist ones, but also the parties that like to call themselves civic parties. Can you draw a parallel between this meeting and meetings between the Presidents of the six republics from the former Yugoslavia?

WP: This is not 1990. From the historical point of view, the war in the Balkans is over. The people who met on Mrakovica are democratically elected representatives of their people. The truth is that the problems have not been solved. However, today's willingness of these representatives to peacefully solve the problems is much greater than back in the early '90s

and we cannot make a comparison. Also I have a feeling that the peoples of BiH are much more mature than before the war. They understand the fact that a war is not the way to solve problems. I am convinced that the Mrakovica meeting represents a new quality in finding a comprehensive democratic solution.

More efficient and cheaper Authority structures are necessary

VL: After that meeting, Mladen Ivanic stated that you will undermine BiH if you introduce the House of Peoples in the RS?

WP: Definitely now is the right time that the leaders of the political parties talk about everything. I want to see a full consensus about the things that should be established. All three peoples should support the solution that is reached. This is a historic opportunity to establish a new and efficient Authority and political structures in the country. This country, probably, has a large number of politicians and a small number of people who produce money to pay taxes in order to ensure salaries for these politicians. I think that it will be important when we see whether we need so many levels of Authority in BiH. If we talk in percentages, this country has the highest number of Presidents, Prime Ministers and Ministers in the whole world.

VL: It has been often speculated that, within the IC, there is a trend of thinking about the abolition of the RS?

WP: I think that it is important to preserve those qualities that have been stated in the Dayton Peace Agreement. The thing that is even more important is an effort to make the system established in Dayton even more efficient and cheaper for the people. BiH citizens have to understand that this is their homeland, in which functioning state institutions are necessary. BiH as such, should, some day, join the European Union to the pleasure of all BiH citizens.

VL: In an interview given to our daily, Mladen Ivanic stated

that he would not have anything against the establishment of the third entity if it does not damage the RS?

WP: Yes, I have read that interview. However, I have to say that it would be contrary to Dayton and it would lead towards the division of the Croat people. The Croats live in different parts of BiH, from the Posavina to Neum. I am convinced that the existence of the third entity would be the worst possible solution for the Croats. The thing that is important for the Croats is the strengthening of the local levels of Authority, as well as, the strengthening of the state institutions.

Lord Ashdown the most probable successor

VL: Lord Ashdown, your successor, has visited you. What were you talking about?

WP: Yes, Lord Ashdown, whom I have known for a long time and who is my friend, is a candidate and the most probable successor. I invited him to meet with me and my closest associates, to make him familiar with the very complicated work that the HR has to do here.

VL: A large number of Croats are afraid of Lord Ashdown's arrival and his policy. Perhaps it would sound cynical, however, it might happen that because of it you could become more popular among the Croats in July, after you leave BiH?

WP: I believe that Lord Ashdown, when he formally gets appointed to this position, will do an excellent job. I stressed and indicated to him, among other things, the sensitivity of the Croat issue. And when popularity is in question, it happens very often that after a man abandons some function he becomes more popular, and his deeds are being viewed from many aspects. Believe me, it would be my greatest happiness if, after a few months or years, the Croats realize that I am their big friend.

VL: Will you be sorry when you leave 'this country full of

hatred', as Ivo Andric writes, because you failed to do what you could have done?

WP: The list of things that I have not done is rather long compared with the things that I have done. However, if I contributed just a little bit to improve the understanding among the three peoples and if I proved that, at least once, Ivo Andric was wrong, it would be my great pleasure.