

Interview: Wolfgang Petritsch, the High Representative for BiH: "I had to make hard but necessary decisions"

I am absolutely certain that Ferhadija will be fully rebuilt – Ivanic could do much more if SDS had not received such large support of voters

I wish to see the Human Rights Chamber's decision on the reconstruction of Ferhadija in Banja Luka fully implemented. This has not been the case so far and the reasons are clear: there are constant delays and obstruction by the RS authorities, which has brought them nothing good. RS authorities seem unable to learn one thing: obstruction is absolutely counter-productive and while it can delay things it cannot prevent them from happening. Look at the economic situation there. Who will invest in a place where basic human rights are violated? When human rights are not respected, there are no investments – the High Representative for BiH Wolfgang Petritsch told "Dnevni Avaz" at the beginning of the interview.

Dnevni avaz: Violating human rights is a constant with the RS?

WP: As is the lack and absence of foreign investment.

Human rights

Dnevni avaz: You said in the interview given to NRTV 99 that time was running out for the RS and it could happen that the

International Community terminates the existence of this Entity?

WP: I wish to clarify this. The obstructions carried out by the RS authorities go towards their own delegitimization and weaken this Entity more and more. The caprice they are indulging in there simply destroys them. Therefore, it is important, regardless of the cost, that human rights are respected.

Dnevni avaz: The accusations you are presenting against the RS are pretty hard and serious. Still, there are no names, nothing concrete. Are you saying that they are all the same there?

WP: No, but even those one might characterize as "better" accept extremist positions and some circumstances too much. It is unacceptable that hooligans should disturb the corner-stone laying ceremony for Ferhadija, that the police must guard the stone ... This, in itself, is a bad picture of the RS. This should be very worrying to Ivanic, Sarovic, Kalinic ...

Dnevni avaz: Do you believe that Ferhadija will be fully reconstructed in the end?

WP: Absolutely. I have been here for more than two years and I have seen many things happening that were unthinkable before. This will be the case with the mosque, too. Sometimes, it is too slow, but it pays in the end.

Prime Minister's position

Dnevni avaz: The Head of the OSCE Mission in BiH, Ambassador Robert Beecroft warned once again of the contacts that SDS has with the indicted war criminals. Does this problem still worry you?

WP: As I have no intelligence service of my own, I cannot confirm this, and really, it does not interest me. It is the caprice in this case, too, which will destroy the RS in the end. It is up to Serbs in the RS to change that. We are doing what we can, our position is very clear, but, unless there is a change in the way Serbs think, a logical consequence is that the RS might disappear.

Dnevni avaz: How satisfied are you with what the RS Prime Minister Mladen Ivanic is doing?

WP: He represents a small party and tries a lot and we respect him. Extremists, particularly SDS, prevent him from doing much more in Banja Luka and in the RS.

Dnevni avaz: This means that everyone would be better off without the SDS?

WP: Yes, he could do much more if the SDS had not received such strong support of the voters. Luckily, this support is now on the decline even in the SDS itself, so you can see change there. I do not believe only in what I hear, but the SDS are now inviting Karadzic to surrender to the Hague Tribunal, this party now speaks about a multiethnic RS, return of Bosniaks and Croats, President Sarovic was one of those who laid the corner-stone for Ferhadija ...

Dnevni avaz: Well, you made him do that, like everything else?

WP: Yes, this is the first time that they did it. No one before succeeded in this.

Dnevni avaz: If you were to point out the most important task of the current authorities in one word, what would it be?

WP: Reform. People voted for the Alliance because they were expecting and looking for change. If they had not wished for that, they would have voted for the old nationalist parties

which were happy with the status quo. Therefore, reforms, no matter how unpopular they might sometimes be, must be undertaken and that is what I am advocating. I implement them myself, if necessary. In this way, I am a kind of an Alliance for Change by myself. I think I share the same principles with the current authorities. People expect a better future and better perspectives from them.

Attitude towards HDZ

Dnevni avaz: These days, the media speak a great deal about the HDZ again. What will happen with this party?

WP: I have never focused on parties or forbidden their work, except in the case of the Serb Radical Party, but that was another thing. When it comes to the HDZ, I simply had to punish certain people who excluded themselves from the process.

Jelavic was a member of the Presidency of BiH, and as such, he had to respect and uphold the Constitution and the constitutional order, and not act against it. He and several others excluded themselves from the process.

I have contacts with some senior officials from the HDZ. I spoke to one of them several days ago and he told me that he had the impression that I was doing more for Croats than that party.

I will not tell you who this person is because it would mean his instant political demise. No, I will tell you that I believe that the HDZ will one day, when it finds the strength to elect a democratic leadership, become a different party.

Dnevni avaz: Some officials of the Alliance resent the changes you made to the housing legislation?

WP: The problem in democracy is guts. You need the guts to make hard but necessary decisions. It is not important whether they are popular or not, they must be made. I will not say that the current authorities do not have the guts.

I want to say that I was aware of the gravity and controversy that changes in property legislation have or provoke, but I had to make them. We are accelerating return and no one can be against that.

Dnevni avaz: Return? If someone really wants to return then they come to 'fight' alone for their apartment and do not send a proxy who then sells the apartment?

WP: I am aware, I say again, of the controversy of this decision. When I was making this Decision, I had in mind the fact that, for instance, a Srebrenica widow does not have to go to Srebrenica and fight for her house or apartment.

What I wanted was that she can send a lawyer there. This is the human side of the changes I introduced and I think it is right. Life here is very complicated. I am trying to simplify it wherever possible.

Remarks to FTV

Several days ago we could watch the arraignment of Slobodan Milosevic before the Hague Tribunal live on CNN. FTV did not show that.

This is not professional and it shows that many things must improve there. Much needs to change in the media generally and their focus must shift from speculation to facts.

The House of Peoples problem

I have received much criticism and requests to finish the work of the constitutional commissions. It is commissions themselves that must finish the work. I have made the basic preconditions for the implementation of the Constitutional Court's decisions.

But, this is the work of local institutions. I will wait another couple of weeks (the forthcoming holidays will slow the process down a little) for something concrete to happen. It must happen, if not – we will use other means – I can impose a Decision.

The Steering Board gave me the basic guidelines in June – in essence, the solutions must be symmetrical.

We are not interested in the name but in the contents of the vital-interest protection mechanism.

I am very keen that people here find a solution and not that someone tomorrow says that it was me who imposed it and that it was someone else's work and not theirs.

Relations with the authorities

I must say I am very satisfied with the Alliance for Change. We have finally come to the level of political processes with them where we speak and argue about politics and not about some other questions.

It was much different before. We had long talks where one could only change the actors. The topics were always the same. Always the same phrases and the prefix Bosniak, Serb, Croat always remained the same. Things are different now, although I

have not changed. I still follow my own compass, I implement the peace agreement.

I must add that personal relations with the ruling authorities are better today than with the people from the previous regime.

Human Rights Chamber and return of refugees

The Human Rights Chamber's decision must be respected and its revision can only go in the legal system, not through politicization. Justice is blind, it does not have eyes to spot moral dilemmas.

I was aware of the difficulties regarding the changes of the housing legislation, I expected objections although I had officials coming to me asking me to impose amendments to the law.

These changes are also the result of assessments by local and international organizations dealing with refugee return that these and such amendments must be made. I had to impose Decisions earlier, too, because if I had let the local authorities pass them, they would never have been passed.

Hercegovacka Banka for robbing Croats

As the investigation proceeds, there is more and more evidence showing that Hercegovacka Banka was established to rob its depositors. We now have a very clear money laundering system, illegal bank transfers, schemes through which individuals become rich by getting money over the backs of ordinary Croat depositors.

I will not speak of names now. I will only say that they are some among the bank's shareholders, people who are privileged and people who are leading personalities in Western

Herzegovina and the HDZ ...

I must say that I am shocked at how long some of the leading Croat representatives can ignore these facts. They often disbelieve what they see, they mix ethnicity and crime and think that some people must be protected just because they are Croats, regardless of the crime they commit.

In a few days we will see the first criminal reports and I hope that independent judicial authorities will make appropriate decisions.