

Interview: Wolfgang Petritsch, the High Representative in BiH: "Strengthened Position of the High Representative in BiH"

Following two day's of discussion, the Peace Implementation Council adopted a strategy for re-shaping the international presence in BiH Wolfgang Petritsch for SENSE: In a few years, BiH will become fully independent, representatives of the International Community will slowly start leaving, and the management of the country will be handed over to local authorities. We are not in BiH to stay forever.*

The position of the High Representative in BiH will be additionally strengthened – he will form a cabinet which will be made up of representatives of several of the largest international organizations, including, for example, officials such as Jacques Paul Klein. That and the fact that the Peace Implementation Council (PIC) adopted the proposal of Wolfgang Petritsch on the reorganization of the work of the International Community in BiH is the most important news from the meeting, which ended in Brussels on Thursday afternoon.

The formation of this international cabinet had been proposed by Petritsch in May, however, the idea was adopted only this time round, the High Representative said in an interview with SENSE immediately after the two-day meeting behind closed doors.

Aside from this Cabinet, another proposal which was adopted pertains to the establishment of four working groups – economic, refugee return, strengthening of state institutions and rule of law. The High Representative believes that this will drastically improve the efficacy of various international organizations, and will simultaneously accelerate the return of BiH from the hands of the International Community to its citizens.

"In a few years, BiH will be a fully independent state, representatives of the International Community will slowly start leaving, and management will be handed over to local authorities. After the Peace Implementation Council accepted my streamlining proposal for the future work of representatives of the International Community on the ground, that is quite clear," said Petritsch to SENSE agency following the meeting of the Peace Implementation Council. The High Representative has worked on this proposal since March of last year, when the Council of Ministers and the Contact Group at ministerial level asked for the reorganization of the international presence in BiH, in order to avoid the stagnation seen in the past six years, and after 5 billion USD had been poured into the country.

Asked to explain how his proposal of reform of the work of international organizations affects the political and social situation in BiH, Petritsch said: "My proposal will accelerate the process of taking charge, for we, from the International Community, will be better coordinated and will cooperate more." He added that the Council adopted the full text of the document (OHR proposal) with a proviso that this initial paper will have to be developed in more detailed and profound form by several international agencies. In the next few months, we will know more details about the structure of the police after the announced withdrawal of the UN Police. "Police reform will continue to take place – and who will be in charge of the implementation of the reform will be decided at the next meeting of the Council," said Wolfgang Petritsch.

It is certain that some alternative proposals for the reorganization of the international engagement in BiH have also been discussed during the PIC meeting. "Everyone, except for representatives of UNMIK, were against the reorganization of BiH on the model of a Kosovo-like pillar system. "That has been rejected. I am convinced that this model would not suit BiH, which is now in its seventh year of peace implementation and which is a sovereign state," Petritsch said. He also rejected criticism expressed by the International Crisis Group in its most recent report. "This (OHR) proposal takes us forward and means great progress in the strengthening of the Bosnian statehood."

The High Representative did not want to disclose detailed figures about the reduction of the international presence in BiH. However, according to a document presented to SENSE, the anticipated reduction of international personnel is 30% by the year 2003. The High Representative proposed that the reorganization of international agencies, who presently number about 100, be implemented according to a geographic principle. According to our sources, some international organizations were hoping that the proposed reforms would be more far-reaching, and believe that

they may not be as profound as is necessary.