Interview: Wolfgang Petritsch, High Representative in BiH”It is clear that the future of BiH and the RS lies within Europe-RS must respect Dayton”

Economic reforms most important

High Representative, Wolfgang Petritsch, said in an interview for “Euro Blic” that he informed the RS leadership of his own dissatisfaction, and that of the PIC, with the slow implementation of economic reforms and the unsatisfactory level of co-operation that the RS has shown with the BiH Joint Institutions. He said that he and the wider International Community wanted to see significant progress achieved in a number of very clear fields. There must be urgent action on close to 40 state level laws that have been passed by the Council of Ministers, but are blocked by Serb delegates in the BiH Parliament.

“By doing this, they effectively block economic reform, prolonging the daily misery of thousands across BiH. The unsatisfactory degree of co-operation with ICTY must change – now is the time for deeds, not words. The return process in the RS has started moving, but still not fast enough, nor is there enough commitment to support the tens of thousands of Serbs who have chosen to return to the Federation. I also have to mention the scandalous rate of implementation of Human

Rights Chamber decisions. This presents a real measure for the level of respect a government has for human rights in general. Only some 55% of the Chamber's decisions relating to the RS are fully implemented. I expect to see an active change in these fields and others, a change that represents progressive European thinking", said Petritsch.

Euro Blic: Reforms in BiH and both Entities are a requirement for a BiH donor conference to take place. What type of reforms are we talking about? What deadlines exist for their implementation? Who will carry them out?

WP: At a meeting I had with World Bank Vice President Johannes Linn and the Bank's Country Director for BiH, Christiaan Poortman, in Washington, the discussion touched on the question of the donors' conference. The World Bank clearly stated that there would not be a conference until more progress is made on economic reform and the EU Road Map conditions are fulfilled. Among the laws pending before the BiH parliament are four that are requirements of the EU Road Map – the Laws on Consumers' Protection, Copyrights, Concessions and Industrial Ownership. Other of the 18 items on the EU Road Map include support for several State-level institutions, such as the Institute for Standards, which will certify goods for export to the EU, measures to support return, the establishment of public broadcasting, etc. These measures should be carried out by the State and Entity authorities. The deadline set for fulfilment of the EU Road Map was the middle of 2001. It is a disgrace that it has not been met yet. Its fulfilment is central to BiH's postwar recovery, its integration in Europe, and the well-being of its citizens. It should be a priority for the authorities

SDS is a hostage to its past

Euro Blic: You've accused the SDS of responsibility for the isolationist policies and the poor results of political and

socio-economic relations. You've said that since December 12th last year when the leadership of the RS signed a kind of agreement with OHR that nothing has been implemented. Have you given them deadlines for their 're-sits'?

WP: No deadlines are necessary for something that should already be happening – results are expected now. On December 12th last year the SDS leadership signed a declaration pledging to support vital State-level institutions and legislation, return, and co-operation with the ICTY, among other things. In the last eleven months, I have not seen that these written promises have materialised. The SDS in effect remains a willing hostage to its past. Without reform within the party, the SDS has no place in modern Europe.

Euro Blic: You've supported the work of Prime Minister Ivanic but explicitly not the work of the Government. You've announced that you would support changes in the Government, which will assist economic reforms and the unification of the economic space in BiH. From this can it be assumed that you asked PM Ivanic to eliminate the SDS from the RS Government.

WP: Forming a workable government that will be able to achieve the necessary reforms and implement policies, is the job of the Prime Minister. In doing this, he needs the support of the RSNA. I've often said that the International Community, and for that matter possible future investors, are interested in concrete results. It is clear that the SDS thus far has blocked the passage of reforms, using Serb representatives in the State-level institutions to do so, accusing them of selling out BiH Serb interests. The Prime Minister must be aware of the SDS' poor record, and I expect the SDS to be aware that the International Community has serious second thoughts about their commitment to Dayton. As long as they procrastinate, they can't be a real partner for the International Community.

Euro Blic: On the sixth anniversary of the signing of the DPA, what have the citizens of BiH received other than the noted peace?

WP: BiH has changed fundamentally during the last six years of Dayton implementation. It is clear now that the future of BiH lies within Europe and that the integration process is a key part in creating a normal, functioning BiH that acts in the interests of its citizens. A normal, functioning BiH is also in the interest of the RS because the RS will not function unless the entire State functions. In order to enable the State to function, the RS should be less afraid of it, but allow it to carry out the tasks that Dayton has allocated to the State.

Much needs to be done still; the State must become effective; the RS must accept its responsibility under the DPA to assist returns and co-operate with the Hague; the rule of law must be established in BiH, and, above all, we need the economic reforms that will revive the economy and really improve the lives of citizens by creating jobs and providing for decent salaries. Bosnians and Herzegovinians more than anything want a normal state, and I believe that the authorities at all levels are slowly realising that this is what they have to work towards. This goal can be accomplished, it just requires a little more pushing from the authorities.

ICTY to decide about Izetbegovic

I am sure that Karadzic and Mladic will find themselves before the International Tribunal in The Hague, and this will be a huge relief for the RS. It will allow it to finally put a full stop at the end of a dark chapter and turn toward the future.

At the moment the RS is alone in the region in not complying fully with this process. Much has been promised, and a law on co-operation passed through the RS National Assembly. Now I

expect concrete action. With regard to the proposed indictment of Alija Izetbegovic, as in all cases it is for the ICTY Prosecutor to decide whether the evidence provided is sufficient and an indictment can be issued.