

Interview: Wolfgang Petritsch, the High in BiH: "Claims that we work against Croats in BiH make no sense "

DL: Could you give us your assessment of political processes in BiH, following the Constitutional Court's decision on the constituent status of the peoples within BiH territory, in other words, could you tell us where is BiH heading when it comes to constitutional-legal solutions?

WP: I am convinced that the Constitutional Court's decision is of historic importance. Since the Entity Assemblies did not react the way they should have, I issued a Decision on January 11 which confirms the constituent status of Croats, Serbs and Bosniaks within BiH. It means that starting from January 11, the Croat people are a constituent people in the RS too and that they must have the same rights as others in that part of the state. I am talking about effective constitutional activities. This decision is appreciated by the returnees to the RS, but unfortunately there has not been understanding from the HDZ and mostly from the politicians that live in Herzegovina. Namely, when I invited the HDZ to submit the names of candidates for the Constitutional Commission, they refused. I learned from my Croat friends that there was a fierce argument about this within the HDZ Presidency. Unfortunately the hard-liners won the battle, but I assure you that that was one of the last victories of the Croat radicals who are working against the interests of their own people. I will personally see to it that the Croats get the rights they are entitled to. Possibilities that the BiH Croats accept this country as their homeland must be sought. It is very important to the IC to have as many Croats live here as possible.

DL: How satisfied are you with the results achieved by the association of parties under the name of the Alliance for Democratic Change?

WP: Speaking in general, I must say that I am satisfied with the work of the Alliance. In particular with the work of the Croat representative in it, in the Government and Parliament. Although the HDZ is leading a fierce campaign against these people, I am convinced that the Croats will vote for their moderate representatives at the next elections.

DL: When it comes to the electorate's will, don't you think that the IC has ignored the HDZ's success and the will, as you put it, of the constituent Croat people?

WP: Let me tell you that the principle of democracy is that the majority has the power. But in democracy, the opposition plays an important role. By refusing to take part in democratic processes, the HDZ cause grave damage to their people. Mr. Jelavic, whom I had to dismiss from office, in fact eliminated himself, because instead of defending the Constitution, he was establishing an HDZ's para-state.

DL: Well don't you think that in BiH, BiH being a complex state, the Croat people are the least represented when it comes to constituent peoples. Don't you think that Croat fears about the concept of the civic state should be viewed a bit moderately?

WP: I agree that in a multiethnic state you cannot have just civil or rights of individuals. On the other hand, you cannot have just ethnic or national rights, it is a combination of the two elements. For sure there will be discussion about whether there will be more ethnic or civil rights. My vision is that the Constitution defends the position of the constituent peoples, especially the Croats, who are smallest in numbers. Claims that the IC is working against the Croats in BiH have no sense because we see BiH as a state in the family of European countries, where cultural and political rights are addressed in a positive way.

DL: A first part of the report on the investigation into the Hercegovacka Banka was recently revealed. What's the future of that banking institution and in what way will you compensate the citizenry that are left without their money?

WP: Everything is surfacing now with regard to the structure of illegal operations. It is obvious that the stockholders used the bank for illegal personal profit, at the expense of other citizens. Stockholders took millions of marks which they never returned and the money was used for suspicious purposes. Ordinary Croats paid for it and I would like those people to ask themselves how those people could afford to live in a grand style. Let's say that

the Republic of Croatia was paying in for soldiers' salaries, yet the soldiers were not paid regularly. We informed Zagreb about the differences in sums, we are talking about millions here. Croats are the most diligent people and I hope that they will ask themselves what the robbers have done in the past years. Prosperity must be ensured for the Croat people. To lessen the sufferings of citizens, I decided to initiate an amendment to the law which will allow the Provisional Administrator to make payments to small-deposit holders who are not involved in illegal activities. I am using this opportunity to call on the tycoons and the so-called stockholders to finally return the money they took from honest people.

DL: Mr. Petritsch, one of the moves that made you unpopular among the BiH Croats was the stopping of HTV broadcasts and the establishment of FTV. How do you assess the low level of programmes on FTV?

WP: Let me tell you that HTV was airing its programmes illegally thus breaching Croatian copyright laws. At the same time, the Bosniaks criticised me for allegedly cancelling their RTV BiH. Croat staff at FTV guarantee that the quality of Croatian-language programming will improve. But the quality will depend also on co-operation with HTV, in light of the agreement between the two houses. Next year we will have a Public Service at the state level so BiH Croats will have a decent representation. I am using this opportunity to call for patience when it comes to FTV, and to call on the people who deal with TV production to support FTV, all this to have a situation that Croats from Siroki Brijeg, for example, do not wait for a South-American soap opera but produce one of their own.