

The High Representative discusses Protectorate in DANI

The High Representative, Wolfgang Petritsch, replied to an article in the independent magazine DANI published on January 28, in which he was called upon to establish a one-year protectorate in Bosnia and Herzegovina. DANI today printed his response: **The High Representative replies to the editorial board of DANI**

This is not our country

At the end of January, the four editors of DANI requested in the article “Ten Theses for Bosnia and Herzegovina” that the High Representative Wolfgang Petritsch introduce a one-year international protectorate in BiH. The Austrian diplomat of enviable experience replies to DANI with his ten theses, insisting on “Ownership” and simultaneously presenting a correct and worrying theory: the citizens of BiH do not perceive Bosnia and Herzegovina as their state.

Lately there have been many calls for a revision of the Dayton Peace Agreement. Ante Jelavic last week asked for the abolishment of the Federation and the transferal of its powers to the State. The Croat National Council advocates a Cantonization of the whole country; Haris Silajdzic has demanded changes to Annex 4 (the BiH Constitution) and Annex 7 (refugee and displaced persons) of the Peace Agreement. A few weeks ago, four distinguished authors published in this magazine an appeal on me to establish a one-year protectorate in Bosnia and Herzegovina. All of a sudden, a public debate is emerging about the merits and shortcomings of the Dayton Peace Agreements, about where Bosnia and Herzegovina stands today, and where it should be headed.

This is actually not surprising. The most immediate war damage has been fixed, both in physical and psychological terms: the infrastructure of the country has been rebuilt, and people are now focused on their daily problems and their future. Bosnia and Herzegovina is no longer a post-war country, but a country in transition, which opens up many new questions.

Though I believe that it is too early to change the Dayton Peace Agreement as many important provisions have not been implemented yet, I welcome that Bosnia and Herzegovina's citizens have started discussing the future of their country. This, I consider taking “Ownership” of the issue at stake.

The Ten Theses for Bosnia and Herzegovina published in DANI at the end of January have attracted my special attention. They come from intellectuals, that means non-politicians, and nine of the ten theses assign clear tasks to me, which add up to asking me to deprive of power all domestic institutions and to put Bosnia and Herzegovina under a one-year international protectorate.

Though I understand and partially share the authors' frustration with the current situation, I disagree with their approach and their conclusion. Their approach is the opposite of what my Concept of Ownership is about. The four authors once again place responsibility for solving Bosnia and Herzegovina's problems on the International Community. I do not accept that. It is easy to declare the Dayton Peace Agreement a failure and demand that the International Community find a new solution. The more difficult bit is to find this solution. This is not and cannot be the International Community's task because this is not our country. Apart from that, I do not believe that a one-year protectorate would bring us any nearer a lasting solution – because, what can be achieved in one year?

My reply is another set of ten theses that I am putting against the ten theses of Senad Pecanin, Ivan Lovrenovic, Nerzuk Curak and Mile Stojic:

1. We have come far in the implementation of the Dayton Peace Agreement. The Dayton Peace Agreement did and does not envisage a protectorate. It is very clear in its description of the role of the High Representative of the International Community, which is “to facilitate the parties' own efforts,” “to monitor” and “to coordinate.” The International Community has invested many efforts in establishing functioning institutions, many elections have been held, many activities have been undertaken to awake a sense of responsibility and commitment among the elected officials and citizens of this country alike. There are results. Admittedly, more progress, much more progress, could have been reached. But we are on the right path. To introduce a protectorate would render all achievements null and void, and return Bosnia and Herzegovina to where it was in 1995.

2. Democracy must be learnt, and that takes time. Bosnia and Herzegovina's problems are ultimately societal problems, resulting from its complex history and terrible recent past. Its political class lacks responsibility, in particular the will to compromise, which is essential in a multi-ethnic country comprising several constituent peoples. In addition, politics here are driven by self-interests of those that conduct it. Bosnia and Herzegovina's citizens, on the other hand, lack political maturity. Both is not surprising given Bosnia and Herzegovina's Communist past, during which neither officials were held accountable, nor citizens were allowed to be critical. But both will not change in only one year. Democracy, good governance, political maturity and civic activity cannot be imposed or declared; this is a process. Democratic and civic skills must be learnt.

3. People will only learn how to run their country when they are given a chance to do it by themselves. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, even the limited powers of the High Representative have led to a certain culture of dependency. A protectorate would reinforce this dependency. It would subjugate Bosnia and Herzegovina's society and structures and make it impossible for them to ever become independent and self-sustaining. For the International Community, a protectorate would be a commitment with no end in sight.

4. It is up to the people of Bosnia and Herzegovina to decide whether and how they want to change the Dayton Peace Agreement. The International Community helped end the war and negotiate this Agreement. It was the best possible agreement that could be reached at the time. It ended a vicious war and created peace. As every compromise, it is not perfect. The time may come when the peoples of Bosnia and Herzegovina will want to improve this Agreement, in particular its centerpiece, the Constitution. It is up to them to decide if and how they want to amend it because they have to find a way of living with each other. Their interests must be reflected in the Constitution. Only if they can identify with it, will there be a lasting peace and stability in the country.

5. Elections are an exercise in democracy and have produced a more moderate political climate. The result of the elections held so far in Bosnia and Herzegovina has been a steady decline in support for uncompromising, narrow-minded national parties. In Republika Srpska, the party that ruled during the war even is no longer in power. More importantly, every election is a good exercise in democracy; in particular for the voters who are not yet fully aware of their power. It would not make any sense to cancel the municipal elections, which are due to take place in five weeks; the general elections will also hopefully take place. Nothing would be gained by canceling them, but a chance for change might be lost.

6. The economy and the judiciary must be liberated from political influence. The ruling parties currently dominate almost every aspect of societal life. They run the economy and judiciary, they determine who may return when and where, they even decide who has a roof above his head and a job. If the judiciary and economy are separated from politics, if the rights of every individual are enforceable and every individual can participate in economic life regardless of his or her ethnic background and political affiliation, it will become acceptable for everybody that everybody else enjoys the same rights. This requires new laws and regulations, but also a change of the mindset of every single individual.

7. The cycle of ethnic negativism must be broken. Bosnia and Herzegovina's politics and attitude toward important issues have been determined by "ethnic negativism." What is good for one people, is automatically considered bad by and for the other two peoples, and opposed by them. Thereby, all the peoples of Bosnia and Herzegovina have prevented each other from progressing.

This pattern dominates the work of the Common Institutions, voting, the attitude toward war crimes, refugee return and many other crucial issues. People do not vote "positively": for the political party they believe will work in their interests and provide them with things they care for, such as jobs, security, pensions or good education. They vote "negatively": for the party they believe will most effectively prevent the other two ethnic groups from progressing. People do not deal with the criminals among themselves, who committed horrible war crimes in their name. Instead they say: once and only if "the other ones" prosecute their war criminals, we will prosecute "ours." They do not allow refugees and displaced people to return to areas that they control. Instead they say: once and only if "our refugees and displaced people" can return to their homes, we will allow "theirs" to return to their homes.

As a result of this negative attitude, there is a general standstill. Unless parties come to power that work in a positive fashion, for goals in the public interest, such as economic recovery, and not in a negative fashion, against other ethnic groups, Bosnia and Herzegovina will not progress. Unless each people faces the atrocities that were committed in its name and deals with them, there will be no reconciliation and no healthy society will develop.

8. Bosnia and Herzegovina and its citizens must develop self-esteem and self-confidence. The Austrian author and Balkan expert Karl-Markus Gauss recently stated critically: "The Balkans as a pejorative term have returned to themselves, and among the Balkan nations there is a competition over which one belongs to the Balkans, which means is lost, and which one has managed to escape the dirt, corruption and hatred of the Balkans and can be counted as part of Europe, that means of civilization." This also goes for Bosnia and Herzegovina. Its citizens do not identify with their home country, they are not proud of being citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina. (I actually see this as one of the root causes for the corruption in the country. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, corruption represents a socially acceptable form of defense against a state that is perceived as an enemy.

As in every relationship, it is important that both sides – the state and its citizens – move toward each other. The state of Bosnia and Herzegovina must become stronger and legitimize itself by offering its citizens real values, from internationally recognized passports that allow visa-free traveling, to a functioning economy. Its citizens, on the other hand, – both the political class and ordinary people – have to accept the state as their home country and work on making it comfortable.

A protectorate would not help this process, but achieve exactly the opposite. The state, once again run by foreigners, would remain alien to its citizens.

9. The intellectual elite should help and shape Bosnia and Herzegovina's future. My Concept of Ownership calls on Bosnia and Herzegovina's political class to take on the problems of this country and solve them. It calls on its citizens to, above all, become aware of their rights and duties and to act accordingly. It also calls on the intellectual elite of this country: to support the processes of democratic transformation that Bosnia and Herzegovina is undergoing, to raise awareness, and to find solutions within the parameters of Bosnia and Herzegovina's reality.

This reality is the Dayton Peace Agreement, the absence and improbability of an international protectorate, and the fact that Bosnia and Herzegovina comprises three constituent peoples who have to agree on what their state looks like. At the moment, their all-dominating "national" interests are quite apart from each other. One can engage in endless discussions about the reasons for this, and one can also ponder about what the "real" interests of Bosnia and Herzegovina's citizens are. These discussions are important – but the issue is to find ways and ideas that will find majority support among all three peoples and move Bosnia and Herzegovina forward.

I am appealing to the intellectuals of this country to take the lead. I appeal to them to take Ownership of Bosnia and Herzegovina's problems and generate ideas for their solution and the future of this country within its context. I appeal to them to break the negative cycles and be the first ones to make the leap of confidence.

10. The International Community's role is to guide and assist. Bosnia and Herzegovina's problems are difficult, but the International Community is ready to assist in solving them – by providing guidance and assistance and by occasionally intervening to accelerate the implementation of peace and democracy. But the process must be led and conducted by the people of Bosnia and Herzegovina. I believe this is the only way in which Bosnia and Herzegovina can become a democratic, self-sustaining and self-confident state. This is the essence of "Europeanization."

There are laws that each state simply needs, and I am willing to impose them if a majority of parliament members are not yet capable of doing it themselves. I have zero tolerance for obstructionists and nationalists and consider them poison for this country; I will continue to use my powers against them. There are issues that are of such importance that I will do whatever I can to further them – such as economic reform, growth and job creation, such as refugee return and the Rule of Law.

My goal is to establish a framework that will give the officials and citizens a chance to act responsibly and take their fate into their own hands. It is up to them to seize this opportunity. In this regard, it is the intellectual elite that must break the ground. Democratic processes are difficult processes. But who else is there to tackle difficult issues if not the very people of this state of Bosnia and Herzegovina?