

Interview: Wolfgang Petritsch, the High Representative in BiH"Jelavic's days on the political scene are numbered"

The HDZ BiH has constantly been losing support – over the last five years it lost half of its constituency. The accusations of use of force in the Hercegovacka bank come from the very same people who organised the gathering of the crowd, from the persons who threw stones, who beat and injured people. I have stated that there are criminal elements in the HDZ BiH, and no one has so far proved the contrary. The constitutional reform is on-going in the Republika Srpska too, and I shall personally monitor each step of it.

In an exclusive interview for Vjesnik, we talked with **Wolfgang Petritsch**, the High Representative of the International Community in BiH, on the latest developments in BiH, on the situation in Herzegovina and the position of Croats in BiH.

Q: The latest events in Herzegovina seem to lead confrontation between the Croat corps and the International Community more and more. Do you agree with this and how do you plan to stop it?

A: This is how some of the people from the HDZ would like to depict the current situation: the Croat people on one side, and the International Community on the other side. However, that is not the case. The International Community did not have a choice as the HDZ leaders have taken a direction that would prove to be detrimental to Croats in BiH. Some people from the party's leadership dream of a Croat mini-state in which there would be no rule of law and which would serve their own interests. It is exactly the HDZ that has initiated the events by refusing to take up its responsibility, although availed of all the means for participation in the legal and constitutional framework of Bosnia-Herzegovina.

Q: Yet, I would like to remind you that the HDZ BiH, whatever it is like, is the election winner in that part of BiH and that it enjoys plebiscite-like support of the majority of Herzegovinian Croats.

A: Quite contrary: the HDZ has been constantly losing support in BiH. Over the last five years, it has lost 50 percent of its constituency. Besides, as a democrat, I see no connection between the number of votes won and the refusal to participate in the work of the institutions for which one has put one's candidacy forward. What matters is quite the other way round: the greater the support you have, the greater your responsibility to participate in the governing bodies is. Otherwise, I call it a betrayal of the trust given to you by your constituency.

Q: Which measures do you intend to take to thwart the functioning of the so-called Croat self-rule in BiH?

A: Bosnia and Herzegovina can move forward only by strengthening of legal institutions and we intend to continue the activities that we have been taking to that end. We have warned the HDZ on a number of occasions that the International Community will not tolerate parallel institutions. That is why our reactions were swift and decisive.

Q: Is it, in your opinion, common that the army raids banks by force and with the use of weapons? Why was that done in the Hercegovacka bank and why were explosives used?

A: Let me clarify a number of things here: first of all, no one broke into the Bank on April 6. Secondly, in any operation in which police forces are involved, some armed units participate also. Third, I find it rather curious that some of the people who accuse employees of my Office of the use of force are the very same people who organised the gathering of the crowd in front of the Hercegovacka banka and its affiliate offices, who threw stones and beat up those people who were performing their task in accord with the law and who were even threatened. I would add that the threats with weapons were directed to unarmed persons – the employees of the Information Technology Department. Don't you find it odd that the injured persons were among the ones who have been accused of using force? I remind you that we even had to evacuate the employees of our Office in Mostar because they were surrounded by an organised crowd.

Q: Has any evidence been found in this specific operation? If so, what sort of evidence is it, who does

it incriminate, what will the OHR, the Office of the High Representative, do about it?

A: Everything could have been done without any difficulties and the Bank could have fulfilled its commitments in the shortest time possible. Unfortunately, after April 6, it became obvious that there are some extremists who are ready to create even more problems than they have created so far. Furthermore, none of the Bank's directors was willing to cooperate with the Provisional Administrator so she was forced to secure the Bank without their support.

Quite a lot of various documentation that needs to be analysed has been collected, but there are clear indications that the HDZ leadership is, to a large extent, involved in illegal activities. There are financial transactions the final destinations of which are unknown. Among other things, it is about the assistance amounting to 54 million German Marks given by the Government of the Republic of Croatia.

Q: The accusations about the organised involvement in criminal activities arrived from the OHR to the address of Ante Jelavic and the HDZ more than several times. However, as a rule, the evidence was always left out. Do you have any proof of that and will you release it?

A: I said that within HDZ there are criminal elements and, until now, no one proved the contrary. The events of April 6 showed that some persons are ready to even execute the attack, to hold hostages and threaten with guns. Does not that show that they are hiding something?

Q: Will you, as the High Representative, ask for the concrete criminal responsibility of Ante Jelavic?

A: I do not want to take part in speculations, but establishing anyone's criminal responsibility is actually the task of independent judiciary which we expect to undertake appropriate measures. Even if I do not share someone's political opinion, the person has the right to a defense as every free person, until the charges are proven.

Q: Media announce Jelavic's escape to Croatia. Will the International Community stop it and how?

A: That is also pure speculation.

Q: Are the claims that you are leaving BiH soon accurate? How founded is the writing that it is a part of the alleged agreement of Jelavic's withdrawal from the political scene?

A: You do not have to worry about my future in BiH. As for the future of Mr. Jelavic, I believe that his days on the political scene were numbered from the day when he, together with his associates, decided to impose the extremist direction on his party. We are speaking about a person who is history already. He breached the Constitution of the state of which he, as President was head. Yet, in any case, my future in BiH has nothing to do with Mr. Jelavic.

Q: Why is the International Community more inclined towards the Republika Srpska, which more and more acquires the characteristics of the state within a state, and is on the other side critical towards the Croat corps in BiH?

A: I need to remind you that the constitutional commissions that I established, in the Federation as well as in the Republika Srpska, will ensure the implementation of the entity Constitutions reforms so that the Croats, Bosniaks and Serbs, would for the first time become the constitutive peoples in both entities. The process of accepting this reform in the RS was long, and I will personally follow every step that will be undertaken in the implementation of this constitutional reform. There is no foundation for the belief that the problems in the Republika Srpska have become marginal. The return of refugees is still slow, there are indications that more obstruction is appearing, and we are fully aware of that.

Q: How do you see the future of BiH - as the continuation of the Dayton project or in some other form?

A: I see the Croats, Bosniaks, Serbs and the Others as the equal constitutive peoples in BiH, which together build the joint future in an even bigger Europe. I see Bosnia and Herzegovina as a state in which its citizens can be Croats, Serbs and Bosniaks but also the citizens of Bosnia Herzegovina. The way that this can be achieved is through the implementation of Dayton Peace Agreement. However, there are ways and means by which the representatives of the peoples in Bosnia and Herzegovina can shape their constitution and shape their country. They are free to do it through means that they have at their disposal, within the constitutional framework, and one of those solutions is consensus.