Interview: Wolfgang Petritsch, the High Representative in BiH”It is too late for Jelavic”

He had his chance many times. Many times I was criticised by the International Community, and also by some Croats, because I was late with the decisions which have been passed now. I am sorry, but the time of Jelavic, as a politician, is definitely over. I removed Jelavic because he violated the laws of the state, which he was supposed to be protecting, in line with his position. If it were up to him, we would have a total anarchy!

ARRESTS: It is a question for the domestic judiciary. The newly formed authorities, such as Mr. Matic and others, have to take care of that. Those authorities now have to ensure the establishment of the rule of law in BiH. They must ensure the functioning of the army, the police and other state services.

What was already a complex political situation in BiH has become even more complicated after the High Representative for BiH, Wolfgang Petritsch, removed Ante Jelavic, the Croat Member of the B&H Presidency and HDZ BiH President, from the highest state and political positions.

We talked in Sarajevo with Wolfgang Petritsch, the International Communities High Representative in BiH about the reasons and consequences of the removal, and the possibilities of getting out of the current crisis situation.

Following the meeting between Minister Solana and Picula in Brussels it was announced that some of the decisions made by HDZ BiH representatives may be in accord with your decisions. Could you comment on this?

Mr Jelavic, like all those I have removed are no longer partners of the International Community. However, all those who are prepared to work in the legal institutions are welcome.

Croats need better leaders

Does this mean that you will be co-operating with Mr. Covic and Mr. Ljubic in the future?

Only if that co-operation is based on the BiH Constitution. If they become active in the illegal institutions, they will not be partners of the International Community. There is a complete consensus in the IC not to contact those who violate the law and the Constitution. This is simply a European standard. Croats in BiH, as Europeans, should accept this idea.

If Ante Jelavic and the HDZ agree to be co-operative, will you revoke or alleviate the sanctions you imposed?

I can only say that Jelavic and the persons I have dismissed are out of the game now. They brought their own people to an impossible situation and disqualified themselves both as interlocutors and as the representatives of the Croat people. The Croat people need better leaders than those who violate the law.

Most of Croats in BiH, irrespective of their party affiliation, agree that their rights have been endangered by the change of the election rules and regulations. Is that, in your opinion, a reason enough to protest?

If the HDZ had tried to enter the House of Peoples, they would have had 16 or 17 representatives out of the total of 30, and that is the absolute majority. That would be on the basis of the new rules. In that way, they could control all the decisions related to the destiny of this country. They did not do it, and therefore, we cannot talk with them, those removed,

about changes of the election rules. I told Mr Jelavic that I was prepared to discuss those changes to his satisfaction also. However, that must happen within the inaugurated institutions, and not within the illegal and parallel institutions. The International Community cannot make an exception for Croats in BiH because the rule of law applies all over the world, in America and Africa, and in Europe particularly.

Croats feel endangered by the rule on the election of deputies to the House of Peoples and the way in which the decisions were voted in at the House of Peoples.

OK. If that is the case, my offer still stands. Let us talk about changes. Let us talk about the Election Law because it is the future of the Croat people and the HDZ. How can I talk to the HDZ about the Election Law if they are not within the institutional framework? Talking within the institutions is the only way.

We cannot allow Mr Jelavic to impose new rules and regulations that do not apply in the rest of the world. I have told him on a number of occasions that I am prepared to discuss those problems and thus solve all the things that are unclear and any existing problems.

I am deeply convinced that there is no BiH without Croats and therefore, the Croat people have the best friend and protector in me. I protect the Croat people in BiH, but I do not protect the politicians who act unlawfully. A people that are as numerous as Croats in BiH, should uphold the rule of law. By respecting the law, they force the others that may be bigger in number, than they to abide by the law, too.

This is leading the HDZ into – disaster

What can you, as the High Representative, do in order to free Croats of their fear for their future in BiH?

The fear within the Croat community in BiH was not caused by the rules of the Provisional Election Commission. That fear is an integral part of the HDZ propaganda. Just remember the HDZ pre-election slogan, which was talked about extermination. It was intimidating.

Instead of encouraging the Croats and approaching them with optimism, they were doing completely the opposite. I send this a few days ago to Mr. Covic, and he agreed that such a propaganda is causing the Croats to emigrate, and then the HDZ criticises the International Community and blames it for the emigration. Instead of closely cooperating with the International Community, to the benefit of the Croat people, the HDZ is intimidating them.

Many Croats in Austria or Germany are rich and they are getting even richer, while here they are growing poorer. Obviously the reason for this are not the people but the politics and the politics is responsible for the situation in which the people found themselves. After ten years of their rule, the HDZ should realise that they have not done anything for the people. Perhaps, they have done something for themselves but they have not done anything for the people. Now the number of Croats in BiH is smaller than ever and I guarantee that I will do my best to stop their leaving. The International Community and myself will support only those politicians who are working for the benefit of the Croat people.

Jelavic's message from Jajce was that they want a sincere dialogue with the International Community. Has the message reached you?

It is too late for him. He had his chance many times. For so many times I was criticised by the International Community, but also by some Croats, because I was late with the decisions which have now been passed. I am sorry, but the time of Jelavic, as a politician, is definitely over. I removed

Jelavic because he violated the laws of the state, which he was supposed to be protecting, in line with his position.

His behavior would not be accepted anywhere in the world. If it were up to him, we would have total anarchy. The President of the State should be the chief advocator and protector of the Constitution and the rule of law. He behaved in such a way that he eliminated himself from the Presidency. None of the democratic parties can have a leader who behavior contradicts to the rules of democracy.

Do you think that a dialogue with some other people from the HDZ could contribute to the resolution of the existing crisis?

Yes, absolutely, I am sure of that. I have met many people from the HDZ, from Posavina to Herzegovina, and they are all concerned about the current situation and the direction that Mr. Jelavic has taken. They know that this is leading the HDZ into a disasterŠ I hope that the moderate and constructive forces within the HDZ will realise this and helping to save the party and returning the Croat people to the law-abiding track.

Would you oppose it if someone from the HDZ came to the Presidency again?

I am the Representative of the International Community and I will respect every decision that is passed in a democratic way, providing it is in accordance with the Dayton Peace Agreement and the BiH Constitution.

If the dialogue with the HDZ fails, and the crisis escalates even further, what measures will you undertake?

As you could see, there are no sanctions imposed on the Croat people. I only pass the decisions that are within my mandate, and those decisions are valid. The measures that I will undertake in the future will be similar to those that I have undertaken by now, and they will refer to the individuals who

violate the Law in politics and economy.

Does it mean that someone will be arrested?

That is a question for the domestic judiciary. The newly formed authorities, such as Mr. Matic and others, have to take care of that. Those authorities now have to ensure the establishing of the rule of law in BiH. They must ensure the functioning of the army, the police and other state services. They have to know that in this country the laws rule within the State, the Federation and the RS.

The Leutar case

Is it true that you mentioned Jelavic in connection with the murder of the Deputy Minister Leutar?

In October last year, at a meeting with Mr. Jelavic I told him I had heard the rumours that some people from the HDZ are in a certain way involved in the murder and I asked him to help the judicial authorities in order to resolve it. I repeated the same to Lidija Topic too, several months later. I told her it is also important for the Party that no criminal elements should exist within it. I told her they should help the judicial institutions and fence themselves off from crime. Jozo Leutar was a Croat, after all.

Recently, Croatia has been advocating, to a large extent, for the problem in BiH to be resolved. How do you see the behaviour of the officials of the Republic of Croatia regarding that matter?

It is very positive. I believe that the Croatian Government has played out a very positive role. People in Croatia are aware that criminal and extremist elements, that were jeopardising democracy and economy there, are now transferring to BiH. So, this is a problem for both Croatia and BiH. It is no secret that the Croatian Government wants to cooperate with the Government in Sarajevo. I support the legitimate

cooperation of both sides when they struggle against criminals. That is one dimension. Another dimension is the attitude toward the Croats in BiH. I personally encourage Mr. Mesic and Premier Racan, as well as other officials, to support the Croat people in BiH since the Croat people are a very important factor for the reconciliation and economic progress in the entire region. The Croat people in BiH have a very important role to help BiH become integrated into the European institutions as soon as possible. Croatia also has its responsibility in that. I want very close contacts to be established in the cultural, economic, scientific and sports' sphere between the BiH Croats and Croatia.

Dayton as the basis

The Croatian Government holds that BiH is Œan open project of the International Community' and that one should work on further development of the existing solution. What do you think about that?

The Dayton Agreement is the basis for future developments in BiH. It is also the basis for the cooperation in the region and I support what Mr Mesic said that the Dayton Agreement should be implemented first, and then the further improving of relations could be taken into consideration. I would not now talk about cantonisation. It is something that should be left for the coming years, something which the Croats, Bosniaks and Serbs in BiH should agree on. Let us do what we can do now, on the basis of the Dayton Agreement, let us implement the decision of the Constitutional Court on the constituency of all three peoples in entire BiH, let us improve the living standard of the people. I think all this should be done now, and they benefit of the Croat people too.

To what extent will the present crisis affect the donor's funds for BiH?

Talks about a new donor's conference are underway. However, it

will be difficult to create a favourable climate with potential donors on allocating their funds to BiH due to the present state of affairs in the country. Also, the behaviour of Mr. Jelavic will stop foreign investment in BiH. No foreigner will invest his money in Herzegovina unless the laws and rights rule in it, and the ultimate responsibility for that rests with Jelavic.

People in Europe do not make a difference between the Croats in BiH and the Croatians in Croatia. When one says that a Croat was removed from a high position because of his lack of respect for the law, means nothing to them whether he is from BiH or Croatia. Now, when the tourist season is expected to start in Makarska, Split and Dubrovnik, people from Europe are concerned if they can travel to the region. I also share that concern, and that is why I am going to Brussels and Washington in order to explain that it is just a few Croats who do not respect the law and that most of the people are good people who want a normal life and normal economic development. Therefore, one should not punish the people but just those individuals who do not respect the law.