

Interview: Wolfgang Petritsch, the High Representative in BiH”I am against Drazen Budisaas proposal to change Dayton, because that would not lead us to success in this stage!”

In the week replete with political turmoil the High Representative of the International Community in BiH gave his first interview to our paper. Of course, the whole conversation was dedicated to the misunderstandings between Croat political representatives and the International Community

The High Representative, Wolfgang Petritsch, currently faces the greatest problems since he took this responsible office. The ever deeper conflict with the Croat political leadership in BiH results in frequent criticism of his work. This Austrian diplomat explains for the “Hrvatska Rijec” why he dismissed Ante Jelavic and speculates on how to resolve this political situation, which seriously threatens the future of the Dayton Peace Agreement.

Q: Are you afraid of a radicalization of the situation in the BiH Federation, that is in the parts of the Entity with a Croatian majority? Do you have prepared answers for situations like that?

A: My doors are always open and will be such. So are the doors of the political institutions to everybody who respects them. I, too, remain open to dialogue with those HDZ officials who wish to work within the Constitution. As to radicalisation, nobody has an interest in an escalation of the situation. However, I am concerned that private citizens are trying to take command of parts of the Federation army. Therefore, I expect that the police and the army will continue to operate under the umbrella of the legitimate institutions.

Q: Do you believe that the elected authorities will factually have any influence in the parts of the federation with a Croatian majority?

A: Every new government has to earn the support of the people it is responsible to. I am confident that the new government will address the concerns of the Croat people. But the And many of those concerns are those of all citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina: viable economy, job prospects and a future for their children.

Q: Do you admit that international organizations, particularly the OSCE, made a series of mistakes in the pre-election period, especially when it comes to changes in rules governing the election of representatives to the House of Peoples of the FBiH Parliament?

A: The HDZ used the changed electoral rules as a pretext for their campaigning of fear and being jeopardised. Had the HDZ taken up their seats in the House of Peoples, they would have had a majority of the Croat seats. In addition, the HDZ holds the absolute majority in three Cantonal Assemblies. There are democratic, legal means for the Croat people to prevent the passage of legislation and rules they feel to be against their interest; for example, now the election law will be drafted. This can also be done through the Constitutional Commissions; however, HDZ refused repeated offers to participate, disenfranchising one part of the electorate. Rather the leadership of the HDZ chose to take care of their own personal interests over those of their people.

Q: Is it too late for dialogue with HDZ, and do you believe that a “normalization” of the situation can be achieved?

A: As I said, the doors have been and will remain open for the HDZ members who respect the Constitution and laws. The HDZ representatives can still take up their seats in the Federation House of Peoples. They can decide to contribute to the work on constitutional reform undertaken by the Constitutional Commissions any time. The road to normalisation lead through the legal institutions of the Federation and the State of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Q: Would you accept an invitation to address the Croat National Assembly, and has this been offered to you so far?

A: I would be extremely hesitant to participate in political rallies openly questioning the constitutional order. This is not the kind of dialogue I want to engage in. However, I would be more than happy to engage in discussion with

any individuals who are prepared to act on the basis of the Constitution and reject illegal adventures which will only lead to the isolation of the Croat people in BiH.

Q: What is your comment on statement of BiH's Bishops Conference that took the side of the Croat National Assembly, criticizing the behavior of representatives of the international community, including yourself?

A: I think the religious leaders in Bosnia and Herzegovina have an important responsibility to work towards reconciliation and a lasting peace. There is a lot to be done in this field for all the religious leaders in this country, including the Catholic Church. In this sense I would like to quote Cardinal Puljic who just recently in an interview stated that "the most important of all is that we do our best at all levels to truly start loving this country, and make efforts to ensure that Croats have equal rights in all of its parts".

Q: You said that you would not punish the Croat people but HDZ officials. How far are you prepared to go with sanctions?

A: I don't want to go into the details of the possible actions that I am contemplating. But I would say that the intention is not to target the Croat people. However, certain individuals will be held responsible for their actions, including their involvement in illegal business activities. I removed Mr Jelavic and the three others because I did not want Croats caught in a ghetto, which would only result in economic isolation and poverty.

Q: How do you comment on the suggestion of Drazen Budisa with regard to a new Cantonal administration of BiH?

A: I see no way to succeed in Bosnia and Herzegovina at this stage by questioning Dayton. What we need is to implement fully the existing agreement. It seems senseless to me to, in the middle of building it, question the foundations of something that is new, still unknown, which offers many possibilities. There is no other way to cross the river to Europe. We have to talk about serious reforms in this country: the need to reform the economy, to attract foreign investment, to create jobs.. All this talk about the so-called national interests which, as recent history has shown, are mainly the personal interests of certain people – is distracting people from the most important issues i.e. the need to build a viable future on the basis of a market economy.