

Interview: Wolfgang Petritsch, the High Representative in BiH”“It is certainly not he who is threatened, because he has made provisions for himself for the rest of his life!”

***Wolfgang Petritsch**, High Representative of the International Community in BiH, in an exclusive interview for our magazine, spoke to our journalist about the situation created after the decisions of the Croat National Assembly, measures the IC was going to take against the Croat Democratic Union and its leader Ante Jelavic, dismissal of Edhem Bicakcic and support to the Democratic Alliance for Change.*

‘I do not know who Jelavic’s advisors are, but I do know that they advise him wrongly I am absolutely unafraid of the consequences of a possible decision to dismiss Ante Jelavic I said to Croatian Prime Minister Racan that fighting extremists in Bosnia and Herzegovina was in the interest of both his government and the stability of Croatia I do not want a TV duel with Bicakcic because he is irrelevant at this moment’

We spoke to the High Representative of the International Community in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Austrian diplomat **Wolfgang Petritsch**, on Tuesday, March 6, in the late afternoon hours. The interview with Ambassador Petritsch was 45 minutes late. During that time, he was having a long talk in his office with the American Ambassador in BiH, **Thomas Miller**, who went straight to the OHR building after returning from Zagreb, where he had met with the Croatian Minister of Foreign Affairs, **Tonino Picula**. All these meetings and talks — between Miller and Picula, Petritsch and Miller, the Slobodna Bosna journalist and the High Representative — had only one topic: response of the International Community to the decisions of the Mostar session of the Croat National Assembly on disassociation of Croats from the Federation of BiH and the ultimatum sent from that meeting to the representatives of the IC in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Talking to our magazine, Ambassador Petritsch tried to be as cautious as possible, although his words, said off the record, when the tape recorder was switched off, made it more than clear that the IC’s response to the challenge of the Croatian Democratic Union would be very swift, more decisive and concrete than ever before. At the end of the interview, Mr Petritsch agreed to resume our conversation on the following day, when, as he said, many things would be clearer and when he would be able to give more specific answers to the questions concerning specific measures against HDZ and its leaders. Allow this journalist to take the liberty of giving his own impression that he had after the talk to Petritsch: that Ante Jelavic, leader of HDZ and Member of BiH Presidency, could be an ex-politician before this issue of Slobodna Bosna comes into the hands of our readers!!!

Q: Mr Petritsch, I must ask you right away what any citizen of this country would ask: what sanctions will the IC take against the Croatian Democratic Union of BiH and its leadership after the holding of the Croat National Assembly and measures adopted there?

A: We are carefully analyzing the conclusions adopted in the Mostar meeting. At first sight, it appears that they were illegal moves directly aimed against the Constitution of Bosnia and Herzegovina and violate in many places the provisions of the Dayton Agreement. This is a very serious case and our response must be serious.

Q: Does this mean that you fully agree with the view that the Assembly passed decisions violating the Dayton Agreement?

A: It is definitely about establishing parallel and illegal institutions. What I am especially concerned about is the fact that a Member of the Presidency of BiH took part in this.

POLITICIANS ROB THEIR OWN PEOPLE

Q: According to reliable sources, the ideological leader of Ante Jelavic and his followers has for some time now been the retired Croatian general, who comes from Herzegovina and who is now an MP in the neighbouring state, Ljubo Cesic Rojs, as well as Jelavic’s advisor, retired general Stanko Sopta.

A: I have met several Jelavic’s advisors. Of course I do not know all his advisors, but what I can say, assessing Jelavic’s statements, is that he has very bad advisors.

Q: Is it possible that OHR might request official Zagreb to remove Rojs from the Parliament of the Republic of Croatia because of his destructive activities in Bosnia and Herzegovina?

A: We, under our mandate, cannot remove anyone from the Parliament of the Republic of Croatia. There is no doubt that the real problem is the fact that people born in Bosnia and Herzegovina can take an active part in the political life of neighbouring Croatia. This is a problem that the governments of the two countries would have to settle between themselves as soon as possible.

Q: You have announced a package of measures that might be taken because of the recent violations of the Dayton Agreement that took place in Mostar. Does the package include economic sanctions, to be precise, blockages of accounts of large companies in Herzegovina, which, to a large extent, represent a logistics base for HDZ?

A: You are probably aiming at one of my important priorities concerning economic reforms. This includes consistent privatisation and establishment of a fully transparent legal framework on which the economy of this country should function. The main reason why this country, even five years after Dayton, during which billions of marks in donations were invested, does not have a sustainable economy is that some leaders in Bosnia and Herzegovina took money from ordinary citizens for themselves and their political parties. This money was taken away from all three peoples, including Croats.

Q: The recent session of the Croat National Assembly concluded that the IC in Bosnia and Herzegovina violates the provisions of the Dayton Agreement. Therefore, they gave you a fifteen day deadline at the Mostar meeting to rectify your mistakes!?

A: This is, of course, nonsense. First of all, I am entrusted here with the implementation of the Dayton Agreement — not for its destruction. I do not think that such a reaction of theirs will find support in the civilized world and, really, in these circumstances, I have no intention of negotiating with people such as Ante Jelavic. What pleases me is that, in this country, the door for dialogue is open to all well intentioned people who are sincerely interested in finding a solution for essential issues of the Croat people.

Q: Are you going to remove Ante Jelavic from the Presidency of BiH?

A: You know that I never say in advance what I am going to do. I can promise you that you will know in time what measures I am going to take.

Q: Can you tell me at least whether, within the measures you are going to take, you are considering the dismissal of the HDZ President?

A: As you know, I have dismissed in the past period several prominent politicians in this country for violations of the Dayton Agreement. It is my obligation and I will do it in the future too, but I will not reveal what I am going to do in this case.

POPLASEN AND JELAVIC

Q: Are you afraid of the consequences of your possible decision to remove Jelavic?

A: Absolutely not! I am aware of my responsibility and do not wish to make hasty decisions. This is a very hard decision and it calls for a great deal of caution and responsibility. When I make these decisions I want to be utterly convinced that I am doing the right thing. I want the same from my associates.

Q: I recently heard a slightly cynical remark that the removed President of Republika Srpska, Nikola Poplasen, made fewer anti-Dayton moves than Ante Jelavic. Can you comment?

A: I do not want to compare anyone. There were many reasons why Poplasen was removed and the future will show what will happen to Ante Jelavic.

Q: If you remove Jelavic, there will be a vacancy in the Presidency of BiH. Since Alija Izetbegovic withdrew, this situation could lead to the organisation of by-elections in the Federation for the Bosniak and Croat Members of the Presidency of BiH. Did you think about this?

A: I will not speak about whether I will remove Jelavic. When President Izetbegovic withdrew, I made a law on succession of a Presidency Member. This law exists and, legally speaking, it is all clear.

Q: Ante Jelavic sent a message from the Mostar gathering that a new Bosnia and Herzegovina must be built as a federation of equal federal units.

A: I must tell you that there are institutions specified under the Dayton and Washington Agreements. These institutions consistently protect the rights of the Croat people, as the least numerous people in BiH. The majority of Croats I know are happy with this constitutional solution. At this moment, the Prime Minister of Bosnia and Herzegovina is a Croat, there is a Croat Member of the Presidency of BiH, a Croat is the President of the Federation of BiH, you have Croats on ministerial posts. The situation is the same in Cantons and Municipalities. So, Croats are represented everywhere. What change then do they want? Where is the inequality they talk about?! I keep putting this question to Ante Jelavic and I have never received a satisfactory answer from him. He cannot answer this question for the simple reason that there is no discrimination against Croats in this country, as he and his party keep saying.

Q: Now that you mention Croats in state institutions, can you comment on the accusations of the HDZ that the Alliance for Change is an “anti-Croat coalition”?

A: My views are completely different to the views of the national parties such as HDZ, SDS and SDA. I think that the Alliance is a democratic right of all parties gathered around that idea. Forming governments on the state level, and soon on the federation level, with the Alliance for Change represents a very important step, which gives hope for change and democracy in this country. Bosnia and Herzegovina needs such things. New governments have a historic chance to change the face of this country. If you want to attract foreign investors then you must do a great deal in order for Bosnia and Herzegovina to project a positive image in the world. You must convince people that they can invest their money here, and you will do this best if you prove that there are laws in this country which will protect their rights.

BICAKCIC AND COVIC

Q: The Mostar meeting is not the only provocation that HDZ and its president prepared for the domestic and international community. Let me remind you of the referendum held at the time of the general elections in November last year. The sanctions that followed then against HDZ, according to general assessments, were very weak and inappropriate.

A: OSCE reacted then and removed several HDZ officials. There are different opinions about whether it was enough or not. The Croat people in western Herzegovina are, unfortunately, manipulated by HDZ, and at times they do not have the right information. But, when you talk to Croats living in Sarajevo, you will get different answers. The situation is similar with Croats in central Bosnia and Posavina. I meet these people and I am sure that they are ready to do something to better their future. Such people are not concentrated exclusively on something that is called the national question. How much can the national question help you if you are a poor Bosniak, Serb or Croat?! In order to start living better, we need economic reforms and people are beginning to realise this. It is clear to them that their leaders, such as Jelavic, made provisions for themselves to the ends of their lives and that ordinary people are getting poorer and poorer.

Q: On the basis of the reactions to the Mostar meeting from the Republic of Croatia, one can conclude that President Stjepan Mesic and Prime Minister Ivica Racan did not support the conclusions of the Croat National Assembly. Contrary to the two of them, hardliners in Croatia fully supported the Mostar conclusions. It appears also that the Vice-Speaker of the Croatian Parliament Zdravko Tomac, did not pass on the positions of the ruling six in Croatia too convincingly and sincerely?

A: I cannot agree with your view that Tomac supported the conclusions of the Mostar meeting. I read his speech and saw that Tomac was very concerned about Jelavic's and the HDZ's policy. Unfortunately, they did not listen to him too well. As for the rest of the participants of the Assembly, it is clear that there was cooperation between extremists from Zagreb and those in Bosnia and Herzegovina. It is a kind of cross border cooperation between the forces of the past, which are, unfortunately, much stronger in Bosnia and Herzegovina than in Croatia. I said once to Prime Minister Racan that this was not only the problem of Bosnia and Herzegovina but that Croatia must also eliminate negative phenomena among the people of that country. On the other hand, many positive things happened in BiH. Now we have a BiH government with Croat representation. Such a government would have to

have the support of the Government of the Republic of Croatia. Five years after the war many people have realised that their constitutional rights are guaranteed and that they have a chance for a better future.

Q: You removed recently the former Prime Minister, Edhem Bicakcic, from the position of the director of Elektroprivreda BiH. He declared your action illegal but you did not comment on that publicly?

A: My action was fully legal. I have the authority to remove anyone who obstructs the Dayton Agreement, and in case of the removal of Mr Bicakcic there was strong evidence against him.

Q: Do you expect the Federation prosecutor Suljo Babic to press criminal charges against the former Prime Minister?

A: I can only believe in the rule of law and that the independent judiciary will do its job. This is a good test for the judicial authorities in BiH to prove that they work in the interest of the state and not in the interest of political parties. It is very important and this is what this country still needs.

Q: After the decision on his removal, did you expect Mr Bicakcic to be arrested?

A: I do not want to interfere with the work of courts. It is a decision that falls under their jurisdiction and they must make it themselves. I fully support the independent judiciary and I believe it will make the right decision.

Q: Do you agree with the view that the positions of Bicakcic and Covic, in terms of crime, are identical, considering that the Federation Prime Minister could not make any formal decisions without the approval of the Minister of Finance?

A: Their position is not identical, but I believe something is wrong if the Prime Minister makes an illegal transfer of money and his Deputy claims he does not know anything about it. Mr Covic must answer this question to his voters. He must prove whether he worked in line with law. Investigations are ongoing and I do not want to comment on them.

Q: During his recent appearance on BHT, Edhem Bicakcic invited you to a TV duel, to test, as he said, before the BiH public your claims. Would you accept such a TV duel with Bicakcic?

A: This is not a sports competition but serious politics! I think that Mr Bicakcic must think seriously about what he did and act accordingly.

WHY WE SUPPORT THE ALLIANCE

Q: According to information Slobodna Bosna has, the IC will organize a mini donor conference for BiH in May, as a token of support to the new government.

A: I believe that the new government will prove to its voters in BiH that it thinks in economic terms and it will certainly be a clear message to the IC t