

Interview: Wolfgang Petritsch, the High Representative in BiH"Zagreb, EU and USA: Extremists should be cut back"

On the eve of the Croat National Assembly in Mostar, the International Community threatened with severe sanctions should the Croat self-rule in BiH be proclaimed. Punishments for high officials of the HDZ and the introduction of severe economic sanctions were mentioned. We asked Wolfgang Petritsch, the High Representative in BiH, about the reasons behind his condemnation of the Croat National Assembly.

HR Wolfgang Petritsch: This is about the attempt of the HDZ BiH to represent all of the Croat people by itself. The International Community and BiH will never accept this. However, I also must stress that, besides my disappointment with the Assembly organizers, I am disappointed with the behavior of a part of the Church as well, in particular with the speech of the Mostar Bishop Ratko Peric.

Q: The International Community announced severe sanctions, which scared the Croat people.

A: Sanctions will not be aimed against the Croat people, they have been punished enough by having such a leadership. They will be aimed against individuals who are directly responsible for holding the Assembly. They are the ones who will be very severely penalized. Therefore, the people should not be afraid of new punishments. We are having discussions with Zagreb, the EU and the USA about the gravity and the manner of sanctions. Their shared opinion is that the extremists should be cut

back. The High Representative has extensive powers and, thus far, has not hesitated to use them in ensuring the implementation of the Dayton Agreement. This time around, we are talking about possible political, administrative, financial, economic and other sanctions.

Q: Sanctions against the Croat leadership undertaken so far have only additionally homogenized the Croat people. Are you ready for a compromise this time? For instance, for a deal with Jelavic – that he disbands the party and you accept the Assembly proposals, primarily those referring to the change of the Election Law?

A: I have often talked with Jelavic so far, but he has broken the agreements. Three weeks ago, we talked for two and a half hours about all the details. I had the feeling that he was ready for an agreement and flexibility and that he would give up holding the Assembly. Shortly there after, I received an open letter from him in which he did not even mention that talk of ours. At that time (during the meeting), I asked him that they remain in the institutions, and told him that the HDZ BiH's views would be taken into consideration in the process of making of the BiH Election Law. However, although I will not accept Jelavic dictating conditions, I am ready for constructive agreements.

Q: Do you think that Croats in BiH alone made a decision on holding the HNS (Croat National Assembly), and on the proclamation of Croat self-government on their own?

A: According to very reliable information and the scenario of what happened a few days ago at the Assembly was agreed by the Croatian HDZ and the HDZ BiH.