

Interview: Wolfgang Petritsch, the High Representative" All who have committed crimes shall be brought before the Court of Justice"

"I am fascinated with the challenge to be able to participate in building a country", said Wolfgang Petritsch when the Heads of Governments and states of the European Union entrusted him with the mandate of the High Representative to BiH in June last year. Before assuming the duty, Petritsch was Ambassador of Austria in Belgrade, Special Envoy of the European Union for Kosovo and member of the peace negotiations on Kosovo in Rambouillet.

The post of the High Representative to BiH prevailed over the offer of the Social-democrat party of Austria to nominate him for the elections for the European Parliament. Symbolically, Petritsch's arrival to BiH is connected with holding the summit of the Pact on Stability in South East Europe in Sarajevo in July 1999 when he sent the message that he was coming to Bosnia and Herzegovina "to build something that already has solid basis".

We begin the conversation with the High Representative by remembrance on the fifth anniversary of signing the Dayton Peace Agreement. The members of that historic event, the Chairman of the BiH Presidency Alija Izetbegovic and President of the BiH Federation Kresimir Zubak at that time called the certification of Dayton in Paris as "victory for peace".

NN: Does the title of your book "Does BiH have a chance for peace 5 years after Dayton?" also mean a certain dose of scepticism when it comes to the future of this country?

PETRITSCH: Regarding the title of my book, I have to say that I am a restrained optimist. That concretely means that I deeply believe in future of the state of BiH, but still a lot has to be done, especially for the citizens of BiH to be more active and constructive in building their country.

NN: Your book, promoted last week in Vienna, starts with the "Yugoslav conflict" and then states a series of facts essentially connected with the BiH drama. Although at the beginning of the book it says: "This book is meant for the citizens of BiH", it seems that its full sense is contained in lobbying for BiH abroad?

PETRITSCH: I would not agree with you when you say that this book is not meant for the citizens of BiH. It is meant for the citizens of BiH, but it is at the same time meant for the international public that should continue its steady support to BiH, politically and financially. Because BiH is not any more the only interest in the program of the international community, especially European Union. I believe that the next thing BiH should do is a phase of its Europeisation. BiH is geographically a part of Europe, and it is also becoming its economic and political part. We have to go on giving even bigger support, but also bearing responsibility so that BiH should become a member of the European Union.

NN: How can BiH be successfully integrated in Europe or, as you say, "be connected locally and globally"?

PETRITSCH: Each European country that is in the European Union has a strong tradition and has a different language. The difference among their languages is, however, much bigger than the difference among three constituent nations in BiH. This is very important, because this difference is something that makes Europe so varied and attractive, because in that way we can set out in the direction of economy. It is necessary for BiH to get united with the modern trends of globalisation, and not for the rest to be included at the expense of others. A working synthesis is necessary.

NN: The coalition agreements after the elections are still in progress. What outcome do you foresee in the Federation of BiH, and what in RS, i.e. will you support the efficiency of the authorities by giving "red cards" to those who make any kind of obstruction?

PETRITSCH: Regarding the negotiations for the new Government, it is very important to have an efficient

Government both at the Entity level and State level. We are certain that the parties will make decisions soon and create a Government which would work fully based on the Dayton Agreement, and also other most important documents, like the one from Brussels which was proposed last Tuesday as a basis for a modern Government.

NN: Can you say if BiH has any reason to celebrate five years after Dayton and Paris or to worry, because there are still many nationalists on the scene, economic perspective is dark, ten thousands refugees have not returned to their homes, and social unrest is happening daily?

PETRITSCH: We have to go on fighting corruption, and that cannot be done only in one year, we need constant, vigorous efforts, because if we do not get rid of everyday corruption, there will not exist conditions for BiH to be successful or for its people to be happy. The same applies to human rights. It is necessary to establish the rule of law, including the governance of the institutions according to the Dayton Agreement. The Hague is still one of the main issues. We have to continue working on it, and with the changes in Belgrade a new era of the rule of law is open in the whole region. All who have committed crimes shall be brought before the court of justice. This is of extreme importance for three constituent peoples. We have to get rid of collective guilt. There is individual guilt, and collective responsibility to prosecute those who have committed crimes in BiH. I have to say that we want to see more progress, but at the same time we have to be realistic and insist on full implementation of the Dayton Peace Agreement. To be more direct in answering your question:

Yes, it is true that there exist a lot of radical forces and undemocratic forces in BiH. I can also see that there are more and more people who incline towards more moderate political parties that support compromise solutions and the things that work for the progress of the people of this country, and that is economic progress in order to get rid of corruption, in order to establish economic situation that will help old people get their pensions, and in order to improve the education of the young people. Those are the issues that we now have to work on. We can see that there were changes in Yugoslavia. In 2001 all the citizens of BiH have to put maximum of their efforts in order to improve the economic and political situation in BiH.

Democratic environment

NN: From the perspective of Dayton, there were only few who could imagine that three main actors of the Balkan drama, as you name it in your book, would leave the scene in the course of one year. First Tudjman physically, then Milosevic politically and Izetbegovic by leaving the Presidency of BiH. What is the democratic perspective of this area?

PETRITSCH: I believe that BiH is today in a new historic position, because the circumstances in its neighbourhood are different, it is surrounded by democratic countries. Democratic changes in Croatia and now changes in Yugoslavia are positive signals for building the country and fast implementation of the peace process in BiH. At the same time, BiH is now in a competitive position in regard to its environment. It is not alone any more and on a long-term basis it has to be more active in participating in the processes in the region and in building the economic structure, factories, concluding business arrangements with Europe. I believe it is necessary, BiH has to be more active and cannot wait for the assistance from abroad.

BiH must go to Europe

NN: You also analyse political reality of BiH. You insist on efficient state administration, so it looks like you are criticising the Dayton Agreement which gave a large degree of powers to the Entities at the expense of the state of BiH?

PETRITSCH: It is true that the Dayton Agreement gave the majority of powers in this country to the Entities, but if BiH wants to be more actively included in the European integrations, it is necessary to build state structures, Presidency of BiH, especially Council of Ministers. When it comes to efficient administration, I believe that the problem now is that the majority of powers is with the two Entities. In order to get a small but efficient administration, the precondition is for BiH to enter European integration processes. And in order to join the European Union, it is necessary for BiH to do it as a state, and not as Entity. It is in the interest of both Entities, all three constituent peoples to strengthen the state level in order to provide self-sustainable, modern BiH.