

Interview: Wolfgang Petritsch, the High Representative"Jelavic has been elected, let him start working for his voters now"

Interview with Wolfgang Petritsch, the HR in B&H, about the election results and the formation of the authorities

Q: 'Election results did not bring the SDP the strength that the IC hoped for. What will be your next steps?'

A: 'We hoped that there will be bigger changes to the benefit of the moderate political parties. Probably, we made the mistake because of the local elections in April when we had the impression that the national parties were losing, indeed. Besides the economic situation, the factor that slows down the changes is the fact that there is no an attractive alternative, let say for the HDZ in BiH. There are many dissatisfied people in Herzegovina, Central Bosnia, Posavina and Sarajevo who want changes, but they have to organize among themselves and come with the attractive civic alternative to the HDZ ethnic movement.

As far as the RS is concerned, despite the interruptions, radicals and nationalists have dropped considerably, and the SDS promised that they will change. I will not believe it until I see them in practice, but still the spectrum of the moderate political parties in the RS has spread.'

Q: 'All the analysts agree that the IC provoked the HDZ reaction and that the results of the elections would have been different that the OSCE had not changed the rules for the election of the representatives which provoked the referendum. Who is, after all, responsible for such election results?'

I knew HDZ was planning some action

A: Many weeks before the elections I knew that the HDZ leadership was planning a sort of a strong action to restore the support of the voters who abstained from the local elections in April. The OSCE rules, when they were passed, actually contained nothing new. Mr. Ante Jelavic was the one who requested a change of the rules. He did not like the change eventually, but the rules were included in the Draft Election Law. The idea was that one who defends the Croats' interests does not necessarily have to be an HDZ politician, that it can be a politician from another party, a Croat from the SDP, or even, speaking in ideal terms, someone who is not from the Croat community but would equitably defend the rights of all the citizens. We are trying to develop a civic society, a civic state. It is the concept that prevails in the rest of Europe and which is completely opposite to the collectivist approach nourished by the HDZ and other nationalist parties. Therefore, this is about the things that are deeper than the decision on the change of the rules.

Q: Can those rules be changed now after the elections? How will you solve the relations with Jelavic, i.e. bridge the blockage created following the elections?

A: First of all, I would like it if the HDZ leadership would calm down a little now, see the results and realise that they will keep most of the positions, even in accordance with the new rules. Therefore, all this together is not such a bad deal for them as a party. Then I will be ready for a dialogue, but a dialogue that will have a meaning. I cannot respond positively to the boycott and requests for a boycott. They have been elected and now they have to meet the voters' requests, finally start working for them.

Q: Is there still a deadline for the formation of the State and Federation authorities? You mentioned you were ready for a dialogue with Jelavic. Does it mean that you prefer dialogues to bans?

We will not allow obstructions from anyone

A: It is up to the newly elected politicians to form the parliaments from the cantonal to Federal and State levels, as well as to form governments. I want to see action faster than was the case after the previous elections when they took them almost a half a year. We will simply not accept it and now we are discussing with the OSCE the rules and regulations that should speed up the process. We will not allow any obstructions from anyone, including the HDZ. I offer a dialogue, but they have to do what needs to be done. This, of course, refers to other parties, we are trying

to create a ground without double standards.

Q: By the statements that have arrived from the OSCE and your Office, it seems that you do not want to take responsibility for a possible failure in the formation of coalitions which will be necessary at the entity and state levels. Can parties reach an agreement by themselves? Would you, for instance, accept formation of a coalition which would include the SDP, the HDZ, the SDS and the SDA?

A: We are not here to govern the process of the establishing of the governments, but to help the establishing of a sustainable institutional structure. We are trying to have the governments, which will have a support in the relevant parliamentary assemblies. Each party now has to be ready for making compromises.

Q: Richard Holbrooke asked you, before the elections, to abolish the SDS, and you opposed it. Now you are advocating for the coalition of the SDS and Ivanic's Party to be established as a way out for the RS?

A: I talked with Mladen Ivanic in Dayton. I told him that I see all the difficulties in the establishing of a moderate government in the RS, but that he should definitely try. He has to come out with a creative solution for the existing problem that the SDS is unacceptable to a large part of the international community, but it has support of more than 30% citizens in the RS.

Q: What kind of assistance do you expect from the Croatian Government?

A: This Government and President are clearly oriented toward the European values and so, they demonstrate to the neighbours, including also the Croats in B&H, that there is a right way.

I am not here to lead your country

Q : ' How will the bodies of the Executive Authority be formed?'

A : 'The situation is getting more complicated because the Catholic and Orthodox holidays are approaching as well as Bayram. The season of the holidays has been prolonged, but I hope that it will happen at the beginning of the next year.'

Q: ' Does the IC have the strategy how to achieve it?'

A: ' Local officials have to start to take over the responsibility. They keep waiting for us. Their first question is always what Petritsch will do. And my question is what you are going to do, I am here to help you and not to lead your country.

Q : 'And thus nothing important happens?'

A : 'It happens.'