

Interview: Wolfgang Petritsch, the High Representative "Nationalists Incite Fear Again"

If it does not wish to be an absurd, backward little state, BiH must go forward, like Croatia and FRY. The trend must be moving away from nationalism and going towards moderate politics and prosperity.

I think that BiH citizens, that is, the whole electorate, are fed up with unproductive, irresponsible and non-transparent leadership. Far too often, such leaders were working for their own interests although they should be accountable to the same electorate whose needs they keep ignoring, said in a "Blitz" interview Wolfgang Petritsch, the High Representative of the International Community for BiH, on the eve of the forthcoming general election in BiH.

Do you think the BiH citizens will vote for those politicians who will act responsibly and do what you say is required?

The issue isn't what I say is required, but what the people of both entities know is required, that is to be part of Europe again, that is a working economy that will provide jobs, pensions and health care, that is an education system that parents will trust the education of their children to and Governmental and Administrative bodies that will implement the rule of law.

In this pre-election period I see that the nationalist parties are once more trying to awaken in people the fears that created the current situation in BiH. The people of both entities deserve more than this. The Dayton Peace Agreement respects and preserves the cultural history of Serbs, Bosniaks and Croats and BiH must move on from this if it is not to become an absurd, backward little state.

I don't know whether we will see such fundamental changes like in Croatia in January and recently in Yugoslavia, but the trend goes clearly away from nationalism toward moderation and economic prosperity.

At the PIC Brussels meeting, you were very unsatisfied with the irresponsible behaviour of the politicians toward their citizens. What does this irresponsible behavior include?

There is a long list of laws that have been delayed and obstructed and where often I have been forced to act – and others still, notably the election law which is fundamental legislation in any democracy, have yet to be passed. Instead of adopting such important laws and fulfilling the duty they have – to be the zakonodavac –, the elected officials quarrel, bicker and pursue narrow-minded ethnic policies, or their own interests.

The list of unpassed, obstructed and unimplemented laws is long and effects every part of BiH society. Implementation of property laws five years after Dayton is too slow, vital state level legislation for BiH and it's citizens to be able to function within Europe are delayed. All too often Entity Parliaments fail to bring fiscally sound amendments to laws regarding employment, pensions and restitution.

It becomes clear how little concern many of the governing parties have for the welfare of their Citizens when you realise that I have imposed more of the legal framework required for entry to the Council of Europe than they have managed to bring for themselves.

It is all too easy to pay lip service to such issues, and then do nothing. The BiH electorate should consider well which parties are likely to work for the citizens, improving the economic situation, making sure that people have jobs, securing good schooling and education, when they vote on November 11th. Such forward-looking, genuinely progressive parties should come to be given a chance.

Recently, you were in the Hague and del Ponte was here. She said nobody had been arrested over the last three months. What can you tell us about these visits and about the relation between ICTY and BiH?

The arrest of war criminals is an ongoing process. There was, as you probably know, an attempt made to detain Janko Janjic an ICTY indictee early last Friday morning in Foca-Srbijne however, Janjic activated an explosive device killing himself and injuring members of his family and SFOR.

I am convinced of the ICTY's independence as a Court and that if BiH is to put behind it the awful incidents of the war then war criminals must be brought to justice. This is the precondition for reconciliation and essential to BiH's future. Individual responsibility is the basis of a nondiscriminatory judicial process, and where allegations of heinous crimes such as rape and torture exist, then these people must be brought before a court.

This process is going far too slowly, and co-operation has not always been good. There are still some 20 publicly indicted war criminals at large in the RS, there are a few more in Yugoslavia. They should be detained and extradited to the Hague by the local authorities, as they have pledged to do when they signed the Dayton Peace Agreement. In many incidents, they don't – and that's why I am grateful to SFOR that they do the job when they can.

Furthermore, there is a concern that at the moment the Judicial system in BiH is not free of discrimination, professional or transparent enough to deal with cases as serious as war crimes. That is why an independent international tribunal is required.

You addressed the NAC and said military presence is still needed in BiH, that the SFOR numbers shouldn't further decrease and that SFOR should stay. How do you assess the security situation in BiH and what's its perspective?

The general security situation in BiH is much improved, there is freedom of movement and the local police are beginning to fulfil the requirements under the law.

However, the NATO-led peacekeeping force, SFOR, remains essential in supporting the civilian peace agenda, by amongst other things, protecting returnees and detaining indicted war criminals on the instruction of ICTY. That's why I believe that we continue to need the SFOR troops in BiH, and 20.000 is in my opinion the appropriate number.

SFOR assists in many other ways, for example in October 1999 SFOR launched "Operation Westar", a raid on Croatian intelligence services working in Mostar. Among its finds, which included surveillance of foreign and local staff working for international organisations, was pornography, used to raise cash to promote anti-Dayton activity. Fortunately, the changes in Croatia in January of this year have led to a much improved relationship, and the Croatian Government is now supporting the implementation of the Dayton Peace Agreement. I hope that recent events in the FRY will lead to a similarly positive approach.