

Interview: Wolfgang Petritsch, High Representative in BiH "Ethnic States Are A Thing Of The Past"

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The last visit of the High Representative to BiH Wolfgang Petritsch to Banja Luka was mainly devoted to discussing economic programmes and how to attract foreign investors to Bosnia and Herzegovina.

"I have to say frankly that I'm very concerned about certain personnel solutions of the new government. When the Prime Minister was elected, at the first meeting after the election, he promised me that his government, his new government, would be a government of experts. That is something that I still expect from him, that his government really acts like a government of experts. I think that now, after the first 100 days of this government, is the time to a critical assessment of its work", said the High Representative during his visit to Reporter. The High Representative met all the Reporter employees and expressed the hope that they would continue to perform their work as they have done so far, though with fewer of the pressures which have been a characteristic of journalism in the RS.

Reporter: You still argue for negotiations with the HDZ, and

also you were not against the idea of talking to the SDS as they are in political life. What do you expect from these parties? Who, from these parties, do you count on in terms of making changes in the parties?

WP: There is one important thing, a minimum standard in respecting Dayton and the rule of law has to exist. As for the HDZ, especially Mr. Jelavic, he, as a member of the BiH Presidency, was in a position to defend the Constitution but he himself violated it. He personally together with his party colleagues established a parallel, illegal institution. The International Community cannot accept this because it would represent an end to Dayton and to the establishment of a democratic BiH.

Reporter: How many mistakes has the International Community made in relations with the HDZ? Their position was clear even during the pre-election period but there was no reaction at that time. Later on they became even more radical and again there was no reaction from the IC until total radicalization happened. Would this crisis have been avoided if the IC had reacted sooner?

WP: I do not believe that this would have happened. I think it is very important that the IC showed readiness for compromise and dialogue, to give them one more chance to return to the institutions. When it became clear that Mr. Jelavic and his men were actively involved in work outside the institutions, the only thing that I could do was sign the document on his dismissal. In a way he excluded himself from democratic institutions. Naturally, if there are some problems in the state system, changes should be discussed within institutions and not outside institutions. If we followed the logic of Mr. Jelavic, we would have had a return to chaos and a situation very similar to a war situation. Five years after Dayton, after democratization in the whole region, meaning in the region of former Yugoslavia, it is time for strict respect for the Dayton Peace Agreement and for democratically established

institutions. The action I have taken against Mr. Jelavic is, in a way, a warning to other undemocratic and nationalist forces not to follow his example.

Reporter: It seemed that Mr. Jelavic wanted to force you to this action, since legally he could not hold on to power any longer. In this way he is trying to hold on to power in an extra-institutional manner. It seems that you may have simply fitted in with the HDZ scenario.

WP: I think the main reason is that Mr. Jelavic realized that the HDZ had lost in the FBiH and at the state level to the reformist forces which formed the Coalition for Changes. The HDZ was in power almost continuously in the nineties up until 2000. This new situation where the HDZ found itself in opposition was, for a politician like Jelavic, not good enough. His politics had led Croats into complete isolation – isolation within BiH, FBiH and also in relations with Zagreb. Racan's government in Zagreb completely withdrew political and financial support from Croats in BiH and that happened because of the wrong and corrupt politics of Mr. Jelavic and his men. So this act of his represented a politics of despair. He wanted to establish parallel authorities which could never function. The International Community did not allow the establishment of Republika Srpska Krajina and would not allow Mr. Jelavic to establish Herceg-Bosna within BiH. That is a sign of the new determination of the International Community – not to allow any undemocratic changes in this region. Such changes brought former Yugoslavia to catastrophe, to tragedy and they will not happen in western Herzegovina.

Reporter: How would you assess the situation in BiH given that the Government of FBiH does not control 1/3 of the territory, that the Croat member of the Presidency cannot take a walk in west Mostar, that even the BiH CoM has no influence in that area?

WP: It illustrates an impossible situation which existed in

that area for five years. I would call this period an authoritarian regime of the HDZ, which did not allow, in this area, any other political option to be expressed in a democratic way. The last elections simply ended this practice. Now that it has ended, the Government of FBiH has difficulties in overcoming the parallelism which existed in the Federation. The new government has really started to work efficiently in transforming the Croat component within the FBiH Army from a totally HDZ component to a truly Croat component. The same is happening in the police force and with state officials. Naturally, this process cannot be finished overnight. It will take some time, but I'm convinced that the new government of FBiH and Croat ministers, lead by Mr. Filipovic, will be successful in the end.

Reporter: Stories about the independence of Kosovo and Montenegro are still being spread. These stories are certainly going to be exploited by nationalists in BiH. If the independence of Kosovo and the separation of Montenegro were to happen, who would be able to explain to Croats in BiH that they could not extract themselves if they wish to?

WP: I think that Zagreb has made it clear that it accepts the sovereignty of BiH with, of course, the Croat people included. Same developments are ongoing in Belgrade. The last elections in Montenegro showed that there was no solution along ethnic or nationalistic lines. The same lesson should be learned and accepted by Albanians from Kosovo. This means that the lesson for BiH is absolutely clear: two entities and three constituent peoples should focus on their economic and social future and forget the idea of ethnically organized states – that is a model which belongs to the past. The model for the future is the EU model – integration and not separatism.

Reporter: The current situation in Kosovo does not give such an impression. What if the lesson to be learned is a different one? We are not talking about the influence of Zagreb and Belgrade but about influence from inside.

WP: Firstly, there is pressure coming from outside, from Tirana, and politically, Tirana's approach is in line with the approach of the International Community – Tirana does not see the solution in Kosovo in terms of one great Albania. We should have in mind and seriously consider these people who are seeking better solutions for the economic, political and social situation, but these solutions cannot be reached by violence. All of us have to learn one important lesson – to jointly prevent war and violence as a means of resolving problems.

Reporter: BiH still doesn't have its Election Law. In most cases of laws drafted by the International Community, they would be imposed by the OHR in the end. That is not the case with this law.

WP: Election Law is fundamental in every democracy and therefore we expect local authorities to adopt it and not me to impose it. If local authorities fail to pass this law, they cannot be nominated to join the family of European democratic nations.

Reporter: Isn't this a failure of the International Community as well?

WP: It would be a failure of the political leadership in this country in the first place. A failure to find a democratic compromise which would address the needs of all three constituent peoples.

Reporter: There are not many healthy investments in BiH. Many representatives of the International Community are calling upon investors and companies to invest in BiH, and by doing so are trying to help. Would you, personally, invest in some business in BiH?

WP: Let me give you an honest answer: I think that the International Community has more and more confidence regarding the situation in BiH and therefore I would support all those –

including myself although I'm not into business – who wish to invest in BiH. The situation in BiH is currently such that one could certainly say that an investment in BiH is an investment in the future.

Srebrenica

Reporter: How do you comment on the Srebrenica District initiative?

WP: My position is that a solution should be found through the establishment of a permanent framework. This also means that the RS authorities have an additional responsibility to deal, in a serious manner, with issues raised by Srebrenica citizens. I believe Srebrenica has a special meaning for Serbs and therefore they should undertake special political care to meet the needs of people who live in Srebrenica and who belong to Srebrenica.

Karadzic

Reporter: Do you believe that Karadzic is not an SDS member?

WP: I want to hear it officially from the SDS and not in an anonymous way. Then I'll believe it.

Reporter: Have you heard it at some of your meetings?

WP: I think that the SDS knows very well what the International Community expects from them and they should take some action in that regard. After the arrest of Mr. Milosevic the focus of the IC was transferred to the arrest of Mr. Radovan Karadzic. In the end political responsibility lies with SDS members.