

High Representative's Press Conference on the Dismissal of HDZ Officials

Alexandra Stiglmaier, OHR Senior Spokesperson: Good evening. Thank you for coming to this press conference in such large numbers, although we called it in at very short notice. I believe you all know what it is about – there has been a lot of speculation in the media. (...) I am now handing over to the High Representative, Wolfgang Petritsch.

Wolfgang Petritsch, High Representative: I thank you for coming to this press conference that we have not announced much in advance. Of course, some of the speculation has reached your ears. It is press conference today in order to announce that I have decided to remove Mr. Ante Jelavic and three other HDZ officials – Mr. Ivo Andric-Luzanski, Mr. Marko Tokic and Mr. Zdravko Batinic – from their public offices, and barred them from holding any party positions. It has to do with their illegal attempt to undermine the Constitutional order of the Federation and the State of BiH. As you might recall, on Saturday in Mostar, they declared an illegal parallel structure in this country. This is of course unacceptable and in absolute defiance of the Dayton Peace Accords.

This was not an easy Decision for me. I have carefully weighed and discussed it with all Steering Board members, the heads of the other international organisations in BiH and all others concerned. But there was no way around it.

Mr. Jelavic and his associates have worked to undermine the Dayton Peace Agreement for a long time now in order to protect their privileged status. They tried to spread fear among Croats in BiH, claiming the position of Croats was not equal. This is of course an argument that has been used in the past by nationalist leaders – I don't need to remind you that the war in former Yugoslavia started based on this argument.

I can assure the citizens of BiH, and the Croats in particular, that over the past few months, I myself and senior staff of OHR have met and talked extensively for many, many hours to Mr. Jelavic and his officials. Mr. Jelavic said the HDZ does not like the PEC Rules. I told him they were a thing of the past. The November elections were the only and last time when they applied. Despite them, despite these PEC Rules, the HDZ would have 16 to 17 out of 30 seats in the Federation House of Peoples if they took them up. And, above all, all future elections will be governed by a new election law. I have asked Mr. Jelavic and his people time and again to co-operate in the drafting of the new election law and to ensure that the HDZ concerns are taken into account. He was not interested.

Another example – As you know, last year the Constitutional Court of BiH ruled on the constituent status of the three peoples of BiH in both Entities. This is a historic ruling. Now the newly established Constitutional Commissions in both Entity Parliaments will draft proposals for its implementation. I asked Mr. Jelavic and other HDZ officials time and again to nominate members to the Constitutional Commissions. I went the extra mile and even extended the deadline, put in extra phone calls and used other channels in order to convince Mr. Jelavic to join the Constitutional Commissions.

Mr. Jelavic consistently blocked and refused again – although, as you know, this will give the Croats constituent status even in the RS and change the set-up of the Federation!

The last meeting I had with Mr. Jelavic was a few weeks ago. It lasted two-and-a-half hours. We discussed every single item, and Mr. Jelavic promised to start implementing the election result and respect the Constitutions of the Federation and the state of BiH. We even agreed on a text that Mr. Jelavic wanted to publish as a statement. But he came out with a completely different statement, breaking all promises that he had given to me personally.

He had also promised to respect the Constitutional Court's ruling from February 2 on his complaints with regard to the PEC rules and EASC Decisions and then start implementing the election results. He did not. Instead, he declared some kind of Croat self-government in BiH on Saturday in Mostar.

All of this has led me to believe that Mr. Jelavic is not concerned about the well-being and position of the Croats, the people he allegedly represents, but the well-being and position of extreme nationalists and perhaps even criminal elements in his party.

Now law and order are slowly taking root in BiH, which has made it increasingly difficult to operate for people like him. Jelavic and the like do not want normality, the rule of law, economic prosperity for everybody. And they apparently hope that a kind of third Entity would allow them to continue to pursue their very personal interests and to further enrich themselves.

This is of course not what the citizens of this country want, this is of course not what the Croat people in BiH want, and this is not what I want. I want the Croats of BiH to participate in and profit from the improvement of conditions here – economic, social and cultural conditions. I will not allow only a few HDZ officials and associates to get richer and richer to build one private home after another, while ordinary people are left behind.

I want the Croats of BiH to feel good and prosper here, in their homeland. The state of Bosnia and Herzegovina needs them. I want them to be led by politicians who are genuinely interested in their well-being; politicians, who really represent them, who genuinely work on improving their situation; politicians who respect the law, the legal institutions and procedures and international agreements.

Mr. Jelavic and the other removed former HDZ officials have proven not to be such politicians. They embarked on a reckless attempt to realise the old Herceg-Bosna scheme for the benefit of a few within their party. And this, I cannot tolerate.

Let me make one thing perfectly clear: There will be no economic or other sanctions against the Croat people in BiH. I removed Mr. Jelavic and the three others because I want the Croats to do well economically – a third Entity would be a ghetto in which they would be impoverished, poor and isolated. A third entity would of course also leave out Posavina and Central Bosnia Croats and the many Croats living here in the Sarajevo region.

Now you recall, I recently removed Mr. Bicakcic. He, too, abused his public office, harming the ordinary citizens of this country. BiH and its citizens deserve better politicians than Mr. Bicakcic or Mr. Jelavic – politicians and officials that will make BiH a better place for all its citizens.

Now, let me come to an end with my rather long statement. I continue to stand ready to listen to all genuine concerns that the Croats of BiH have. I am always ready for dialogue. Their constituent status and rights are guaranteed by the Dayton Peace Agreement, and this will not change. I personally guarantee this.

But it needs to be clear to the Croat people in BiH that this I can do only with Croat officials who are sincerely interested in making Bosnia and Herzegovina a normal, law-abiding European country. Thank you.

Questions and Answers

AP Television : Why have you waited for so long with this Decision, and secondly, what reaction do you expect from the Croat people in BiH, particularly in Western Herzegovina; are you expecting any actions of violence or anything like that?

High Representative : I can tell you I've been waiting so long because I wanted to make it indubitably clear to the Croat people that Mr. Jelavic has eliminated himself, has put himself outside the Constitutional order of BiH. I do not expect any reactions to this, which would not be within the Constitutional frame and based on law and order in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Radio Fern : I want to ask you if you are aware of some reactions from HDZ, first, and second, who will replace Mr. Jelavic on the post of the member of the BiH Presidency?

High Representative : I hope after such a long time for some constructive reactions from the HDZ, which the more moderate people in HDZ might realise. That is their way into the future. The future of HDZ lies in moderation and compromise and the work in the established institutions. This is the way to address concerns of the Croat people – inside and not outside the legally established institutions. Since last summer, the Law on Succession has been in place, and this will also apply to the succession to Mr. Jelavic.

Jutarnje Novine : You have mentioned that Mr. Jelavic and his associates have actually undermined the Constitutions of the Federation and the state of BiH. Under the Federation laws, such an act is considered a crime. So, are you expecting the prosecutors to take action against this act?

High Representative : The independent judiciary, the prosecutors will have to take a good look at my Decision,

and I'll leave it up to the independent judiciary here to do its job.

Thank you. Hvala.