

Farewell Interview: Wolfgang Petritsch, the High Representative in BiH for Dnevni Avaz: "Local politicians should be congratulated on the changes"

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The indicted war criminals at large, the third GSM operator and non-implemented economic reforms are the three biggest failures which the outgoing High Representative for BiH, Wolfgang Petritsch, outlined in an exclusive farewell interview for "Dnevni Avaz".

WP: I am leaving BiH with bitterness due to the fact that persons wanted by the Hague Tribunal have not been arrested and transferred to Scheveningen – Petritsch said.

He also highlighted great examples of success with regard to the return of refugees, constituting the Alliance authority, and particularly the Agreement on the implementation of the Constituent Peoples' Decision issued by the Constitutional Court of BiH.

A serious challenge

Dnevni Avaz: How would you assess your three-year mandate?

WP: Three years ago this country was facing serious challenges. In essence, political and economic aid extended by

the international community was then dramatically reduced, so that it was necessary to focus on reform in the fields of refugee return, economy and the building of state institutions.

At that time, for instance, there were many voices which suggested that we should give up return because it was not yielding results. A major breakthrough in that field has changed these sentiments.

In sum, I would assess these three years as a great success which should be credited not to myself but primarily to my partners from the International Community as well as the Alliance. I think that the changes, which cannot be clearly seen yet, have changed the political future of this country forever.

Election expectations

Dnevni Avaz: What were your greatest frustrations?

WP: Concretely, the failure with the third operator. Now, a year later, it is clear that in one move BiH lost an investment worth up to KM 400 million. The Alliance did not understand that a success with the third operator would have had a multiple positive effect.

You would have brought in one of the biggest telecommunication operators which would have introduced competition and abolished the monopoly in this field held by Sarajevo and Banjaluka, and which would have reduced prices and improved services. The whole country would have looked friendlier to foreign investors.

Dnevni Avaz: What experience have you gained from contacts with BiH politicians? Can they be trusted?

WP: There are several of them who do not meet the challenges and the profile of modern politicians, and there are some whom

I respect very much. The picture is mixed. I do not want to make personal remarks, so I do not want to mention anyone in particular. It is the principles which are important, and not the names. In general, it is clear that politicians from the nationalist parties are not able to do the job that will be beneficial for the country.

We are still in a phase when we consider as success the fact that the nationalist parties have less than 50% of the votes.

Dnevni Avaz: When you speak about elections, what do you expect from the October polls?

WP: After the Agreement on the implementation of the BiH Constitutional Court's Decision, I am even more optimistic that the modernist forces will win.

I base that on the fact that the nationalist parties can no longer be focused on their exclusive parts of the country, and a precondition for equality in the whole territory of BiH has been created.

Dnevni Avaz: Don't you think that you give too much importance to the Agreement?

WP: People have not yet seen the advantages of the Agreement because it is only after the elections that new political bodies will be established and functions will be distributed. You will see Bosniacs and Croats being appointed, for instance, in the judiciary and all levels of public administration in the RS. That will change the political scene in the RS forever.

We have not focused our efforts only on the constitutional amendments which are important and for which I had been commended by Jim O' Brien, who drafted Dayton. He said that something like this could not have been conceived at Dayton and that, based on his experience, he was convinced that such changes could never have taken place in BiH. I said that

changes had taken place and credit for that should be given to the local politicians.

That is my decision

Dnevni Avaz: Some people from the Independent Judicial Commission said that the list of judges and prosecutors who would be removed had already been made?

WP: Whether that will happen or not, that is my decision and I will make it at a

moment when I judge it to be necessary. I want to underline that it will be a decision that is completely based on law and in accordance with Dayton. All in good time.

Entities are not states within the state

WP: From the beginning it was clear to me that the RS was the greatest obstacle for BiH on its road towards “statehood” in the full sense of the word. I have therefore intensively worked on the RS issue. While Milosevic was in power, the status quo in BiH was advocated.

After Kostunica took over, we faced a “good nationalist” who was supported by the international community. However, the negative influence on the RS was very important. You will recall my remark in the “Financial Times” when I criticised Kostunica. At that time, it was the only voice of criticism coming from the international community.

I have also talked to RS politicians, to whom I said that they would have to either change their attitude towards BiH or I would change them. The Agreement on constitutional amendments is confirmation that my strategy was successful. And the Agreement is only the beginning of change.

The manner of implementing the radical reforms as required by the Agreement will be decisive not only for the future of the RS but for BiH as a whole.

Both Entities will have to accept the fact that they are not states but parts of one state – BiH – which cannot exist without its Entities, but the Entities cannot exist without BiH either. For me, the Entities are administrative units of one state, as in the case of the US or Germany.

Bad situation in the judiciary

Dnevni Avaz: To what extent are you satisfied with the situation in the judiciary?

WP: One of the reasons things in BiH are going so slowly lies in a non-functional judiciary. We have taken over the reform of that segment for the UN, and in several days we will announce comprehensive measures that will once and for all replace the old and obsolete system with a modern and successful one.

We have envisaged a two-year deadline to establish a depoliticised, professional and impartial judiciary.

The most difficult moment in life

WP: The situation when I faced the hostage crisis and decisions I had to take in that respect were probably the most difficult moments not only during my mission in BiH but also in my life.

Those were events related to the Hercegovacka Banka and the situation in Grude.

We had to carry out that operation in order to prevent the failure of Dayton. At one moment, we were facing 7,000 soldiers who left the army, as well as the threatening boycott of tax payment, actions supported by the extremist part of the HDZ. Had it continued, after several weeks we would have faced the collapse of the Federation and the failure of Dayton.

It is clear now that Jelavic and the removed HDZ leadership including former generals were behind that. Their aim was to

keep their positions, war games and illegalities, at the expense of ordinary Croats and other people in BiH.

Jelavic and his group are facing charges now before the court for everything they have done.