

Interview: Wolfgang Petritsch, the High Representative for BiH: “HVO has never received its 1,16 billion Kunas from Croatia”

In 1999 alone, the Croatian Government has secured 1,16 billion Kunas for the needs of the HVO and war victims and it was presented that out of this amount, 183 million Kunas went through the company Monitor M, then 692 million Kunas which were allocated to the HVO and another 285 million Kunas which were allocated for the needs of social welfare. The persons who were supposed to receive the greatest part of this money never received it.

Not even a year after Wolfgang Petritsch, the High Representative, introduced the Provisional Administration in Hercegovacka Bank, has the investigation in this case been completed. The Austrian diplomat, who has concluded recently that the Hercegovacka Bank case was the greatest BiH crises since the war, is still convinced that the results of the investigation will reveal ‘a core of crime’ and he is also convinced that the agreement on constitutional changes, signed at the OHR, will come to life completely.

Vecernji List: How do you see now, a year later, the case of Hercegovacka Bank and the results of the investigation into its financial operations?

WP: The case of Hercegovacka Bank is much more serious than I expected at the beginning of the investigation. This is the reason why the Provisional Administrator and the Anti-Fraud Department are acting in such a way that they do not reveal

details of the investigation or the names of persons who obviously committed criminal and illegal acts. Finally, an independent Judiciary in BiH has to pass its judgment on this issue and, as I have said from the very beginning, I do not want to reveal a single name if that person does not have the possibility of defending himself before a regular court. This is more important than the bank, this is about the Rule of Law. However, it is completely clear that my suspicions are well-grounded and that the competent institutions are revealing an increasing amount of evidence about a widespread deceit. It is obvious that a political dimension was also present because Croat extremists started with the establishment of Croat self-rule at that time. A lot of money is necessary to establish a mini-state within a real state.

I would introduce the Provisional Administration again

Vecernji List: Has your decision on the establishment of the Provisional Administration been more motivated by these political reasons or by irregularities detected in the work of the bank?

WP: It was completely clear that we were primarily motivated by illegal activities of the bank. Basically, the money disappeared without trace and obviously the bank's regulations were not respected. To what extent Hercegovacka Bank was acting in a wrong way shows an example of the money, which came from the Croatian Government. In 1999 alone, the Croatian Government secured 1,16 billion Kunas for the needs of the HVO and war victims and it was presented that out of this amount 183 million Kunas went through the company Monitor M, and then 692 million Kunas which were allocated to the HVO and another 285 million Kunas which were allocated for the needs of social welfare. The persons who were supposed to receive this money never received the greatest part of it, and these are only

figures for 1999, although the figures for the other years do not differ much from these figures. Consequently, it is about a scandalous misuse of public funds.

Vecernji List: Does it mean that you would do the same now, that you would introduce the Provisional Administration in Hercegovacka Bank?

WP: Yes, it does. The Provisional Administrator and experts who are working on this case believe that this is the right decision. However, there are nevertheless hundreds of thousands of documents, millions of computer documents, which should be analyzed and because of which the investigation has lasted a long time. A lot of things have been done during the last year, however, it is completely clear that we want to offer the whole picture, which will present that deceit. I am ready to wait for it and not to celebrate a triumph in advance. We shall offer the whole picture to the Croats, which will reveal who are the criminals who are hiding behind Hercegovacka Bank. In this way I want to help the Croat people in BiH and to contribute to the creation of a healthy economic environment in the whole of BiH.

I am not reducing Croats to a national minority

Vecernji List: Within some Croat circles, and especially within the HDZ structures, there is a strong belief that exactly you, by your actions in BiH, have contributed to a situation where the Croats have been reduced from the position of a constituent people in BiH to the level of a national minority?

WP: This is absolute nonsense. Why did the three negotiators from the HDZ stay until the end of the negotiations on constitutional changes, which were led at OHR? Why did Kresimir Zubak, who refused to sign the Dayton Peace Agreement, sign this Agreement on the constitutional changes?

He signed it because this Agreement is very good for the Croats. The HDZ in its fundamentalist opposition to everything that might contribute to the progress of this country, did not have the courage to sign this Agreement, although the HDZ negotiators are aware that by their proposals they have contributed to the fact that this Agreement on constitutional changes is very favorable for the Croats. Zubak was also a very vehement negotiator and I see him as the greatest patriot during these negotiations. During these negotiations he has really done a lot for the Croats. He was a difficult negotiator for me, however, at the same time I believe that the Croats should thank him because he won such constitutional solutions. The Croats should also bear in mind that the Croatian Government has welcomed this Agreement although they themselves were skeptical during the negotiations. The real winners in these negotiations are the BiH Croats, and the HDZ is actually the greatest loser.

Vecernji List: How do you then explain the results of the public opinion polls, which even marked that Kresimir Zubak and NHI are losing popularity?

WP: I am trying to be completely objective and for this reason I can say that this is about the Agreement, which is very good for the Croats and thus I believe that the whole IC and all Croats know what I am talking about. When you see what the Croats have got, for instance in the RS, I do not know how anyone can claim that it is a poor result. I want to appeal on the Croats to read the Agreement carefully and to form their own opinion and not to let egoists from the line of the HDZ, who think only of themselves, influence them. In this way they want to camouflage their defeat.

HDZ future with moderate politicians only

Vecernji List: You are rather convinced that the Agreement

from OHR will come to life, although the RS Assembly adopted the Amendments, which are contrary to the Agreement in many aspects?

WP: We are carefully considering conclusions passed at the RS Assembly. However, I assure you that this Agreement has to be one-hundred percent implemented. I will only accept such implementation in both Entities. An absolute symmetry must exist with regard to the implementation of the Agreement in both Entities.

Vecernji List: Were you surprised when the RS Assembly did not listen to your warnings?

WP: I am not surprised that nationalists have the biggest problems with the Agreement, which represents progress for BiH. However, eventually, all three constituent peoples and citizens will realize that it is the best possible Agreement that could be reached.

Vecernji List: Do you think that the HDZ success at the elections might influence negatively the development of events that you are predicting?

WP: I still have impressions of these negotiations, which lasted over 100 hours and in which three HDZ representatives participated. Jelavic and those like him prevented these representatives from putting their signature. I am convinced that such people can play a constructive role on the political scene in BiH. However, it is obvious that extremists within the line of their own party impede such people. If moderate politicians secure greater influence and trust within the party, I believe that the HDZ might become a part of the political scene in BiH again. However, as long as the HDZ has such leadership I am not an optimist.

Vecernji List: Mr. Petritsch, you are going to leave the position of the HR soon. How would you describe, in a few sentences, the development of events in BiH during the time

you were here?

WP: I believe that I have helped the building of BiH. When I came to BiH, there were two Entities with a lot of parallelism and there were no joint efforts. There was no constitutional protection for some peoples in the Entities. BiH has managed to become a member of the Council of Europe. And finally, the things, that I have been fighting for since I came to BiH, are finally taking place. BiH with three constituent peoples is a European country and as such it starts to join in European integration.

Vecernji List: Are you sorry because of some decisions that you passed or some decisions that you did not but should have passed?

WP: Well, I believe that from the very beginning I should have been stricter with regard to some illegal activities. It is something that I have been too patient with, when the passing of decisions is in question. However, when I take a look back now, I see how necessary it was to take the steps directed against radical elements, the extremists within all lines.

Vecernji List: Finally, what do you think BiH will look like in 5 years?

WP: I believe that in five years there will be no phenomena such as Hercegovacka Bank and that persons such as Ante Jelavic and Nikola Poplasen as well as nationalistic parties will belong to the past, that Bosniaks, Serbs and Croats will be Europeans and that there will be more places of work for all them.