

Interview: Wolfgang Petritsch, the High Representative in BiH" After Milosevic was arrested, Herzegovina is the only refuge of criminal elements left in the region"

The evidence clearly indicate to the existence of a direct link between the crowd that gathered in Mostar and the HDZ leaders who were in the vicinity at that time. It is the Federal Prosecutor's Office that has the competence in arresting those responsible. I expect the Cantonal Police to help, too.

The totalitarian dependence of Croats on the HDZ must stop. The HDZ made the Croats in Herzegovina hostages. There is no democratic alternative there.

JL: Why was SFOR engaged for the occasion of introducing the Provisional Administration in the Hercegovacka Bank last Friday?

WP: SFOR is a constituent part of the Dayton Agreement implementation and is engaged in all actions of the International Community. It was obvious that SFOR was in the background and did not provoke violence, but quite the opposite occurred. The international community was too optimistic and expected that the people would abide by the law and allow for the audit of the bank to go peacefully. Twenty two persons were injured, and some of them are still

undergoing medical treatment. If you look at the video recordings, you can see the course of the events. The violence was caused by local criminal elements.

JL: Do you think the engagement of SFOR was justifiable in such an inflammatory atmosphere in Herzegovina?

WP: You are mixing the cause and the effect. SFOR is visibly and constantly present in the whole territory of BiH in order to secure peace and stability. In the cases of Mostar and Grude, SFOR intervened only after the violence broke out. You can see the video recordings, which evidently show that it was a preplanned pattern of provoking violence in an exceptionally short period of time. There are quite clear indications that it was a case of organised violence, by elements that are inclined to violent behaviour. Their arrival was organised, they were recorded talking on their mobile phones, and after that a crowd gathered and burst into the Bank building. They destroyed the computers and documentation and physically assaulted the auditors. It is quite clear that one group of people instigated the arrival of others to the scene. It was no coincidence that Mijo Zlatan Jelic and his associates were seen at the same spot.

JL: Where was that?

WP: Jelic and some of the persons from the HDZ leadership were, at that time, in the coffee bar opposite from the Hercegovacka Bank. They will really have to explain whether it was a pure coincidence or an organised gathering of the crowd.

Link between the HDZ and the crowd

JL: Do you think Jelavic is personally responsible for the riots on Friday?

WP: It is exactly due to the gravity of the evidence, and for possible legal reasons, that I think we should wait for the outcome of the investigation. However, the evidence clearly

indicates the existence of a direct link between the crowd that gathered and the HDZ leaders who were in the vicinity at that time. The same pattern existed in other places where incidents occurred.

JL: Who is conducting the investigation and who will be in charge of arresting those responsible?

WP: It is the Federal Prosecutor's Office. I expect the Cantonal Police to help. They say their work is professional, so let them prove it.

JL: Arrests of HDZ leaders have been announced. Can you really imagine the Mostar police arresting Jelavic for instance?

WP: The very question clearly shows the non-existence of the rule of law in Mostar and Herzegovina. The full responsibility for that rests with the HDZ, which is in power there and has been in power for ten years now. Now is the time to change that situation and to provide the ordinary citizens, Croats and others who live in Mostar and Herzegovina, with the right to be protected from criminals and bullies. I will personally not accept anything less than the professional behaviour of the police. They are not the HDZ's police. After the arrest of Milosevic in Belgrade, Western Herzegovina is the only refuge of criminal elements left in the region. The international community will not tolerate that. To make myself perfectly clear – the international community did not allow the secession of either Knin or a "Serb republic" in Croatia, and will not allow Jelavic's self-rule in Herzegovina either.

JL: Milosevic was arrested after he lost the elections and the support from the citizens. For that matter, the HDZ won the regular elections. Do you really think now is the right time?

WP: We cannot choose the right time. We can no longer wait for the establishment of the state of law in the entire territory of BiH. Winning the elections does not mean being entitled to break the law. Five months after the elections, the HDZ has

not formed the new governments in the areas where the party won. What sort of democracy is that?

Showdown with crime

JL: You have announced an action of establishing the state of law in Herzegovina without any delay. Do you think an action that would include arrests could be successful while the HDZ really has the support of 95% of Croats in Herzegovina?

WP: I doubt it is about 95% of the people, but indeed they have the support of a large number of Croats. At the same time, there are hundreds of indications of the HDZ exerting pressure on Croats in order to discipline them. The totalitarian dependence of Croats on the HDZ must stop. The HDZ made the Croats in Herzegovina their hostages. There is no democratic alternative there. History tells us that there has always been a resistance to the authorities in that region. Zagreb managed to cast out the Herzegovinian mafia from its country in a democratic manner. Unfortunately, we are still faced with them.

JL: Do you believe that such an action could pass without casualties?

WP: The essential goal is to do it in a peaceful way because human lives are exceptionally valuable, whenever such a decisive, robust action is in question. I am in a constant dialogue with other Croats, the moderate forces such as Prime Minister Bozidar Matic, Presidency Member Jozo Krizanovic, and others. There is no democratic BiH without the Croat people, but Croats themselves must realise there is no future for them if they rely on criminal elements. They must distance themselves from those elements for their own sake, and for the sake of their children.

JL: When can we expect a new action?

WP: Which action do you have in mind?

JL: The showdown with crime that you were talking about?

WP: It is already in progress. We are already half way through the action.

JL: When could arrests be expected?

WP: I am not talking about individual cases, that is the responsibility of this country's bodies. I want to say clearly – we are not here to punish, we are here to help the establishment of a state based on law and the rule of law. I can assure you that anyone who is charged with illegal actions will be heard before a fair court. The people must understand that the rule of law is in their interest. The international community is going slowly but will not stop before democracy and freedom are established. Democracy must reach Siroki Brijeg, Posusje, Grude and Mostar, too. Herzegovina is an integral part of Europe.