

Interview: Wolfgang Petritsch, the High Representative in BiH: “Bosnia and Herzegovina on the brink of a major breakthrough”

*Critical mass reached in economy and politics. * Impressive cooperation between Lagumdzija and Ivanic. * The importance of Sarajevo visits by delegations of Croatian Parliament and the Yugoslav Assembly.*

The High Representative of the International Community in Sarajevo, Wolfgang Petritsch, is convinced that the sixth anniversary of signing of the Dayton Peace Agreement – which on November 21, 1995 promoted a new Balkan state comprising two entities and three equal national communities – finds Bosnia and Herzegovina on a turning-point which opens new horizons on the road of economic reconstruction, democratization and gradual integration in the European mainstream.

“Bosnia and Herzegovina has grown in the past six years. The Alliance government in Sarajevo is an indicator of exceptional progress achieved in this period. All in all, we can be satisfied with what has been achieved,” said Petritsch for SENSE, commenting on the results of the Dayton Agreement over the past six years. “At the same time, that is a challenge and motivation for all of us to do more. At this moment, BiH is on the brink of a key breakthrough in a number of fields, primarily in politics and the economy. We can say that it has reached critical mass in this regard.”

SENSE: How much has been achieved, if you compare the present situation with August 1999, when you assumed the post of High Representative in BiH?

WP: There is more cooperation between the Entities now than two years ago. Naturally, it is still not enough, but I am pleased with the manner in which Zlatko Lagumdžija and Mladen Ivanic communicate and resolve problems in a pragmatic way – in fact, in a normal way...An identical situation is within the Alliance and in contacts with Neven Tomic. It is very encouraging to see these positive forces, which are now appearing even within nationalist parties. Indeed, there are many changes. People are beginning to understand that the old politics can no longer work – and they are moving more towards the center. The bottom line is that this precisely represents the European model: political parties left and right from the center. In this respect, BiH is increasingly becoming more European.

SENSE: After these six years, BiH needs all sorts of help. What does she need the most – when we are talking about aid coming from abroad?

WP: I think that the most important thing for BiH at this moment is the strengthening of the political, intellectual and cultural elite's orientation towards a multinational and democratic state, which will, as such, play an important role in the region. And we are already there. One could see some encouraging examples in the past few weeks: the recent visit of delegations of the Croatian Parliament and of the Yugoslav Assembly, which followed only days later. Both delegations arrived in the capital, they came to Sarajevo, thereby recognizing the state of Bosnia and Herzegovina...They did not go to Banja Luka or Mostar, but they came to Sarajevo and, that way, they did a lot for Serbs and Croats in BiH. As far as I am concerned, this is a clear sign of the desperately needed normalization of relations between Sarajevo and Belgrade and Sarajevo and Zagreb.

Speaking about the greatest problem BiH is facing at the moment, Wolfgang Petritsch said the following: "There are two main problems. On one side, there is a need to better organize the state institutions such as the judiciary, police, public services, administration, etc. On the other, BiH needs broader and faster economic reform. Most of all, that means, faster privatization and restructuring which would attract foreign investment. In addition, more private initiatives, such as small and medium companies, are needed here. Those are two key elements for the further development of BiH – a state which provides all necessary services and security to the population and the economy which is constantly striving to achieve more.