Interview: Wolfgang Petritsch, the High Representative in BiH”I am shocked by the intensity of the hatred in Bishop Ratko Peric?s speech at the Assembly in Mostar and his support for convicted war criminals”

Wolfgang Petritsch, the High Representative of the international community for B&H, comments the decisions of the Croat People’s Assembly in Mostar: I am shocked with the intensity of hatred in the speech of Bishop Ratko Peric at the Assembly in Mostar and his support to the sentenced war criminals

Q: The representatives of the international community strongly reacted to the decision on interim Croat self-government in B&H. Sanctions are announced, however, one can get impression that pressure is easing off on both sides in the last days?.

A: The HDZ passed an illegal, unconstitutional decision, which violates the Dayton Agreement and is not acceptable. Besides, the HDZ is not a party that has right to represent the entire Croat people in B&H and that is why the decision on interim independence is completely unacceptable to the international community in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Q: However, it seems that there is a readiness for compromise, a couple of days after. Ante Jelavic, the leader of the B&H HDZ, seems to be trying himself to find a way out and proposing some new solutions. So, it can be heard that Jelavic is ready even for the dissolving of the HDZ B&H, the party supported by the Croat people at the elections, with whom, however, they can not go forward in any sense.

A: No one is asking for the HDZ to be dissolved but only to be working in accordance with the laws, constitutions and positions to which they have been elected. I have had a myriad of meetings with Jelavic in the last couple of months. The last time we met was three weeks ago. Then, we talked about all details for two hours and a half. He presented the problems and I responded to any item. At the end he promised to talk about everything with the HDZ leadership and fully support what we agreed. At that time I was completely sure that we agreed. However, several days later I received an open letter from Jelavic in which he even did not mention what we had talked about and agreed upon. In that way he showed that he would not keep his word.

Pasalic's plan

Q: Jelavic, or the HDZ, with the support of most of the Croats in B&H, insists that the election results should be respected and that the authority should be formed on the base of those results. What was your proposal to him?

A: I asked Jelavic to tell publicly that he would, in line with the Constitution and Dayton Agreement, stay in the state institutions and work in them. In return, I promised we would be open to the proposals on the change of the election rules about which the HDZ has been complaining a lot. In spite of those rules, the HDZ would have received 16,17 of 30 seats in the House of Peoples of the Federation if they had participated in its formation. I invited the HDZ to join the constitutional commission in the Federation and RS. As it is

known, the B&H Constitutional Court proclaimed that the Croats are a constituent people not only in the Federation but in the RS too. We wish the Croats to start returning to the RS. However, Ante Jelavic simply does not want for the Croats to start believing in B&H as a state.

Q: Why has Jelavic changed your agreement?

A: One should not have any illusions about it. It is only about personal interests of few people who are now representing the HDZ. In the case of the HDZ, that interest was always stronger than the interest for the Croat people and issues referring to the living standard of the Croat people.

Q: Whose personal interests?

A: Shortly, the people who are now leading the movement, supported by some more persons from the military structures of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia, are behind the decision on interim self-government. Also, it is important to say that the action was possibly led, to a large extent, from Zagreb, from the Croatian HDZ. We have reliable information that there is a very close cooperation between Jelavic's HDZ and Croatian HDZ in the entire operation. The visit of Ivic Pasalic to B&H several weeks ago was a clear signal that something was being prepared.

Sanctions for the leaders of the HDZ

Q: Do you think that there is a connection between the events in Bosnia and Herzegovina and previous massive demonstrations of the veterans in Split, even in Zagreb?

A: I think that the authorities of both of the states, of Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, have to be very concerned because of the trans-border cooperation between the extremists. It is very dangerous for the new democratic institutions in Croatia, but also for Bosnia and Herzegovina, the emerging state.

Q: You are announcing sanctions, however, one can get impression that the sanctions will, basically, be personal, in other words directed to the reduction of political and economic power of some people. Ante Jelavic, General Stanko Sopta Baja, and even Ljubo Cesic Rojs, a former general and present representative in the Parliament, are mentioned as the targets.

A: Clearly, I do not want to speak about the details for the time being, however, I assure you that the sanctions will not be directed toward the Croat people, but strictly toward the individuals and they will be very much affected. It is not my intention to punish the people, but only the leadership of the HDZ.

Q: Could you be more specific about a type of the sanctions or measures. For instance, will the business interests of Ante Jelavic and his group be affected?

A: All the time we have been in touch with the Government in Zagreb, the European Community in Brussels and the main representatives of the United States. I want to say that there is a full consent that the Congress on Saturday, with the decisions it passed, reached a point which shows that we can not tolerate political extremists any more. I was additionally disappointed with the stances of the Catholic Church in all of that.

Peric's hatred

Q: Who do you have in mind?

A: I am appalled and shocked with the speech of the Bishop Ratko Peric and I can not begin to describe his vehement hatred and support to the sentenced war criminals, which he expressed in the speech.

Q: You are announcing sanctions, but they can hardly change anything except for homogenizing of the Croat population, what

happened once again.

A: Apart from the measures, it is necessary to establish a dialogue with the Croats who are truly willing to establish cooperation and support the efforts for Bosnia and Herzegovina to get affirmed as a state and for the Croats to understand that B&H is their state too. My interest is in the fact that B&H can not exist without the Croats and it is necessary for a full attention to be paid to the Croat component and their relations with Croatia. It is easier for B&H to get closer to Europe through Croatia.

Q: What do you think if the latest developments de-stabilised Croatia?

A: I would not like to interfere in the policy of the Croatian authorities, however, they have to be very much interested in the developments in Bosnia and Herzegovina. There are two reasons for that. The first reason is that the dissatisfaction is spreading to Croatia, as we saw in the case of Split, and the second, more important reason is that I expect the Croatian authorities to fully support the historical and cultural identity of the Croat people in Bosnia and Herzegovina. It has to go through a form of partnership.

Q: What do you think about the role of Zdravko Tomac, who represented the Croatian ruling coalition at the Congress in Mostar?

A: Mr. Tomac did not come with a hidden agenda. He is truly interested that the crises should be overcome, but, unfortunately, nobody heard his voice of reason.

Q: Do you intend to negotiate with someone from the HDZ leadership in the days coming?

A: I think it does not have any sense any more, because Jelavic throws himself out when it comes to any kind of negotiations. I do not believe we have something to talk about

any more. Extremists are losing the battle, but they are trying by all means to keep the status quo, to protect their business interests. It is very unfortunate that the Croats in Herzegovina are getting poorer every day, while their leaders, in only a couple of years, made incredible fortune. Such a system is a tragic mistake. In this state law has to be installed instead of the tribal, Mafia-ridden oligarchies, which, they have shown it from long ago, do not have any respect except for their concerns according to how something affects their pockets.

Q: With whom of the Croatian authorities do you cooperate?

A: Mostly with Premier Racan. We met recently, on Tuesday, a group from my Office talked about this crisis in the Croatian Government. On the other hand are the non-HDZ representatives of the Croat people in Bosnia and Herzegovina, with whom we closely cooperate.