

Interview: Wolfgang Petritsch, the High Representative in BiH "Nationalism impoverished the country"

In interview to SRNA News Agency the High Representative Wolfgang Petritsch explains his views on ways that BiH should take in the future, stressing that the best recipe for resolution of the national issue and economic prosperity is admission of BiH into the EU and Europe.

"A unique way forward for BiH is civic society where, at the same time, you can be a good Serb, a good Croat, a good Bosniak and a good citizen of BiH", says Petritsch and adds:

"Integration does not mean new borders, but rather lifting of the old ones and reduction of their importance. Finally, when this entire region becomes part of the European Union, then all Serbs will live in one country called Europe. If I were Serb I would be very pro-European orientated".

After the government at entity and the state level were constituted, the High Representative expects BiH to join the CoE in this year. He also expects new generation of BiH politicians, Zlatko Lagumdžija and Mladen Ivanic to provide their assistance in this process.

Q: The BiH Parliament did not discuss election of the CoM Chair at Monday's session. When do you expect the new BiH Government to be elected?

A: I have to say that I share your inpatience when it comes to

political system here in BiH. Of course that the process is extremely slow and certainly we have to accelerate it. What we need to see at the Federal and at the state level is a very quick and decisive move and that is establishment of the Government in accordance with will the BiH people expressed at the November elections. At this moment the RS is in better situation since Mr. Ivanic reacted more quickly and formed the new RS Government.

Q: To what extent the BiH Presidency is responsible for slow formation of the CoM?

A: I think that at the beginning the BiH Presidency made mistake by failing to commence the consultations process. It is not possible to ignore election results, to propose the same candidates and simply act like the elections never took place. When constituting process was over it was already too late because the candidate was very well known to the media. Now, of course, it is up to the parliament to work as it should and to include item on mandatory in the agenda. I expect the Parliament and the Presidency to decide on formation of the new Government as soon as possible.

Q: Recently Mr. Raguz said in an interview that he has support of all RS parties in the BiH Parliament. Do you think that Mr. Raguz will get support of majority in the Parliament?

A: I would not comment on Mr. Raguz's statements. We shall see very soon in the Parliament whether he has support of the majority or not.

Q: The IC's very firm stand on participation of SDS in the RS Government was reiterated after the SDS had been included in the Government. Why?

A: My opinion has always been that we need a government elected in accordance with the will of people, and above all that we need a government that will do a good job for the RS people and will be supported by the IC.

From the very beginning I made known to public that work of Ivanic's Government will be judged by results it achieves. Ivanic promised that he is going to form the Government of experts and what I expect now are experts' results.

Q: Is it true that you approved the new RS Government, including SDS minister in it, because Ivanic promised he would support the Alliance for Changes at BiH level?

A: These are two different things. The first thing is that Mr. Ivanic promised that he would form a government in which party membership will not be important, and the second thing is that he wants changes at the state level. My feeling is that he likes the Alliance rather than the old BiH Government. It certainly makes sense because it is also an interest of the RS.

Q: Do you think that there is difference between Serb, Croatian and Bosniak nationalism, considering the fact that the IC applied different standards on three national parties?

A: In my opinion, nationalism is extremely dubious concept. During the past ten years the concept of nationalism showed that it is cannot bring peaceful and prosperous life to citizens of those countries where it existed. Nationalism neither was successful in Croatia, nor in Serbia and BiH, and I think that this tells us a story about bad nature of nationalism.

Of course that national identity of every people exists, but nationalism certainly cannot be a ruling political principle, because if it is then it will leave those who believe in it in the lurch.

Q: To what extent the moves the IC made were counter-productive and led to national homogenization of voters and victory of national parties at the elections?

A: I think that there is a difference between political

pressure that has been applied by the IC when it comes to issues related to democracy development, and pressures the IC applies when it comes to establishment of the government that has to be capable of doing its job.

The IC will not allow those politicians, who are against the DPA, to be included in the government. Therefore many ministers have to pass the test. When it comes to quality of ministers then it is something that the Prime Minister has to be responsible for. I expect voters and citizens to apply pressure on politicians so that only the best politicians are included in the government.

Impatient Silajdzic

Q: General opinion among people in the RS is that Haris Silajdzic is an extremist and that he and his party might be very detrimental to the RS and its interests. Many people even think that he is more dangerous than SDA. On the other hand, the IC considers SBiH as being a party of civic orientation. Why?

A: I will say that SBiH is not nationalistic party but it is very impatient and anxious to become a civic party in a specific situation we are dealing with here in BiH. I think that sometimes Haris Silajdzic and SBiH should turn to and talk to Serbs and Croats. It is also true that some ideas he has are highly evaluated among some IC representatives. I personally think that he wants BiH that will include Croats, Serbs and Bosniaks.

There is no prosperity with extremists

Q: Do you think that HDZ's firm stand toward the IC and relatively mild IC's reaction to HDZ activities can be understood as an encouragement for similar political options from the other two peoples?

A: Extremism has never been good solution for any of the three

ethnic communities in BiH, and in any case it is very harmful for living together. Only those politicians and political parties who will be open-minded and will advocate tolerance and compromise making will be successful. That is the secret of success and European idea. BiH cannot become a prosperous country if extremists exist because these two concepts do not go together. The same can be applied on all extremist nationalistic parties including HDZ itself.