

Interview: Wolfgang Petritsch, the High Representative in BiH: "New Solutions are not emergency measures for Balkans"

Wolfgang Petritsch speaks to Danas about Bosnia, ten years after the beginning of the war

Special interview for Danas

After several hundred hours of negotiations between the two entities and representatives of the three peoples of Bosnia and Herzegovina, at the end of March an agreement was signed which promoted minorities in the Republika Srpska and Federation into citizens, with full rights. This means that their languages are recognised as official languages, that the Serbs are equally represented in the Federation bodies, as well as Bosniaks and Croats in the Republika Srpska. The agreement was signed at 7 o'clock in the morning, after an exhausting night of persuasion and negotiation. The High Representative of the International Community, Wolfgang Petritsch, at whose initiative the agreement was signed, rejects all objections which qualify this agreement as a typical Balkan political creation that allows all sorts of provisional interpretations, made only to satisfy the increasing ambitions of the many nations in this region.

"This agreement was reached in a very transparent manner, where a separate document stipulates who achieved what. That document was signed by the USA and the EU, and it represents a basis for constitutional change. It is an addendum to the Dayton Agreement and it fulfils the requirement of impartial

equality of all", Petritsch says.

Reminded that these solutions somehow resemble those of the former Yugoslavia, the High Representative says that it is necessary for the peoples of Bosnia and Herzegovina to continue looking to the future together, and that it is not important what resembles what.

"It is important that the equality of all three constituent peoples was achieved across the whole of Bosnia and Herzegovina, for Bosniaks and Croats in the Republika Srpska, and for Serbs in the Federation. There are no more differences between the entities regarding collective rights and basic civil rights. It is a great development", Petritsch said in Sarajevo during his exclusive interview for Danas, conducted on the day proclaimed as the day the war began ten years ago.

Danas: Did you expect more resistance to the constitutional changes in the Republic of Srpska?

WP: We must first carefully examine the very complicated amendments adopted in the RSNA, to check whether they are completely in compliance with the agreement reached on 27 March in my office. RS parties signed that agreement with two reservations. Now we have to see whether that agreement, which I call the 'Mrakovica-Sarajevo agreement', is really fully implemented. This will be clear in the next few days. However, I really do commend the constructive attitude shown by the RS whilst being engaged in making the necessary changes to the Constitutions.

Danas: How would you assess the changes in Bosnia ten years after the beginning of the war, first of all changes in people's attitudes?

WP: My impression is that the majority of people are against the war. It seems to me that the notion of resolving conflicts by means of force no longer exists. I believe that the idea that war can help achieving something better has completely

disappeared from people's minds. There are still, of course, 6 years after the war, many problems, because there are many people who feel as victims, not only in terms of human lives, but also as social victims, being deprived of their chance for a better future. The overall development of Bosnia and Herzegovina is still far below the pre-war level of economic development. It is these problems people tend to protest against more and more.

Danas: What do people say, do they regret the war happened at all? Do they try to forget about it, or do they persist with their accusations?

WP: There are two types of reactions. Many would like to forget war tragedies as soon as possible, but also, there are many people who live with war traumas and find it hard to overcome them. Therefore I believe that it is important to help people, not so that they should forget their tragedies, but to direct them towards the future more positively. That is why the issues of return of refugees, as well as individual responsibility for the crimes committed are regarded as priorities. That is the only way if there is to be development and co-existence.

Danas: At this point, Serbia has the highest number of refugees in Europe.

WP: Yes. Around 700,000 refugees from Serb areas of Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina now live in Serbia. One of the worst sides of the events in Croatia is the passive behaviour of the Racan government in accepting their own citizens who live within the territory of Bosnia. There are around 50,000 Serbs living in the Republic of Srpska, mainly occupying Bosniac and Croat houses, which means that the behaviour of the Croatian government impedes the normalisation in the Republic of Srpska and Bosnia and Herzegovina as a whole.

Danas: The arrest of Karadzic was unsuccessful, despite two

attempts.

WP: Those two attempts were most spectacular and most evident. They clearly showed that the international community does not intend to give up when it comes to Karadzic and Mladic. There will not be any compromise or deviation from the established goal of getting them into The Hague. The Serb side must finally understand that it is in their own best interests, this includes Serbs in Bosnia and Serbs in Serbia. This is not about the condemnation and responsibility of the entire nation, but about the establishment of individual responsibility, which can only be done through the courts. In this regard, The Hague is not against Serbs; it exists for all those who seek justice.

Danas: Currently, an investigation is underway in the Netherlands about what happened in Srebrenica. Before the Netherlands there was a similar investigation in France. How important is the fact that some countries in Europe examine their roles in certain events?

WP: It is absolutely essential. It can serve as an example to all nations on how to face their own responsibility and their own role. My Dutch friends testify as to just how dramatic an experience Srebrenica was to the Dutch. They had several hundreds soldiers in service with the UN. One complex investigation should establish if there was responsibility on the side of the Dutch soldiers and the Dutch government. After the investigation we will know whether the Dutch soldiers could have prevented the massacre, and whether and to what extent the government was responsible. But what happened in France and what is now happening in the Netherlands is important for this region too. It would be good if based on this an investigation is conducted in the RS, and also in Belgrade. I believe that it would be in the best of interest of the Serb people from both sides to face what was happening at that time, and see how those responsible behaved.

Danas: You are at the end of your mandate. How much does Bosnia and Herzegovina still need the High Representative of the international community?

WP: I would divide my three-year term here into two parts. The first, which lasted for about a year and a half, was marked by robust and intensive work Bosnia and Herzegovina's circumstances. During that period I removed some 70 politicians, amongst them one president of the state, the Croatian member of BiH's joint Presidency, a former Prime Minister, a Governor, and various other mayors, ministers. I had to pass many laws, to take several measures against those nationalist parties, which were in power at that time. The second half of my term was marked with efforts to establish partnership with the new political forces that had come to power, and to show them that they are also responsible for resolving BiH's problems. This second part, is for me, more important and I am personally more satisfied with it as we came closer to the European model of political relations, where the local authorities take responsibility, and responsibility does not have to be imposed from outside. Bosniac politics is now more capable of solving problems alone and being independent. That is for me the most important development.

Danas: The Yugoslav government decided a few days ago to make transparent relations between the Yugoslav Army and the RS Army, as well as ending financial support to parts of the RS Army. How do you see this?

WP: That is the most important step made in March. It is one more step forwards, towards the independence of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The RS has shown that Yugoslavia is a neighbour, but that the two armies can not co-operate in a manner which is not prescribed. There are clear and transparent criteria of army co-operation, but this has to be through co-operation between two sovereign countries. This is a positive step by the Yugoslav government, by which it took additional

responsibility for the construction of an independent of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Danas: Have you had protests following your decision not to allow persons who have been removed from office to participate in the November elections?

WP: Parties now must decide what they are going to do with the people whom I have removed from office, and who are still leading those parties. Take the Jelavic case. Ante Jelavic is still a HDZ representative. This party will not be allowed to participate in the elections if it is lead by Jelavic. Now they have the chance to elect a new president and participate in the elections.

Legacy for Paddy Ashdown

Danas: What lies ahead for the new High Representative, Paddy Ashdown?

WP: I believe that the new High Representative has to complete the last, final stage of the International Communities work in Bosnia and Herzegovina. I have prepared reforms in the judiciary, the legislature and the public administration and also army restructuring – and Europe wants to see them implemented. Those are the reforms necessary for any State if it is to be able to function as such. That is my most important legacy for Paddy Ashdown.