Interview: Wolfgang Petritsch, the High Representative in BiH”Take a look in the past and you will see that we have done quite a lot in the past two years”

The High Representative, Wolfgang Petritsch, received on Tuesday, July 17, a journalist of Slobodna Bosna and, in a detailed conversation, he talked about his view of the situation in our country, reasons for wanting to stay in BiH, the arrest of Karadzic and Mladic, Bosnian politicians he respects a great deal`

*I have not completed some important tasks and that is the reason I would like to stay in BiH one more year * Austria used to be a poor country as well * The essence of the RS is not as it used to be before January 11, when Bosniaks and Croats became constituent in this entity * Journalists of “Slobodna Bosna” together with a number of politicians do not understand that BiH is a state of high risk and that foreigners hardly decide to invest here*

SB: At a session held in the middle of last month in Stockholm, representatives of member-countries in the Peace Implementation Council (PIC) voted in favor of extending your mandate in BiH for one more year. However, unofficially, internati for one more year. However, unofficially, international and domestic circles speculate that you will, despite the PIC decision, stay in BiH only for a few more

months. Is there a possibility that you will leave BiH in the near future?

WP: Everything is clear in connection with this issue. The mandate of the High Representative of the International Community in BiH is always awarded for the period of one year. Every year, it is extended or a new High Representative is appointed. My predecessors, Carl Bildt and Carlos Westendorp, had mandates ranging from a year and a half to two years. It was completely logical to, immediately prior to the expiration of my two-year mandate, start discussions about who is going to be my successor or about the possibility that I remain on the post of the High Representative in BiH in the next year as well. After such a decision is made, nothing can change. Therefore, I will certainly stay here one more year.

SB: Did all international representatives agree that you should remain in this post in BiH, or have there been problems in securing a consensus from certain member-countries of the PIC?

WP: All decisions about giving a mandate to the High Representative of the International Community in BiH, or extending the same, are made unanimously. If only one country does not support such a concrete proposal, the High Representative cannot rnnot remain in the post, which means that I received the unanimous support of all representatives and organizations who are members of the Peace Implementation Council Steering Board. Even in November last year, during the EU Summit in Zagreb, I was asked by the key international representatives as to whether I would like to stay for a third year in BiH. At the time, it was still too early to give my response. In the Spring of this year, I made a decision and announced that I would like to stay in BiH an additional year.

I HAVE A PASSION FOR BOSNIA

SB: Your successors did not even think about working in

Bosnia. Why would you like to stay?

WP: There are still certain things I would like to accomplish here. At this moment, the peace process in BiH is far more complex and needy than it was at the very beginning. The civilian implementation of the peace agreement, which is the responsibility of the OHR, is the most important task in this country, because this is a very complex, very long and slow process that will help in building a modern state in BiH. And, finally, I believe that if we want to be successful in what we are trying to do here, international representatives in BiH ought to know a great deal about this region, ought to have experience, know the country, know what has been done here in the past years and know theow the main actors in BiH, international and domestic. For all I have just listed, one needs a lot of time, and I have invested a lot of time and effort in dealing with these exact issues since my arrival in BiH.

SB: I presume that when you assumed the post of the High Representative in BiH in August 1999 you did not anticipate that everything would go so slowly and with difficulties.

WP: There is an important reason which explains my stay in BiH – I really love my job and I donąt feel exhausted and tired because things are moving ahead slowly. I still have enough energy and passion for what I do in BiH. In the morning when I wake up I am usually very nervous, I would like the day to have 48 hours so more things could be done, but the process which was started needs time. I come from a country whose history is, similarly to BiH, marked by a tragic war and great destruction. Austria today is one of the ten wealthiest countries in the world, but that did not happen overnight. For years, my country was considered one of the poor ones in the economic sense. I am convinced that significant changes are possible here as well. Bosnia and Herzegovina is going through a double transition: one, which started at the end of the war, the consequent rebuilding of the country, and the second one

(transition) from the communist system to the creation ofn of one completely different, democratic system and the basic preconditions for the market economy.

SB: Very important laws in BiH should be adopted during this month, however, there are no indications, thus far, that that this is indeed going to happen. There is still no consensus about the Election Law.

WP: I think that the attitude of the new authority towards the adoption of the long-awaited Election Law is different. Unlike the former one, it has taken upon itself the responsibility for its adoption and there is no dilemma about that. It is completely clear that the authority, largely comprising the Alliance parties, genuinely wants this law to pass. We will see in the next few days what is going to happen with this issue, but it is definitely clear by now that, despite the difficulties, we have one completely different attitude and that is very encouraging.

SB: Recently, you stated that it is not realistic to expect that the Election Law in BiH will be adopted by the end of the year. Why did you change your mind now?

WP: No, I just said that we do not have much time and that we cannot wait until the end of the year for this law to be adopted. That simply must happen during this month or in the next few weeks. I just want to mention the technical reasons because of which this has to happen in this perthis period. First, the OSCE will not organize the elections which will be held in a year. And, in order for local institutions to organize them, it will require time for preparations. The second one is, naturally, the accession of BiH into the Council of Europe, and the latest deadline is September if we want it to happen this year. These two reasons simply dictate that the Election Law is urgently adopted`.

THIS IS NOT “THAT” REPUBLIKA SRPSKA

SB: The same reasons were present earlier as well, but the Election Law was not adopted.

WP: Yes, but there is a tendency here that politicians wait until the last moment to make decisions.

SB: OHR has been criticized for not finding better possibilities for the implementation of the Constitutional Court decision about the constituent status of all peoples in BiH. How do you comment on this?

WP: I think it is important to bear in mind everything that has been happening with this issue since summer last year, when the BiH Constitutional Court made the decision. We had been waiting for half a year for entity parliaments to take the initiative which would change and amend the entity constitutions in accordance with the constitutional decision. Only in January this year, I made two decisions whereby 16-member constitutional commissions of the entity parliaments wliaments were established. The commissions have the task of evaluating all proposed laws so as to ensure that they do not discriminate against one of the constituent peoples or the Others. Practically, this is how this Office determined the constituent status of all three peoples on the entire territory of BiH. Thus, from January 11, the RS is not what it had been until then.

SB: Perhaps formally, but substantially nothing has changed.

WP: This is how the process starts, this is just a beginning. We need a legal basis to change the present situation. It is a fact that Bosniaks and Croats are now constituent peoples in the RS, as are the Serbs in the Federation. The second task of the constitutional commissions is drafting proposals for changes and amendments to the entity constitutions in accordance with the decision of the Constitutional Court. We simply have to allow local politicians to do their job. I

think that this is one of the ways leading us there. I cannot, on behalf of them, make such important decisions changing amendments to the entity constitutions. That must be done by the entities themselves and they are doing it. Now, the constitutional commissions need to meet in order to harmonize the existing entity constitutions. By European standards, everything is happening too slowly, but this is the first time, something is done by tby the entities and their representatives. They must learn how to do the job for which they were chosen and the International Community is here just to help them in that.

SB: At some of the most recent PIC conferences, the International Community insisted on the need for strengthening the state institutions in BiH as one of its main priorities. However, the progress achieved so far is almost insignificant. At this moment, BiH does not even have a candidate for the chair of the Council of Ministers. Couldnąt the International Community have been more efficient in strengthening the state institutions?

WP: Let me try to answer this very complex question. Two years ago, I proposed a strategy for BiH, emphasising three issues – the return of refugees, economic reform and strengthening of the state institutions. In the first area, we have achieved great results. This can even be said about the eastern parts of the Republika Srpska. In comparison with last year, the return of refugees has increased by 100 percent. The question is how slowly this process is taking place, however, there is no dilemma – it is continuing. Second, we have achieved, I believe, significant and substantial progress in the economy – we have a single BiH economic space, we abolished the Payment Bureaus, BiH has become the first country on the territory of the former mer Yugoslavia which has a commercial banking system, interest rates fell from 30% to 10 %, we have European banks here which secure conditions for foreign investments` Thus, progress is significant and it can be detected even if

we talk about strengthening the state institutions. Right now, BiH simply looks different. If you are here to do the job of a representative of the International Community, you would be far more impressed. Each individual move forward in BiH requires a great deal of effort. I already said – the essence is that we are working on a very difficult and complicated transition from communism to democracy. All this with the same people. However, the government we have now fully focuses on problems whose resolution is essential for the development of this country. It is moving slowly, but we are moving towards our goal`

MATIC AND BELKIC ARE EXEMPLARY POLITICIANS

SB: Who are the politicians you trust?

WP: I do not want to talk about party leaders, because then it would look like I support certain parties, but I can mention two positive examples of persons who are not party leaders. It is very difficult to talk about individuals because I do not want to talk about my job in BiH from that perspective. One is Bozidar Matic, whom I believe to be a politician of European standards – he is a real professionfessional. He is pragmatic, realistic and principled. He is a politician others should strive to be like. The second example I want to mention is Mr Beriz Belkic. When I initially met him, he was the Sarajevo Canton Prime Minister. Our first meeting was with the mayor of Serb Sarajevo, during which we talked about the development of the Sarajevo region and crossing of the entity boundaries. Mr. Belkic, is in my opinion, an example of a serious and courageous politician. Of course, there are a number of others I will not mention this time. In both entities, there are a number of ministers who are trying to do their job well, which, in such circumstances, is not simple at all. Naturally, there numerous others who could serve as a bad example, but I do not intend to talk about them right now.

SB: We mentioned politicians from the Federation. Do you think

that the SDS influence is a main reason why the new RS authorities essentially do not change?

WP: I know the SDS has a big influence, too big even, considering that I see them as an extremely problematic party. However, their influence is not as big as it is often thought, considering the number of votes they won at the elections; although, it is sad that they sill enjoy support. Six years after the Dayton, representatives of the international community and local politicians did not manage age to persuade more Serbs to vote for more democratic parties, those without a national omen. That is the reality, but I am convinced the SDS influence is diminishing, because the situation in the entire region has changed, influencing the situation in the RS. At the same time, the influence of reform-oriented parties, such as the PDS, is increasing.

SB: Your answer is mostly related to the SDS influence over people who reside in the RS. However, the SDS influence is also reflected upon the policy of the newly elected RS authorities.

WP: I know the SDS still has a lot of influence at the local level, among mayors, in economic field etc. However, generally speaking, one can say that the hard-liner SDS supporters are fighting a lost battle and the SDS has to change radically, if they want to survive. I have visited Bijeljina recently. I visited Bosniack returnees in Janja together with the local Mayor who is a SDS member. That picture was something unimaginable, for example, three years ago. He was standing there with the returnees and I said: “Here, this is your Mayor”. I told him: “You have to take care of these people”. He said he would. I do not believe it will happen over-night, that the SDS supporters will give up the old policy of their party so easily; however, in general, the atmosphere in the RS has changed very much. I thinkhink it is very important. Unfortunately, in addition to all I have mentioned, some tragic events are taking place, such as the recent murder of a

16-year-old girl near Vlasenica. However, several days after this horrible crime the Banja Luka police arrested a suspect. The police acted professionally; we could not have expected that kind of reaction a few years ago. What is important is that the Serb side slowly faces the facts which are difficult for them, and gradually takes up the responsibility for the past.

Karadzic and Mladic in the Hague Soon

SB: Over the last couple of days there were numerous speculations regarding the arrest of the most wanted Bosnian war criminal, Radovan Karadzic. Do you expect he could be arrested soon?

WP: Who could have said a year ago that Milosevic would be in the Hague this summer? A year and a half ago, Milosevic was the Yugoslav President; he is a Hague prisoner now. Now, with Milosevic in the Hague, the conscience of people in the RS is starting to change drastically. Recently there have been many speculations on whether Radovan Karadzic and Ratko Mladic will join Milosevic soon. I am sure it will happen very soon and that we will see them in the Hague too.

Croat Self-rule is History

SB: Is it true that criminal charges will be pressed against thagainst the leading HDZ officials by the end of September, on the basis of the investigation of financial business operations of the Hercegovacka banka?

WP: The return of soldiers in the barracks and the normalization of the situation in many fields are strong indications that the majority of BiH Croats have a strong feeling that their future is within Bosnia and Herzegovina. Their political representatives must participate in the joint state and Federation institutions to ensure the rights of their voters and justify their confidence. Furthermore, I do not want to predict a result of the investigation which is

being conducted by the Provisional Administrator of the Hercegovacka banka, but I am convinced that those who have committed crimes will be brought to justice and that extremists who care only about their financial interest will be removed.

SB: Have the discussions, started in May this year, between the HDZ delegation and international representatives failed?

WP: No, one cannot say that at all. OHR still has contacts with the HDZ representatives, but not with those who stepped out of the constitutional and legal framework of the Federation and BiH. The HDZ representatives participated in the discussion in the BiH Parliament on the Election Law. The HDZ proposed its own draft Election Law, but nothing has been solvedsolved as regards this issue. I believe this represents a clear indication that the extremists, who have violated the law and the Constitution, are losing, their support is diminishing, and now they have to understand that they must leave the political scene. The policy of the so-called Croat self-rule is a delusion and a project which was doomed to failure.

SB: What is your view regarding the conflict between the Council of Ministers and the Director of the Regulatory Telecommunication Agency which published a humiliatingly low tender for the allocation of the third GSM network at the end of the last month?

WP: It seems that nobody here, from politicians to journalists, has complete information on international telecommunication trends. I read a text in “Slobodna Bosna” regarding this issue which said that the third GSM operator would have to pay a concession in the amount of 200 or 300 million KM! If this journalist, your colleague, could really find such an investor than he is a genius and I will find him a job wherever he wants. The thing here is that the future operator must meet a number of requirements, build

infrastructure, offer excellent service to the customers, which may cost him up to 400 million KM. The tender was opened and only 5 companies applied, which indicates that the 2 million KM price is not so attractive; if it wit was, there would be hundreds of interested parties. I think this whole discussion is very damaging to BiH. Whoever knows a little bit about telecommunications knows that the CRA made a realistic offer. And the politicians make noise about it, instead of doing everything to welcome the future operator which will invest 400 million and create 1000 new jobs. That was very disappointing to me, as it creates negative image of BiH.

According to our information, the process was fully transparent and conducted in a professional manner by Mr. Torngren, the CRA Director, who is a renown international expert for the telecommunication sector.

The problem is that nobody in this country, from politicians to journalist, understands that the independent agencies, such as the CRA, are established in order to remove political influence. The model for the CRA was the Central bank of BiH, which was also managed by internationals during an interim period. Political class in BiH has to get used to the fact that there are areas in which they cannot interfere.

SB: Couple of years ago, Croatia sold one third of its state capital in Cronet to German Deutsche Telecom for almost a billion. Why would BiH give its national wealth for a mere trifle?

WP: Because Croatia is in a different situation. Things are different in BiH, in international busine business circles they talk about possibilities of division of BiH in the future. For them, BiH is a country of high risk for foreign investments. We cannot ignore these issues. What we try to do, nevertheless, is to get as many foreign investor to BiH as possible. But that has to be a task of local politicians too. Yesterday, (Monday 17, July) an international

telecommunication seminar took place in Sarajevo. The seminar was chaired by Akki Liikanen, the EU Commissioner and one of the most reputed experts in the communication field. Unfortunately, no local journalists and politicians attended the seminar, or consider necessary to learn something about the situation at the international telecommunication market.