

Interview: Wolfgang Petritsch, the High Representative in BiH "The Victory of the Coalition is a clear signal to Herzegovinian radicals that they should forget about annexation to Croatia for good"

Q: What will, in your opinion, the victory of the opposition in Croatia mean to the relations between BiH and Croatia?

A: I would say that the election results in Croatia will contribute to the improvement of the relations with BiH. First of all, they open an opportunity for a better correlation on equal foundations of the two independent and sovereign countries, which derived from the former Yugoslavia, but between which there are many political, social and cultural ties. Croats in BiH can already feel certain changes that occurred upon the HDZ's loss of power. This particularly relates to radicals to whom the past elections are the last signal that all speculations about the tentative annexation to Croatia are to be forgotten. It is known and clear that Croatia and BiH are two neighbouring, sovereign states and that the BiH Croats are no Croatian Diaspora, but a constituent nation in BiH.

Q: Neither the opposition coalition nor the presidential candidates, seem to be prepared any longer to "inject" hundreds of millions of DM for the Croat community in BiH.

What is your position?

A: First of all, Croatia has certain duties towards the Croats in BiH, and the IC has been requesting those donations be fully transparent. This is what the Croatian tax-payers should insist, too. My Deputy, Ambassador Johnson, has been to Zagreb and has contacted the new government's representatives. He has said that we in BiH have nothing against the continuation of the assistance, but that we are against a non-transparent transfer of money. We have requested this be sorted out. We have reached full agreement on this. I am of the opinion that Croatia can assist Croats in BiH in social and cultural realms.

Q: But, the Croat army component is the biggest Croatian money spender.

A: The issue of the army financing is quite a complex one. The new leadership in Zagreb must seriously reconsider the financing of the Bosnian Croats' army and give an accurate review of the means and their purpose. It is exactly in the military segment that the situation can considerably be improved by reduction of the contributions for the army. Demilitarisation in the region must strengthen, which has been foreseen by the Stability Pact. Therefore, Croatia, but all the other donors too, will be decreasing military contributions in the forthcoming years. The sooner this is done, the better.

Negative legacy

Q: How will, in your view, the election results influence the events in Croatia itself?

A: Croatia has just had historic elections and, I dare say, Croatian elections will have a historic significance in the whole region. After the elections, Croatia and Slovenia are the best example of a successful transformation into civil societies that are on the best way to become a part of the

European community of nations. I expect that in the presidential elections, too, Croat(ian)s voted for the one who would integrate the country with Europe. Croatia, naturally, must not be euphoric as the economy was left in a bad situation, the unemployment rate is high, the level of the human rights and freedoms is low, media landscape is too directly depending on politics. However, I am certain that the situation in Croatia will be improved very soon with the help of the European Community.

Q: What should the relations between Croatia and BiH be in the future? Should there be special relations, according to the Agreement on Special Relations?

A: Irrespective of the form, and the special relations formula's becoming reality is possible, the relations between Croatia and BiH must be sincere, good neighbourly relations, without tongues in their cheek. The two states have a common history. Croatia can nowadays help BiH on its way to the European community of nations. In my judgment, both states are a part of Europe, although both have gone through really difficult temptations over the last years. The Stability pact is a good framework for cooperation for other countries in this region, too.

Wrong priorities

Q: Unlike Croatia, BiH has not been admitted to the Council of Europe. Namely, it has been assessed that many things need to be improved before the entrance. What are the fundamental Council of Europe's objections?

A: Common institutions in BiH still do not function. The Council of Ministers is in a deep crisis, the Parliament has not taken all of its responsibilities yet, the election law has still not been adopted. Unfortunately, the visit of the Council of Europe's delegation coincided with the rejection of the election law draft. This indicated that the state with its

institutions is still not ready to enter the Council of Europe, although it has the Council's sympathies. The first condition is that BiH becomes functional politically-wise, which is still not the case. I, or anybody else from the function of the IC's High Representative, am not allowed to represent BiH in Strasbourg, it must have a leadership of its own. When it will be admitted depends exclusively on the leadership that must show its will to cooperate.

Q: Bosniak and Croat representatives in the BiH Parliament have not agreed upon the draft election law as the new election law might easily bring about the weakening of the nationalistic parties that remain to be the major political forces in BiH. After that, speculations started that you would, in accordance with your authorities, impose the election law?

A: I am not too happy when I have to impose any of the laws. The best would be if the law could be passed in a regular procedure, although it does not go without problems in BiH and sometimes there is no other solution. This was the case of the establishment of the Border Service in conformity with the law imposed by me, although the Serb side was against it. For us, the story about the election law is not finished yet. We will keep on requesting the Parliament's cooperation. There is a possibility of changing the draft law. The decision has not been made yet, but we will not give the new election law up.

Q: Which side in BiH is in your opinion the most cooperative one?

A: Generally speaking, the people living in that country wish for prosperity and want to cooperate with the IC. Yet, there are nationalistic parties that are primarily and almost exclusively interested in maintaining their political power. The people and the country are the last interest on their lists. The national leaderships in BiH have wrong priorities. People who would care more about the citizens should come to

power because, from my six-month experience, I can say that, just like in Croatia, people who are familiar with the European democratic standards and who want to live in conformity with them live here.

Support to Dayton

Q: The IC in BiH has been trying for years to strengthen the social-democratic option and decrease the influence of national, or nationalistic, parties. You have not been successful so far. Do you expect changes?

A: The election results in Croatia give most hope that nationalistic parties that are in power in BiH would be replaced by moderate Europe-oriented parties, although the situation in BiH is considerably different. The country is still traumatised by the terrorist war, which significantly slowed democratic processes down. There are also a communist legacy and finally the ruling structures' obstruction. However, the things are gradually changing for the better.

Q: Will there be a redefinition of the DPA like, for example, the Croat side in BiH is wishing? There have been some stories lately about the creation of a third entity?

A: The DPA is not made of wrought iron. Anything can be changed if majority of citizens decides so. That is, if majority of the BiH citizens requests changes. However, since a considerable part of the obligations from the DPA have not been fulfilled yet, it would be better to concentrate on their fulfillment. I still think that the time will come when changes will be necessary. For example, a change of the Constitution requires two-third majority. When that is voted in, a new Constitution is created. Something similar could soon happen in Croatia.

Q: Do you have contacts with Croatian politicians?

A: I have met all of the most important Croatian politicians

from the former Government, headed by Prime Minister Matesa, Minister Granic, as well as the former Opposition Six. I also had a separate meeting with Stipe Mesic.

Q: Will you ask for a meeting with new Croatian President and what will you request?

A: I am preparing a visit to Zagreb. That is a priority. I want to meet immediately with new President and the Government representatives. Croatia must accept BiH as a sovereign state with the possibility for development of special relations. I will request from the new Croatian authorities also a sincere support to the DPA.