Interview: Wolfgang Petritsch, the High Representative”I Expect From The Rs Authorities To Arrest War Crime Indictees”

Wolfgang Petritsch, High Representative for BiH, in the exclusive interview for the “Nezavisne novine”, states his position on the new RS Government, work of the BiH Presidency, requests of HDZ for forming the third entity, future of the BiH Council of Ministers, as well as on the integration of Bosnia and Herzegovina in Europe.

NN: Mr. Petritsch, one gets the impression that there are a lot of unknowns when it comes to the final position you have regarding the new Government of the Republika Srpska and, in general, implementation of the latest elections?

PETRITSCH: First of all, I should say that I have regular contacts with the Prime Minster, Mr. Ivanic. I am also in contact with the newly elected President and Vice President of the Republika Srpska, and I have made clear to all of them that we shall make judgement on the new Government and Presidency in line with the results of their work. The primary responsibility lies with the Prime Minister, who he will take in the Government, but, as we know, SDS represents a special case for the international community. There is a widely spread scepticism when it comes to SDS. On the other hand, SDS has been elected by a significant number of voters in RS and because of that the political will of the voters must be taken into account. I can say that I have presented a series of requests to SDS, and they, if fulfilled, shall make it

possible for SDS to become a partner of the international community. I am talking about a series of preconditions which SDS was obliged to fulfil five years ago. Maybe we shall get back to this later, but I have to say that this represents only the first step where each of six points will have to be proved by SDS in practice in order to prove that SDS is now ready to change and that SDS is ready for a fundamental, i.e. essential change of the party, and also ready to get rid of its criminal past and the members who were in its ranks and who are indicted by the International Criminal Tribunal for War Crimes in the Former Yugoslavia. Of course, the basis for the implementation of election results is the Declaration of the Peace Implementation Council, as well as ten points issued by the Steering Board on December 7 in Brussels.

NN: You have recently stated that you have used your powers without any restraints. I am asking this since it is obvious that the Alliance for changes with the support of certain number of deputies from RS has an undisputed parliamentary majority in the BiH Parliament. Namely, it has the support and will of the people. Nevertheless, in spite of that, the BiH Presidency behaves in the same manner as Nikola Poplasen did in the procedure of proposing the Prime Minister designate. Can you comment on that?

PETRITSCH: I will repeat once again that I shall not accept nor tolerate any kind of obstructionism in this process of forming the Government as a part of the implementation of the Dayton Peace Agreement. This also represents a new era, both in the country, in the domestic, local politics, and in the whole region with new democratic Governments. So, these are the conditions that must be respected. When it comes to the proposal of the mandatary for the Chairman of the Council of Ministers, I expect a fast decision. If the current candidate, i.e. if Mr. Raguz does not have the democratic majority in the Parliament, I shall expect the BiH Presidency to give the proposal acceptable in the Parliament. Of course it is a

democratic process that should happen now.

NN: I have to be a little bit unpleasant. You say you are going to expect. Can we expect any measures if your expectations do not come true, and if so, what kind of measures?

PETRITSCH: You have already got to know me, I can be very patient. However, when I come to a certain point, then I can be very strict, too. I think I shall come to that point very soon. The BiH Presidency does not have a lot of time and must not waste a lot of time regarding this issue and should take a responsible decision. The Presidency should also understand that this is a new period, new era and that a right decision should be taken. But, I have also to add that the test will take place on Monday, January 29, in the Parliament. Mr. Raguz could still get a majority in the Parliament, we still do not know what is going to happen. Theoretically speaking, of course, since it has not been tested yet.

NN: I have asked this question because of the following: does not it seem to you that BiH and international community and Dayton Agreement become a little bit of hostages of a hard-line political structure in HDZ. There happened the referendum which had a propaganda role before the elections, there are obstructions in Livno, obstructions in the BiH Presidency. How long will it last and is it late to cut it off, beginning with the call to establish the third entity?

PETRITSCH: I had a very long meeting with Mr. Jelavic, and that was after a long period of time, after a lot of weeks. I had this meeting upon his request. I explained to him that he should make a clear and public statement on the position of HDZ on topical issues. He promised that he would do it and clarify those issues, especially the issue of the third entity, and that he would disassociate himself from the rhetoric used at the latest elections, which simply prevented the implementation of the election results. HDZ shall have to

accept the democratic rules of game. The Croatian people are one of the three constituent peoples, so their existence and their welfare are recognised, but, when it comes to democratic mechanisms, when it comes to Governments, we have to say that they have to play the game based on the democratic rules. And, in democracy, the majority has the right to form the Government. This democratic right has been misused by HDZ in Livno and in Cantons 8 and 10. They have missed all the deadlines, they have not respected them, nor have they formed the Government.

NN: Ambassador Miller recently stated that it was not excluded that the people from Hague Tribunaląs secret indictments were amongst those working at certain state and entity levels. Could such a possibility discredit certain political institutions and political leaders in the entities or at the state level?

PETRITSCH: We absolutely have to take care that only those people who have adequate qualifications and moral characteristics represent and be represented at the entity and state level of authority. Certainly that people indicted by the International Tribunal, both publicly and, also, those from secret lists, cannot be part of authorities here. And, I am confident that Ivanicąs Government is going to fully respect statements that they have given and that they are going to cooperate closely with the International Criminal Tribunal in this regard. This represents the easiest way to secure that there is not a single person in the Government that is indicted by this Tribunal.

NN: Going back to the Council of Ministers, do you believe that the CoM can now continue to work, as it has been doing in the past two years? Actually, do you think that the CoM can be a BiH institution without strong instruments of authority and its own source of revenue dependant on payments by entity governments?

PETRITSCH: I would first like to say that I will continue with my strategy of strengthening common institutions. You are aware that this issue was, from the very beginning of my mandate here, on the list of my priorities together with the refugee return and economic reform. I am a strong believer that no economic or social progress will be possible in the interest of BiH citizens without a small but efficient government. We are now, also, in the process of determining independent sources of revenue for state institutions. We have to identify a healthy balance between the two entities and the state of BiH, a balance that will be in the interest of people. The two entities will realize that this is not going to be to their detriment but will continue to strengthen the structures of the state and those of the entities. I will try to secure structures that will, in the future, improve the relationship between the entities and the state.

NN: Could you, please, comment on the issue, which is directly related to BiH, of unsuccessful, so described conditionally, visit of Carla Del Ponte to Belgrade?

PETRITSCH: I would not agree with the assessment that her visit was unsuccessful. I think that the very fact that Mrs. Carla Del Ponte was able to travel to Belgrade, and that she was able to meet the President, Prime Minister and other politicians, was a major success itself. On the other side, it seems to me that Belgrade, i.e. the FRY, have still not developed to the extent where they could recognize the positive side of the International Tribunal in terms of their own future. Milosevicąs propaganda about the International Criminal Tribunal is still strong and it must be overcome. The Serb people must understand how important and relevant the International Criminal Tribunal is so as to simply clarify the role of their former leadership as well as the responsible individuals in the drama that is now over. What I wish to say is that one of the achievements of the former Prime Minister, Dodik, was actually related to his understanding, from the

early phase, of the political relevance of establishing relations with the International Tribunal in the Hague. Without him, former Prime Minister Dodik, the SDS would not have signed the protocol, and, without him, the statement given by Mr. Ivanic would not have been possible either. The Republika Srpska, therefore, has, in this regard, advantage over Serbia and Yugoslavia, which has, certainly, contributed to the fact that Ivanicąs Government is going to be supported, i.e. is going to get support by the international community, both economically and politically.

NN: Do you now, after the protocol has been signed with SDS leaders and after the statement by Mr. Ivanic, expect that the RS authorities are going to arrest at least those from the public list of indictments?

PETRITSCH: I absolutely expect and request cooperation on the protocol. And not only rhetorically but I want to see this in reality, as well.

NN: Let us go back to the BiH Federation issue. Parliamentary majority has been practically formed in the Federation without representatives of national parties. The formation of the Federation Government will take place shortly. Given the reserves of the international community towards national parties, is there a possibility for international communityąs resources to be directed there where national parties are not prevailing. On the other side, there is a danger of, before all, the U.S. Government not entering into the RS where the SDS is participating in the power share?

PETRITSCH: I am of the view that the Government of Mr. Ivanic has an additional responsibility of performing and accomplishing a decisive job and of respecting not only the letter, but also the spirit of the DA. And the success of his Government will certainly depend on continuous changes within the SDS. Speaking about the Federation, we still do not have a government, but, irrespective of which government is

eventually going to be established, programs and principles presented by the international community will have to be fully accepted. In any case, a number of critical signals, or signs, now exist on the side of the international community. If changes in BiH do not start happing faster, there is a risk of aid being withdrawn, which is going to directly affect the welfare and living conditions of ordinary citizens in BiH. In the new era, the one that I mentioned at the beginning of this interview, conditionalizing will be far more stringent than it was the case in the past. Both, political conditionalizing, when it comes to behavior of political parties, especially those nationalist parties, and economic conditionalizing, in terms of application, i.e. implementation of economic reforms in this country.

NN: Are you satisfied with what has been done in BiH thus far?

PETRITSCH: I have to say that I am not fully satisfied, but not completely unsatisfied either. People, especially those working in different authorities, are telling me that they are satisfied with what I do. However, I am personally more rigid and I am applying higher standards, so that I expect that this work of mine be better during the year of 2001. But, this work will certainly depend on other players in this game, if I may so describe it, and those are local politicians. My personal interest, therefore, is that the best and the wisest people be brought to power. But I have to say that I am skeptical about whether this is going to happen. Being an Austrian I live so close to the Balkans, and being actually a part of this region I am optimistic. **NN: Are you optimistic about the integration of BiH into Europe?** PETRITSCH: That this is going to happen in the course of this year is also part of my optimism. I will, on my part, do my utmost to ensure that this happens, but I cannot, normally, do so alone. I have to have support by entitiesą governments, and, especially, by the state government, the formation of which I am now waiting for.