

**Pro Europa
Fondation Européenne de la Culture
Remise des Prix Européens des Droits de l'Homme
2006 et 2007
à l'Ambassadeur Wolfgang Petritsch
Strasbourg, 23 février 2007**

Excellencies,
Distinguished Guests,
Dear Ambassador Petritsch,

It is a particular pleasure to be with you today, to honour Wolfgang Petritsch. Why is this occasion very special for me? Well, as a Prosecutor, my daily bread is to reveal the dark sides of human beings, investigating their sins and wrongdoings and searching the obscure compartments of their souls to shed light on their crimes. What an extraordinary feeling it is for me to be allowed, for once, to praise a man and highlight his great accomplishments!

Wolfgang Petritsch is equally a man of reflection and a man of action. In both areas, reflection and action, his achievements are abundant, so much so that I am wondering if we are not honoring two or perhaps even three outstanding people today.

To begin with, we are honoring a prolific writer. I count no less than 97 entries in his bibliography, demonstrating a broad and wide-ranging mind, but also a deep concern for the human condition. In this regard, I would particularly note his books on the former Austrian Chancellor Bruno Kreisky, which serve as an inspiring tribute to his mentor. It is important, particularly at the beginning of a professional career, to have inspiration of someone who leads us on our professional path and points out the way ahead. For myself, I was privileged to work closely with Judge Falcone who helped me find my professional path and served as my mentor. Am I wrong to suspect Bruno Kreisky played the same role in your case, dear Wolfgang? (See, I am afraid that I cannot stop being a Prosecutor entirely after all: I have to suspect...)

Of course, in your literary work, you focused largely on the former Yugoslavia. Your numerous books and articles on Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo and Serbia are always connected to reality and to action. They draw the lessons of past experiences to better address current challenges. Your writings propose new avenues to solve the difficult problems of that region which, to paraphrase Churchill, “continues to produce more history than it can digest”. But – and my internal Prosecutor is happy – your writings also recall principles without which no long-standing peace and reconciliation can happen. In June 2005, a few weeks before the tenth commemoration of the Srebrenica genocide, you wrote an article strongly calling for the immediate arrest of Mladic and Karadzic. As Prosecutor, I applaud the writer who is calling for action in favor of Justice.

We are honoring a writer, but also a man of action. As the Special Envoy of the European Union for Kosovo, Wolfgang Petritsch was confronted with the stubbornness of a man I know all too well, Slobodan Milosevic. That man allowed his own nation to be bombed rather than accepting the reasonable, just compromise that

Ambassador Petritsch had managed to reach in Rambouillet. At the ICTY, Milosevic defied the Judges of the ICTY for four years of trial, using every possible trick to derail the proceedings. What a difference it would have made for the peoples of the Balkans if he had simply faced the truth. This evil man preferred to die with his perverse beliefs in a surreal world where the truth was twisted beyond recognition.

Wolfgang Petritsch understood very well the harm Milosevic and others did to the millions of men, women and children who suffered the consequences of the wars in the former Yugoslavia. As the High Representative of the International Community in Sarajevo, he saw and shared the distress of the victims on all sides. Meeting victims of war crimes generates the energy that fuels our fight for Justice and against impunity. My outrage in the face of these atrocities motivates my fight against the war criminals and those who, actively or passively, protect them. In your position in Sarajevo, Wolfgang, you were ideally placed to see that the international community should not be spared criticism for its failures. As you rightly wrote, “failure to arrest Mladic and Karadzic is a permanent stain on the international community’s reputation.” Now I wonder whether allowing a country protecting war criminals into the family of European Nations is not indecent – how can it be squared with European values and principles?

We are here in the center of Europe, in the cradle of European institutions placing the rule of law and humanist values at the core of the social fabric. Is it not natural to insist that an applicant to this important club fulfills these essential conditions? Or should we lower the standards to allow such a party in? A desperate prosecutor needing and seeking the support of the international community was pleased to read these strong words that you wrote in 2000: “Aid to the former Yugoslavia must be strictly conditional on each country’s cooperation with the U.N. war crimes tribunal in The Hague”. I would wish that all European Statesmen – and I should add, thinking of your own country, Stateswomen as well, to take such a principled approach when it comes to essential issues like Justice, Human Rights and the Rule of Law. Europe is the mother of humanism. Now more than ever, it is Europe’s duty to defend and protect its values.

We are honoring a thinker, an actor, but also a true humanist. When trying to bring peace to Kosovo and Bosnia and Herzegovina, but also when presiding over the Nairobi Summit on a Mine Free World, at the focus of his attention has always been the life and fate of the men, women and children affected by war and destruction. I know for a fact how affected you, Wolfgang, were on these dark days of March 1999 after you had tried a last attempt to avoid the NATO bombing of Serbia. You certainly had in mind the sufferings of all those Serbs and Albanians, civilians and soldiers, young and old, obliged to fight or flee and maybe die despite the fact that a peaceful solution was at hand.

Ambassador Petritsch, Dear Wolfgang, you are the finest incarnation of European values. I wish you much success in further promoting the values which are yours and which are ours. Your success will be ours.

Carla Del Ponte