High Representative Calls for Popular Support in the Battle against Corruption

The High Representative, Wolfgang Petritsch, on Tuesday called on the people of BiH to support those honest judges, politicians, civil servants and police officers who are already engaged in the fight against fraud and corruption. Speaking at an anti-corruption conference at the Holiday Inn in Sarajevo, the High Representative said that anti-corruption efforts fuelled by popular indignation represented "the essence of a vibrant civil society capable of fighting the abuse of power." He said that an orchestrated campaign to root out corruption, combined with the strengthening of the judiciary, would "in itself strengthen the state of BiH and its legitimacy."

The Second BiH Anti-Corruption Conference was organised by OHR's Anti-Fraud Department. Other speakers included BiH Minister for Foreign Trade and Economic Relations Azra Hadziahmetovic and RS Prime Minister Mladen Ivanic. The object of the conference was to assess the progress that has been made since the First Anti-Corruption conference, organised by the OHR in February 2000.

The High Representative noted that corruption, a problem throughout the region, arises from "an unhealthy interaction between weak states with only a short tradition of democracy and weak civil societies undermined by the communist and nationalist ideologies of the past." He said the problem must be addressed by promoting "the legitimacy and efficiency of the state and the establishment of a vibrant civil society" and by fighting directly against corruption in all its forms.

"Corruption hampers this country's chance of becoming

sustainable and normal," the High Representative said. "Corruption is impeding the development of the economy and the administration of justice. Corruption contributes to unemployment and to the inefficiency of services for citizens. Corruption discourages foreign investment. It is time the thieves were thrown out of the counting house. We must do everything in our power to ensure that this happens and that it happens sooner rather than later."

Noting that Bosnia and Herzegovina signed the Civil and Criminal Law Convention, in March 2000, an agreement that commits European countries to joint action against corruption, he pointed out that the Convention was only ratified by the BiH Parliamentary Assembly in January this year. BiH has also become a member of the Group of States against Corruption, but it has yet to make optimum use of the monitoring mechanisms which membership of this organisation makes available.

The High Representative said that the creation of a Single Economic Space in BiH will help eliminate possibilities for corruption. "Citizens do not get any benefits from unnecessary administrative and legal divisions – criminals and corrupt officials do," he said.

He also noted that the audits of the Entity government accounts carried out during three months in the spring of 2001 had led – and continue to lead – to convictions.

At the State level, the High Representative called for the robust implementation of the Council of Ministers' BiH Anti-Corruption Action Plan, presented to the public in March this year. He also noted that judicial reform, initiated with the establishment of the Independent Judicial Commission in early 2001 and now being intensified, will ensure that the fight against corruption is sustained. "Effective reform can only be sustained by effective institutions. It is no secret that I plan to establish bodies that will serve as a tool for an accelerated reform of the judiciary," the High Representative

said. He added that this would “allow for a reinvigorated review of judges and prosecutors and an overall restructuring of the judicial system to make it efficient.”