Interview: Wolfgang Petritsch, High Representative for BiH”Privatization has to be transparent”

The High Representative for BiH, Wolfgang Petritsch, in his interview for “Nezavisne” talks about terrorist attacks on Washington and New York, about the possible consequences BiH could face after certain officials and the media link it to Islamic terrorists and about privatization and functioning of the electronic media in BiH.

NN: Could you comment on the position of BiH after the terrorist attacks on New York and Washington, considering that the American administration has helped BiH to a great extent so far?

WP: Bosnia and Herzegovina has to express its determination and strong solidarity with the United States and it’s people. It must clearly show that it is against terrorism and that its position is anti-terrorist. It must say that it absolutely condemns all acts of terrorism, regardless of whether they were committed in America or elsewhere. Bosnia and Herzegovina must continue to work on building a modern country in order to meet the expectations of the USA and Europe. I hope that it is now clear to all how necessary the establishment of the State Border Service was, how important it is for the country to have a single passport. We are all working on this and we hope that the citizens of this country will also soon have a single ID card, driver’s license, and finally, and most importantly

for BIH, a single citizens register, all this is being dealt with. When this is in place the BiH authorities will be in the position to answer all these accusations that foreign terrorist are hiding here.

NN: Regarding the events in the USA and a certain suspicion that Europe has toward BiH, how will this affect the accession of BiH into the Council of Europe, since there are already certain indications, that in a way, link BiH to terrorists?

WP: I agree that there is a concern, however, this need not and should not happen. This is a challenge to the state and entity governments to create a strategy and I have clearly indicated this in the meetings with the Chairman of the Council of Ministers, Zlatko Lagumdzija. We have both given clear suggestions, and proposed measures. We have offered our assistance, as well as the assistance of the other international organizations working in BiH. I will be leaving for New York soon, where I will address the UN Security Council, and I will mention this as well, to offer answers to the questions that the world is asking. The local authorities in BiH need to understand that they have to be equal partners with the international community in the fight against terrorism. Not one constitutional part of this country can be excluded from these efforts. Certainly, there are also nationalist parties, which may try to deepen the isolation of this country in regard to the rest of the world. Democrats have to be very cautious, regardless whether they are in the Government or a part of civil society. As far as the Council of Europe and these events are concerned, I will now work on BiH's attempts to join the CoE as soon as possible. I have already talked to CoE officials and urged for BiH to be accepted as a member now.

NN: Is it possible to have a partner like relationship with the international community in BiH regarding politics and the governing structures? Some claim that you are exercising your

authority too often, and some that you are not exercising it enough?

WP: I must be doing something right since the both sides are attacking me, that I am destroying their authority and that I am exercising my own too seldom, which means that I am still going along the middle line, and that is good. I still remember that when I suggested the introduction of the concept of responsibility two years ago, I was attacked then and some intellectual circles published a manifesto, asking me to establish a "full protectorate" in BiH. My answer to these proposals was that this was your country and you had to take the responsibility for it, we could only assist you in this, but we could not run it for you. And now these same writers, intellectuals, call and attack me, and say that I should have established partner relationships with the people in power- and that is what I am doing. I am very happy with the development of the situation regarding this issue. I have suggested the concept of responsibility, partnership, and now we have the Government that wants these things, I think that the respective positions have been brought closer. That is positive. Of course, we face certain problems. Sometimes there is a conflict. We do not agree with each proposal given. But the conflicts are now different. Now we discuss real political issues. In the past we only discussed so called "ethnical problems". For instance, with Croats, i.e. with the HDZ, it was possible only to discuss the so-called "national issues", and now we discuss economic reform, privatization, – as in the "Aluminijum" Mostar case. Now we have different positions regarding this, but, basically, these are purely political and not ethnical positions. So, in this way as well, BiH is becoming "more normal".

NN: You have mentioned privatization. It seems that in BiH this process is being done rather clumsily and, above all, in a non-transparent way. A good example could be "Banjaluka brewery". This is a company whose corruption potential is

high, so after a clumsy and completely non-transparent privatization process, obviously, the only way out would be to revoke the tender. A similar thing happened with the questionable attempt to privatize the "Holiday Inn".

WP: I have to say that I am definitely not pleased with the privatization process in BiH. When I say this, I have very high, Western standards in mind, and because of this I have undertaken certain measures to ensure transparency, so that the bodies conducting the privatization could be able to take responsibility for their work. If we take a look at what is happening in neighboring countries, we see that this is not a problem that only BiH is faced with, this is the problem of the highest economic importance. This could be seen during the time of Tudjman's tycoons and now in the discussions that are on going in Serbia.

NN: But BiH has Pertitsch? And he has a concept?

WP: This is an issue of standards that are being applied transparently, but you will never reach the ideal solution. I think that we need to balance the issue of transparency and the need to move fast with regard this process,-to reconstruct and create new jobs. Certainly, we need to ensure that we do not reach some irregular compromise, as in the case of the "Holiday Inn". Things had to be started all over again, and generally speaking, I am unhappy with that process. In total there are 140 strategic enterprises in BiH, which will be privatized through tenders under the supervision of international experts, in order to insure that investors will truly reconstruct them and create new jobs in the long-term. Privatization needs to be used in a way that it attracts foreign investors, to bring new, modern technology to the country and to achieve higher managerial expertise. Once that is accomplished we can say that privatization was successful.

NN: Some media are constantly debating on issues pertaining to

Federation television, TVBiH, RTRS. It seems that the situation in these media has not been resolved yet?

WP: Electronic media have crucial importance for this country. You know that the media played “a fatal part” in the tragic conflict. At the same time, you have the technical aspect. Most of the electronic media equipment is old-fashioned and needs to be replaced – and this takes a lot of money. Secondly, you have a great problem when it comes to the management and the personnel employed in these electronic media, who are not professional journalists – they are also “old-fashioned”. For example, there are 1,200 employees at RTV BiH, of which only around a hundred journalists, which explains dissatisfaction regarding the quality of the program. I really wish to see authentic television in BiH where the creativity and knowledge of the local producers and writers is used on films, series and drama programs. American soap operas are funny, but I would really like to see BiH programming showing real life in the country with Serbs, Croats, Bosniaks and others. That is my goal, to have one public electronic media, which would reflect BiH’s reality.