

Remarks by High Representative Valentin Inzko On the Occasion of Brcko District Day Brcko, 8 March

Ladies and Gentlemen

I am delighted to be with you to mark the 15th anniversary of Brcko District. And I am pleased that we are celebrating this anniversary at a time when the District is continuing to make progress.

I want to stress that what happens in Brcko is important for the rest of Bosnia and Herzegovina too. In the past, Brcko often provided an example of what can be done in this country when challenges that may seem almost insurmountable are addressed with imagination and determination. For example, government formation in Brcko took only 40 days. In recent years, however, the reforms in Brcko have stalled. This needs to change, and I hope that Brcko will once again lead the country by example. Coexistence, harmony and reconciliation come first.

Let me remind you that the District was created in response to a situation where conflicting objectives had produced what looked like an insoluble political problem. That problem was so insoluble that it was not possible to find a solution for it in Dayton.

But the problem couldn't simply be left unsolved. For the sake of the people of Brcko and for the sake of peace in the country as a whole, a solution had to be found.

The solution took the form of an innovative and multi-ethnic constitutional arrangement that has been overwhelmingly supported by the people of the District. This is not in the first place the problem of affiliation; it was primarily about concrete problems, and only then about constituent status.

The institutions created in Brcko District have made it possible to address strategic challenges in ways that are practical and effective – and that respond to the actual needs of citizens.

That's not a bad model for the rest of the country, as long as political parties work together to make life better for all residents in the District. Especially today, when – more than ever – there is a clear and pressing need for fresh political ideas.

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Like the rest of the country, the District faces real problems. I don't need to remind anyone that corruption has repeatedly emerged as one of the main concerns of citizens, not only in Brcko. And the Brcko institutions have had mixed success in dealing with this.

And despite the fact that Brcko has consistently performed better than the rest of the country economically – especially by exploiting the commercial advantages of its position on the Sava – the dissatisfaction of a certain number of citizens with low living standards compared to neighbouring countries has been as pronounced here as elsewhere in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

It was because of this entirely understandable dissatisfaction that citizens came out onto the streets of Brcko at the start of last year and demanded that their representatives start working more productively.

Citizens will reach their own conclusions as to whether this demand has been met. Economic development must be accelerated. The future is indeed important, but the citizens live in the present.

What we can agree on is that fifteen years after Brcko District was established, the District's institutions are working, and citizens are able to enjoy greater security and a measure of prosperity because of that.

The task facing representatives of the people of Brcko is the same task facing representatives of citizens throughout the country – to expand the present level of success, so that living standards begin to rise much more

quickly and much more substantially.

The achievements of the past show that success is possible – it is possible in Brcko and it is possible in the whole of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

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Let me conclude by extending my very best wishes to the women of Brcko District and to women throughout Bosnia and Herzegovina on the yesterday's occasion of International Women's Day.

Let me assure all citizens that the International Community remains committed to working with the people of this country to build a prosperous and sovereign multi-ethnic democracy that can take its rightful place at the heart of the European family.