

Remarks by Principal Deputy High Representative Tamir Waser on the Occasion of Brcko District Day

Popular Support for Positive Change

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Today, on the fourteenth anniversary of the inauguration of Brcko District, we have an opportunity to review the achievements of the past year and assess whether or not the District has maintained the positive trajectory that has made it – for more than a decade – one of the success stories of post-war Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The Final Award created the legal framework for a multi-ethnic Brcko. The Brcko Statute was designed to institutionalize that framework. What we mark today is the success of those institutions in making Brcko an example for the rest of Bosnia and Herzegovina of how people can work together to achieve a better future.

Looking back on the last twelve months, we can certainly point to significant achievements within those institutions; these include:

- The timely adoption of the budget for the first time since the District was established;
- The Assembly has carried out its other duties in an orderly and constitutional manner and the parties have been able to sort out political problems;
- The inauguration of the Brcko Public Health Care Institution (Javna zdravstvena ustanova “Zdravstveni Centar Brcko”); and
- The establishment of “Putevi Brcko”, a public company

that will conduct a number of projects, including supervising the construction of the Brcko bypass, working with EBRD financing.

One important element of functioning institutions is ensuring that individuals working within them who violate the public trust are investigated and, if appropriate, punished. In this regard, the continuing work by the State Prosecutor's Office, in cooperation with the Brcko District Police, to secure successful indictments – and one conviction so far – of those arrested in the “Bingo” anti-corruption operation are important steps. As elsewhere in Bosnia and Herzegovina, there is more to do to combat corruption and ensure that people pay a price for cheating the citizens.

Brcko's stable institutional structure has enhanced the security of residents and helped to create the conditions in which those who live and work in the District can begin to look to the future with hope and confidence to their multi-ethnic future.

In Bosnia and Herzegovina as a whole we have seen in recent months the evolution of a new and direct civic engagement in public affairs. This has been evident throughout the country, including in the Brcko District. Citizens have come onto the streets in peaceful demonstrations and gathered in civic organizations and plenums to demand better government, better employment opportunities, better living standards, better public services – and, of course, an end to the scourge of corruption. These are all legitimate demands.

This new civic activism is something that the International Community welcomes.

It is the job of the institutions now to engage citizens for a discussion of their demands. I welcome the efforts of the District leaders to engage in dialogue with citizens and hope that it will continue in a constructive manner on both sides.

What the demands of Brcko residents have made very clear is that they are not prepared to wait another 20 years for things to get better – they want better government that is dedicated to improving the lives of its citizens and they want it now.

So, we must all understand that while Brcko has taken important and positive steps in the last 12 months, indeed the last 14 years, the District authorities need to take the requests from the citizens and civil society very seriously and deliver more improvements in the next 12 months. That's not an impossible challenge but it will require hard work.

Let me finish by wishing all the residents of the District a very happy International Women's Day, and let me add that we in the International Community look forward to working with the people of Brcko and their representatives in the coming year to build on the progress that has been achieved so far.

Thank you.