Remarks by the Deputy High Representative and Head of the OHR Mostar Office Anatoly Viktorov at the Congress of Local Self Government of the FBiH

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am honored by the opportunity to address you today. As the conference program is quite full, I will be very brief in my remarks.

Firstly, on behalf of the High Representative, Miroslav Lajcak, I extend warm greetings to the participants of this conference, and wish great success to the organizers. Dr. Lajcak has asked me to express his regret that his schedule has prevented him from being in attendance today.

I am particularly pleased to be able to address you as Bosnia-Herzegovina has entered a new phase in its development. With the initialling of the Stabilization and Association Agreement on Tuesday, the country is finally moving beyond its "post war" recovery period, and is now firmly on the path to join the European Union.

This development makes even more relevant the basic principles

of the European Charter on Local Self-Government – particularly the notions that local self-government contributes to democracy, and that local authorities have an important role to play in the construction of Europe.

This last point is particularly germane to the theme of this conference – which, of course, is the relationship between the local and central levels of government. The coming year will be one of change for Bosnia-Herzegovina, as the country must not only undertake implementation of the Action Plan on Police Reform, but also as the political leaders enter talks on constitutional reforms.

The political parties will no doubt frame these activities in a national, or ethnic, context. However, the local governments across BiH have an obligation – and an opportunity, through conferences such as this – to press the country's leaders to pursue reforms that make sense in the broader context of European democracies.

What will benefit your municipalities more? Policies and institutional structures based on narrow political agendas, or those based upon sound administrative and economic principles? Policies and institutional structures designed to further separate the peoples and regions of this country, or those that will bring them closer together? These are among the key questions facing BiH today, and you should not allow yourselves to be counted out of the debate. Wherever and whenever there is an opportunity for you to balance the dialogue with reasoned arguments in favor of the basic economic interests and democratic principles of local self-government, and the communities that those governments serve, I urge you to seize upon it.

Thank you.