

Remarks by Brcko Supervisor Susan R. Johnson at the Second Mayors' Conference on Civil Society in BiH

18 April 2005

Mr. Prime Minister, distinguished Mayors and dear guests, it is a pleasure to welcome you to Brcko District on the occasion of the Second Conference of Mayors and Civil Society in BiH.

This Conference is particularly timely as Brcko reaches out, builds relationships within BiH, and beyond, and seeks to contribute to and learn from others as the process of democratizing and reforming structures of governance moves forward.

I would like to take this opportunity to speak about Brcko District as a unique model of local self-government, which perhaps can provide some useful insights into key elements of effective local government.

The District model of local governance is based on the Brcko International Arbitral Tribunal's Final Award that established the District in March of 2000.

Perhaps because of Brcko's strategic location and importance to both sides, and the deep mistrust that prevailed at the time, it took over two years and considerable deliberation for the Tribunal to issue the Final Award, after unsuccessful efforts to find a compromise solution.

Although at that time agreement was not possible, and both Entities were dissatisfied with the Brcko Final Award, one of the key purposes of the Award was to provide conditions for

local self-government in this strategically located and multiethnic small piece of BiH – 1% of the territory – not under the governance of either Entity, but rather directly under the State of BiH.

The Award provided the basic conditions by:

- First, permanently delegating the powers and responsibilities of governance previously exercised by the Entities and the three wartime municipalities, to the Government of the Brcko District, to be exercised exclusively by the District;
- Second, laying out conditions that should be achieved, starting with refugee return and property restitution and including economic revitalization as fundamental;
- Third, mandating a supervisory regime to ensure that all the parties fulfilled their obligations under the Award, that democratic, multiethnic institutions of government were established and developed, and the required conditions achieved.

Although the process is not yet complete, much has been accomplished and in many respects, the District model has delivered results.

What have been the key ingredients? This question deserves further consideration and discussion, but I will try to name a few.

- High rate of returns and property restitution as a first priority – and the acceptance of DP's;
- Right to retain all revenue collected in the District, including customs and excise taxes;
- Early acceptance of reform and of building democratic and multiethnic institutions of governance;
- Investment in the rebuilding of infrastructure and the provision of the institutions of government in order to provide basic services to the residents of the District;

- Humanitarian and technical assistance from the IC –
- A unique and pragmatic approach to privatization of strategic enterprises based on amount of investment in the business, number of jobs created and the credibility and experience of the investor;
- An effort to create conditions conducive to foreign and domestic investment;
- Democratic local elections with high voter turn-out;
- OHR and the Supervisory regime – a partnership relationship at the local level, in which the imposition of laws has been a last resort rarely invoked.

Building the District into what it is today has been a huge and ongoing challenge. Those of you in local government will appreciate the magnitude of the accomplishment to date:

- Three wartime municipalities were merged into one multiethnic administration.
- The new District government took on the responsibilities formerly exercised by the Entities and established new institutions of government including an executive, a legislature, an independent judiciary, an independent police force, a health care system and a multiethnic school system.
- The District has achieved a measure of economic revitalization and a steady improvement in the level of services provided to its residents.

In a recent public opinion survey in the District, 75% of the respondents indicated their support for the current status of the District and 90% said that inter ethnic tension is no longer a primary issue – economic development and good governance are more important.

Now the District has a new elected government, accountable to the electorate and facing continuing challenges –

- Restructuring and downsizing government and making its

- processes more transparent and effective;
- Developing the economy and creating new jobs by attracting investment;
- Building more effective and cooperative relations with State institutions, the Entities and municipalities throughout BiH.

It would be wrong of me to talk about what the District has achieved so far without mentioning those who, from the beginning, have come forward and were willing to work hard to do something rather than to find endless reasons not to do anything.

I am referring to the citizens of the District who worked in and with the interim appointed authorities. Individually and collectively, they have played an historic role that will be better understood with the perspective of time. It is a pleasure to salute them and their contribution to the District.

Today I would like to recognize the key role that the citizens of the District themselves have played from the outset, in promoting reconciliation, cooperation and restoration of trust – in short – in building an atmosphere in which progress can take place. I would like to single out just 3 groups whose contribution has been key and perhaps under-appreciated:

- Women
- Sports people
- Teachers

Could the District have done better? Can the new government do better? How?

There are many things that we could mention in answering these questions. I would like to mention only one, which I believe, is key.

The District could have done – and can do – better in the

future by more broadly recognizing that merit – professional skills and demonstrated ability – is key to good governance and success – rather than political party membership, nationality, or personal connections.

If the District is to move forward and to successfully meet the challenges it faces, political parties and leaders must accept that ability and professional skill and experience must be the first criteria in filling positions in government. Parties and government will fail to deliver unless they can select and appoint professionally qualified people as public employees.

Finally, I would like to stress the importance of young people – the youth of the District and the youth of your municipalities – collectively the youth of BiH.

BiH needs its youth. You, as leaders, must give them a stake in this country, starting at the local level. You must give them reasons to stay here and build a better future, and to go abroad for education and experience, not to stay.

There is no more important investment than in youth, through education, training, and providing experience to the young people who are your future and without whom BiH cannot realize its potential. I would urge you, if you are not already doing so, to listen to them and engage them directly in building a multiethnic, democratic and prosperous BiH, based on strong and effective local self-government.

Thank you.