

Speech by the Brcko Supervisor, Susan R. Johnson, to members of the Brcko District Assembly, Administration, Judiciary and other invited guests

Mr President, Mr Mayor, Councillors, representatives of the District Administration and the Judiciary, distinguished guests:

Last summer, I was asked to take the position of Supervisor of Brcko. The more I learned about the it, the Final Award, and the important work going on here, the more interested I became. It's now a great pleasure for me to be here in Brcko.

I already consider myself part of this community. Although Brcko may be relatively small in size, the progress that you have already made is large in significance and has associated Brcko with success, with moving forward into the future, rather than with stagnation and the past.

But before I go any further, I would like to recognize the outstanding work that you, together with my predecessors – Ambassadors Farrand, Matthews and Clarke and the dedicated staff of the OHR office here in Brcko, have done in laying a strong foundation for future progress and greater prosperity for your community.

I would specially thank Gerhard Sontheim, whose skill, dedication and experience have contributed in no small measure

to our effectiveness. I hope that he will remain with us for the duration of my mandate.

Today I would like to focus my remarks around three broad areas:

- First, the notable progress that you have made here in Brcko over the last four years, which we can build on together to face the important new challenges ahead;
- Second, the strategic issue that Bosnia and Herzegovina faces this year, namely whether the country confirms its European destiny or slips into its periphery, and how these issues will affect Brcko and its prospects;
- And third, OHR Brcko priorities and how I plan to approach my work with you.

First – The measurable progress that we have achieved through this unique partnership. You know better than I that Brcko has become an example for many in BiH and certainly has built a reputation far greater than its physical size. You have shown what can be done by dedicated effort, cooperation across ethnic lines and initiative at the local level – by a willingness to look forward and genuine partnership with the international community. Brcko is today well positioned to continue to lead the way in many areas, but we need to tell our story even more effectively and better explain why success here is good for the Entities and for Bosnia and Herzegovina as a whole.

In March, it will be four years since the founding of the District.

At the time, Brcko was a bold experiment, without precedent and with many risks. But the partnership between the Brcko District and the OHR Supervisors, operating under the mandate of the Final Award, has worked. Together we have laid a strong foundation on which continued progress can be built. You know the indicators well:

- The District is demilitarised.
- Refugees have returned, property has been restituted and OHR has handed over responsibility for education, human rights, returns and reconstruction to the District Government.
- The District's institutions are multiethnic;
- The judiciary is independent and efficient;
- Economic progress is evident, economic development is gaining momentum and the District is attractive to domestic and foreign investors.
- The Brcko District Interim Assembly has passed over one hundred laws and amendments. You, rather than the Entities, the State or the international community, have dealt with and regulated many sensitive issues, from the naming of streets to the public display of monuments.
- In the last few months alone, the District has hosted a meeting of over forty mayors from around the Balkans, and has supported a respected theater festival and trade-fair;
- The District is a member of two European regional associations of municipalities;

In many areas, the District stands out as a model to other parts of BiH. We have a solid foundation to build on but there is still much to be done. We face a number of challenges:

First – continuing to make local government ever more effective, efficient and transparent, responsive to the needs of all of its citizens, and business friendly. Some of the measures that we think will contribute to these goals include:

- Early implementation of a Code of Ethics, Standard Operating Procedure and Disciplinary Order and re-energizing the Office for Citizens' Complaints.
- Reform of public service recruitment so as to ensure that qualifications, not connections, are the prime requisites for employment.

- Early registration of local communities.
- Greater transparency in budget decisions.

Second – creating more employment opportunities in the private sector, by completing the process of privatization, attracting more domestic and foreign investment to the District, and creating a good business environment.

- We need to accelerate the process of re-structuring companies that have not yet been privatized, and to develop a concept and strategy for privatizing business premises.
- We need to reorganize and modernize the Brcko Port.
- We need to develop industrial zones in the District.
- We need to create a single, consolidated unemployment office that provides effective assistance to its clients.

Third – To achieve these goals we need to continue and accelerate the vigorous harmonization and reform of Entity laws.

- We need a list of legislative priorities for this year and beyond.
- We need to finalize the inventory of Entity legislation that would continue to apply in the District.
- We need to coordinate the District's legislative activity with State legislation.
- We need to finally declare the IEBL as of no legal effect in the Brcko District.

Fourth – much work needs to be done to rehabilitate the District's damaged and neglected infrastructure, and to invest in the District's future.

- We must move forward with dredging of the Sava River.
- We must implement key improvements to the District's water supply and waste management facilities.
- We need more road repairs, including implementing a

Brcko by-pass.

- We need to develop a strategy to deal with issues of reconstruction of, or compensation for, devastated housing.

Too many of the District's residents still live in circumstances that represent a personal tragedy for the individuals involved. Many qualified persons are still unemployed, others are disabled through war or illness, a number of pensioners live in poor conditions and many families need support to bring up their children in humane conditions. The best way to ensure that the most vulnerable members of society are given a social safety net is not through ad hoc handouts but rather through a "needs-based" legal framework for social security. The bigger issue here is how Brcko can work effectively with the Entities and the State to resolve the issue of a fair, affordable and adequate pension system for all citizens.

These are just a few of the areas where moving forward can have important payoffs in building good governance and in creating the conditions needed for further progress. Brcko is catching up with neighboring countries faster than most of the rest of BiH, but we will need to keep moving forward in order not to slip backward.

As Supervisor, I commit myself and the OHR office to support and assist you in all these endeavors. We have commitments from the US Government for over a million dollars in projects to move us forward. We also need to attract more friends and supporters who recognize that Brcko's success is also in the interests of the Entities and BiH as a whole – and that Brcko is not a separate island but a key and integral part of BiH.

Moving forward, however, will depend more and more on you – the Government, the Assembly, the Judiciary and all citizens of Brcko. We can provide financial resources, but only your ideas, your willingness to find practical compromises and to

work hard together will enable you to achieve concrete and measurable results.

The Elections

Let me now say a few words about the elections. Free and fair elections are the key mechanism that allows citizens to direct the institutions of government and to hold parties and public officials accountable for their performance.

The elections to the District Assembly, scheduled for October 2004, are of crucial significance to the consolidation of the District and to the implementation of the Final Award. Regardless of the outcome of the elections, I am convinced that the resulting increased legitimacy and authority that the Assembly and Government will enjoy can only be a positive and welcome development – and a signal of political maturity.

For our part, we are working in conjunction with the Government's Department for Public Records, the Brcko District Election Commission, OSCE, and other relevant authorities to register voters. I want to take this opportunity to urge all eligible voters to register, and to double-check that their voter registration details are in order with the voter registration center in Hasana Bećirevića.

Secondly, I encourage all political parties to present District voters with realistic, specific and practical proposals – what we call a “political platform” that lays out what issues the party believes are the most important and what they would propose to do about these issues. To win the trust and support of voters, parties must demonstrate that they are operating not in their own interest, but rather in the public interest. Voters must demand that parties respond to their concerns.

Third, I would encourage public officials to be particularly careful not to use public funds and resources for election campaigning and party politics and to avoid the perception

that they are doing so. The willingness and ability of public officials to use public funds responsibly and wisely is closely linked to building public trust in government – at all levels.

The Way Forward

International supervision through OHR and the Supervisor cannot, and should not, become a permanent feature of Brcko and BiH. But before phasing out this supervision and international presence, we want reasonable confidence that the investment we have made together is secure, that the job is done, and that it is the right time to develop new ways and forms to continue our cooperation in the future.

In practical terms, then, the Supervisory regime will remain in place for some time after the elections to the District Assembly. In the meantime, the OHR's own priorities, combined with those of the Government and the Assembly, indicate to me that we can expect a busy and challenging year.

Achieving our agenda will require three core skills – hard work, political will, and last but not least, the ability to compromise. This last skill will be particularly important after the elections. Your – our – ability to progress further cannot take place in a vacuum, but rather in the larger context of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and its place in the region, in Europe and in the trans-Atlantic alliance.

This brings me to another broad area that I want to touch on today – one of the crucial issues that BiH faces this year, namely, whether you confirm what High Representative Paddy Ashdown has called your “European destiny” or not, or as he sometimes says – whether you catch the European and NATO trains – or not. 2004 will be a year of decision.

The region is turning toward Europe. Many of your neighbors are already engaged in the step-by-step process of joining the European Union. By the middle of this year, it will be clear

whether BiH is firmly on track, with its neighbors, towards inclusion in Europe, or whether it will slip into Europe's periphery.

- At the Istanbul Summit in June of this year, NATO will decide on BiH membership in the Partnership for Peace, the first step toward NATO membership.
- During the course of the summer, the European Commission will assess BiH progress on implementing the Feasibility Study conditions, and decide whether or not to recommend opening negotiations with BiH.

The Entities and the State must move forward with making difficult structural reforms, adopting new legislation and establishing new institutions; we here in Brcko will need to find effective ways to ensure that our interests and equities are taken into account.

This will mean intensifying dialogue at all levels, and finding the right strategy, both to ensure that progress we have made here is not undermined and that Brcko can contribute appropriately to the overall effort to "catch the European train". I look forward to working with you in this important area.

Working Together, OHR priorities and role:

I have already mentioned some of the priority areas that we need to address this year.

Broadly speaking, the role of OHR in BiH this year will be to assist with the implementation of the reform and restructuring requirements for European Union and NATO membership. This means that the High Representative in Sarajevo and the Supervisor in Brcko will broker, urge, suggest, support and facilitate. If and when we must issue orders or remove officials, it will be as a last resort and not the success that we increasingly expect of you and of ourselves. You, we hope, will take on the responsibility to make the necessary

reforms yourselves and not put off hard decisions that require compromise. The fewer times OHR has to impose or issue orders, the greater our success and the more you demonstrate readiness for European and NATO membership.

Finally, while Brcko itself is new to me, I have worked in and with transition situations for the last 15 or more years in many different countries of the former Soviet Union, Southeastern Europe and the Middle East. In the course of my career, in diplomacy and in the private sector, both in business and with NGO's, I have been fortunate to have opportunities to work on many challenging problems and issues.

Brcko District is unique in combining the challenges of overcoming some of the darker legacies of history and creating a multi-ethnic, democratic and prosperous society, with many positive aspects – a well-educated and talented population, many different cultures and traditions that add richness to life here, and the bold and creative nature of the Final Award itself.

I am also fortunate to inherit a team of dedicated, knowledgeable staff predominantly made up of people from Bosnia and Herzegovina.

I am looking forward to the time that I will spend here and to the opportunity to meet you individually in the course of our work together and to get to know you personally. In the meantime, I invite you to continue your close cooperation with OHR staff, your partners in government and fellow citizens, and I wish you a successful and prosperous 2004.