Address by the High Representative, Wolfgang Petritsch on the occasion of Establishment of Brcko District

I am delighted to be here today on this historic occasion – the inauguration of the Brcko District. I would like to welcome the members of the Presidency, Secretary of State Madeleine Albright and Commissioner Chris Patten.

This day could not have come about without an enormous amount of hard work from a great many people. I would like to thank the Presiding Arbitrator Roberts Owen, whose long commitment together with Judge Popovic and Professor Sadikovic resulted in the District's creation. I would also like to thank Ambassador Farrand and the staff of the OHR office in Brcko for their efforts to make the 'Award' into a 'District'. And a special thank you to the Joint Implementation Commission – which included representatives of the State of BiH, the Federation, the Republika Srpska and the Brcko Opstina – for their essential contributions.

For the citizens of Brcko, the enactment of the District Statute and the establishment of the Brcko Assembly and District government promise to provide a framework for the future. The District also has wider significance for BiH: it belongs to both the Federation and the RS, and therefore to all the people of Bosnia and Herzegovina. As such, the District represents a new phase in democratic, multi-ethnic government which can provide an example to the whole country.

While much has been accomplished, in Brcko as in the rest of

BiH, much still remains to be done. Like all citizens of BiH, the people of Brcko want a stable and prosperous district within a stable and prosperous country; a country which can enter European institutions as a real state. To do this, we must all work together to accomplish the goals of Dayton, most importantly in the areas of refugee returns, economic growth and strengthening of common institutions.

Regarding returns, until all who wish to return to their pre-war homes are able to do so, there will be no stability.

For this District to prosper and for BiH to have a future, economic growth must be self-sustaining. The crippling grip of bureaucratic restrictions and politicization must be removed in order to create conditions for growth, and replace the current aid-driven economy with an investment-driven one. Finally, effective state institutions shared and supported by all people are a prerequisite to BiH’s integration into European structures and institutions.

In closing, I want to again congratulate all involved, and to stress my sincere hope that with the coming into force of its new Statute, the District of Brcko will move quickly and resolutely to tackle these difficult issues.