

Address by the High Representative, Wolfgang Petritsch at the First anniversary of the establishment of the Brcko District of Bosnia and Herzegovina

Mayor Kisic; President Djapo; Ambassador Matthews; Ladies and Gentlemen;

The Brcko District's first year has flown by and you have passed many testing times with flying colours. It is a very great pleasure to be here today to congratulate all of you on your dedication and pioneering work in creating what I personally hope is the future Bosnia and Herzegovina in microcosm.

This District already has many successes to its name. You have a working, multi-ethnic government. It did not pass unnoticed how quickly and responsibly the District Assembly acted during the schools crisis in the autumn. The District Assembly has also been very active in adopting legislation in a whole range of important areas: on the police and courts, on health care, education and property. The 23 Laws adopted by your assembly puts the past Entity and State legislatures to shame and I very much hope the new parliaments and governments will follow your energetic example.

Brcko is also a safer place than it was last year. The District is fully demilitarised and law enforcement is the

duty of a fully integrated, multi-ethnic police force. The Brcko police took part in Operation "Makro" which helped free 177 women last weekend across the whole of Bosnia and Herzegovina from a real blight in the region, forced prostitution. This is an especially important piece of good news which – along with the recent tribunal ruling in The Hague, which for the first time punished rape as a crime against humanity – enables all of us in Bosnia and Herzegovina to mark International Women's Day today in a serious way.

The concrete results of this are clear: over 5,000 refugees and displaced persons have returned to their homes in the District last year compared to 1,200 in 1999. The return figure could be higher and there is still much work to be done to improve Brcko citizens' lives, from jobs to the classroom. So I am very pleased to hear the District is close to establishing a professional judiciary and is looking at ways to revitalise the economy. The District's work to integrate education, giving kids here a firm base on which to build a secure and prosperous multi-ethnic community, is important not only for Brcko but for the whole of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Connected to all this is the District's intelligent approach to reforming the Arizona Market, taking out the potential for unchecked criminal activities and putting in its place a thriving centre of business which meets proper safety standards.

What is the recipe for your success? I believe it is your willingness – the District Government, the District Assembly, the international agencies represented here and above all the citizens of the District – to cooperate, to work together to build a better life, building on its long past as a crossroads for the region.

Brcko is showing all in Bosnia and Herzegovina the way to a future in Europe. I hope with all my heart that we will see your hard work, after many long, tragic and hard years,

repeated across the whole of this beautiful country.

Thank you for listening and happy birthday!