

Remarks by Senior Deputy HR Werner Wnendt at a Centre for the Promotion of Civil Society Conference on NGO Effectiveness

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure for me to have the opportunity to address you at this event, which is important for the future development of Bosnia and Herzegovina. We are here today to analyse and build on the significant achievements made by the non-governmental sector in recent years.

The NGO Coalition “To Work and Succeed Together” has managed to do what no other NGO initiative has done in this country in the last ten years – to gather hundreds of NGO representatives from all over Bosnia and Herzegovina and work in a combined effort on key issues affecting the operation and aims of their organizations.

The documents presented and promoted at this conference will play an important role in achieving the highest goal of BiH civil society – its SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT.

First of all, they will provide a framework and introduce reliable practices for communication and cooperation between the non-governmental sector and the BiH Council of Ministers. I sincerely hope that this will lead to an authentic partnership on all issues of mutual concern and importance to the citizens of this country.

On the other hand, these documents – the Development Strategy and the Code of Conduct – also represent important

requirements for more effective and professional work by non-governmental organizations.

But the greatest achievement of this whole process is one simple fact – you are united. People from non-governmental organizations have recognized how much they have in common and how important it is to act jointly in order to be able to promote their aims. And your combined efforts have produced substantial documents.

I am well aware that the role of NGOs is not an easy one, and that small, local NGOs in particular face numerous difficulties in their everyday work. The two major problems are the difficulty of maintaining financial support and the present political and social marginalization of civil society issues in this country.

I believe that greater involvement in drafting legislation and greater participation in the political decision-making process are the key to overcoming these difficulties – NGOs must find ways of influencing decision makers effectively; they must lobby in a way that gets results. This Coalition proves that you are finding a way to make your voice heard.

The OHR and the International Community understand that reforms cannot be implemented successfully without the active support of civil society. A strong civil society is crucial to creating the conditions that are necessary to safeguard the peace process and a viable democracy. A well developed civil society is an essential requirement for every modern democratic state.

The significance of a well-functioning civil society will continue to grow as Bosnia and Herzegovina moves forward along the path to Euro-Atlantic integration.

I am confident that the BiH authorities are coming to recognize the potential of NGOs. Not only do they represent a potentially influential lobbying function – they represent a

pool of expertise and, potentially, an extension of the authorities' capability in making progress with reforms that will improve the lot of citizens. Today, I strongly urge the representatives of the authorities who are with us to understand and engage in the productive partnership that the NGOs in this room wish to build.

The future is promising. I hope that the documents presented today will be implemented sooner rather than later so that you can work more effectively. You have a crucial role in the development of BiH, and the proposals discussed at this conference will help you fulfill that role.

Thank you.