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REPUBLIC OF SERBIA

**OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting
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Fundamental freedoms I**

**Statement by the Adviser at the Administration for Cooperation for Churches and Religious
Communities of the Ministry of Justice
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Freedom of thought, conscience and religion in the Republic of Serbia 2011-2016

Although we align ourselves with the EU statement I would like to make few remarks in my national capacity.

The Constitution of the Republic of Serbia and the Law on Churches and Religious Communities guarantee freedom of thought, conscience and religion to all residents of the Republic of Serbia.

State authority in charge of religious affairs in the Republic of Serbia which succeeded the Ministry of Religious Affairs was first the Office for Cooperation with Churches and Religious Communities in the Government of the Republic of Serbia (2012-2014) and then the Administration for Cooperation with Churches and Religious Communities in the Ministry of Justice (2014 and present). Headed by Dr. Mileta Radojević this authority continues to achieve significant results in the field of religious cooperation in the past five years.

There are seven traditional churches and religious communities in Serbia which make almost 95% of total population in our country. Traditional Churches and Religious Communities are those which have had a historical continuity within Serbia for many centuries and which have acquired the status of a legal person in accordance with particular acts, that is: the Serbian Orthodox Church, the Roman Catholic Church, the Slovak Evangelical Church (a.c.), the Christian Reformed Church, the Evangelical Christian Church (a.c.), the Islamic Religious Community and the Jewish Religious Community. Also, in accordance with the Act on Registration in the Register of Churches and Religious Communities, as a bylaw, the Diocese of Romanian Orthodox Church, Dacia Felix, acquired status of traditional church on the territory of Serbian Banat. Relations between the state and all the churches and religious communities are very fruitful.

Population by religion in the Republic of Serbia according to the 2011 census		
Christians	6 555 931	91,22 %
Orthodox Christians	6 079 396	84,59 %
Roman Catholics	356 957	4,97 %
Protestants	71 284	0,99 %
Other Christians	3 211	0,04 %
Pleaded only as Christians.	45 983	0,64 %
Islamic	222 828	3,10 %
Judaic	578	0,01 %
Eastern religions	1 237	0,02 %
Other	1 776	0,02 %
Agnostics	4 010	0,06 %
Nonbelievers (atheists)	80 053	1,11 %
No reply	220 735	3,07 %
Unknown	99 714	1,39 %
	7 186 862	100 %

In addition to these traditional churches and religious communities there are legally registered 17 more denominational churches and religious communities in the Republic of Serbia. In terms of exercising the rights established in the Constitution and the Law on Churches and Religious Communities, all the churches and religious communities have equal rights. The only difference is that the traditional churches and religious communities insisted on the name "traditional" because of its many centuries of existence and operation in this area and because they are by their nature more numerous since the newly established churches and religious communities exercise registration on the basis of affiliation of at least one hundred believers. That's how this law is one of the most liberal laws in the field of realization of rights related to religious freedom. The diverse Protestant churches are active in Serbia and registered as organizational units of larger Protestant churches. The Law on Churches and Religious Communities allows the registration of new churches and religious communities.

Positive attitude of our state towards religious rights and freedoms is also reflected in the continuing process of property restitution. In the process of restitution so far, churches and religious communities have been returned over 50% of the property confiscated to them after the Second World War by the communist authorities.

Decree on performing religious service in the Serbian Army was adopted in 2011. Religious service in the Serbian Army is performed by priests and religious officials of churches and religious communities.

Decree on payment of contributions for pension, disability and health insurance of priests and religious officials was adopted in 2012 and is applied to all churches and religious communities.

State budget allocates funds for project activities of churches and religious communities which are related to: construction, education, culture, helping monks, clergy and religious officials, support for the clergy and monks in Kosovo and Metohija as well as for the protection of religious, cultural and national identity.

Property and status of the Serbian Orthodox Church in Kosovo and Metohija are under constant attack. Attempt of unilaterally proclaimed independent Kosovo to enter UNESCO, as a flagrant example of the aggressive policy of the Provisional Institutions of Self-Government in Priština is prevented. Serbia continues diplomatic and every other campaign against attempts of falsifying history and appropriation of heritage, that is against deprivation of the rights of Serbs and the Serbian Orthodox Church on its own identity.

Facilities and property of the Serbian Orthodox Church are continuously and chronically exposed to vandal attacks and the institutional and social extremism, which further reinforces the validity of the request of Belgrade that the issue of property, including the property of the Serbian Orthodox Church, should be as soon as possible on the agenda of the dialogue with Priština, conducted through the mediation of the EU.

Budget funds are allocated to all the churches and religious communities in proportion to their percentage according to the last census. There is a principle of positive discrimination when religious

communities that have a very small number of believers, receive a higher amount compared to their percentage on the census.

The Republic of Serbia marked 1.700 years of the Edict of Milan in 2013 through a series of government programs where the representatives of all Christian denominations in our country and abroad participated.

Belgrade, the capital of Serbia, hosted Conference of European Rabbis in 2013.

The Second Bilateral Interfaith Dialogue between Serbia and Indonesia was held in 2013 in Jakarta when for the first time in the history of our country the highest religious leaders of traditional churches and religious communities with high government representatives officialy together visited a foreign country.

The Third Bilateral Intefaitth Dialogue between Serbia and Indonesia was held in 2015 in Belgrade where the high state, university and the highest religious representatives discussed about current issues and considered the possibilities of involving the youth in the interfaith dialogue.

The Administration for Cooperation with Churches and Religious Communities has the intention to offer the platform for the regional interfaith dialogue, where all the republics formed after the dissolution of Yugoslavia could have the oppotunity to resolve issues of mutal importance for religious harmony.