



REPUBLIC OF SERBIA

**OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting
Working Session 2
Fundamental freedoms I**

**Statement by the Adviser to the Minister of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Serbia,
Mr Aleksandar Rakovic**

Warsaw, 28 September - 9 October 2009

Improvement of religious tolerance in the Republic of Serbia, 2008-2009

According to the last census held in the Republic of Serbia in 2002 almost 95% of the population was registered belonging to one of the traditional churches or religious communities: The Serbian Orthodox Church, the Romanian Orthodox Church, the Roman Catholic Church, the Slovak Evangelical Church, the Reformed Christian Church and Evangelical Christian Church, the Islamic Community and Jewish Community. Around 85% of the Republic of Serbia's population are declared Orthodox Christians. Around 83% of the Republic of Serbia's population are ethnic Serbs, faithful of the Serbian Orthodox Church, the largest church or religious community in the Republic of Serbia. Only 0,5% of the Republic of Serbia's population are declared atheists.

Therefore, almost all people of faith belong to traditional churches and religious communities with multi-centennial continuity on the Republic of Serbia's soil. Relations between the traditional churches and religious communities and the Republic of Serbia's Ministry of Religious Affairs are good and ever-improving.

Between September 2008 and September 2009, the Republic of Serbia's Ministry of Religious Affairs has made several important steps toward improving religious tolerance in the Republic of Serbia.

In Autumn of 2008, the Republic of Serbia's Ministry of Religious Affairs successfully provided all required help in solving the stalemate in Islamic religious education in a number of public primary and secondary schools, caused by the permanent division within the Islamic Community in the Republic of Serbia. Although with some delay, Islamic religious education was normalized in all public schools where factions of the divided Islamic Community were unable to agree on the choice of Islamic religious educators.

In April 2009, the Romanian Orthodox Diocese of Dacia Felix was registered as a traditional church in the Republic of Serbia and accorded equality with other traditional churches and religious communities previously recognized by the Law on Churches and Religious Communities in the Republic of Serbia.

The Republic of Serbia's Ministry of Religious Affairs has intensified contacts with non-traditional Protestant churches, whose faithful account for but a half percent of the Republic of Serbia's population, ensuring them of the Republic of Serbia's full respect their religious freedom and missionary work. Very important fact is that NGO monitors of human rights inform that number of isolated incidents against Protestant churches shows 30% decrease.

Representatives of the Republic of Serbia's Ministry of Religious Affairs had a series of official meetings on the highest level with several international missions: The UN, the OSCE, the Council of Europe and the European Commission. The impression was that the Republic of Serbia's Ministry of Religious Affairs was „very convincing“ with its facts presented to international missions.

The harmonic relationship between the Republic of Serbia and the Serbian Orthodox Church are often met by tendentious verbal attacks from a smaller yet radical portion of the NGO sector in the Republic of Serbia. The same circles, in a wholly inappropriate manner, are hard at work at debasing the authority of the Serbian Orthodox Church, as well as other churches and religious communities. The Republic of Serbia's Ministry of Religious Affairs considers that these verbal attacks against the Serbian Orthodox Church and other churches and religious communities do not contribute to the development of tolerance and good neighbourly relations in the Republic of Serbia.

At the very end, the Republic of Serbia's Ministry of Religious Affairs wishes to underline that the assistance of the international community with regard to the unsatisfactory position of the Serbian Orthodox Church in Kosovo and Metohija should be more sufficient effort in order to protect the Orthodox population, priestly and monastic orders in the southern Serbian province from provocations and the autocracy of the secessionist Albanian authorities.

