



Republic of Serbia
MINISTRY OF HUMAN AND
MINORITY RIGHTS
-Department for Improvement and
Protection of Rights and Freedoms
of National Minorities-

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**Strategies for promoting tolerance and understanding, interethnic and
intercultural dialogue, including with respect to religion, in the OSCE area**

**OSCE High-Level Conference on Tolerance and Non-Discrimination
Astana 29-30 June 2010
Session 7**

Mr. Petar Antic, Assistant Minister for Human and Minority Rights, Serbia

Your excellencies, dear participants,

Since 2008 and the establishment of the new government, Serbia has taken important steps forward in promoting tolerance and understanding, interethnic and intercultural dialogue. These efforts have been led by the Ministry of human and minority rights, which was established by the new government. Two particularly important steps has been taken in creating appropriate legal and institutional frameworks.

1. First, the Law on national councils was adopted in 2009, and this was followed in 2010 by the elections for national councils
2. Second, the Law against discrimination was adopted and the Commissioner for Equality appointed

The national minority councils are minority self governance bodies elected by minorities in order to present their interest in the area of culture, information, education and official use of language and in other question important for their identity. The national minority councils are important tools for communication between national minorities and state institutions.

On June 6, this year, the Ministry of Human and minority rights organized the elections for the national minority councils. 19 national minority councils were elected, with more than 230,000 people participating in the elections.

Special attention was paid to the process of electing the Albanian national council, which previously had no similar representation at State level. More than 55% of Albanian voters participated in the elections and next week the Council will be established based on the election results.

The second important step taken by the Government was the adoption of the Law against discrimination, the provisions of which are fully inline with EU standards. Under this law, on May 5, this year, the Serbian parliament appointed the Commissioner for Equality.

Having in mind that persons belonging to the Roma national minority are among the most vulnerable in Serbian society, the Government adopted the Strategy for Improvement of the Status of Roma and the Action plan. Within the action plan, Serbia allocated 5 million EUR for 2009 and 4 mil EUR for 2010.

The Serbian Government has taken specific steps to address the discrimination and prejudice faced by the Roma.

1. In recognizing the problem of over representation of Roma in special Schools, Serbia has adopted a new law on education which among other reforms will ensure automatic enrollment of Roma children into regular primary schools.
2. This law has also institutionalized Roma teacher assistants within the education system, as of the beginning of this school year.
3. In the following months, the government will adopt a new bi-law which will contain definitions of discrimination and segregation in education and provide indicators for discrimination, against which schools will be required to report.

Also, unfortunately, in Serbia, like elsewhere in the OSCE region, discrimination against the members of LGBT community remains prevalent. The Serbian government is committed to providing special attention to this issue, including providing support for the organization the first pride march which is planned for this summer.

In Serbia more than 14 % of population belongs to national minorities. This diversity creates many opportunities but also challenges. Serbia has a legacy from the 20 century, a legacy that creates a necessity, indeed an imperative, for interethnic dialog not only within the country but also beyond its borders. Serbia stands ready to cooperate with other OSCE member states in order to achieve improved levels of tolerance