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MINISTRY OF RELIGION AND DIASPORA  
REPUBLIC OF SERBIA

**OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting**

Working session 2: Fundamental freedoms I (continued)

Freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief

**Statement by Senior Adviser to the Ministry of Religion and Diaspora,  
Dr Aleksandar Raković**

**Warsaw, 26 September 2011**

The Ministry of Religious Affairs' (from March 2011 the Ministry of Religion and Diaspora)  
 Cooperation with Churches and Religious Communities in 2010-2011  
 and the Advancement of Religious Rights

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.

| Religious Structure of the Republic of Serbia<br>(According to Census Results in the Republic of Serbia, 2002) |                  |              |
|--|------------------|--------------|
| Orthodox   | 6 371 584        | 84.98 %      |
| Roman Catholics  | 410 976          | 5.48 %       |
| Muslims  | 239 658          | 3.20 %       |
| Protestants  | 80 837           | 1.08 %       |
| Jews   | 785              | 0.01 %       |
| Oriental cults   | 530              | 0.01 %       |
| Atheists   | 40 068           | 0.53 %       |
| Undeclared   | 197 031          | 2.62 %       |
| Unknown  | 137 291          | 1.83 %       |
| <b>TOTAL</b>   | <b>7 498 001</b> | <b>100 %</b> |

| Religious Structure of Serbs in the Republic of Serbia<br>(According to Census Results in the Republic of Serbia, 2002) |                  |              |
|---|------------------|--------------|
| Orthodox  | 6 052 391        | 97.41 %      |
| Roman Catholics   | 5 040            | 0.08 %       |
| Muslims   | 4 328            | 0.07 %       |
| Protestants   | 907              | 0.01 %       |
| Jews  | 34               | 0.0005 %     |
| Oriental cults  | 193              | 0.003 %      |
| Atheists  | 21 190           | 0.34 %       |
| Other faiths  | 12 409           | 0.20 %       |
| Undeclared  | 65 045           | 1.05 %       |
| Unknown   | 51 188           | 0.82 %       |
| <b>TOTAL</b>  | <b>6 212 838</b> | <b>100 %</b> |

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 Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Serbia are good and ever-improving.

In 2010 and 2011, the Ministry of Religious Affairs/Ministry of Religion and Diaspora continued with activities whose goal was the affirmation and development of freedom of religion and the advancement of cooperation between the state and all churches and religious communities, which function in the Republic of Serbia. Churches and religious communities were given assistance in protecting their legal and social status as well as enabled to realize rights accorded to them by law.

Owing to the established institutional framework and undertaken measures, relations between the Republic of Serbia's state bodies and churches and religious communities in Serbia are good and stable. With that in mind, the Interreligious Council of the Republic of Serbia's Ministry of Religious Affairs was formed on June 17, 2010. It is constituted by the Minister of Religious Affairs Prof. Dr. Bogoljub Šijaković and hierarchs of the traditional churches and religious communities: The Bishop of Bačka Irinej Bulović (Serbian Orthodox Church), the Archbishop of Belgrade Stanislav Hočevar (Roman Catholic Church), the Reis-ul-ulema Adem Zilkić (Islamic Community of Serbia) and Rabbi Isak Asiel (Jewish Community). That has further strengthened interreligious dialogue and emphasized the readiness of Churches and Religious Communities to actively contribute to the democratization and general progress of society in the Republic of Serbia.

There are no significant open issues when it comes to the relation of state bodies with traditional churches and religious communities: The Serbian Orthodox Church, the Roman Catholic Church, the Islamic Community of Serbia (with seat in Belgrade), the Jewish Community, the Slovak Evangelical Church, the Reformed Christian Church and the Evangelical Christian Church. When it comes to the smaller churches and religious communities, international organizations and forums that follow religious rights have noticed and publically stated positive changes in relation to the government's and citizens' attitude towards smaller churches and religious communities.

The stance of the Islamic Community in Serbia (with seat in Novi Pazar) towards the Republic of Serbia represents an unpleasant exception. Namely, the head (Mufti Muamer Zukorlić) and clergy of this Islamic community are engaged in endless political threats of internationalization and radicalization of the "Sandžak issue" according to the "Kosovo scenario", the boycott of competent state bodies, verbal attacks on state bodies of the Republic of Serbia and its national institutions. Despite these facts, the Ministry of Religious Affairs/Ministry of Religion and Diaspora of the Republic of Serbia has made several gestures of good faith and allocated considerable financial help in 2010 and 2011 to the Islamic Community in Serbia (with seat in Novi Pazar).

During 2010 and 2011, the Ministry of Religious Affairs/Ministry of Religion and Diaspora of the Republic of Serbia continued its material assistance to churches and religious communities, realizing three programs with seven projects. The Program "Implementing Cooperation Between the

State and Churches and Religious Communities” encompasses the projects: “The Advancement of Religious Culture, Religious Freedoms and Tolerance” along with “The Protection of Religious, Cultural and National Identity”. The program “Religious Education” is made up of: “Middle School Education” and “Upper Theological Education”. The program “Assistance to Churches and Religious Communities is made up of the projects: “Assistance in Building, Maintenance, Emergency Sanitation and Reconstruction of Shrines in Underdeveloped Regions”, “Kosovo and Metohia Clergy Assistance”, “Assistance to Clergy in Border and Economically Underdeveloped Regions and in Goal of Regulating Contributions for Pensions and Health Insurance”.

The Commission of the Government of the Republic of Serbia on Religious Education in Elementary and Middle Schools is addressing issues concerning the curriculum and syllabus, textbooks and qualification of employed teachers.

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 and some media. 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 Ministry of Religion and Diaspora 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.

We are happy to say that in 2011 the Ministry of Religion/Ministry of Religion and Diaspora of the Republic of Serbia started international interfaith dialogues. We held the First Interfaith Dialogue Serbia – Indonesia (Belgrade, 7–9 April 2011), the biggest ever interreligious meeting Serbia or Yugoslavia ever held on state level with foreign countries. Members of delegations and participants were: ministers, ambassadors, government and ministry officials, the highest religious leaders and theologians (Orthodox Christians, Roman Catholic Christians, Protestant Christians, Muslims, Hinduists and Judaists), university professors and other scholars. The First Interfaith Dialogue Serbia – Indonesia gave the new, but very important level in Serbia’s state cooperation with foreign countries.

Finally, our assessment is that during 2010 and 2011, the cooperation of the state with churches and religious communities has strengthened on several levels, as well as inter-confessional cooperation and religious freedoms which are in conjunction with the course of the Republic of Serbia’s Government on the acceleration of European integrations. We stress with satisfaction that religious intolerance in the Republic of Serbia is rendered to exceptions and a minimum.