



**Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe**  
**MISSION IN KOSOVO**

**Remarks of Ambassador Werner Wnendt,  
Head of OSCE Mission in Kosovo,**

**Press Conference on "Minority Language Use in Kosovo"**

**Prizren, 7 December 2006**

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*The following are opening remarks given at a press conference organized by the OSCE Mission in Kosovo.*

Ladies, gentlemen, municipal authorities, Respect for the language rights of minority communities is a symbol and a living testimony of tolerance. It is my honour to be here today in Prizren, a city with a tradition of more than 1,000 years of multiculturalism and language diversity.

Prizren Municipality, through its simultaneous translation facilities located in the Municipal Assembly, and its practice of regularly translating official documents in Albanian, Serbian, Bosnian and Turkish, represents a positive example for Kosovo.

Today's event is to launch the findings of the OSCE Mission in Kosovo report on Minority Language Use in Municipalities in Kosovo covering March to August 2006.

Through this report, the OSCE Mission in Kosovo is proud to contribute to the continuing development of minority language rights and policies in Kosovo's municipalities.

The OSCE applauds the recent promulgation on 20 October 2006 of the Kosovo Assembly Law on the Use of Languages, new legislation which adds clarity and provides a more comprehensive legislative framework for the future protection of all communities' linguistic rights.

This assessment covers the time period from March to August 2006, on the eve of the passage of the new legislation. This assessment therefore provides an indication of where Kosovo stands now. It remains a valid testament to where Kosovo can and should continue to improve under the new legislative framework.

The report focuses on the implementation of applicable law in areas such as participation in the decision-making process and the right to communicate in one's own language with all municipal bodies and municipal civil servants.

The OSCE Mission in Kosovo also acknowledges the importance of further reinforcing existing central level language monitoring mechanisms established in the Ministry of Local Government Administration (MLGA) and the Ministry of Public Services (MPS).

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*Ambassador Werner Wnendt, Head of OSCE Mission in Kosovo  
7 December 2006*

This report is a tool for evaluation and progress. There are still areas that require improvement at the municipal level. I would underscore for example:

Demonstrating a higher level of commitment to promote minority communities' language rights by adopting a proactive approach in addressing community needs, including increased outreach activities to minority communities and more training and capacity building for civil servants on both language skills and rights.

Furthermore, there is a pressing need to ensure better allocation of municipal resources that would enhance translation and interpretation capacities.

Finally, promoting the more effective use of the Communities Committees and Mediation Committees to protect, raise awareness and promote the language rights of minority communities and their members.

The creation of a Language Commission, as foreseen by the new law on the Use of Languages, promises to reinforce the capacity of the Kosovo Government to ensure the implementation of language rights.

It is envisaged that the Commission receives complaints, carries out investigations, mediates solutions and issues recommendations related to the violation of minority community language rights and the implementation of the Language Law.

The creation of this Commission will be important in bolstering the existing capacity of central level mechanisms established by the MLGA and MPS in order to monitor central and municipal level language compliance. It is commendable that both MPS and MLGA have developed a system to monitor language compliance through reporting templates and statistical tools. This system covers access to official documents, translation services, issuance of personal documents in the native language of the recipient and official signs.

It is also important to foster awareness of other existing complaint procedures for persons who consider themselves to be a victim of a violation of their language rights. In addition to municipal remedies and complaint procedures, aggrieved persons can also resort to the Ombudsperson Institution, which has proved to be a respected and effective human rights protection mechanism.

More efforts are needed to enforce a system of warnings and sanctions in case of violations.

The Ministry of Transport and Communications has made considerable progress in installing language compliant signs on regional road ways. The Ministry is advised to guarantee corrective and sustained action to replace signs that utilise unofficial names, are defaced or reflect incorrect spelling.

The Ministry of Finance and Economy and other line Ministries are encouraged to ensure that all documentation sent to municipalities is translated in all official languages.

Finally, the OSCE Mission in Kosovo encourages the development of comprehensive assessment mechanisms directly managed by central and municipal PISG.

Today here in Prizren, I would like to launch a message of hope that, in the coming years, the continued efforts of municipal and central authorities set an example for all communities in Kosovo and contribute to consolidating full respect for minority community language rights as a common societal value.