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**OSCE Chairmanship Conference on Intolerance and
Discrimination against Muslims
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Session 1

*Statement delivered by Mr. Vladimir Radulovic,
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of Montenegro, Head of delegation of Montenegro*

Distinguished Mr. Chairman,

Your Excellencies,

ENGLISH only

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Dear friends,

It is an exceptional honour and pleasure to address this respective audience as a representative of the Republic of Montenegro, the OSCE youngest participating state. Right at the beginning, I would like to emphasize that Montenegro is fully dedicated to achieving the OSCE standards and goals, represented in the distant but lasting Helsinki Final Act from 1975. We have confirmed our dedication through our permanent support to the regional and international initiatives aimed at fighting different kinds of discrimination and non-tolerance, as well as through development of the mutual respect and understanding in our own society. To this aim, we welcome all the efforts that so far have been made by the three OSCE representatives.

Firstly, I would like to stress the importance of a continued dialogue on this subject. This issue may not and can not be ended. Discrimination, non-tolerance and perception that always "the hell are always the others" (*L'enfer c'est les autres*), will never disappear. Neither will our fight, commitment and persistence to end this perception of the world. Allow me, in this sense, to take this opportunity to thank Spain, chair of the OSCE, the host of this important event, with this important issue.

As well as this beautiful city, where we stand today, the Republic of Montenegro is very proud of its multiethnic, multicultural and multi-religious character. In the numerous situations through our, not so distant past, we confirmed our sense for the respect of multiculturalism in our country. Montenegro has managed, in a very dramatic years at the end of the last century, in spite of many, external and internal challenges, and many extremist threats, to preserve its civil peace, ethnic tolerance and stability.

Dear friends,

Allow me to remind you that in a spring of 1999, during NATO intervention on a FRJ, over 100 thousands of Albanians, overwhelming majority of them being Muslims looked for salvation, running away from bombs and repression. And they found a safe haven in Montenegro. We open our doors and our hearts to

“others and those different from us”. In my opinion, dear friends, this was the moment when Montenegro was established as a modern and viable political society. On a Referendum held on a May 21st last year, this fact was only confirmed by our citizens. All of its ethnic and national minorities, with no exception, have voted for the Republic of Montenegro, as in not many places in the region and world. Therefore, as a small country, we are dedicated to preserve our unique and diverse culture. Cherishing these values, we are promoting the most important principles of the OSCE.

Allow me, dear friends, to present to you just a few facts. According to the Census of Population, made by the Republican Statistics Bureau (MONSTAT) in 2003, there are around 48 thousands or 7,77% of Bosniaks, and around 25 thousand or approximately 4% of Muslims living in Montenegro. Thus, all together, around 12% of citizens of Montenegro are Muslims.

Participation of national minorities in political life is guaranteed by the Constitution and other laws provisions regarding voting right, freedom to association and election process. In such a way it will be also in a new Constitution, in whose drafting and adoption, as we speak, are being involved members of all national and ethnic groups in Montenegro. Through national and civil parties, through civil society, through media, experts groups and in many other ways.

National minorities have a right to establish political parties. There is only one limitation in the Constitutional provision defining freedom to associations, and that is forbidding the work of political organizations which is directed towards violent destruction of the Constitutional order and territorial integrity of the state, violation of guaranteed human rights and freedoms or instigating racial, national, religious or other type of hatred and animosity, as it is in any other democracy in the world.

Political organization of minorities in Montenegro is various. Bosniak and Muslim minorities are organized in political parties and NGOs. As free voters they support both national political parties as well as civil parties, mainly political structures in power. Out of the 81 MP's in Montenegrin Parliament nine of them or more than 10% belongs to Bosniaks and Muslims. Some of them hold ministerial or deputy ministerial portfolios, some are ambassadors or diplomats in Montenegrin missions abroad; some are taking other important positions in various public and administrative offices. Besides, they are also organized through the non-governmental organizations among which the best known is “Matica muslimanska Crne Gore”/Muslim Mother in Montenegro. Of course, having said neither is perfect or enough. There is a lot yet to be done in order to

make the position of all national minorities better, because, as I said before this process has no end.

With ratification of European Charter on Regional and/or Minority Languages, Montenegro has accepted Albanian and Romany as minority languages. As we speak today, in the Parliament of Montenegro and outside of it, there is an open debate, dialog and negotiation how this issue should be resolved within the new Constitution of the Republic of Montenegro, to be adopted shortly. One of possible solutions, that we seriously consider and that would recognize well known multicultural and multiconfesional character of Montenegrin society, but also in full harmony with the core European values, is one that would recognize languages of national and ethnical minorities- Croatian, Bosniak, Albanian, as official ones along with the official Montenegrin language.

The current Constitution stipulates that in municipalities and areas mostly inhabited by national minorities, their language is officially used, too. For example, in the municipality of Plav, predominantly populated by Muslims, the official languages are also Albanian and Bosniak. City councilors belonging to national minorities are free to speak their language as well as to write in their language pursuant to the Law. Names of those municipalities, districts, squares, streets, public institutions and places are written in Bosniak and Albanian. At the sessions of the city assemblies, Albanian and Bosniak language are being spoken. Drafts of the acts should be given on a public discussion in their native language also.

Free expression and free practice of religious beliefs is guaranteed to all citizens of Montenegro. Free expression of religious beliefs is also guaranteed by legal solutions that allow believers to be absent from work during greatest religious holidays. This law determines offending responsibility that is included for a responsible person in a firm, institution, other legal entity, state body or an entrepreneur that does not provide the paid absence for an employee during the period of religious holidays.

Education of minorities foremost Bosniaks, Muslims and Croats in Montenegro, is an integral part of the single educational system, and is being realized through the concept of common curriculums, since the language spoken by all of them, beyond any doubts, and no matter or question how should we call it, is the part of a single language system. Minority communities have additional possibility to propose and arrange about 20% of the overall curriculum, if those are important for their education and they may be separately learnt according to their needs and interests. Significant novelties in the reform of education are also new educational curriculums for history. These curriculums respect historical facts and all the contents containing insulting elements or some national extreme

elements are removed. All nations of Western Balkan, and its political elites, after a decade of traumatic experiences, have to look, read, interpret and valorize history in a new sense and in a new context. For the sake of the European future of the generations that will come.

Dear friends,

At the end, I would like to stress once again the importance of combating discrimination and promoting mutual respect and understanding. In this light, I strongly believe that Montenegro, of course not by its size or geopolitical importance, but by the fact of its positive and inspiring example could contribute to affirmation of values this conference is dedicated to. Cherishing our diverse culture and traditions, we will preserve our common identity, always aware of a fact that above all of us is one common identity, identity of human race and of the mankind.

Thank you.