



**STATEMENT BY AMBASSADOR MIROSLAVA BEHAM,  
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF SERBIA,  
IN RESPONSE TO THE ADDRESS  
OF AMBASSADOR KNUT VOLLEBAEK,  
OSCE HIGH COMMISSIONER ON NATIONAL MINORITIES,  
AT THE 718<sup>th</sup> MEETING OF  
THE OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

26 June 2008

Mr. Chairman,

On behalf of the delegation of Serbia I warmly welcome Ambassador Vollebaek to the Permanent Council and thank him for his eloquent statement, as well as for the presentation of the Recommendations on National Minorities in Inter-State Relations, which we think is a knowledgeable and thoughtful document.

Since the Recommendations are still carefully studied in Belgrade, allow me to make only some, more general and preliminary remarks on their nature and intentions. We believe that the close scrutiny of the problem of national minorities in inter-state relations *per se* is highly relevant and topical, even – or maybe in particular – in times of integrative processes and globalization, where borders and boundaries are being overcome. As we are aware of, however, in spite of the world growing closer together, the notion of the state remains – politically and emotionally – an indispensable element of identity and singularity. Minorities, again, have their own need for identity, which might tie them to other states, on the one hand, and the need for integration in the society in which they live, on the other hand. To find common guidelines for addressing these complex relations is a challenging and important task. With respect to the Recommendations we particularly welcome the references to existing binding documents as the Helsinki Final Act, and our understanding is that the Recommendations refer to the participating States, all equal in their sovereignty and territorial integrity.

Mr. Chairman,

Though Ambassador Vollebaek did not mention Serbia explicitly in his statement, he spoke about a part of our country – about Kosovo. We very much appreciate the High Commissioner's focus on the situation of the non-Albanian communities in the province and highly welcome his status neutral approach. Non-Albanians in Kosovo, in particular the Serbian community, face a twofold problem now – the serious lack of

implementation of standards that has been prevailing since 1999, and institutions that they do not accept due to their illegally declared independence.

In Kosovo, we have very obviously a conflicting situation today – from the local level to the United Nations Security Council. Under these circumstances, the first priority of all actors should be to find common ways to decrease tensions, stabilize the situation on the ground and facilitate the daily life of the people. What is needed now is communication, dialogue and confidence-building measures – among the communities in Kosovo, but also between Belgrade and Pristina.

In this respect we appreciate the continuous efforts of the High Commissioner to open up the path of reconciliation, trust and better understanding. This is a highly challenging task, not only for the High Commissioner, but for the international presence in Kosovo as are UNMIK and the OSCE, and the international community in general. Problems can only be solved through dialogue and growing confidence, and only agreed solution can lead to stability and security. After all, this is the end of all our common efforts here in Vienna and elsewhere.

In this sense, we look forward to further good cooperation with Ambassador Vollebaek and wish him all the best for the challenging tasks ahead.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman