



REPUBLIC OF SERBIA

**OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting
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Tolerance and non-discrimination II**

**Statement by the Adviser to the Minister of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Serbia,
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The current situation within the Islamic Community in the Republic of Serbia, one of its factions' intolerance and gestures of good faith by the Republic of Serbia's Ministry of Religious Affairs

A real and deep division persists amongst the 239,658 strong Muslim faithful who account for 3,2% of the population of the Republic of Serbia. This division is reflected on relations with the Republic of Serbia. In both Islamic community factions the faithful and leadership are majorically Bosniak, the ethnically Albanian autonomous Islamic religious organisation in the south of the Republic of Serbia will be dealt with later separately.

While the clerics of the Islamic Community of Serbia (with Raees ul-Ulema Adem Zilkić at the helm) respect and support the Republic of Serbia in international political, cultural and religious associations, the clerics of the Islamic Community in Serbia of the Bosnia-Herzegovina Riyasat (with Raees ul-Ulema Mustafa Cerić and Grand Mufti Muamer Zukorlić at the helm) continually threaten to internationalize and radicalize the issue as well as assailing the Republic of Serbia's state bodies and national institutions.

Despite this fact, the Republic of Serbia's Ministry of Religious Affairs has made several gestures of good faith and allocated considerable financial help to the Islamic Community in Serbia of the Bosnia-Herzegovina Riyasat.

Namely, the Islamic Community in Serbia of the Bosnia-Herzegovina Riyasat received 17,242,612 RSD (211,600 €) from the Ministry of Religious Affairs in 2008, while the Islamic Community of Serbia received 8,537,963 RSD (104,800 €) in the same period. Respectively, the Islamic Community in Serbia of the Bosnia-Herzegovina Riyasat received around 67% while the Islamic Community of Serbia was recipient of some 33% of the Republic of Serbia's Ministry of Religious Affairs' grants to Islamic communities in 2008. In the first half of 2009, the Republic of Serbia's Ministry of Religious Affairs has allocated 6,460,000 RSD (66,200 €), some 60%, to the Islamic Community in Serbia of the Bosnia-Herzegovina Riyasat, while the Islamic Community of Serbia received 4,250,000 RSD (43,500 €), or 40% of the grants.

It is without a doubt then, that the Republic of Serbia's Ministry of Religious Affairs has given much more support to the Islamic Community in Serbia of the Bosnia-Herzegovina Riyasat than to the Islamic Community of Serbia. Yet despite this fact the leadership of the Islamic

Community in Serbia of the Bosnia-Herzegovina Riyasat has claimed human rights abuses to international organizations, calling on reports whose inaccurate sources they were themselves.

Unfortunately, the *Glas islama* (“Voice of Islam”), the official organ of the Islamic Community in Serbia of the Bosnia-Herzegovina Riyasat, whose publishing was regularly subsidized by the Republic of Serbia’s Ministry of Religious Affairs, has been writing with unhindered animosity about the Republic of Serbia, its Government, state bodies and its highest governing officials, from the President to ethnic Bosniak Ministers of the Government of the Republic of Serbia. Also prone to attacks of this gazette are reputable national religious, scientific, cultural and state institutions: the Serbian Orthodox Church, the Serbian Academy of Science and Arts, the Armed Forces of Serbia. In view of all that, the Republic of Serbia’s Ministry of Religious Affairs regrettably ascertained that the editorial policy of the *Glas islama* is the propagation of hate speech, xenophobia and intolerance, therefore deciding to end all further financial support for the *Glas islama*.

A separate brief review must be made on the theme of the Islamic Community of Preševo, Bujanovac and Medveđa made up mostly of ethnic Albanians. Namely, a portion of the community recognizes the leadership of the Islamic Community of Serbia, a portion the leadership of the Islamic Community in Serbia of the Bosnia-Herzegovina Riyasat, while another supports the secessionist Islamic Community of Kosovo. This fact only illustrates the complexity of Islamic divisions in the Republic of Serbia.

Furthermore, the Law on Churches and Religious Communities of the Republic of Serbia (Article 15) provides for only one Islamic Community to have traditional religious community status.

The Islamic Community of Serbia’s Statute underlines the continuity of Islam as a recognized religion in the Principality of Serbia (19th century). The Statute of the Islamic Community in Serbia of the Bosnia-Herzegovina Riyaset makes no mention of this sort of continuity.

The Islamic Community of Serbia (with seat in Belgrade) submitted its request to the Republic of Serbia’s Ministry of Religious Affairs for entry into the Registry of Churches and Religious Communities on May 15, 2006. The Islamic Community in Serbia of the Bosnia-Herzegovina Riyaset (with seat in Novi Pazar and seat in Sarajevo) submitted its request to the Republic of Serbia’s Ministry of Religious Affairs for entry into the Registry of Churches and Religious Communities on July 23, 2007.

The Republic of Serbia's Ministry of Religious Affairs is in the procedure of forming an expert commission which is to assess the historical and legal facts as well as to submit a report to the Minister of Religious Affairs on its objective and competent opinion on the historical legal continuity of Islamic communities in the Republic of Serbia. Following the commission's report, the Minister of Religious Affairs will bring about his decision on the determination of adequate statuses for Islamic communities in the Registry of Churches and Religious Communities of the Republic of Serbia.

Finally it is worth underlining that the Republic of Serbia's Ministry of Religious Affairs is of the opinion that both Islamic communities should be given the opportunity to name their representatives in the Commission for Religious Education, founded in 2004 by the Government of the Republic of Serbia. Both Islamic communities participate in this Commission's work, making it the only denomination to have two representatives in this Commission.

In Autumn of 2008, the Republic of Serbia's Ministry of Religious Affairs successfully provided all required help in solving the stalemate in Islamic religious education in a number of public primary and secondary schools, caused by the permanent division within the Islamic Community in the Republic of Serbia. Although with some delay, Islamic religious education was normalized in all public schools where factions of the divided Islamic Community were unable to agree on the choice of Islamic religious educators.

We are informed by the Republic of Serbia's Ministry of Education that from September 2009 Islamic religious education goes normally except in some schools in Novi Pazar.