

Statement by Mrs. Snezana Trkulja, member of the Serbian delegation at the
Human Dimension Implementation Meeting

Session - Rights of Persons Belonging to National Minorities

Warsaw, 29 September 2014

Mr. Moderator,

Allow me at the outset to thank Ms. Tors for her very insightful statement. Serbia supports the activities of High Commissioner in addressing inter-ethnic tensions. We commend her valuable role in assisting Participating States in implementing their commitments pertaining to rights of national minorities.

With regards to my country, its constitutional, legislative and institutional framework for protection, exercising and improving rights of persons belonging to national minorities place Serbia above the average European standard in this field, which has been confirmed in the findings of numerous international institutions. We are constantly working on further improvements. In her last report of 10 July 2014, High Commissioner recognized our Government's efforts in promoting and safeguarding rights of national minorities.

The main objective of our national minority policy is full integration of minorities into social life, whilst preserving their national and cultural characteristics. Serbia recognizes the rights of national minorities both as collective and individual rights. A number of measures and activities aiming at better normative regulation of rights of persons belonging to national minorities have been carried out.

With regards to education rights of persons belonging to national minorities, I would like to underline that members of national minorities have been provided either with classes in their respective languages or with the option of enrolling in the subject "Mother Tongue with elements of national culture". This possibility is

provided in all three levels of education, including pre-school, primary and secondary education, in 14 national minority languages.

Availability of textbooks in minority languages is regulated by the law which further envisages printing textbooks in the language of students attending schools where classes are conducted in their language. National councils of national minorities participate in approving textbooks that express the uniqueness of national minority.

Mr. Moderator,

Let me use this opportunity to mention some of the developments that took place in Serbia since the last report of High Commissioner that pertain to national minorities' participation in public life.

Decision to schedule elections for members of national councils of national minorities was adopted in August. In line with this decision, the elections for members of councils of 21 national minorities have been scheduled for 26 October. According to the amended Law on national councils of national minorities, national councils can be elected directly or through their respective electoral assemblies. In the incoming elections, 17 national minorities shall elect their national councils directly, while four of them (Poles, Montenegrins, Macedonians and Croats) shall elect their representatives through electoral assembly.

It is important to emphasize that in the course of these elections, a sufficient number of persons belonging to Roma national minority had been registered in the Special Register of voters, thus allowing for this national council to be elected directly.

The Internship Program in Serbia's public institutions, designed for young professionals among national minorities—jointly supported by the Embassies of the United Kingdom and the Netherlands, SIDA and OSCE, and conducted by the Government's Office for human and minority rights—represents a very significant project. The aim of the project is to increase active participation of young persons of Albanian, Bosniak and Roma national minority in public life, and foster larger integration in the conduct of public institutions in Serbia, as well as achievement of greater inclusiveness to our society.

Mr. Moderator,

In concluding, allow me to express our appreciation for the work and assistance of the High Commissioner and the OSCE Mission to Serbia in implementing high standards for protecting individual and collective rights of all national minorities in Serbia.

Thank you for your attention.