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REPUBLIC OF SERBIA
MINISTRY FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS

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**THE OSCE CONFERENCE ON COMBATING DISCRIMINATION AND
PROMOTING MUTUAL RESPECT AND UNDERSTANDING**

**Address by
H.E. Ambassador Dejan Šahović,
Head of the delegation of the Republic of Serbia**

Bucharest, 7 and 8 June 2007

Mr. Chairman,
Ladies and Gentlemen,
Distinguished colleagues

My delegation aligned with the statement of the EU that we have just heard earlier this morning. I will, therefore, now briefly highlight only a few issues that we deem important from our national point of view.

It is widely recognized that tolerance means respect and acceptance of the rich diversities in today's global world. Tolerance is crucial for peace, stability and development of democratic societies. The protection and promotion of human rights and fundamental freedoms as well as maintenance of peace and stability is enshrined in the basic documents of the OSCE and as such are an integral component of its activities. Thus, it is quite natural that we, the participating states of the OSCE devote substantial attention to the issue of promoting mutual respect and understanding.

The delegation of Serbia fully supports the increased focus of the OSCE on combating intolerance and discrimination. We see this event, envisaged by the Ministers of the OSCE participating states at the last ministerial Council meeting in Brussels, as a practical tool to make a collective step forward after important conferences held in 2003 and 2004 and in particular the 2005, Cordoba Conference on Anti-Semitism and Other Forms of Intolerance.

The topics to be discussed at the Conference today and tomorrow are very relevant for my country, as Serbia is a multi-cultural and multi-confessional society. Having said this, allow me to mention only some of the legislative steps that have been taken in Serbia towards enhancing the implementation of the OSCE commitments related to tolerance and non-discrimination:

- Under the new Constitution of Serbia, prohibition of discrimination is guaranteed. All persons are equal before the Constitution and before the law.
- The Law on Public Information, prohibits the use hate speech and publishing ideas, information and opinions which promote discrimination.
- The Broadcasting Law stipulates that all relations in the field of broadcasting are to be based on the principles of full affirmation of civil rights and freedoms and the implementation of internationally recognized standards and principles, especially the respect of human rights in that area.

- According to the said law, the Republic Broadcasting Agency is in charge of ensuring that the programs by broadcasters do not include information which would stimulate discrimination, hatred or violence against persons or group of persons due to their political affiliations or belonging or non-belonging to a racial, religious, national or ethnic group, sex or sexual orientation.
- Our electoral regulations have been improved recently to allow positive discrimination for national minorities. Hence, national minorities are well represented in the Serbia's new parliament, including two Roma political parties.
- Mechanisms for the protection of minority rights have been established; National Council for minorities has been established and Councils for each of minority groups, including the Romanian community.

Mr. Chairman,

Combating anti-Semitism is an issue very high on our internal as well as external agenda. In December 2006, Serbia started to participate as an observer in the Task force for international co-operation on Holocaust, education, remembrance and research. Our intention is to get the status of a *liaison country* soon, which would lead us to the full membership in the mentioned Task force.

Recently, in Serbia important activities related to understanding and remembrance of Holocaust have been carried out, such as: the restoration of war memorials and monuments («Topovske šupe»), a workshop on curriculum for education programs in elementary schools was held, as well as education of lecturers. In addition, several books concerning Holocaust have been published recently.

Mr. Chairman,

The Republic of Serbia in its current capacity of the Chair of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe, fully supports as a highly important objective all activities aimed at implementing the Council of Europe strategy to develop intercultural dialogue, both within European societies and between Europe and its neighboring regions. In this context, we attach particular importance to the completion and publishing of the «White paper on Intercultural Dialogue», by November 2007. Serbia is ready to host an informal ministerial conference to present the «White paper» to the European public and to discuss the strategic reflections on

the long-term role of the Council of Europe in intercultural dialogue, in Belgrade in the first half of November.

Being a multi-cultural, multi-ethnic and multi-confessional country, Serbia attaches significant importance to the work that has been carried out with regard to enhancing intercultural dialogue and combating intolerance and discrimination, both within the Council of Europe and the OSCE. Having said that, I wish to emphasize that Serbia fully supports the efforts to create synergies and avoid duplications in the activities of the two Organizations, as an important aim also reflected in the Declaration on Co-operation between the OSCE and the CoE at the Third CoE Summit of Heads of State and Government held in Warsaw, 16 and 17 May 2005.

Being from a country that host the OSCE field Missions, I would like to underline the importance of the OSCE work on the ground on issues related to the promotion of greater understanding of and respect for different cultures, ethnicities, religions or beliefs.

In particular, we have in mind OMIK, the OSCE Mission in our province of Kosovo and Metohija. The Mission's important work has to intensify in order to more effectively combat discrimination promote mutual respect and understanding between ethnic groups that live in the Province. Communities that are in minority there, especially the Serbian community, are victims of discrimination and different forms of intolerance. Their prolonged grave situation requires concerted action by relevant international organization. OMIK has a very important role to play in that context.

Finally, Mr. Chairman, let me express our confidence that this Conference will result in an understanding that would enable us to further strengthen the effectiveness, coherence and consistency of the OSCE in combating intolerance and discrimination and promoting mutual respect and understanding.

Last but not least, I join previous speakers in thanking you Minister Moratinos and the Spanish Chairmanship in Office for organizing this important Conference together with our generous Romanian host, to whom we are grateful for their hospitality.

I thank you.