



**STATEMENT BY AMBASSADOR MIROSLAVA BEHAM,
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF SERBIA TO THE OSCE,
IN RESPONSE TO THE HIGH COMMISSIONER
ON NATIONAL MINORITIES,
AMBASSADOR KNUT VOLLEBAEK,
AT THE 765th MEETING OF
THE OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

18 June 2009

Madame Chair,

Allow me on behalf of the delegation of Serbia to very warmly welcome the High Commissioner on National Minorities, Ambassador Knut Vollebaek, to the Permanent Council and thank him for his oral and written reports, which we consider to be always thought-provoking and substantive at the same time.

Let me first underline, Madame Chair, that Serbia highly appreciates the activities of the High Commissioner, which we believe are most important to the preservation of stability and security in the OSCE region. Among the more significant of the most important, we think, are the High Commissioner's activities with respect to the Bolzano/Bozen recommendations on national minorities in inter-state relations. We are convinced that the results of the regional round tables, organized by the High Commissioner on this issue, will contribute to further enhancing the implementation of commitments of the participating States with regard to minority rights and will help finding solutions to concrete problems national minorities are facing in the OSCE region.

Of equal importance, we believe, is the High Commissioner's focus on education, with its ramifications on the integration of national minorities, as well as his accentuation of the significance of the participation of national minorities in public life and in the bodies and institutions of the state authorities. As the High Commissioner rightly outlined, participation, inclusion and social cohesion are indicators of valid democratic pluralism in all our societies.

Being a country that strives for reaching the highest standards in the field of minority protection, the Republic of Serbia is grateful for all of the High Commissioner's recommendations, and in particular for his assistance delivered

during his visits to our country. Let me underline that we also very much appreciate the High Commissioner's positive assessment of Serbia's efforts to improve its performance with regard to its policy on national minorities.

Since we firmly believe that the High Commissioner's work constitutes a major contribution to stability and security, we also welcome his activities in Kosovo/Serbia, provided that they are in compliance with UNSCR 1244 and status neutrality and aimed at strengthening the position of the non-Albanian communities in the south Serbian province. In this sense, we appreciate his endeavors to enable the Gorani community in Kosovo to exercise their right to education, and encourage him to continue to search for ways and means how to rebuild trust among the communities in Kosovo.

For this and other challenging tasks we would like to wish Ambassador Vollebaek every success.

Thank you, Madame Chair.