



**STATEMENT BY AMBASSADOR MIROSLAVA BEHAM,
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF SERBIA,
UNDER CURRENT ISSUES
AT THE 773th MEETING OF THE OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL,
ON THE LAW ON NATIONAL COUNCILS OF NATIONAL MINORITIES
OF THE REPUBLIC OF SERBIA**

10 September 2009

Madam Chair,

The delegation of Serbia would like to inform the distinguished Permanent Council that the National Assembly of Serbia adopted a new Law on National Councils of National Minorities on 31 August 2009. This law was elaborated by a group of national governmental and non-governmental experts, supported by the representatives of all National Councils and minorities, who were interested in preparing the law.

One of the main objectives of this law is the precise regulation of the competencies and creation of conditions for democratic elections of the Councils, which will guarantee that the elections will be the result of the will of all representatives of the respective national minority.

The law enables national minorities to elect their National Councils in order to exercise their rights to self-government in the fields of education, culture, information and the official use of the minority languages.

According to the new Law, the National Councils will have autonomy in adopting and changing their statutes, financial plans, reports and statements, they will have their own property, they will decide on the name, symbols and seals of the respective National Council and they will adopt their own proposals on national emblems, symbols and holidays. Additionally, and with the objective of preserving the integrity of the respective national minority, the National Councils can establish institutions, associations and foundations.

We believe that it is of special importance for the functioning of the National Councils that they are authorized to initiate and follow the implementation of laws

and regulations in the fields of culture, information and the official use of languages, and that they can also participate in the preparation of regulations and propose amendments to laws, which regulate the constitutional rights of the national minorities. Besides, the National Councils have the right to initiate proceedings regarding the protection of their individual and collective rights before the relevant national institutions for the protection of human rights as are the Constitutional Court or the Ombudsman and other institutions.

With the adoption of this new law, Madame Chair, which is in line with the highest international standards, Serbia has made a significant step forward in the process of democratic reforms, particular in the field of minority rights protection.

We are convinced that the OSCE Mission in Serbia will continue to actively contribute to the reform process in Serbia. In this regard we welcome the Mission's intention to support the successful implementation of this law, both on the local and central level, in cooperation with the state institutions and National Councils of National Minorities.

Thank you, Madame Chair