

Press Release

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Bosnia and Herzegovina: Commissioner Hammarberg recommends stronger efforts for human rights protection

Strasbourg, 20.02.2008 – The Council of Europe's Commissioner for Human Rights, Thomas Hammarberg, today presented his human rights assessment report on Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Whilst underlining that the authorities have ratified key European and international human rights treaties and adopted legislation and action plans in important areas, Mr Hammarberg highlighted the need for further efforts to ensure concrete implementation of the reforms. His recommendations focus on internally-displaced persons and minority returnees, Roma, children, poverty and social exclusion.

The Commissioner considers that the effects of years of conflict have contributed to persisting poverty, social exclusion and inequality; social assistance is not distributed fairly and elderly people, single-parent families and people without health insurance coverage are particularly vulnerable and risk destitution.

He stated that further efforts are needed to facilitate return of people who were displaced during the conflict and that appropriate housing, infrastructure and services should be offered without discrimination to all returnees. Commissioner Hammarberg also urges national authorities to provide assistance and integration opportunities for those who cannot return to their places of origin.

Refugees who have been under temporary protection should be offered a durable solution, particularly those for whom return to Kosovo is not yet possible. Legal safeguards should be introduced to protect persons deprived of citizenship from being returned to countries where they would be at risk.

Furthermore, the Commissioner recommends more positive action for the protection of national minorities. The rights of Roma to education, employment, health and housing rights should be given priority. The report also sets out specific recommendations to combat violence against women and children.

The Commissioner recommends swift action to finally establish the office of the ombudsman at a State level. While he notes progress in the judiciary with regard to independence and professionalism, Mr Hammarberg expresses concern about the huge backlog of cases in the courts. There is an urgent need for an action plan to remedy this problem, he suggests.

The report, based on the findings of an official visit to Bosnia and Herzegovina in June 2007, is available on the Commissioner's website (www.commissioner.coe.int).

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The Parliamentary Assembly brings together 318 members from the national parliaments of the 47 member states.

President: Lluís Maria de Puig (Spain, SOC) ; Secretary General of the Assembly: Mateo Sorinas.

Political Groups: EPP/CD (Group of the European People's Party); SOC (Socialist Group); EDG (European Democratic Group); ALDE (Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe); UEL (Group of the Unified European Left).

For further information, please contact Mr Stefano Montanari (stefano.montanari@coe.int).

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The Commissioner for Human Rights is an independent, non-judicial institution within the Council of Europe, mandated to promote awareness of, and respect for, human rights in the organisation's 47 member states. Elected by the Council's Parliamentary Assembly, the present Commissioner, Thomas Hammarberg, took up his duties on 1 April 2006.

For further information on the Commissioner's activities, please visit www.commissioner.coe.int