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Albania: Commissioner Hammarberg presents human-rights report

Strasbourg, 18.06.2008 – The Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, Thomas Hammarberg, today presented a report on the human rights situation in Albania. In the document, the Commissioner underlined the positive steps undertaken by the Albanian authorities to improve the protection of human rights, but expressed some concerns on structural problems which still affect the country. In particular, he made a number of recommendations on the functioning of the judiciary, police behaviour, conditions of detention, minority rights, protection against discrimination, rights of disabled persons, children's and women's rights, trafficking in human beings and freedom of expression.

The Commissioner observed that shortcomings in legislation and implementation, as well as widespread perceptions of corruption, continue to jeopardise the effective functioning of the judicial system. Moreover, he expressed concern about cases of police misbehaviour and the lack of effective investigations into allegations of ill-treatment. The Commissioner also highlighted "unacceptable human and material conditions" in places of detention and recommended the adoption of effective measures to overcome this situation.

Commissioner Hammarberg noted that, although Albania has made some impressive efforts in the protection of the rights of minorities, "some structural problems still exist and the situation of Roma minority deserves more attention." Furthermore, he stated that the existing prevention, protection and prosecution mechanisms concerning various forms of discrimination remain weak and recommended adopting, as a matter of priority, a comprehensive anti-discrimination law in line with international standards.

On children's rights, the Commissioner stated that persistent physical and economic obstacles exist, hindering access to education for vulnerable groups, particularly Roma and persons with disabilities. "There is a need to ensure that all children complete a full cycle of compulsory primary education, and that vulnerable groups be integrated into mainstream schooling as far as possible." The Commissioner also noted that further improvements are needed in relation to the detention of minors, children involved in forced labour and violence against children at home and in institutions.

Discrimination and violence against women was also addressed as an underreported problem in the country. "Violence, particularly domestic violence, and victims' needs are not addressed effectively," said the Commissioner, stressing the need to increase women's representation in Parliament and in other decision-making bodies.

Moreover, while commending the efforts undertaken in recent years to tackle trafficking in human beings, Commissioner Hammarberg underlined the need to adopt more comprehensive measures, including assistance to victims and public awareness activities, particularly in the poorest regions of the country.

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A political organisation set up in 1949, the Council of Europe works to promote democracy and human rights continent-wide. It also develops common responses to social, cultural and legal challenges in its 47 member states.

Finally, the Commissioner also recommended more serious efforts to protect lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender persons from routine episodes of intolerance, physical and psychological violence, and called on the national authorities to decriminalise defamation and ensure real media freedom so as to effectively fulfil their duty as a public watchdog.

The report is based on the findings of an official visit to Albania in October 2007 and is available, together with the government's response, on the Commissioner's website (http://www.coe.int/t/commissioner/default_en.asp).

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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 47 member States of the Organisation. Elected by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, the present Commissioner, Thomas Hammarberg, took up his function on 1 April 2006.