

Press Release

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Protection of minorities in Serbia: Council of Europe's monitoring body says progress needs to be sustained

Strasbourg, 25.06.2009 – The Council of Europe Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities today published its [2nd Opinion on the protection of national minorities in Serbia](#), following this country's agreement to early publication.

The Advisory Committee adopted this report following a country visit in November 2008. In its report, the Committee noted progress but it also identified areas where more efforts would be needed. The main findings of the report include the following:

- Since the adoption of the Advisory Committee's first Opinion in November 2003, the Serbian authorities adopted a new Constitution in 2006 which includes a specific chapter on national minority protection.
- A new Criminal Code has been adopted with some important provisions in the field of non-discrimination. An Ombudsman has started his work at state level, with promising initiatives to be launched in the field of monitoring minority protection in all regions of Serbia. The commitment shown by the recently established Ministry of Human and Minority Rights in pursuing reform is also encouraging.
- Increased opportunities for persons belonging to national minorities, notably the Bosnian, Bunjevac, Macedonian and Roma to learn their languages in the Province of Vojvodina. The optional character of classes in minority languages is however a persistent concern of representatives of national minorities and solutions need to be found in consultation with representatives of minorities.
- There are considerable discrepancies in the implementation of minority rights between the Province of Vojvodina where regulations and practice are more advanced and other parts of the country where Albanian, Bosnian, Bulgarian and Vlach-Romanian minorities are living in large numbers. The judicial system needs to address acts of discrimination against minorities more efficiently. There is a need for local authorities to be more engaged with national minorities' issues and to increase intercultural dialogue throughout Serbia.
- The national minority councils established so far have started to play an active role in articulating minorities' interests but there is an urgent need to provide a legal framework regarding their role and activities.
- There have been positive steps to address the problems faced by Roma in certain areas but more resolute action is needed to tackle the discrimination they still face in particular in the field of education, employment, health and housing. Many Roma still lack identification documents, which hampers their access to social rights.

The Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities provides for a monitoring system whereby the Committee of Ministers, assisted by the Advisory Committee, composed by independent experts, evaluates the implementation of the convention.

For more information, see <http://www.coe.int/minorities>

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