

# Press Release

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## Bulgaria: "Minorities and children must be better protected" recommends Commissioner Hammarberg

Strasbourg, 09.02.2010 – "More efforts are needed to better protect minorities and children and to ensure that their needs are embedded in the decision making process," said Thomas Hammarberg, the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights. He publishes today a [report](#) on his visit to Bulgaria carried out in November 2009 to assess progress on the protection of the rights of minorities and disadvantaged children.

"Protection of minorities against discrimination, racism and intolerance should be enhanced" he said, recommending a legislative amendment to make racist motivation an aggravated circumstance for all offences. "Adequate measures should be taken to prevent and punish cases of police misconduct". The Commissioner also calls upon the Bulgarian authorities to provide reparation and find speedily a solution for pending pension claims to victims of the 'Revival Process'.

Commissioner Hammarberg recommends a simpler law concerning registration of religious denominations to fully protect their freedom of association. He also highlights the need for local authorities and law enforcement officers to be properly instructed to avoid unnecessary interference with the right to exercise one's freedom of religion and calls on the authorities to resolve outstanding property claims, including those of the Muslim community. In addition, the Commissioner recommends an amendment to the Constitution in order to better safeguard minorities' freedom of association and assembly and to fully align practice with the Council of Europe standards.

"Educational efforts aimed at integrating children from minority groups and children with disabilities should be furthered" he added, urging the authorities to improve access to information and health services to members of socio-economically disadvantaged minority groups - particularly Roma, ethnic Turks and Pomaks.

Serious concerns persist about the situation of Roma people, who continue to live in sub-standard conditions. "Evicted Roma should be offered decent alternative solutions. More generally, access to adequate housing, education and social rights remain problematic and all too often they are victims of racially motivated discrimination and violence. The authorities should urgently reverse this situation."

Finally, acknowledging the authorities' efforts in enhancing children's rights, the Commissioner observes with concern that unsuitable institutions continue to accommodate a number of children, especially those with intellectual disabilities. "These institutions should be closed and a comprehensive deinstitutionalisation programme adopted, in co-operation with local authorities and the participation of civil society and the parents concerned."

The report is available, together with the Government comments, on the [Commissioner's website](#).

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