

**EU and Serbia continue partnership in the fight against discrimination  
EU launches Twinning project “Support to the advancement of human rights and zero  
tolerance to discrimination”**

On the eve of the approval of Serbia’s Action Plan for Chapter 23, the EU and Serbia launched a new Twinning project to support advancement of human rights and increase tolerance in Serbia. The launching event took place on 19 October 2015 in Klub Poslanika. Audiences were addressed by Acting Director of the Office for Human and Minority Rights, Suzana Paunović, Commissioner for Protection of Equality, Brankica Janković, Deputy Head of the EU Delegation to Serbia, Oskar Benedikt, the Ambassador of Austria, Johannes Eigner, and Chargé d’Affaires of the Slovenian embassy, Mateja Norčič Štamcar, Assistant Minister of the Ministry of Finance, Nataša Šimšić.

The project, which will last over the next 1.5 years, is financed by the EU €1.2 million and co-financed by the Republic of Serbia with €60,000. The project will strengthen and promote the implementation of the relevant legislative framework on protection against discrimination, protection of minorities and of human rights defenders and bring it in line with European standards. An important element of the project will be to promote the implementation of measures related to fundamental rights in the Action Plan for Chapter 23 and focus on the principle of anti-discrimination and the position of socially vulnerable groups as well as national minorities. The aim is also to strengthen the existing capacity of the Office for Human and Minority Rights, the Commissioner for Protection of Equality and other key stakeholders for the implementation of human rights and to make antidiscrimination policies more effective at national and local level.

The Office for Human and Minority Rights expects the project to support the implementation and the monitoring of the implementation of various action plans – such as the Action Plan for the Implementation of the Strategy for Prevention and Protection against Discrimination 2014-2018 already in place. Currently the Multi-Annual Strategy and Action Plan for Improving the Living Conditions of Roma as well as the Action Plan for Exercise of the Rights of National Minorities are under development, the implementation of which will partly fall within the mandate of the Office for Human and Minority Rights. The implementation of these strategic documents involves a wide range of stakeholders (e.g. National Councils of National Minorities, police, judges, CSOs, towns/municipalities), which the project wants to reach out to and offer support in raising awareness for human and minority rights, the necessity of data collection and the development of measures preventing discrimination.

The Commissioner for Protection of Equality wants to make use of the project activities as an opportunity for increasing her visibility at the regional and local level to ensure equal access to justice for persons who have experienced discrimination. A special focus on strengthening mechanisms to follow-up on the implementation of recommendations issued by the Commissioner for Protection of Equality will contribute to establishing structures effectively preventing future discrimination. Outreach work targeting National Councils of National Minorities, towns/municipalities and CSOs and a public awareness raising campaign will support the development of a culture of rights encouraging the reporting of incidents of discrimination.

The following outcomes are expected:

- Recommendations on bringing the relevant legal framework in line with the EU legislation,
- Indicators and monitoring tools for human and minority rights developed,
- Input for strategic documents of the Commissioner for Protection of Equality by way of surveys on the awareness about discrimination delivered,
- Strengthened capacities of the Commissioner for Protection of Equality to do outreach work at the regional and local level,
- Implementation of preventive and promotional measures ending discrimination at the local level,
- Capacity building for civil servants (30), National Councils of National Minorities (40) and CSOs (60) to promote access of justice and improve the protection of rights of vulnerable groups,
- Train the trainers for judges and prosecutors (20) and police officials (20) on enforcing the protection of human and minority rights,

- Implementation of public campaigns raising awareness for human and minority rights.

The project will be implemented by the Vienna based Ludwig Boltzmann Institute of Human Rights and the Office for National Minorities of the Republic of Slovenia who will offer experiences and knowledge gained within a broad range of human and minority rights regimes as well as anti-discrimination mechanisms established in different EU member states. Some forty European experts will cooperate with the Office for Human and Minority Rights, the Commissioner for Protection of Equality and a wide range of stakeholders by exchanging experiences, knowledge and skills through training events, on the job trainings, developing legal and institutional analyses and drafting recommendations.

The launching event was attended by representatives of a number of embassies, of the Council of Europe and UN agencies present in Serbia, Serbian actors including representatives of line ministries, National Councils of National Minorities, Civil Society Organizations involved in the protection of human and minority rights.