

**The role of civil society in promoting
social inclusion and equal treatment**

Hotel Tirana International

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Address by Ambassador Helmuth Lohan,
Head of Delegation of the European Union to Albania

Dear Ladies and Gentlemen,

I understand that this workshop on promoting social inclusion and equal treatment has addressed many of your daily concerns. It was, I believe, a privileged occasion for you - and for the speakers and moderators - to exchange experiences, to talk about your problems, and perhaps to realise that solutions to some of your worries already exist or that existing solutions can be adapted to your needs. In short, the workshop would have been a success if you returned to your activities with new vigour and - if at all possible - renewed enthusiasm.

Because your real work - the persistent fight for social inclusion and equal opportunities - continues.

Within the EU that fight has won many battles and we remain committed to it. This workshop was a practical illustration of our commitment. The fact that the principle of equal treatment and non-discrimination is enshrined in the Stabilisation and Association Agreement between EU and Albania may be a bit more abstract, but it actually reinforces the point.

The Commission's Opinion on Albania's application for EU membership is currently under preparation. Policies and measures to ensure social inclusion and social protection of all Albanian citizens, and to actively fight against discrimination are an important part of the conditions that must be met towards membership.

Our evaluation will take account of the adoption of the Anti-Discrimination Law, and its entry into force in March 2010. This law is indeed an example of what civil society actors and government can achieve together.

With the law on the books, the fight for equal treatment has not come to an end. Proper enforcement of the Anti-Discrimination Law is clearly instrumental to ensuring social inclusion and equal treatment for all members of Albanian society, and I wish the recently appointed Commissioner for Protection from Discrimination every success in the realisation of her tasks. It is obvious that sufficient human and financial resources will be crucial for the effective implementation of such an important piece of law and for the work of the Commissioner's Office.

The European Union will continue to respond to the need for assistance in that respect. The People to People Programme (P2P) that brought you here for these two days is just one useful tool in this sense. Some of you may already be familiar with other EU support instruments for the benefit of civil society.

Legislation, institutions, budgets, action plans are all very necessary for the promotion of social inclusion and equal treatment in all strands of life. But in order to be really successful, it takes a bit more: it takes people - people with civic courage who name and shame the obstacles that may stand in the way of social inclusion and equal treatment, wherever and whenever they might occur.

In this sense I wish you every success in fully assuming your role in promoting social inclusion and equal treatment.

Thank you.