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**Regional Conference:
"The implementation of minority rights in the Balkan
region: trends, challenges, and perspectives"
(Hotel Arka)**

**Speech by
H.E. Mr. Aivo Orav
Head of EU Delegation**

Dear Member of Parliament Mr. Hasipi,

Dear Minister Mr. Mustafa,

Dear Deputy Minister Mr. Petrov,

Dear Ambassador Mr. Breth,

Dear Director Mrs. Babich-Petrovski,

Ladies and gentlemen,

Firstly, I would like to thank Mrs. Babich-Petrovski and Ambassador Breth for their kind invitation to address this regional conference.

Respect and promotion of minority rights stands high on the European Union's agenda in the Western Balkans. Considering the recent history of the region, the European Union is paying careful attention to the integration and inclusion of national minorities in majority societies. This is not only important for preserving stability, but also for fostering a cohesive and dynamically growing society.

To take full benefit of the multi-ethnic character of a society, it is vital that all communities feel fully integrated and actively and freely participate in the social, economic, political and cultural life.

Importantly, this Country was able to fully preserve its multi-ethnic and multi-confessional character resulting in a much

higher degree of diversity than most of other European countries. These diversities constitute unique and irreplaceable resources. The Ohrid Framework Agreement remains a key instrument for enhanced dialogue between all communities in the country.

The European Union itself doesn't have common rules and legislation on minority rights. However, when assessing the state of minority rights, for example in the Progress Report, we take into consideration other relevant international and national instruments. The application of the Council of Europe's Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities is particularly important in this respect.

In July 2012, the Council of Europe's Committee of Ministers adopted a resolution on the implementation of the Framework Convention by this Country. Several positive developments were noted. But challenges remain, especially as regards Roma inclusion, equitable representation and cultural rights of smaller communities.

European Commission's last Progress Report, published last week, also reflects these findings. Allow me to quote from chapter 23: "Institutions responsible for promoting the rights of smaller communities and the Roma remain underfunded, posing a serious obstacle to the implementation of existing strategies. Inter-institutional cooperation is weak. The pace of

implementation of the Roma Strategy has slowed down in the areas of health and culture".

The Progress Report also notes that there are several public institutions responsible for ensuring and promoting minority rights but they lack funding and better coordination. Therefore, we very much welcome events such as this which not only bring different national institutions together but also allow for sharing of experiences at regional level.

The EU is also committed to provide assistance in this area through IPA funding. A project under IPA 2010, at the amount of 1,8 million Euros, is under preparations. Its aim will be to provide support to institutions in implementation of policies relevant to non-majority communities. The Agency for realisation of rights of the communities is a direct beneficiary of this project, along the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, Office of the Minister without Portfolio, and SIOFA. We very much encourage these institutions to use this opportunity also to enhance their coordination and to develop ideas for joint initiatives.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I wish you a successful conference.

Thank you.