

## New round of strategic grants for the Minority Rights in Practice project

Launched in 2004, the Minority Rights in Practice project (MRP) aims to increase opportunities for the inclusion and participation of ethnic minorities in the countries of South-East Europe in view of their European integration objectives. Strategic grants amounting to a total of &euro; 285,000 have been approved for Phase II of the programme (2006-2008). Partner NGO's in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Kosovo, Romania and Serbia were invited to build on the results of their activities during the first phase and submit plans for Phase II of the programme which will run from 2006-2008. Macedonia will follow in the Spring while a coalition of four NGO's has been created for the launching of the project in Montenegro. The action plans will focus on three key aspects:

- The local level: there is a need for a policy that would reconcile local self-governance with the principles of multi-ethnicity. Minorities should indeed be recognised not only at national but also at local level, this especially in the context of the new policy of decentralisation, and their position should be strengthened through the effective implementation of existing institutional mechanisms;
- EU accession/integration has proven to be a powerful driving force for reforms throughout the region and particularly in Bulgaria, Croatia and Romania. It has also increased awareness and attention amongst European decision makers and institutions;
- The need for training and capacity building, particularly for public institutions and representative bodies such as minority councils.

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