

**Grant signing event “Development of local social services through the Social Innovation Fund”**

**20 November 2008, Sava Centre, Japanese Hall, 1<sup>st</sup> floor, 11.00h**

**Speech by the Head of EC Delegation, Ambassador Josep M. LLoveras**

**Dear Mr Minister, ladies and gentlemen,**

- It is a great pleasure for me to participate in this event which marks the sixth year of successful cooperation with the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, as well as in getting civil society involved in the development of poverty-reduction policies. Once again we are happy to work with UNDP as our implementing partner.
- For this latest joint action in the field of social protection and support to the most vulnerable categories of society, the EU has donated 560,000 euros to social service providers at municipal level to support their efforts to introduce new social protection services which fall within their jurisdiction. It is especially important to note that all the municipalities which will receive support are from the interior of the country. Also for the first time municipalities are getting financially involved which will assure their continuity.
- Projects implemented with the support of the EU are helping in the efforts to reduce the poverty of the most vulnerable groups. As Serbia goes through a process of economic transition, there will inevitably be people who loose out. These people, for various reasons, cannot cope with the ongoing changes or adapt to them. These people need support in acquiring new skills and in finding alternative ways of making a living. We should

send the message that everyone has a chance if they are given the opportunity.

- The projects that will be signed today are aimed at helping people who would be vulnerable in any society, regardless of whether it is in transition or not. In societies in transition, these categories of population are at the margins of society and are even more vulnerable. We are talking about supporting and helping municipalities in introducing and strengthening services for home care for the elderly and people with disabilities, about establishing day care centres for them, as well as day care centres for children and youth with disabilities or with behavioural problems.
- Support to programmes such the Social Innovation Fund is a clear priority in the assistance the EU has provided to Serbia since 2001. The EU's overall support to the Social Innovation Fund was 9.4 million euros under the previous CARDS programme. In our 2008 assistance budget for Serbia (IPA 2008) we have earmarked 5.5 million euros for social inclusion, for programmes which are similar to this one and whose implementation will start in 2009.
- I would like to end by saying that this programme is a clear demonstration of our intention to continue supporting the Serbian government's Strategy for the development of social protection. The implementation of this strategy has started, but – as we noted in our annual progress report – lack of resources is preventing more rapid implementation at a local level. With these grants – which have been awarded through an open and transparent call for proposals – we try to alleviate some of the most problematic issues, but also to give support to the most energetic and creative local authorities to implement their plans. We hope today's

contract signatories will share their knowledge with their peers in other regions, because the problems are common and so are the solutions.

- I hope these projects will be successfully implemented and that they will truly benefit those most in need.

Thank you