



SUBMISSION - The Serbian Orthodox Youth Association

Statistics indicate that 50% of people currently living in Australia have been born overseas or at least have one parent with a foreign background. This statistic in itself calls for a government policy which will address the concept of multiculturalism and ensure that such diversity is managed appropriately.

The 2006 census found that there are almost 95 500 Australian citizens who have Serbian ancestry. Serbs migrated to Australia throughout the 20th century – after the civil war from (1991-1995), Australia received almost 33 000 Serb migrants during 1999-2001 (mainly refugees).

Despite having fairly low unemployment rates, the Australian Serbs have come across numerous barriers in achieving their potential such as the language barrier as well as the fact that migrants with tertiary qualifications from overseas find it difficult to gain recognition for these in Australia. Lack of government support has been identified in these areas hence this is a topic recommended for discussion.

The Australian multiculturalism policy is supportive of migrants retaining their cultural identity, not insisting on assimilation and allowing existence of institutions and support programs/policies to assist newcomers in exercising these rights. Anti-discrimination policies have also been put in place and account for discrimination on racial, religious and national identity levels. Although these assist the integration of migrants and people with different cultural backgrounds, these programs need to be reviewed and monitored regularly to ensure that they continue to meet the needs of newcomers.

However, the policies also need to account for assumed obligations of all migrants as serious political consequences could be experienced in the contrary. The Balkan region has had their own problems in the past with failed multiculturalism policies or the lack of them – something that Serbs are familiar with. Australia needs to strive towards preventing these and ensuring that all migrants live in accordance with Australian laws, policies and cultural expectations while remaining committed to Australia's future prosperity and long term goals.

Although it comes with numerous challenges, multiculturalism appears to be a part of Australia's identity and we, as an organisation, are supportive of this policy and feel that all

communities need to work together to make it a successful one.

For instance, the multicultural festival in Canberra, from our perspective, continues to be one of the most beautifully diverse events in the country and continues to gather thousands of people each year celebrating the people of Australia and their traditions. The benefits arising from multiculturalism are evident in many sectors – diversity of skills and knowledge, gastronomy, art, etc.

Australia CAN manage multiculturalism.

The Serbian Orthodox Youth Organisation (SOYA) strives to preserve Serbian culture, tradition, language and faith in dispersion whilst at the same time supporting the country that we live in and integration of Serbian Youth into its future. As representatives of SOYA in Canberra, we have engaged in various educational, cultural, recreational and fund-raising activities in order to remain committed to the aforementioned goal. Our involvement in the multicultural festival, the Serbian Film Festival, the annual Harmony Day at the Hughes Primary School, Saint Sava parish activities, musical and entertainment focused events, witnesses this commitment.

Thank you for providing an opportunity for us to exercise our democratic and freedom of speech rights and allowing us to put forward an opinion on the topic of multiculturalism in Australia.

Sincerely,

Nada Miljus

Co-ordinator of SOYA Canberra