

OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting 2014
Statement by the Republic of Latvia on
Working Session 10: Rights of Persons Belonging to a National Minority

Thank you madam/mister moderator,

Latvia aligns itself with the statement delivered by the European Union welcoming the High Commissioner Astrid Thors. I would like to make a statement on national capacity regarding minority education in Latvia.

My country has a long standing record of fruitful cooperation with the High Commissioner and we are certain that it will continue in the same vein.

I would like to note that Latvia's society is multi-ethnic, and it has a long-term history of interethnic tolerance. Latvia guarantees cultural autonomy for all its national minorities and provides significant support for strengthening their identities. National minorities actively use their constitutionally guaranteed rights to establish national schools, associations, organisations, cultural institutions, as well as to publish media in their native languages.

The State support for education in national minority languages in Latvia exceeds that of many other European countries and is available in seven *minority languages* - *Russian, Polish, Hebrew, Ukrainian, Estonian, Lithuanian and Belorussian*. Currently (academic year 2013/2014) state finances 99 schools with instruction in Russian, and 65 bilingual (Latvian and minority language programmes) schools.

There are no plans to change this policy. If any education policy reforms take place in Latvia, it will be done in accordance with international standards and only after a complete debate and analysis, and will not in any way affect the rights of persons belonging to national minorities, guaranteed to them by the Latvian Constitution and law.

In Latvia the bilingual education programs for minority schools were first introduced in 1999 in primary schools, followed by secondary schools in 2004 by using/applying a so called 60/40 model, which means that every school is entitled to determine which subjects are taught in Latvian, total being 60% of all subjects and 40 % of all subjects are taught in minority language.

The Latvian bilingual education methodology has received international recognition, from the start on, it has been welcomed by former the High Commissioner of National Minorities Mr Ralf Ekeuss. Our approach has served as a model for other countries. It has proved to be sustainable and is showing improved results of the level of Latvian language proficiency amongst the younger generation of non-Latvians.

The quality of national minorities education is constantly being monitored and has been maintained at a consistently high level and has not deteriorated.

Finally, let me inform and invite everyone to use the opportunity to learn more about Latvian best practice, meet practitioners working in field of bilingual education on the side event starting right after this session, which will be organized by the Latvian NGO Center for Public Policy PROVIDUS with participation of Latvian, Estonian and Croatian experts.

I thank you!