

Human Dimension Implementation Meeting 2014

Monday, September 22, Working Session 1

Latvian delegation, Right of reply

Madam Chair,

I would like to apologize for having to reiterate some basic facts that might have seemed obvious were it not for some statements that grossly and, I believe, purposefully misrepresent the state of democracy and human rights in Latvia.

As one would expect of a modern European democracy, the fundamental principle of the Latvian constitution is equal rights for all citizens regardless of their ethnicity, native language, religious beliefs or other traits. It explicitly guarantees, and this is implemented in government policies, the right of national minorities to preserve and develop their languages and their ethnic and cultural identity.

And, contrary to what has been said, the Constitution provides for a practicable and actively used, referendum procedure.

As for non - citizens, almost 142,000 of them have already used the naturalization procedure to become citizens of Latvia. Since its introduction, the procedure has been simplified several times. Last year the Latvian parliament adopted amendments to the Citizenship Law which, *inter alia*, significantly simplified naturalization for children. Latvian citizenship is granted automatically to children of stateless persons and non-citizens.

These amendments to the Citizenship Law attest to Latvia's firm intention to consolidate and integrate our society, and to further develop a broad and inclusive political process. The broad consensus in the Latvian society is that the current simple and liberal naturalization process is the way to achieve that goal.

Lastly, regarding the suggestions of Neo-Nazi tendencies. Not only are they baseless; such accusations are also offensive when used against a country that remembers and commemorates the crimes against humanity committed by Nazism and mourns its victims. Let me assure you that Latvia is committed to education, remembrance and research of the crimes committed by the totalitarian regimes.

Thank you.