

## **PROTECTION OF THE RIGHTS OF PERSONS BELONGING TO NATIONAL MINORITIES IN LITHUANIA**

Protection of the rights of persons belonging to national minorities has always been one of the main priorities of the Government of Lithuania. Lithuania is fully committed and has been continuously working in order to create a sustainable environment for smooth integration of persons belonging to national minorities into the Lithuanian society so that they can fully and effectively participate in all aspects of the country's life while preserving their cultural and religious identity. Following the provisions of the Constitution and of national and international legislation, Lithuania ensures equal political, economic, social and cultural rights and freedoms for persons belonging to national minorities, recognises national identity and cultural continuity and fosters national awareness and self-expression.

For this purpose, the Government has been developing all-embracing national strategies, programmes and action plans such as:

- Strategy for Development of the National Minorities Policy until 2015
- Programme for Development of Regional Culture for 2012–2020

The adoption of a new law on national minorities is set as a priority in the programme of the current Government. The draft Law on National Minorities has been submitted to the Parliament for its consideration in the autumn session in 2014.

### **Political rights**

Equal participation of all citizens in public life is guaranteed in the Republic of Lithuania. Legal acts of the Republic of Lithuania regulating exercise of the right of citizens to take part in public affairs at any level and equal access to public service do not impose any restrictions on the ground of nationality. The strategic documents on the enhancement of openness of the public administration processes and improvement of the public service system ensure that implementation of the legislation does not have any direct or indirect effect on equal rights of persons belonging to national minorities.

Legal acts do not provide for any restrictions on the grounds of nationality when voting or standing for elections. It should be noted that person is not required to indicate his/her nationality when standing for elections.

### **Media**

Laws of the Republic of Lithuania guarantee equally to all persons the right to have their own opinions and express them freely. Persons belonging to national minorities, like any other persons, have the freedom of provision of information to the public, i.e. the right to run one's own mass media and have access to mass media in one's mother tongue. For example, periodicals have been published in Russian, Polish and Yiddish as well as news websites are available in Russian and Polish (<http://ru.delfi.lt>, <http://kurierwilenski.lt>, <http://nedelia.lt>, <http://kurier.lt>, <http://pl.delfi.lt>, [www.zw.pl](http://www.zw.pl), [www.zpl.lt](http://www.zpl.lt), [www127.lt](http://www127.lt), [www.magwil.lt](http://www.magwil.lt), [www.wilnoteka.lt](http://www.wilnoteka.lt)). The National Radio and Television of Lithuania has been broadcasting radio and television programmes for national minorities in Russian, Belarusian, Polish, and Ukrainian.

### **Education**

The new Law on Education of the Republic of Lithuania of 1 July 2011 provides that 'schools of general and non-formal education shall provide learners belonging to national minorities with opportunities to foster their national, ethnical and linguistic identity, to learn their native language, history and culture.' (Art. 30).

Presently in Lithuania there are 50 schools of formal education (primary, basic, secondary education) teaching in Polish, 31 – in Russian, 1 – in Belarusian and 37 schools where classes are taught in different national minorities languages. Therefore, 14,427 learners study in Russian, 12,359 learners – in Polish and 176 learners – in Belarusian (7.6 per cent of total).

There are also 2 schools where a national minority language is taught as a separate subject (the majority of other subjects are taught in Lithuanian). An important role in the education process in those schools is given to ethno-cultural education. These are: the Jewish secondary school of Sholom Aleicheim in Vilnius and the German gymnasium of Herman Zuderman in Klaipėda.

Children learning in national minority languages receive 20 per cent more funds for learning than those who learn in Lithuanian.

Such partial bilingual education corresponds to Recommendation 1740 of the Council of the European Union (2006) (*Parliamentary Assembly. Recommendation 1740 (2006) The place of the mother tongue in school education*), which emphasises both the significance of learning a national language (p. 4) and the state language of a country (p. 5) as well as the significance of bilingual education (p. 7, 8, 9, 10) stating that '...bilingual education based on mother tongue is the basis for long-term success'. *The Hague Recommendations Regarding the Education Rights of National Minorities* (1996) suggest that several subjects should already be taught in a state language by the end of the primary school, and the number of such subjects at the basic and secondary schools should continue to be increased.

In accordance with the Law on Education schools teaching in non-Lithuanian languages incorporate fragments of teaching in the Lithuanian language into the subjects of primary education, meanwhile in later grades of further education, Lithuanian is used as the teaching language only in those lessons of history and geography which are directly related to Lithuania and the basics of citizenship. Therefore, the contents of the curriculum taught in the state language make up less than 20 per cent of the whole curriculum. The rest of it may be taught in a national minority language.

Teaching in the Lithuanian language is not carried out at the expense of native language lessons; the number of lessons for learning the native Polish, Russian, Belarussian language has remained unchanged since the adoption of the new Law on Education in 2011.

## **Culture**

Lithuania has been continuously making efforts to create equal conditions to participate in cultural life for everyone, including members of national minorities. By supporting the culture of national minorities, the Government seeks to reinforce the cultural rights of persons belonging to national minorities, to create conditions for their integration into the life of the country, and to foster their cultural traditions and heritage.

To achieve this goal, the Strategy for Development of the National Minorities Policy until 2015 aims at the integration of Lithuanian residents belonging to national minorities into the Lithuanian society by preserving their culture, identity and ensuring harmonious relationship among ethnic groups. A number of programmes contain relevant provisions promoting cultural activities of national minorities:

- The Programme for the Modernization of Cultural Centres for 2007–2020
- The Programme for Development of Regional Culture for 2012–2020
- The National Youth Policy Development Programme for 2011–2019.

Also the co-financing from the state budget of cultural projects promoting the development of national minority cultures is provided by the Government. The co-financing is focussed to the projects on promotion of culture of national minorities in Lithuania and abroad, activities of national minorities' children and youth, preservation of cultural heritage of national minorities

and its cultural value, activities of Saturday/Sunday schools, cultivation of tolerance, promotion of fight against racism and discrimination, Roma national minority integration and fostering of national identity. Over 100 events of national minorities NGOs at national and local levels are organized annually with support from the state budget.

Seeking to ensure that the cultural needs of national minorities are met, the Government provides support for cultural centres of national minorities. Also, in years 2011-2014 the Ministry of Culture has provided about 1,200 thousand Litas (about 350 thousand Euro) for projects promoting development of national minorities' culture.