

Delegation of the Russian Federation

**STATEMENT BY MR. ALEXANDER LUKASHEVICH,  
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION,  
AT THE 1156th MEETING OF THE  
OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

31 August 2017

**On language discrimination in Latvia**

Mr. Chairperson,

The situation of the Russian-speaking population of Latvia continues to give rise to great concern. The Latvian authorities are conducting a deliberate assault on the status of the Russian language in the education system.

Not so long ago we informed the Permanent Council and OSCE specialist bodies of the amendments drafted by the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Latvia to the regulations of the Committee of Ministers No. 335 of 6 April 2010 on the content and procedure for conducting centralized examinations and No. 1510 of 17 December 2013 on the procedure for State attestation. These legal norms prohibit ninth and twelfth grade pupils from sitting centralized exams in non-State languages.

On 8 August, the Cabinet of Ministers of Latvia approved these amendments. The arsenal of legislative acts prejudicial to Russian pupils (in particular, that 60 per cent of subjects in senior high school be taught in Latvian) already existing in the country now contains one more draconian measure.

In the opinion of the Latvian Ministry of Education, the amendments will encourage members of national minorities to perfect their knowledge of the Latvian language. Local experts, however, see this merely as an attempt to create unwarranted difficulties for Russian-speaking pupils in Latvia in order to reduce their numbers. Moreover, the regulation that has been adopted diverges from the amendments to the Law on Higher Education Establishments drafted by the Saeima deputy Ilze Viņķele: in contrast to the regulations by the Committee of Ministers, they give educational establishments the right to determine the language of teaching and attestation of pupils independently.

A number of Latvian politicians have expressed their discontent at this clearly anti-Russian initiative. Aivars Lembergs, Chairman of the Ventspils City Council and the Latvia and Ventspils party, has stated that he does not support this decision and calls for a

nuanced approach to the language of attestation. Furthermore, the mayor believes that this measure disrupts “ethnic calm” in Latvia and in doing so threatens national security.

The Latvian Association for Support of Schools with Education in the Russian Language (LASHOR) is against these amendments. At a meeting of the Committee of Ministers of Latvia on 8 August, Igor Pimenov, co-chairman of the Association and deputy head of the parliamentary faction of the opposition party Harmony, and members of LASHOR pointed out that their message to the State Chancellery of Latvia outlining the negative consequences of this initiative had been ignored.

Against this background, we are not surprised at the reports appearing in the media that Latvian human rights advocates representing the interests of the Russian-speaking population have sent a letter to the Council of Europe defending the right of citizens to receive education in their native language. It is also reported that a similar message will be sent to the United Nations in the near future. A request had been sent earlier to the Prosecutor’s Office of the International Criminal Court to investigate violations of the rights of the Russian-speaking population of Latvia. One might ask how many more international instances the Latvian human rights advocates will have to address for the State authorities to listen to their opinion.

This policy by the authorities can only be described as a planned assault on the right of national minorities to receive education in their native language. This right is set forth, in particular, in the 1990 CSCE Copenhagen Document, which states that “the participating States will endeavour to ensure that persons belonging to national minorities, notwithstanding the need to learn the official language or languages of the State concerned, have adequate opportunities for instruction of their mother tongue or in their mother tongue, as well as, wherever possible and necessary, for its use before public authorities, in conformity with applicable national legislation.”

Once again, we call on the Latvian authorities to stop the discriminatory policy with regard to the Russian language and the infringement of the rights of the Russian-speaking community in the country. We believe that it is important for the new OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities to pay close attention to this situation.

Thank you for your attention.