

The issue of continuing discrimination of the Russian-speaking population in Latvia

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Discrimination against the Russian-speaking population continues in Latvia. At the end of March 2018, the parliament of Latvia adopted in final reading amendments to the law on education and the law on universal education. This law provide for the beginning of a gradual transition to education only in Latvian language at the secondary school level in schools of national minorities. It is planned that by 2022 all pupils in all schools will receive education only in the state language.

The Russian-speaking minority population of Latvia took the reform quite negatively. Several protests took place in the country. Participants expressed concerns about the quality of education that their children will receive after the reform takes effect, as the country lacks teachers who can quickly switch from teaching in Russian to teaching in Latvian.

However, the Latvian government only tightened the legislation in response. Starting in January 2019, Latvian private universities and colleges will prohibit students from enrolling in Russian-language training programs even those privately-funded. A corresponding amendment to the law on universities was adopted by the parliament of Latvia in June 2018.

School education in the native languages of traditional and ethnic-linguistic minorities is one of the most important values of the European Union. The Russian-speaking community of Latvia is one of such minorities of the EU, not worse than the others, and its rights should be respected by the Latvian authorities. Russians are the largest national minority in Latvia, accounting for about 25 percent of the population.

The Council of Europe's Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, ratified by Latvia in 2005, specifically stipulates that in regions traditionally populated by representatives of national minorities in significant numbers, the authorities are obliged to make every effort to provide their representatives with, as far as possible, the appropriate opportunities to receive education in their native language. As we clearly see, Latvia violates its obligations to protect the rights of national minorities and develop regional languages and minority languages on its territory.

Besides, the authorities of Latvia do not make efforts to the solution of a problem of the so-called "non-citizens". This year the bill on automatic assignment of Latvian citizenship to newborn children of "non-citizens" was completely rejected. For comparison, in neighboring Estonia, where the problem of "non-citizens" also exists, in 2016 amendments were introduced into national legislation, according to which the children of "non-citizens" will automatically receive the citizenship of the country from the moment of birth.

The majority of "non-citizens" are former citizens of the USSR, mostly representatives of national minorities, who were deprived of the right to citizenship after the collapse of the USSR. The number of "non-citizens" is about 12 percent of the population of Latvia.