



PERMANENT MISSION OF THE REPUBLIC OF LATVIA TO THE UN,
OSCE AND OTHER INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS IN VIENNA

**Statement by the Ambassador of the Republic of Latvia
on the ratification by Latvia of the Council of Europe's Framework
Convention for the Protection of National Minorities at the Permanent
Council Meeting No. 558 on 2 June, 2005 .**

Thank you, Mr. Chairman,

I would like to inform the Permanent Council that on 26 May 2005 the Parliament of Latvia ratified the Council of Europe's Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities.

The Framework Convention will be applied to those citizens of Latvia who differ from Latvians in terms of culture, religion or language, who have been traditionally living in Latvia for generations, who consider themselves as belonging to the state of Latvia and the Latvian society and who wish to preserve their distinct features. This definition is modelled on the definitions used by the present States Parties to the Framework Convention.

The political and legal debate in the society has addressed the issue whether the persons who arrived in Latvia during the fifty years of illegal occupation by the Soviet Union and have not yet become Latvian citizens and whose genuine link with Latvia is still weak, should be granted minority rights. The Latvian parliament has decided to be more generous towards the non-citizens than is the law and the practice in most European states. According to the ratification law, persons who are not citizens of Latvia or any other country but who permanently and legally reside in the Republic of Latvia, who identify themselves with a national minority that meets the definition contained in the law, shall enjoy the rights prescribed in the Framework Convention, unless special exceptions are prescribed by law. Thus, Latvia will continue to provide non-citizens with the possibility to enjoy rights associated with minorities – be it education, media or religion. Latvia considers that this is a key element of the ratification process that shows the good will of the Latvian authorities towards full integration of non-citizens.

The Parliament has decided to declare that the provisions of Article 10.2 and Article 11.3 of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities will be applied in Latvia insofar as they are compatible with the Constitution of the Republic of Latvia and legislation governing the use of the state language. Declarations on these two points - the use of the minority languages in street names and local governments, - were necessary to ensure the ratification of a legal document on a still sensitive issue by the Parliament. In practice Latvia will continue to be flexible on the matter of language use in local governments, a number of which already provide opportunities to use minority languages.

The ratification of the Framework Convention provides an additional guarantee for Latvia's minorities and will provide for a basis of objective evaluation by the Advisory Committee of the Framework Convention, its supervisory mechanism.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.