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of New York, Director of Russian Division.

LATVIAN STATE MINORITY SCHOOL REFORM

Dear Mr Chairman, ladies and gentlemen.

Ljubljana Guidelines on Integration of Diverse Societies clearly states, “Multilingualism should be promoted for all as an element of integration, particularly in linguistically diverse societies. [States should respect the right of persons belonging to minorities to be taught their language or to receive instruction in this language, as appropriate, especially in areas inhabited by them traditionally or in substantial numbers. States should complement this by developing integrated and multilingual education systems at all levels designed to provide equal access, opportunities and educational outcomes for all pupils, regardless of their majority or minority background. Such integrated education should also include teaching all pupils about the diversity in their society.”

I would like to particularly focus on guidelines for providing equal access, opportunities and educational outcomes for all pupils. I graduated from a Soviet school and I speak several foreign languages, other than Russian. We really had equal outcomes (depending on perseverance and talent of pupils), because all students had equal starting conditions.

The current reform of schools of national minorities in Latvia clearly contradicts these guidelines. In 2007, pupils of these schools were transferred to an educational system where 60% is taught in the official language. Thus, 60% of subjects in a Russian or Ukrainian school, for example, is taught in Latvian language. It often turns out that teachers who are not native in Latvian language have to use it to teach chemistry to children who, in turn, have difficulty understanding the subject in a non-native language. These are good teachers, experts in their fields

students’ native language and students find it much easier to learn. At first glance, this is absurd. □ chem

The outcome is sad. With an overall increase of proficiency in official language (which is the main goal of these reforms), there is a decrease in interest towards studying general courses in Latvian language among graduates of national minority schools in Latvia (materials of the roundtable “Conversion of education in Russian schools of Latvia to Latvian language as a form of forced assimilation of the Russian community”, 26/04/2011).

Today we stand on the threshold of the next phase of the reform. Starting from 2015, education in Latvia’s minority schools will be conducted at a ratio 80:20, i.e. 80% of all courses will be taught in Latvian language. National minority language will be only used in language studies, literature and folklore. I would like to point out that this concerns only national minority schools □ schools of the Latvian majority do not have any bilingualism at all, and never did.

Thus, pupils of national majority and national minority schools are put in unequal starting conditions and therefore we cannot expect equal outcomes of education. Placed under different conditions, students will have different level of education and therefore, different chances on the Latvian labour market. I ask the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities to pay attention to these facts.