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**Effective participation of national minorities  
as a key challenge for inclusive democracy in Latvia and Europe.**

I will address situation in Latvia, but it has relevance for general public because it shows importance of minority policy for democratic institutions. In times of free movement of workers the benchmark for democracy not only for Latvia, but also for Europe should be minority policy and effectiveness of their participation in decision making.

Despite of visible democratic features in Latvia, such as periodic elections, free media, relatively open gender relations, and an autonomous judiciary and human rights legislation, the deeper structure of Latvian political regimes is undemocratic, mainly because it facilitates and promotes power by one ethnos.

According to the 2011 census 62% of population in Latvia are ethnic Latvians and 38% ethnic minorities. Different ethnicities have lived in Latvia for centuries being in different power position. Today structure of minorities has been significantly influenced during the WWII and free movement of workers within Soviet Union. Now common language for different national minorities is Russian which speaks at home 37,2% of population. Unfortunately the minority policy interfere with foreign policy and often are seen in context of relationship with Russia. It negatively influence minority policy in Latvia. The Russian linguistic minority in Latvia identifies itself as integrate part of Latvian people and as Europeans. Preservation of Russian cultural and linguistic identity is absolutely legitimate interests and has to be handled in fair manner.

There is a lot of problems, one of them non-citizens problem. In my view the key issue is participation of minorities in decision making. In Latvia ethnical minorities are represented and treated as 'external' to the ethno-national project. Even legally organised referendum for second state language was deemed as a a subversive threat. Last week in Latvian parliament was presented a draft of a new preamble to the constitution, which aims to legitimise shift from liberal to ethno-national democracy and to prevent citizens initiatives about language and citizenship. Of course there are ethnic tensions, but in no case it is a reason for compromising democracy. In contrast to existing preamble referring to the people of Latvia the draft introduce a new concept of ethnic Latvian nation as a primary source of sovereignty. Thus the tenets of self-determination are used only selectively, pertaining to ethnicity and not to an inclusive geographical unit, as required by the basic principles of democratic statehood. Some features of announces constitutional changes are similar to broadly criticised constitutional changes in Hungary.

It is not a separate case, but a trend for several years. Concept of ethnical dominance earlier was included in National identity, civil society and social integration policy paper adopted by Latvian government in 2011. This paper defines Latvian language and culture

not only as primary basis for social integration, but also as precondition for democratic participation, factually it denies the participation of minorities such.

Similar process of limitation of democracy occurs in other participating states and I believe that inclusive democracy and effective participation of ethnic, as well as of religious minorities is main challenge for democracy today. There is no rational argument for discrimination, but there is a trend to avoid open discussion and to discredit minority organisations. Therefore we recommend to develop forms of mediation empowering dialogue between majority and minority groups in order to make participation of minorities really effective.