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25 March 1997

**Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
Secretariat**

ENGLISH only

Department for Conference Services

At the request of the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities, the attached letter of 21 November 1996 to the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Latvia, Mr. V. Birkavs, as well as the letter of reply, dated 27 February 1997, are being distributed to all OSCE delegations.

**OSCE
High Commissioner
on National Minorities**

His Excellency
Mr. Valdis Birkavs
Minister for Foreign Affairs
of the Republic of Latvia
RIGA
Republic of Latvia

Reference no:
1147/96/L

The Hague
21 November 1996

Dear Mr Minister,

I am writing to you in connection with the particular matter of nationality identification in citizens' passports in Latvia. As I understand, Latvian citizens' passports have a box where there is a compulsory requirement for

passport holders to provide details about their nationality. It seems to me that the compulsory inclusion of such details does not accord fully with international practice in other countries. Furthermore, in the Latvian context, it may give the impression to some that there are different categories of passport, partly dependent on nationality identification.

May I suggest that the inclusion of these details should, in future, be a voluntary decision on the part of passport holders. Such a change in procedure would not involve any unnecessary costs as there would be no need to alter the technical layout of existing passport books. Simply, the box on the appropriate page in the passport could be left blank if the passport holder does not wish to give this particular information.

I would welcome your consideration of this matter and look forward to your reply.

Yours sincerely,

[signature]
Max van der Stoel
OSCE High Commissioner
on National Minorities

No 31/127-275
27 February 1997

H.E. Mr. Max van der Stoel
OSCE High Commissioner on
National Minorities
Prinsessegracht 22
P.O.Box 200062
25000 EB - The Hague
The Netherlands

Excellency,

First of all, I will be very glad and honoured to meet you once again in Riga in April this year. your visits contribute greatly to the constant strengthening and harmonisation of relations among the national and ethnic groups in Latvia. That is why we give the most serious consideration to all your proposals and recommendations.

Referring to your letter 1147/96/L of 21 November 1996, regarding inclusion of information on nationality into the Latvia's citizens passport, I can inform you about the following. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Latvia has discussed your proposal with other relevant ministries, the Naturalisation Board and the Consultative Council on Nationalities, and has collated the various views. All the consulted institutions supported the general idea of the proposal. However, there undoubtedly exist some difficulties in its implementation. The following were mentioned most often:

- the present passport of citizens of Latvia is internationally recognised, including the fact that information is given under all headings;
- implementation of the proposal would require a considerable number of amendments in Latvian legislation, which might be a lengthy process.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs will suggest the proposal for inclusion into the agenda of the Council of Ministers. Decision-making on this issue might require some time. I assure you that we will keep you informed about any further developments in this regard.

Referring to your letter with questionnaire of 10 December 1996, I have the honour to forward to you the requested information on the linguistic rights of persons belonging to national minorities and the principles of education of national minorities in Latvia.

Accept, Excellency, the assurances of my highest consideration.

Yours sincerely,

[signature]

Valdis Birkavs
Minister for Foreign Affairs of the
Republic of Latvia