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PC.DEL/1084/19  
4 October 2019

ENGLISH  
Original: RUSSIAN

Delegation of the Russian Federation

**STATEMENT BY MR. ALEXANDER LUKASHEVICH,  
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION,  
AT THE 1242nd MEETING OF THE OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

3 October 2019

**On the violation by Latvia of the educational rights of national minorities**

Mr. Chairperson,

We have repeatedly drawn attention to the propagation of the total “Latvianization” of the education system in Latvia, as a result of which the rights of the Russian-speaking minority are being grossly violated.

In that connection, we cannot fail to mention the decision of 23 September by the Coalition Council for Co-operation, which brings together all the ruling parties in Latvia, to order the switch to instruction in Latvian at all levels of education. The development of a plan for the full achievement of “Latvianization” will be entrusted to the Ministry of Education and Science. Despite the lack of specific details as regards time-frames, representatives of nationalist parties in Latvia are demanding that “the transition take place as soon as possible”.

Furthermore, Regulation No. 716 of 21 November 2018 of the Latvian Cabinet of Ministers on guidelines on State pre-school education and examples of pre-school education programmes entered into force on 1 September. This instrument provides, among other things, for the use of the Latvian language as the main medium of communication in play-based lessons with children over the age of five. An exception is made for special activities organized with the aim of learning a national minority’s language and ethnic culture. We note that we are talking about games that are now strictly regulated in terms of “linguistic purity”. What will be regulated next – reading children bedtime stories?

As human rights defenders have noted, the aforementioned regulations state that educational games should take place in pre-school State and private institutions every day, but the regularity of “special classes” is not established. This may lead to the exclusion of other languages, primarily Russian, from the educational process.

These developments violate not only national legislation, but also a number of the Latvian Government’s obligations under international law. I am referring, in particular, to Article 27 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, according to which “persons belonging to ... minorities shall not be denied the right ... to enjoy their own culture ... or ... own language”. Article 5 of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination states that: “States Parties undertake to prohibit and to eliminate racial discrimination in all its forms ..., without distinction as

to ... national or ethnic origin ... notably in the enjoyment of the following rights ... [t]he right to education and training.” Article 5 of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization’s Convention against Discrimination in Education recognizes “the right of members of national minorities [to carry on their own educational activities, including] ... the use or the teaching of their own language”. Lastly, Articles 29 and 30 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child stipulate that “the education of the child shall be directed to ... [t]he development of respect for the child’s parents, his or her own cultural identity, language and values” and also that “a child belonging to ... a minority ... shall not be denied the right ... to enjoy his or her own culture ... or to use his or her own language”. The 1992 United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities is not being respected either.

At the regional level, the new legislation in Latvia contravenes the provisions of the European Convention on Human Rights and the Council of Europe’s Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities as well as the CSCE Copenhagen Document of 1990. The Latvian Government is also ignoring The Hague Recommendations regarding the Education Rights of National Minorities, published by the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities.

We note that in August the Latvian Human Rights Committee filed a complaint with the Constitutional Court, in other words the supreme judicial body of Latvia, regarding the groundlessness of the new regulations on pre-school education and their discriminatory nature towards national minorities. We recall that Article 91 of the Latvian Constitution states that: “All human beings in Latvia shall be equal before the law and the courts. Human rights shall be realized without discrimination of any kind.” Article 114 of the Constitution states that: “Persons belonging to ethnic minorities have the right to preserve and develop their language and their ethnic and cultural identity.”

Against this background, the experts’ criticisms concern not only matters of substance but also, first and foremost, the vagueness of the aforementioned new legislation and the fact that there is no way to monitor its implementation. They believe that the introduction of these regulations could lead to conflicts arising among children, but this time on ethnic grounds.

The United Nations has also voiced its concern. The Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination has initiated proceedings under its early warning and urgent action procedure in connection with the entry into force of the aforementioned regulations of the Cabinet of Ministers of Latvia. In September, the special procedures of the Human Rights Council – Special Rapporteurs on the right to education, freedom of opinion and expression, contemporary forms of racism, and minority issues – sent a collective request to the Latvian Government regarding the entry into force of the notorious regulation on pre-school education. They believe that this instrument imposes restrictions on the use of minority languages in pre-school institutions.

These facts, in addition to many others, demonstrate the failure of the attempts by the representatives of Latvia to justify the openly discriminatory policy of their authorities towards a significant proportion of the population of that Baltic State.

In that connection, the strange silence on the part of the relevant European Union bodies, which are responsible for monitoring the compliance of Member States with their human rights obligations, is alarming.

We urge the High Commissioner on National Minorities and the Director of the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights to provide an objective assessment of the Latvian Government’s

actions and also to take measures within the framework of their mandates to put a stop to the continuing flagrant violations of the linguistic and other rights of ethnic and linguistic minorities in Latvia.

Thank you for your attention.