

17 September 2018

Good day, my name is Ilya Kozyrev, I'm a citizen of Latvia, and I'm forced to be a member of the organization with the name "The Headquarters for the defense of the Russian schools"

Just think of what I've just told you. I'm a citizen of Latvia, a democratic country, which fully meets the criteria and values of the European Union. And I'm a member of the organization that is forced to struggle against the democratically elect parliament and government, since they are planning to annihilate the system of education in Russian language, which is the mother tongue for 37 per cent of the population of Latvia.

The educational system in Russian is traditional for Latvia. This year Latvia is celebrating a hundred years of its independence. The same year we are celebrating another anniversary – two hundred and thirty years since the day first Russian school was founded in Latvia.

We, the defenders of the Russian schools, held the meeting for the parents of Russian school-kids March 31, 2018. There attended more than a thousand people at this meeting, who criticized the parliament and the government for the annihilation of the educational system in Russian. Therefore, the Latvian Security Police opened a criminal case.

Eleven people overall, including two mothers of many children have been charged for the organization of this meeting and making speech there. We are accused of the organization of mass riots, of the activities against the state in the unconstitutional way, of activities against the independence of Latvia. These heavy charges are brought only on the basis of our public statements, both oral, and written. No actions and any mass riots which could confirm these charges exist in nature. We are tried to be condemned only for the wrong thoughts and words, as well as for the attempt to protect our rights.

Three of the suspects have been arrested, including me. Aleksander Gaponenko has spent four months in prison during the investigation. Vladimir Linderman has been arrested the second one and has spent two weeks in prison. I have spent two days in prison.

In all three cases during the detention the Security Police showed unmotivated cruelty. Police officers in masks attacked suddenly, brought us down and put the handcuffs. All of us have bruises and scratches. As for me, they injured my back and now I'm treated for it. Alexander Gaponenko was kept in handcuffs for eleven hours, without the permission given to eat and drink all this time. Such cruelty was applied to the people of the middle-age and older. I am fifty-two years old, Vladimir Linderman is fifty-nine years old, Alexander Gaponenko is sixty-four years old.

Personal computers and phones have been confiscated from all of us. In spite of the fact these devices have already been hacked – as we receive notifications about passwords changes – the Security police wouldn't hurry to return them to us.

Looks like, the Security Police has no purpose to condemn us surely. The investigation has to be the punishment itself. The exact content of the charges isn't known to anybody. The investigation isn't interested in the facts - during all this time interrogations has happened just for a couple of times. It seems like their main task is to force the defenders of the Russian schools to spend time and money for own protection.

Besides, the authorities have a purpose to intimidate those defenders of the Russian schools whom the repressions didn't touch personally. Having seen what the inconveniences and losses suffered those of us, who got under repressions, other participants of protests will reduce their activity. And the authorities will be able to destroy the educational system in Russian without any resistance.

It is difficult for us to fight for our rights alone. Russia can't help us because the country has been stigmatized by the West as the enemy of freedom and democracy. The European Union doesn't want to help us because any criticism of Latvia would mean the criticism of them, since the EU knew about situation in Latvia when it accepted this country.

Human rights violations in the democratic countries are dangerous not only by themselves. They are able to become – and do become – an example and justification for the countries, which are non-democratic. So, in Ukraine where there happened coups and people are killed directly in their own houses, where the ethnocratic regime is in power too, the educational systems in the languages of minorities are being annihilated as well.

Also it isn't a coincidence at all that the Ministers of Education of Latvia and Ukraine met last year, discussed and coordinated these plans. Since now on, to any criticism about it Ukraine might refer to the precedent of Latvia.

Therefore we, linguistic minorities of Latvia, count on the help of OSCE. We urge you to watch closely the events in Latvia, not to give in on the deception of the ethnocratic authorities and not to weaken the attention to human rights violations.