

Delegation of the Russian Federation

**STATEMENT BY MR. ALEXANDER LUKASHEVICH,
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION,
AT THE 1191st MEETING OF THE
OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

5 July 2018

**On discrimination against national minorities in the
education sector in Latvia**

Mr. Chairperson,

We are forced once more to raise the issue of the Latvian authorities' policy of having national minorities' educational establishments move over entirely to teaching in the State language.

As we have learned, on 13 June, the Latvian Saeima Commission on Education, Science and Culture supported amendments to the Law on Higher Education, which ban teaching in the Russian language at private universities and colleges. Under the amendments, accreditation for programmes in the Russian language will remain in force until the accreditation expiry date but these programmes must stop enrolling new students as of 2019. On 21 June the Parliament approved the amendments in the third and final reading.

The Latvian Ministry of Education and Science says that these amendments regulating the use of languages at private universities follow on from the recently adopted amendments to the Law on Education, which encourage a gradual transition to teaching in the State language alone in secondary schools. We have already spoken about the discriminatory nature of these amendments at the Permanent Council on numerous occasions. Up until now, the law set requirements concerning language use for State universities only, but the Ministry of Education and Science says that higher education is a function delegated by the State and that similar amendments are therefore needed for private universities too. Following this logic, if the State sets the criteria for conducting and accrediting teaching programmes, it also has the right to decide what language they should use.

To understand the scale of the problem, we note that in 2017 there were 15,439 students at private universities in Latvia, of whom 5,189 or 34 per cent were studying in the Russian language. This is no small figure for a country with such a small population.

Until recently, the private universities had one, albeit slim, hope of stopping the law from taking effect – by calling on the Latvian President, Raimonds Vējonis, not to approve

the amendments. But on 4 July, just yesterday in other words, he approved them. The upcoming parliamentary election in Latvia also does not help to resolve the problem, given that a number of candidates have built their campaigns in large part on nationalist slogans and calls for the pursuit of a policy of forced Latvianization in all areas of public life.

Mr. Chairperson,

Along with the notorious “reforms” of education in the school system, these actions demonstrate once again the Latvian Government’s complete disregard for the interests of the national minorities, who are an integral part of the population in this OSCE participating State, and for their international obligations, not to mention the fact that the amendments are also in flagrant violation of the right to private enterprise and private property. They also go against the Council of Europe Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, which gives national minorities the right to set up their own educational establishments. The amendments are at odds with the Bolzano/Bozen and Oslo Recommendations of the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities, the tenth and twentieth anniversaries of which we are marking this year.

We hope that common sense will ultimately prevail. Encouraging narrow nationalist interests always ends eventually in sorry results for the State and for its people. We call on the relevant OSCE structures, including the Secretary General, the High Commissioner on National Minorities, the Director of the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights and the Chairmanship, to publicly state their position on this latest outrageous discriminatory step.

Thank you for your attention.