



**Statement of the Permanent Representative of the Delegation
of the Republic of Latvia in response to the Statement of the
Permanent Representative of the Russian Federation at the
Permanent Council Meeting No.497 on 26 February, 2004.**

Mr. Chairman,

First of all I would like to mention, that Latvian authorities have studied the report by Council of Europe Commissioner for Human rights Mr. Alvaro Gil-Robles equally carefully, like the Russian Federation. We recognize the right of the Russian Federation to raise this issue in the Permanent Council; however the full picture of the report and recommendations it contains can be seen only in the body it was meant for. This aspect of the similar statements made by Russian Federation I mentioned already in one of previous PC meetings. Latvian authorities have given written comments on 13 sections of the report, which covers all issues mentioned by distinguished representative from the Russian Federation. They are available for all delegations in the OSCE. Today I would like to mention general assessment and some items from the report of the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human rights.

It is worth mentioning, that the report is a remarkable achievement for a visit of just four days. We are glad to see that the Commissioner's assessment of the cooperation and good will of the Latvian authorities is equally positive. The Commissioner has gained a rather broad overview of the human rights situation in Latvia and we agree with the reasoning behind the majority of his recommendations.

Latvia continues and will continue to attach much importance to the issue of citizenship, equally the government continues the proactive measures to promote naturalization. As the Commissioner has recognized in his Report, the Latvian Government has already taken a series of measures – the naturalization fee has been reduced by a third, information is spread about the requirements of naturalization, applicants can benefit from free Latvian language training. The Latvian legislation allows practically every non-citizen to naturalize and it is up to an individual to decide whether and when he or she wants to become a citizen. The Government continues to encourage non-citizens to apply for citizenship both by adopting legislative measures facilitating naturalization and by carrying out

informative campaigns, which have certainly yielded results. We are pleased to note that the interest in obtaining Latvian citizenship has considerably increased lately. Since September 2003 the Naturalization Board has received twice as many applications as in the same period in previous years. One reason for such an increase is certainly due to the openness and encouragement policy of the government and more resources provided for Latvian language training to naturalization applicants. Another reason is that the first major difference in rights between citizens of Latvia and non-citizens will soon inevitably emerge, namely, the citizens of Latvia will also become citizens of the EU.

Mr. Chairman,

As I have already informed the Permanent Council, on 5 February 2004 the Parliament approved in the final reading the amendments to the Education Law that legally consolidate the norms that were previously foreseen in Government regulations. Today I'd like to mention some aspects, I have not spoken about in my previous statements. The issues of dialogue between governmental institutions and NGO's and parents' organizations on the reform are being addressed through several channels. There is School Councils mechanism through which directors communicate with teachers, pupils and their parents. There is another important mechanism for dialogue – the Minority Education Consultative Council under the auspices of the Ministry of Education in which participants from minority schools, NGO's, parents' organizations and independent experts take part. This year Council will be enlarged with new participants from several minorities NGO's to promote wider and more effective dialogue. The issue of providing adequate information will be tackled by an information campaign on the education reform. For this purpose the Society Integration Foundation has financed 18 projects worth some 50 000 euro from the state budget.

At present there is no shortage of teachers of Russian as the native language who are prepared in two higher education establishments – the University of Latvia and Daugavpils University – in sufficient numbers. It should be noted that all these higher education establishments acknowledge that there is low demand for these teachers because due to the demographical situation the number of pupils is reducing. Each year about 15 teachers of Russian as the native language are prepared at the University of Latvia Department of Slavic languages and two Departments of Daugavpils University – Department of Russian Literature and Culture, General and Russian Linguistics Department.

The last issue, I'd like to mention, is the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities. The Parliament and the Government continue their work towards ratification of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities. On 22 January 2004, the Human Rights Commission of the Saeima (the Parliament of the Republic of Latvia) decided to establish a Sub-commission on Society Integration. One of the main tasks of the Sub-

commission is to consider the issue of ratification of the Framework Convention. The Ministry of Justice and the Secretariat of the Minister for Special Assignments for Society Integration are preparing a comprehensive analysis on the compatibility of national legislation with the Convention.

In the coming months Latvian authorities will study closely the recommendations contained in the Report of Council of Europe commissioner for Human rights to find the most appropriate ways for following them up.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman