



PERMANENT MISSION OF THE REPUBLIC OF LATVIA TO THE UN,
OSCE AND OTHER INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS IN VIENNA

**Statement by Ambassador Nils Jansons, Permanent Representative of
the Republic of Latvia, delivered in response to the statement by the
Russian Federation**

Permanent Council No 757,
Vienna, April 2, 2009

Madam Chairperson,

Let me start by correcting a few inaccuracies that have found their way into the Russian statement.

First, the Russian Ambassador referred to non-citizens as having lived in the Republic of Latvia since its foundation. I presume, what was meant here was since the renewal of Latvia's independence.

Second, the mixing up minorities and citizenship. Let me recall that citizenship in Latvia has never been handled according to ethnic criteria. There were many non-Latvian citizens before the occupation, whose citizenship was reestablished. And at present, about 2/3 of Latvia's Russian minority have citizenship and, naturally, enjoy all voting rights.

Next, on the issue of voting rights of non-citizens to the municipal elections I should like to emphasize that Latvia's election legislation is fully in compliance with international standards. There are no international norms, which would require granting the voting rights for non-citizens. The state power is realized by its citizens. Similar legislation is in most of the OSCE participating states and Latvia is not an exception. All those who want to participate in the elections can obtain citizenship.

Latvia prefers citizens with full rights to non-citizens with many rights, at the same time acknowledging that any restrictions must have strong justification and shall be in accordance with international standards.

The naturalization process in Latvia is open for everybody. The Government of Latvia has adopted numerous legislative and proactive measures to encourage the naturalization, including simplifying of exams, reducing fees, sponsoring informative campaigns and providing free of charge language courses for naturalization applicants. Every effort has been made to make the process efficient, user-friendly and desirable. However, one should also bear in mind that naturalization is an individual process, based on a expressed desire of the applicant to become a citizen.

Finally, I should thank many Participating states that really care about this issue and have in one form or another supported the process of naturalization. We would only wish that the others who claim concern would follow the suit.

Thank you, Madam Chairperson