

Dear Ladies and Gentlemen,

Differently from national minorities of other countries, the Poles who have lived in Lithuania for ages do not form any kind of emigration – neither political nor economic. They have not come from somewhere and have not crossed any state border. They live on their own land, where their parents and grand-grandparents lived. It was not them who crossed the border, the border crossed them. Children of the citizens of Polish nationality have always studied in schools in their native language. Even during the long Soviet years, there were Polish schools in which children of Polish parents studied in their native language. This tradition has been further continued in the independent Lithuania. However, in the districts of Eastern Lithuania, where the Poles make up the majority, they do not have the same conditions with students of Lithuanian schools.

First of all, there is a different subordination of the two types of schools (Polish and Lithuanian) subject to the nationality of children who study in them. This differentiation is particularly enthusiastically implemented in the district of Vilnius, where the Polish make up 61%, and in the district of Šalčininkai, where Poles make up 79%. In these districts, schools of national minorities belong, as it should be, to the municipalities. A modest budget of the municipalities conditions quite a poor existence of these schools. However, Lithuanian schools are not subordinate to the municipalities. They have a special status, as if they were sacred cows, and belong to the Government structures. These schools are considerably off, they have been provided with better facilities, and the luxurious buildings significantly exceeding the needs are built and given for them. They have more school busses, received more funds from the Government and are patronised and pampered in every possible way. This is not only in stark conflict with the Convention for the Protection of National Minorities but also grossly violate the provisions of the Convention on Human Rights, let alone human honesty and basic decency. There is no such injustice in any country, be it in Europe, or elsewhere in the world.

National minority schools lack textbooks. Textbooks are more expensive and the state does not compensate for the difference in the prices. Schools receive a “pupil’s basket” funding. However, the basket of national minorities increased only by 15% does not cover additional expenses of these schools (for additional lessons and textbooks). In comparison, the “pupil’s basket” in schools of national minorities in

Poland is indexed up to 50%. It is noteworthy that in schools of Eastern Lithuania an extra 10% is allocated to Lithuanian schools as well; and they have neither more subjects (than Polish schools), nor more teachers or more expensive textbooks. Thus, compared to Lithuanian schools, the Polish schools in this region in fact don't receive almost any additional funds and have much more expenses. This contravenes with the statement provided in Article 12 of the Convention, which reads that: *the Parties undertake to promote equal opportunities for access to education at all levels for persons belonging to national minorities.*

The Seimas and the Government adopt, on a regular basis, the substantially funded so-called "education development programmes of Eastern Lithuania". It sounds very sonorous. However, almost all the funds under these programmes are allocated only for the construction of Lithuanian schools, including those areas, where there are practically no Lithuanian children.

Governmental Resolution No. 257 of 12 March 2009 provided for the requirements to strictly comply with the minimum number of pupils in the class. Those norms are uniform both for the whole Lithuania, where there are monolingual schools, and for those areas where pupils are divided into two or even three flows (Lithuanian, Polish, and Russian) and no such number of pupils in the class can be collected. Differently from the European practice, where founders of schools (municipalities) have the right to resolve the issues related to class formation, depending on financial possibilities, the Lithuanian municipalities were deprived of this right in 2008. Under its Resolution No. 903 of 29 August 2009, the Government further increased the norms of the minimum number of pupils in the class, which must be complied with. The Vilnius District Municipality has been brought to court several times already for the failure to observe the set norms; by the way, courts always make judgements that are unfavourable to schools. In compliance with the requirements of the courts, one-third of schools would have to be closed in the district of Vilnius.

This way and by employing various other means, it is constantly sought to gradually liquidate schools of national minorities and deprive children of national minorities of their rights to study in their native language.

Thank you for your attention.

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of several loops and a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.