



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

Statement “On education in a state language in Latvia” by the Permanent Representative of Latvia, Ambassador Jānis Zlamets (in reply to a statement delivered by the Russian Delegation)

Permanent Council No.1170,
Vienna, 21 December 2017

Mr Chairman,

Since my country was addressed in a statement delivered by the Russian Delegation, I would like to provide a response, as, in regard to education in a state language in Latvia, we have done several times this year already.

Indeed, a further step of reform of education in minority languages is introduced in Latvia. After a transition period all centralised graduation exams of schools in Latvia will be taken in Latvian. Actually we have been very cautious so far - this step only de facto recognises reality already in place. In reality more than 85 percent of graduates of the minority schools already choose to pass centralised graduation exams in Latvian.

This is a logical further step into long term reform to ensure equal opportunities for all graduates in Latvia in their further education or in labour market. And this is a logical further phase in reform that is well in its second decade already. All steps here are carefully weighted according to the best standards of good governance. All relevant professional and civil society organisations and partners are closely involved in this process.

As regards proposals to enlarge proportion of curriculum taught in Latvian within bilingual system for minority schools - for the time being it is only a proposal. No exception there - it will be carefully scrutinised through procedures in accordance to the best standards of good governance.

We are also in close contact, be it by using quiet diplomacy, with competent international bodies, including those of the OSCE and the Council of Europe, and value positive recognition of our work done so far.

Mr Chairman,

This recent step of reform of education in minority languages in no way limits opportunities for pupils belonging to minorities to receive education of their mother tongue, literature, culture and history aspects. Those subjects are not part of centralised exams.

Claims of discrimination of persons belonging to the national minorities on education grounds are false as well. Let me remind that Government of Latvia provides education in eight minority languages. An interesting observation – according to a recently published annual school rating in Latvia, the middle sized schools group (where the majority of minority schools are) is led by a Russian language school. One also will find eight minority schools (six Russian, one Polish and one Jewish) in the top 20 of that group.

Mr Chairman,

I have to admit here that statistically numbers of those receiving education in a state language – Latvian - are indeed rising, and proportion of those receiving education in minority languages are decreasing through years. Those figures are made through individual decisions of parents after judging on what is the best for the future of their children.

Even more – that phenomenon has a certain universal character. For example, in accordance to statistics of the Russian Federation, in 1989 there were 45 languages taught in different National Republics of the Russian Federation. Today that number has decreased to 39. Moreover, only in 15 of 21 National Republics of the Russian Federation education in the titular language is available.

Thank you, Mr Chairman!