

PC.DEL/408/18

13 April 2018

ENGLISH

Original: RUSSIAN

Delegation of the Russian Federation

**STATEMENT BY MR. ALEXANDER LUKASHEVICH,  
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION,  
AT THE 1181st MEETING OF THE  
OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

12 April 2018

**On discrimination against national minorities in Latvia**

Mr. Chairperson,

We are forced to return to the issue of the Latvian Government's policy to have national minorities' schools go over to teaching in the State language. As we know, back in January this year, the Latvian Cabinet of Ministers approved legislative amendments on a full transition to teaching in the Latvian language by 2021. The Latvian Saeima approved these amendments on 22 March.

A number of experts believe that this "blitzkrieg", which the Latvian authorities plan to carry out in such a socially and politically sensitive area as education, could fuel inter-ethnic tension in what is still a multi-ethnic State. People in Latvia itself have been calling this "linguistic genocide", and this is not the most critical response. The Federal Union of European Nationalities, which brings together more than 90 organizations in 33 European countries, has expressed its opposition to serious curtailing of Russian-speaking Latvians' rights to use their native language and be educated in their native language in schools, and has called on the Latvian Head of State not to promulgate the amendments to the law on education.

The amendments effectively mean dismantling an entire system of teaching in educational establishments run by the national minorities. The acute shortage of Latvian language teachers and relevant teaching materials, and a lack of expert research into the current education system were just some of the problems discussed at the All-Latvian Parents' Assembly on 31 March in Riga. This event was attended by parents, students, teachers and representatives of civil society organizations. The Assembly approved a resolution that was sent to the European Parliament, the European Commission, the United Nations and the OSCE, as well as to the President of Latvia, Raimonds Vējonis. This document has been circulated at the OSCE and is available for examination. It stresses that "the amendments pursue the sole objective of forcibly assimilating Latvia's Russian-speaking residents, or forcing them into emigration, and contradict articles 91 and 114 of the Latvian Constitution and decisions of the Latvian Constitutional Court, as well as Latvia's international obligations under the Framework Convention for the Protection of National

Minorities, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and the Convention against Discrimination in Education.”

Unfortunately, President Vējonis ignored the views of a large part of his country’s population and on 2 April, as the country celebrated the Catholic Easter, hastened to promulgate the amendments to the law on education. This resulted in mass protests, including a rally attended by around 2,000 people on 4 April in Riga. The Mayor of Riga, Nils Ušakovs, called the President’s decision “yet another very big mistake” and confirmed that the Harmony political party would appeal to the Constitutional Court.

What is more, the Latvian authorities have continued their offensive against Russian-language education. The State Language Centre notified Riga schools that all teachers would soon undergo an inspection to assess their knowledge of the Latvian language. This could set off a new spiral of repression.

Thus, under the pretext of “integration” and “strengthening the State language’s position”, the lawful interests and internationally recognized rights of more than a third of Latvia’s population are being trampled underfoot. Earlier, at the Permanent Council meeting on 21 December 2017, we drew the attention of our colleagues from the European Union to these discriminatory measures. We hope that a response from Brussels will follow.

We hope too that these actions will be given an objective assessment by the High Commissioner on National Minorities and the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights.

Thank you for your attention.