

Human Rights Council  
Regional Forum on Education, Language and the Human Rights of Minorities  
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**Intervention under the 1 item of the agenda: Human rights and minority language education**

**Intervention presented by: Elizabete Krivcova – Russian community of Latvia, Citizens advice bureau “Conscentia”.**

For years, Latvia was known for its bilingual education, providing solid knowledge of state language and good education in minority language. Absolute majority of minority schools are using Russian as second languages of instruction since 38% of Latvian population speaks Russian as its mother tongue. Unfortunately, since March 2018, the majority of Latvian parliament decided to stop it and declared an education system in one language as ultimate goal of educational policy. As a lawyer and civil activist, I have represented interests of Russian speaking community on all stages of the decision making from Ministry of Education to Constitutional court, which delivered its judgment on 23 April 2019. In name of linguistic united society the Constitutional court have denied our rights on education in minority language.

New law significantly reduces proportion of minority languages permitted as language of instruction. Kindergarten, school and high schools, public and private schools are subject of strict language rules. The aim of kindergarten is preparation to school in state language. Education in minority language is allowed only up to 50% in first 6 years in the elementary school, afterwards it is possible factually only as a language course. However even that seems to be temporary solution in transition to educational system in state language only.

Advocating for minority education we asked for proof-based educational policy, where the good education for all would be the ultimate criteria. We claimed right on education as right of parents to choose best education for its children, as a necessity of education system to be acceptable for its users and as academic freedom for ours schools. We claimed right on non-discrimination because we believe, minority scholars needs different treatment as majority children. Finally, we claimed rights of national minorities especially based on the Framework convention for the Protection of National Minorities.

The constitutional court have denied all of our claims, saying that the right on education is the right to education in state language, that no different treatment of minority children in educational system is necessary. Concerning obligations arising from the Framework

convention the court hold that the Advisory Committee on the Convention is bad informed about Latvian unique situation, so the priority for decision-making should have the opinion of Latvian Ministry of Foreign affairs. Comparing with the judgment of the Constitutional court on issues of minority education in 2005, when the Framework convention was not yet ratified, now we have less protection for minority education as it was prior to joining Framework convention. It is very clear shift against diversity and lowering of human rights standards for minority education.

Russian minority in Latvia are in situation, when there are necessary personal resources, teaching practices, sufficient demand and good results of given minority education system, but it will be prohibited. In this situation, we recommend

- 1) to develop closer cooperation among stakeholder minorities in European countries. We believe European minorities should cooperate in sharing resources, experience and creation common educational space and particular educational products, supporting individual mobility and making for individuals possible to use right on minority education in different EU countries.
- 2) we urge UN bodies for more support for freedom of education. The intervention of the state should be limited with minimal standards, which are applicable to the educational achievements, not to the process and language of education.

Thank you!

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