

Dear participants of the Forum!

NGO „Russian School of Estonia” is an organisation that is constantly dealing with the question of preserving of Russian minority Schools in Estonia. We are very worried with the tendencies that we have in our country. There are about 25% Russians living in Estonia and about 30% of the population speaks Russian in every day live. Some minorities are using Russian language as their second language.

During 28 years of Estonia's independence, a number of politically biased decisions were adopted; in particular, a plan was adopted for the phased transfer of Russian schools to the Estonian language of instruction. This was done without any broad discussion with the Russian minority representatives. The Russian national minority took such policy as an attempt on their constitutional rights, as ignoring the parents' rights to choose the language of instruction, and most importantly as ignoring the basic rights of children to preserve their national identity.

Repeated legitimate attempts by parents and schools to preserve education in their native language have been declined by the Estonian government for almost ten years already. Under the slogan of a «better study of Estonian language» and «cost optimizing”, the whole system of Russian education, which has been built for centuries, and which has proved its necessity, is planned to be vanished. More than that, Estonia officials (including the president of the country Kersti Kaljulaid) are saying that in the future only Estonian schools should remain. No teachers were prepared for Russian schools for decades as a part of this policy. This all means quite clear plan of assimilation of Russian minority via estonization of Russian children in Estonian schools. We are watching this process going with the full speed in Latvia where Russian schools should be totally transferred to Latvian language starting from this autumn.

We see in European Union (and especially in Baltic states) quite a big range of arbitrariness and unwillingness to consider the wishes and rights of national minorities. This mainly happens because the policy of education in EU countries is fully left to the country governments and we already see to what disastrous results it leads for Russian minority in the Baltic countries. Therefore considering the 12th UN Forum on minority issues that will be dedicated to the theme of education we would like to make our recommendation proposal on this matter:

The countries where national minority makes quite substantial percentage of population should be obliged to offer and support the educational system (kindergartens, schools and universities) on the language of the national minority.

Without this guarantee we will see the same cases of ignoring the interests of national minorities in different countries again and again (like we see it Estonia and Latvia).

Thank you.