

First Forum on Minority Issues (15-16 December 2008)

Statement by Valērijs Romanovskis, First Secretary of the Permanent Mission of the Republic of Latvia

VII The content and delivery of the Curricula

Madam Chairperson,

Since there is very limited time allocated for speakers, allow me to briefly touch upon the experience of Latvia concerning the main ideas contained in Chapter VII of draft recommendations and respond to some comments expressed previously.

In Latvia there are two kinds of educational programs: for schools which have education programs in the state language - Latvian - and those which have programs for education of ethnic minorities which are held in the minority language, in Latvian and both.

Let me stress that Latvia finances obligatory primary and secondary education in eight national minority languages, even where only a small number of children are seeking instruction in a certain language. These minorities are Russians, Byelorussians, Poles, Ukrainians, Lithuanians, Estonians, Jews and Roma people. Education in national minority languages is a precondition for maintaining the cultural identity of national minorities in Latvia.

The Ministry of Education and Science has drawn up four model bilingual education curricula for primary schools that differ from each other in terms of the proportion of classes to be taught in the minority language and Latvian or bilingual. National minority schools can opt for one of these curricula or prepare their own. Minority secondary schools have been given 40% of the total number of subjects in the national minority language and free choice is given to the minority schools in determining the subjects which should be taught in the official state language.

The standards are common for majority and minority schools. Many aspects of education for diversity are integrated into variety of all school subjects: for example, human rights education; intercultural / multicultural education, inter – religious education, anti – racism education, tolerance education, civic education, education combating anti – Semitism, teaching on ethnic/cultural minorities, gender equality.

Instruments of diversity education in Latvia are the following: recognition of the positive value of diversity, intercultural approach at school, diversity in textbooks, ensuring equal access to education for various groups, inclusive environment at school, training teachers to address equality issues in diverse society.

The Government of Latvia has constantly been exerting efforts to promote the dialogue with representatives of national minorities. The Ministry of Education and Science has established the Consultative Council on issues of national minority education. This institution helps to maintain a dialogue between the Ministry of Education and Science, students and teachers of national minority schools, parents' organizations and NGO's.

The quality of education is constantly monitored by the Ministry of Education and Science. Statistical data clearly shows that the examination results in minority schools do not differ substantially from the results observed in previous years. Examination results in some subjects are even better than before.

Madam Chairperson, we must admit that it is not an easy task to provide state financed education in eight minority languages; however, we are dealing successfully with different challenges in this process. In conclusion I would like to stress that the Latvian educational system in general and schools in particular have become important force in the process of social integration.

Thank you Madam Chairperson!