

# **Human Rights Council**

## **Forum on minority issues**

### **7-th session**

**Geneva, 25-26 November 2014**

**Item 4 of the agenda: Improving prevention of violence and atrocity crimes.**

**Presented by: Oksana Bekeriene, Lithuania - Association “Centre for Research and protection of fundamental rights”, 2014**

Mr. Chairman,

Distinguished delegates and colleagues,

Today I speak on behalf of the Russian minority in Lithuania. (*ed. translator: [I represent]*) Association “Centre for Research and protection of fundamental rights”.

Lithuania was the first country in Central and Eastern Europe to adopt the Law on National Minorities in 1989. The Government established the Department for Immigration and National Minorities, whose main task was to take care of the needs of minorities and preservation of the national identity of all ethnic groups in Lithuania.

The situation was changing with time though. In 2010, the Law on National Minorities was repealed, and the new law has never been adopted. In 2009 the Government also abolished the Department for Immigration and National Minorities, and

transferred its functions to the Department of the Lithuanian Ministry of Culture; by doing so, Lithuania disregarded the existing human rights obligations the country committed itself to.

On 10 November this year, the Government of Lithuania has reached an agreement on the establishment of the Department of National Minorities at the meeting of the Strategic Committee of the Lithuanian Government. This is seen as a positive development.

The new wording of the Education Act of 2011 was adopted without taking into account the views of the Russian and Polish communities, who gathered more than 60 000 signatures against the adoption of this act on the eve of the voting at Seimas (*ed. translator: Lithuanian Parliament*). The Act does not enshrine a concept of “minority schools”, meaning the same standards of equipping the classes with teaching materials apply to schools not to minority language of instruction compared Lithuanian schools. The previous version of the law contained a provision on the right to secondary education (1 to 12 classes) in the mother tongue, while the new version of the Education Act provides that all subjects relating to history and geography of Lithuania, familiarity with the environment and civics must be taught exclusively in the Lithuanian language.

As a result, the number of candidates unsuccessful in passing the state language examination is growing with every year, according to the National Examination Centre under the Ministry of Education and Science of Lithuania. The issue of

emigration of young people forced to realise their opportunities and choose universities abroad raises serious concerns.

Guided by the International Bill of Human Rights, the Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities, the Charter of Paris for a New Europe, point 33 of the Document of the Copenhagen Meeting of the Conference on the Human Dimension of the CSCE (1990), other international instruments and according to the aforementioned, we believe, the recommendation 12 should be enhanced and expressed as follows:

***“States are obliged to comply with and implement into national legislation the ratified international legal instruments, both universal and regional, relating to the protection of minority rights, justice and non-discrimination, considering it the most important measure to prevent violence. States have an obligation to implement the Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities, and other international legal instruments in their entirety; develop and implement mechanisms for the protection of minorities. Any measures intended to change the situation of the minority rights shall be taken only after proper consultations with minorities, including contact with organisations or associations of such minorities.”***

We believe that only if the provisions of such a recommendation are respected, will the political and social stability be possible to achieve in the country of the rule of law

and equality of every citizen exercising their potential to the benefit of society.

Thank you!

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