

# MINORITY SCHOOLS UNDER ATTACK IN LATVIA













[www.minorities-latvia.info](http://www.minorities-latvia.info)

[www.shtab.lv](http://www.shtab.lv)

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Rally for the defence of minority schools in Riga, May 1, 2018

<b>Education level</b>	<b>Regulation as at early 2018</b>	<b>Amendments adopted in 2018</b>	<b>Entry into force planned</b>
<b>Post-secondary private education</b> Law on Institutions of Higher Education	 No mandatory language use proportions	 Instruction in Latvian, with some exceptions for EU official languages and philology	2019-2022
<b>Grades 10-12</b> Education Law	 At least 60 % in Latvian	 Instruction in Latvian, with some exceptions for EU official languages and ethno-cultural lessons	2020-2021
<b>Grades 7-9</b> Education Law	 At least 60 % in Latvian (with exceptions)	 At least 80 % in Latvian (with exceptions for EU official languages)	2019-2021
<b>Grades 1-6</b> Education Law	 No mandatory language use proportions	 At least 50 % in Latvian (with exceptions for EU official languages)	2019
<b>Late pre-school (age 5+)</b> Cabinet regulations No. 716 (2018)	 No mandatory language use proportions	 At least 50 % in Latvian	2019

### **Minority schools get closed disproportionately often**

<b>Academic year</b>	<b>Schools offering Latvian-only education programs</b>	<b>Schools offering education programs with some instruction in Russian</b>	<b>Schools offering education programs with some instruction in Polish</b>
1998/1999	873 (100 %)	340 (100 %)	5 (100 %)
2018/2019	618 (71 %)	145 (43 %)	4 (80 %)

## Demographics

**2017** – an official survey shows 30.0 % of the population aged 0-14 uses Russian at home, 0.8 % use other minority languages.



Central Statistical Bureau data, [www.csb.gov.lv](http://www.csb.gov.lv)

**2018/2019** – 54,718 (26.7 %) learn at schools bilingually using Russian, and 1,232 (0.6 %) using Polish.



At private post-secondary education institutions, over 6,000 students (40%) study in Russian or multilingually.

Data of the Ministry of Education and Science, [www.izm.gov.lv](http://www.izm.gov.lv)

## Salami tactics

**1992** – amendments to the Law on Languages. Public post-secondary education is ordered to be mainly in Latvian, starting from the second year of studies.

**1995** – amendments to the Education Law, concerning minority schools. At least two subjects in basic schools (grades 1-9) and at least three in secondary schools (grades 10-12) must be taught mainly in Latvian, starting from 1996.

**1998** – a new Education Law is adopted. It provides for education only in Latvian:

- in public universities (with some exceptions), starting from 1999, and
- in public high schools (i.e., grades 10-12), starting from 2004.

**2004** – after the widest non-violent protests since regaining independence, the authorities soften the Education Law provisions. Minority high schools are allowed to teach up to 40 % of curriculum in minority languages.

**2014** – Cabinet regulations No. 468 require minority schools to teach in Latvian at least 60 % of the curriculum in grades 7-9 (with some exceptions), starting from 2015.

## Current update

**January 2019** – a new cabinet of Latvia, led by Mr Karins, is approved. Its declaration maintains the course to abolishing minority rights in education: “160. We will ensure sequential transition to education in the official language”

**April 23 & November 13, 2019** – the Constitutional Court upholds the new restrictions on minority languages in public and private schools, respectively, in cases Nos. 2018-12-01 & 2018-22-01. Cases on tertiary education and on kindergartens, Nos. 2019-12-01 & 2019-20-03, are pending.

# OPINIONS BY HUMAN RIGHTS BODIES:

## **23.08.2018. UN, Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination:**

*"the Committee is concerned that: (a) Amendments to the Law on Education reduce the teaching of minority languages in public and private secondary-level education institutions and reduce the portion of minority language education in the last three grades of basic education, which will create undue restrictions on access to education in minority languages; (..) The Committee recommends that the State party (..) (a) Ensure that there are no undue restrictions on access to education in minority languages. Reconsider the necessity of amendments to the Law on Education that create further restrictions on the number of lessons of minority language in public and private schools"*

Besides, three UN Special Rapporteurs – on minority issues, on freedom of expression and on the right to education – have expressed concern by the amendments switching minority education to Latvian – both in schools,<sup>2</sup> and in post-secondary education<sup>3</sup> and kindergartens.<sup>4</sup>

## **23.05.2019. Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, High Commissioner on National Minorities:**

*"I reiterated my position that the reform constitutes a departure from a previously well-functioning model of bilingual education, which was based on the advice of my institution"*<sup>5</sup>

## **23.02.2018. Council of Europe, Advisory Committee of the Framework Convention for the Protections of National Minorities:**

*"Plans to narrow the scope of national minority language teaching in grades 7 to 9 to 20% of lesson hours within a week and in grades 10 to 12 only to lessons of minority languages and ethno-cultural subjects are of particular concern (..) Issues for immediate action: (..) ensure the continued availability of teaching and learning in languages of national minorities throughout the country with a view to meeting existing demand"*<sup>6</sup>

## **01.03.2019. European Union, Committee on Culture and Education of the European Parliament:**

*"Children need to learn in their native language, especially in primary schools, as highlighted by UNESCO (..) and OSCE Hague recommendations"*<sup>7</sup>

Over 100 members of the European Parliament from various countries and political groups have expressed an even stricter position:

*"We call upon you to revise the last amendments to the Education Law and amendments to the General Education Law, which are aiming to eliminate secondary school education and to restrict primary school education in Russian language in Latvia"*<sup>8</sup>

NB Latvian Human Rights Committee (FIDH) provided information to all the bodies quoted on the issue.

1 CERD/C/LVA/CO/6-12, paras. 16, 17

2 OL LVA 1/2018 of 26.01.2018

3 OL LVA 3/2018 of 08.11.2018

4 OL LVA 1/2019 of 24.09.2019

5 Statement to the 1229th Meeting of the OSCE Permanent Council

6 ACFC/OP/III(2018)001REV, executive summary

7 Letter to the Prime Minister Karins No. IPOL-COM-CULT D (2019) 8190, 01.03.2019

8 Letter to the Parliament and Cabinet of Latvia, May 2018