



STUDY VISIT LATVIA

28-29 April 2011
Riga, Latvia





Introduction

The study visit has been organized within the framework of the project “Breaking Stereotypes - Building Tolerance”.

The project is co-funded by the European Union’s Fundamental Rights and Citizenship Programme.



European Commission
Justice

The main objectives of the study visit were as follows:

- to examine and exchange experience and good practise of combating racism and xenophobia and promotion of diversity,
- to examine and analyse situation in Latvia with anti-discrimination policy, anti-racist education and actions.

During the visit we tried to find interesting projects promoting tolerance and diversity, programmes of state and munitipal bodies as well as to learn more about activity of institutions responsible for integration and anti-discrimination policy in Latvia.

We also met young people in order to learn how much they informed and affected by anti-racist education projects and actions.

We have organized visits to following institutions:

- legislative (Parliament of the Republic of Latvia)
- executive (Ministry of Culture, Riga City Council, Ombudsman of the Republic of Latvia)
- education (Baltic International Academy, Riga State Gymnasium)
- non-governmental (Latvian Human Rights Committee, NGO “Culture. Tolerance. Friendship.”)

During the visits, we have received information about other organizations and projects concerned the themes of the study visit (the Ministry of Education and Science, The Latvian Centre for Human Rights, etc.) which we put to the report as well.

Besides, the report contains information about information of ethnical composition of population of Latvia, the status of Russian-speakers after independence, national legislation against racism and discrimination, etc.

Preparing the information we have used materials of the report of the European Network Against Racism (ENAR) “Responding to racism in Latvia”, information from the article of Timothy Heleniak “Latvia Looks West, But Legacy of Soviets Remains”, ENAR Shadow Report 2009/2010 Racism and Discrimination in Latvia.



The programme of the visit

28 April

- 11.00 Students' Council of the Baltic International Academy
- 14.00 Human Rights and Public Affairs Committee of Parliament of the Republic of Latvia (Saeima)
- 16.00 Project and Society Integration Division of the Education, Culture and Sport Department of Riga City Council
- 18.00 Latvian Human Rights Committee

29 April

- 10.00 Society Integration Department of the Ministry of Culture
- 12.00 Ombudsman of the Republic of Latvia
- 15.00 Students' Council of Riga State Gymnasium No.1
- 17.00 NGO "Culture. Tolerance. Friendship."

Participants of the visit

Dmitrijs Bočarovs, Natalja Mickeviča and Leonid Kelim (Culture. Tolerance. Friendship., Latvia)
Jana Kondraševa and Anton Diev (Vitateam, Estonia)
Marija Osun and Oksana Treščenko (KLAMC, Lithuania)



Ethnic composition of the population of Latvia

Data on the beginning of 2011:

	Number	%
Latvians	1335646	59,40
Russians	620017	27,57
Belorussians	80259	3,56
Ukrainians	55330	2,46
Poles	52313	2,36
Lithuanians	29916	1,33
Jews	9736	0,43
Roma	8558	0,37
Germans	4519	0,20
Estonians	2426	0,11
Others	49654	2,21
Total	2248374	100,00

Share of Latvians in different regions (%)

Riga region	42,4
Latgale region	44,1
Zemgale region	68,5
Pierīgas reģions	70,4
Kurzeme region	74,1
Vidzeme region	85,3

Historical review

Because of Latvia's location at the crossroads of various powers, for most of its history it has been subject to foreign rule. At various times, Poland, Lithuania, Sweden, Germany, and Russia have governed the area and peoples of present-day Latvia. The inflow of people from other parts of the Soviet Union started in mid 1941 and peaked in the post-war period (1945 to 1959). Because of the upheavals of this period, the population of Latvia increased only 10 percent, from 1,905,000 at the time of the 1935 Latvian census to 2,093,000 in 1959 when the Soviet Union's first post-war census, which included Latvia, was conducted.

During this period, the ethnic balance shifted from ethnic Latvians to Russians or Russian-speakers, whose population increased 230 percent from 168,000 to 556,000. The Latvian population decreased by 169,000 because of forced deportations, the voluntary outflow of Latvians to other parts of the Soviet Union, and low levels of natural increase.

Russian-speakers in Latvia were also concentrated in urban areas because of their occupations. They were also disproportionately represented in the Latgale region of eastern Latvia, which borders Russia. For centuries, Latgale had stronger Slavic (both Polish and Russian) influences and had been part of the Polish commonwealth.



The Status of Russian-speakers after Independence

All of the states that emerged from the FSU faced the same dilemma in the early 1990s — whether or not to grant citizenship to ethnic Russians and other non-natives. Most decided to grant citizenship to all residents, regardless of ethnicity. However, Latvia did not view itself as a new state but as a continuation of a Latvian state that existed between the two World Wars.

Latvia chose to exclude them from citizenship even though many had spent most, if not all, of their lives in Latvia. In 1989, 55 percent of Russians had been born in the country and 36 percent had been born in Russia. Of those Russians born outside Latvia, one-fourth had lived in the same place in Latvia for 20 years or more.

Latvia restricted citizenship to pre-1940 citizens and dependents, thus leaving out an estimated 700,000 to 800,000 people, most of whom wanted to remain.

This approach upset both Russia and the international community because the naturalization tests made it practically impossible for older Russians who grew up in Latvia to obtain citizenship. Latvia, sensitive to criticism, wanted to be seen as a Western-style democracy and eventually join the EU, so it softened some aspects of its citizenship law and issued non-citizen passports to allow freedom of travel in the EU and elsewhere.

Non-citizen residents can travel on non-citizen passports that provide the same rights as citizen passports. To date, about 690,000 non-citizen passports have been issued.

Overall, integrating the Russian population has not been the government's highest priority. Initially, non-citizens (mostly Russians) were not able to vote, hold state office, own land and other natural resources, or purchase housing from the state; many were also denied some housing and social benefits.

Because of pressure from the EU and a realization that there will continue to be a sizeable Russian minority, the Latvian government has taken steps to socially integrate Russians. These include ratifying, in 2005, the Council of Europe's Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities. This convention, among other provisions, gives minorities equal rights and equal protection before the law, bans discrimination based on ethnic origin, and protects the right to freely use one's native language both publicly and privately.¹

¹ Timothy Heleniak, *Latvia Looks West, But Legacy of Soviets Remains*



Legislation of Latvia against racism and discrimination

The equality principle is established in the Constitution. There is no all-encompassing anti-discrimination act. However, the prohibition of discrimination is included in several laws, including the Labour Law, Consumer's Rights Protection Law, Law on the Rights of Patients, Law on Social Security, Law on Support of Unemployed and Job-Seekers and the Education Law.

Criminal Law Section 78 prohibits incitement to racial and ethnic hatred, as well as restriction of economic, political, or social rights based on race and ethnicity. Violation of equality rights based on religious conviction and incitement to hatred based on religion, as well as the violation of religious sensibilities, are prohibited in Section 150. Cases initiated under Section 78 have increased over time, mainly relating to publications. In 2005, police initiated 13 cases. No legal case based on Section 150 has been reported.

The anti-discrimination legislation is still incomplete, especially in regard to access to goods and services. There are criminal law provisions against the incitement to hatred, but no other racist crime is identified, and racism is not an aggravating factor.

Latvia does not have a system of monitoring manifestations of racism or discrimination on various grounds in the media, including the internet. However, the majority of criminal cases registered by the Security Police under Section 78 of the Criminal Law (incitement to national, ethnic and racial hatred) are hate speech cases, mostly comments in relation to articles on internet news portals, inciting hatred towards Latvians, Russians, Jews and visibly different minorities.²

Racism

Members of "visible" minority groups claim they do not feel safe in many places, including the center of Riga and the old town, and especially at night, due to the increasingly aggressive behavior of youths often dressed as skinheads. The groups most vulnerable to such violence are those of African, Asian and Roma descent. No less worrying are reports that the police do not always behave appropriately when victims complain of racist attacks. In fact, there are reports of police harassment of minority members who came to police stations to file a complaint.

The main challenges regarding discrimination are within the labour relations, administrative relations – lack of good governance in public institutions and access to services (this is mostly connected with persons with disabilities).

² European Network Against Racism. Responding to racism in Latvia



Parliament of the Republic of Latvia

Presentation by Boriss Cilevičs, Deputy Chairman of Human Rights and Public Affairs Committee of Saeima, member of PACE

About the Saeima

The Constitution of the Republic of Latvia sets forth that the Saeima is composed of 100 representatives of the people and is elected for a term of four years in general, equal and direct elections conducted by secret ballot and based on proportional representation. All citizens of Latvia who enjoy full rights of citizenship and who on election day have attained 18 years of age are entitled to vote.

Human Rights and Public Affairs Committee

The Saeima currently has 16 standing committees including the Human Rights and Public Affairs Committee..

Committee prepares matters to be considered at plenary sittings. Upon the decision of the Saeima, committee considers draft laws, proposals and submissions or submit such documents, provided they pertain to the objectives of relevant committees.

Another field of activity of the committee is parliamentary scrutiny of the executive branch. For this purpose, the committee considers topical issues of public interest and the need for improvements in the work of ministries, public institutions or local government bodies. The committee also carries out parliamentary scrutiny of the work of the government by providing recommendations for streamlining the work of the executive branch.

The committee has the right to directly request information and explanations necessary for their work from a relevant minister and the institutions subordinated to or supervised by him/her, and from local governments, as well as to summon the relevant officials to provide the required comments.

Mr. Cilevičs has told about national legislation against discrimination, has discribed situation with discrimination and racism monitoring in Latvia.



Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Latvia

Presentation by Deniss Kretalovs, Senior desk officer at the Department of Society Integration

The Ministry of Culture is the state governing institution, which organizes and coordinates state culture policy and cultural-educational policy. The Ministry of Culture operates pursuant to the regulations of the Ministry of Culture, the declaration of the Cabinet and the basic principals of the State culture policy.

The central apparatus of the Ministry of Culture consists of two departments: Cultural Policy Department and European Union Funds Department. There are 10 independent divisions at The Ministry of Culture: International Cooperation and European Union Policy Division, Personnel and Management of Documents Division, Legal Division, Budget and Investment Division, Bookkeeping and Accounts Division, Procurement Division, IT Division, Internal Audit Division, Culture and Creative Industries Education Division and Project Implementation Division of the Latvian National Library.

The Department is a member to the National Hate Crimes Prevention Network of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE is responsible for the summarization of information regarding hate crimes in Latvia, promotion of good case practice on tolerance building and hate prevention).

Society Integration

Ethnic integration related policies in Latvia are mainly defined in the State Programme "Society Integration in Latvia" (approved in 2001). The programme covers cultural policies, language policy, education policy, also civic integration policy and partially social integration policy.

In order to ensure the functioning of the programme, Society Integration Fund has been established in 2001, as well as Secretariat of the Special Assignments Minister for Society Integration in 2002.

The Secretariat's competence included the development and implementation of the national policy in the area of societal integration: the facilitation of civil society development; the eradication of racial and ethnic discrimination; the eradication of discrimination in inter-sectoral issues; the promotion of tolerance within the community; minority rights; conservation of the Liv culture and its traditions; support to the Latvian diaspora, as well as the integration of immigrants.

The Secretariat of the Special Assignments Minister for Society Integration was closed in 2008 and its functions were passed to the Ministry of Children and Family Affairs. After closure of this Ministry, since 1 July 2009 the Ministry of Justice was responsible for development and implementation of society integration policies till 2010.

Since 2010, the Ministry of Culture is responsible for society integration in Latvia.

The Ministry of Culture within the Policy of Integration is responsible for:

- the development of state policies in the area of society integration and civil society development;

- coordinated implementation of the integration policies;
- formation of the environment favourable for the development of civil society;
- protection of the minority (including Roma) rights by eliminating the racial and ethnical discrimination;
- facilitation of the preservation of the Livs culture, traditions, language and identity.

In the fulfilment of the above-mentioned functions, the Ministry cooperates with other state and municipal institutions and NGOs.

The Department is very active in the European level legislative process. Currently the Department consists of six employees who deal with the issues of discrimination and the above mentioned functions. Currently the work of the department is inactive due to state austerity measures and a lack of finance. Before 2010, there was a good financial support from the European Social Fund, which made possible organisation of different kind of activities aimed at development of society integration dialogue.

Deniss commented that there are many stereotypes in Latvian society. The biggest challenge is a lack of dialogue between different groups of society. Therefore, the best solution in the promotion and facilitation of tolerance would be creation of effective dialogue by inviting different minorities and NGO who represent them to participate in state policies development process. Another solution would be an efficient education of state authority representatives, mainly policeman, judges who often lack a proper understanding of antidiscrimination policies and are driven by stereotypes themselves.



The National Programme „Roma in Latvia”

There are about 8500 Roma people in Latvia, 98% of them are citizens of the Republic of Latvia and most of their communities live here since the 15th century. There are a lot of stereotypes in the society regarding this minority, for instance, a large part of society is convinced that Roma are criminals and do not trust them. Roma communities are “closed”, the characteristic of their mentality is that they will not come to ask for help themselves. Therefore, in order to eliminate the stereotypes it is necessary to work with Roma communities directly.

The main goal of the Programme is to promote the inclusion of the Roma community in Latvian society and ensuring that Roma are not discriminated against but instead given equal opportunity in education, employment and human rights in accordance with the community's specific needs and conditions

The target audience of the Programme

The primary target audience is the Roma community in Latvia. The secondary target audience of the Programme are those who implement national policy in Latvia.



The civil service and public sector employees, professional associations, educational institutions, the mass media, etc.

The Programme emphasizes three main foci for the continuing integration process of Latvia Roma minority and foresees following sub-goals:

1. Education

To create opportunities for members of the Roma community to raise level of education and to enhance the inclusiveness of the general education system

2. Employment

To decrease unemployment among Roma and to facilitate dialogue between representatives of the Roma community and employers and other structures relevant to employment

3. Human Rights

To promote tolerance and diminution of negative stereotypes and prejudices about Roma; to protect the ethnic identity of Latvia's Roma and to complete information and statistics about the Roma

We also learned about interesting project implemented by the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Latvia.



Adaptation Programme and Development of Materials for Children of Third Country Nationals aged 6 to 12

The Ministry of Education and Science (MES) in cooperation with the Latvian Language Agency has implemented the project "Adaptation Programme and Development of Materials for Children of Third Country Nationals aged 6 to 12".

Two adaptation/ educational programmes and teaching materials for school children aged 6 to 9 and 10 to 12, as well as information material for parents in English and Russian have been developed within the project.

The developed educational material "Latvia through Friend's Eyes" consists of:

- Pupil book "My Diary of Latvia";
- Working sheets "Latvia through Friend's Eyes";
- Book of comics "Latvia through Friend's Eyes" and Teacher's book.

Each adaptation programme is planned to be realized within 60 hours. The objective of the programmes is to assist children in the process of acquiring basic skills of the state language and practical intercultural skills, thus facilitating the adaptation process in the society and environment of Latvia. According to the Ministry, 405 foreign children are attending Latvia's general education schools in the 2009/2010 academic year. The Ministry is also planning to continue the development of adaptation programme for older children.



Ombudsman of the Republic of Latvia

Presentation by Juris Jansons, the Ombudsman of the Republic of Latvia

The Ombudsman of the Republic of Latvia is an official elected by the Parliament. The Ombudsman is independent in its actions and is governed only by law. The Ombudsman is elected for five years and assumes his or her duties after taking an oath.

Since 17 March 2011, Mr. Juris Jansons is the Ombudsman of the Republic of Latvia.

Functions of the Ombudsman

- Protect the rights and legal interests of a person in situations when State and municipal authorities have breached the human rights defined by the Constitution and international human rights' documents. Some of the key human rights are the rights to a fair, free and timely trial, freedom of speech and expression, private life, housing, social security, employment, property, these and other rights related to the interests of children, the rights of persons with special needs, etc.
- Ensure equal treatment and prevention of discrimination. The Ombudsman addresses issues regarding discrimination on the grounds of nationality, religion, social background, material or health conditions, sexual orientation, political or other views, etc. He can deal with complaints in case of discrimination or breach of the principle of equal treatment not only by State authorities, but also by private individuals or legal entities. In cases, when a breach of the principle of equal treatment is detected, the Ombudsman is entitled to prepare an application on behalf of the person and to represent the person in hearings of civil cases in court.
- Evaluate and promote adherence to the principle of good administration in government. Good administration implies unprejudiced and honest decision-making within reasonable time limits, the right of a person to be heard, to get acquainted with case materials, to request a justified decision, compensation of damages, etc.
- Reveal imperfections in regulations and application thereof connected with adherence to human rights and works to eliminate such imperfections. The Ombudsman is entitled to submit reports on certain matters to the Parliament, State President, Cabinet of Ministers, State authorities and international organisations or to file an application for bringing a case to the Constitutional Court, if the authority, which has passed the debatable regulation, has not eliminated the imperfections within the specified time period.



- Work to enhance the public awareness of human rights, the mechanisms of protection of these rights and the work of the Ombudsman. Once a year, the Ombudsman prepares a written report on the work of the Ombudsman Office, elaborates and distributes information on human rights and the principle of good administration guaranteed by the law and international commitments of Latvia.

In 2009, the Ombudsman's Office has received more than hundred complaints and has provided more than ninety consultations about possible violations of the principle of equal treatment: discrimination on the grounds of race and ethnicity; discrimination on the ground of language, discrimination because of religious persuasion. Most of these complaints concerned language usage and race/ethnic discrimination in employment.

The Ombudsman Mr. Juris Jansons and his team this spring developed "The Ombudsman Strategy for the term 2011-2013."

According to the Strategy the main focus areas for the next term are:

- children rights;
- civil and political rights;
- social and economical rights;
- criminal rights;
- prevention of discrimination;
- good governance

Within the mentioned areas, the Ombudsman has set three main goals:

- 1) to increase awareness of society about human rights and the role of the Ombudsman in the protection of those rights and to prevent the potential human rights violations and the good governance principle infringements;
- 2) to increase awareness and understanding of the good governance principle within the state administration employees;
- 3) to increase the capacity of the Ombudsman office and the image of the Ombudsman in Latvia and internationally.

Within the discrimination prevention area the Ombudsman has set four main priorities. They are reduction of discrimination cases in the employment area; reduction of hate crimes; ensuring equal access to goods and services without any discrimination based on gender, race, ethnicity or disability; facilitation of the implementation process of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

To ensure the fulfilment of goals and objectives the Ombudsman is planning to continue the process of case examination (based on the claims submitted to the Ombudsman and the Ombudsman own initiative); organise working groups and informational and educational activities, researches, including researches to monitor the implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Additionally within the Webpage of the Ombudsman, it is planned to develop a website for reporting hate crimes in the Internet.

The link to the Strategy in Latvian:

http://www.tiesibsargs.lv/lat/tiesibsargs/majas_lapas_jaunumi/?doc=664



Project and Society Integration Division of the Education, Culture and Sport Department of Riga City Council

Presentation by Irina Vasiljeva, senior officer of the Department

The Education, Culture and Sports Department

The Education, Culture and Sports Department ensures the pre-school and primary education and the possibilities to receive the secondary education for all children residing within the administrative territory of the Riga City; manages youth work as well as coordinates society integration process in the City of Riga.

Project and Society Integration Division

Apart from government-level initiatives, some municipalities are also paying attention to the issues of society integration, inclusion and cooperation with the civil society. In order to draw greater attention to the issues of society integration and to promote a welcoming and inclusive environment in Riga, a Project and Society Integration Division was established in March 2010 within the Education, Culture and Sports Department of the Riga City Council.

Areas of responsibility of the Division

- Coordination of society integration processes
- International cooperation
- Management of the projects of the Department

Coordination of Society integration processes

In 2010, the Division implemented following activities:

Project competition.

The first call for proposals for NGOs "Society Integration Programmes" was announced in April 2010. The call for proposals aims to financially support projects that promote integration in Riga and facilitates the formation of a cohesive society. The funding will be granted to the following thematic areas: development of civic participation and mutual cooperation; promotion of social integration; promoting tolerance and prevention of any discrimination.

116 projects were submitted, 21 project supported (total sum 56 113 LVL)



Survey “Society Integration Issues in Riga” (public procurement, telephone interviews of inhabitants of Riga, expert interviews).

http://www.iksd.riga.lv/upload_file/IKSD_pievienotie/rd_iedz_aptauja_2010_isais_var.pdf
http://www.iksd.riga.lv/upload_file/IKSD_pievienotie/atskaite_eksperti_2010%20doc.pdf

Creation of the Advisory Board on Society Integration Issues

At the end of 2010 Riga City Council established the Advisory Board on Society Integration Issues in order to provide non-governmental sector participation in processes of planning, implementation and evaluation of society integration policy. The Advisory Board consists of deputies of Riga City Council, specialists of municipal institutions and departments as well as non-governmental sector representatives.

Citizens’ Forum “Riga rings out – inhabitants talk”

Priorities of the Department for 2011:

- to elaborate strategy and plan of actions for the promotion of integration process in Riga.
- to organize projects competition for non-governmental and religious organisations.
- to organize projects competition for Riga City Council subordinate institutions.
- to promote the development of voluntary work and its development in the institutions of the Riga City Council.
- to conduct Latvian language courses for the inhabitants of Riga.

There is no political document regarding integration issues on the municipality level in Riga. While several municipalities in Latvia have such a political programme document, Riga City Council currently is only starting to develop it. There are no statistical surveys on the discrimination issues in the municipality.



Baltic International Academy Students’ Parliament

Presentation by Aljona Vasiljkova, head of the Student Parliament

About the Baltic International Academy

The Baltic International Academy is the largest non-government higher education establishment in the Baltic States and Eastern European countries amounting 7,500 students, including 450 foreign students from 15 countries worldwide.



22 computer laboratories, 17 reading rooms, the unique system “Media-bridge” (in Riga and branch establishments: Daugavpils, Yekabpils, Rezekne, Liepaya, Ventspils, Smiltene, Yelgava), 300 staff lecturers, 100 of which are scientific doctors and professors. Studies at the BIA have been realizing multilingually under the programme “Eurolingua” The Russian taught groups: 75% - in Russian and in Latvian and English. The English taught groups: 75% - in English + in Russian and Latvian.

The Student Parliament

The Student Parliament of the Baltic International Academy is a selected collegiate body whose main function is to protect the rights and interests of the BIA students.

The purpose of the Student Parliament is to represent and defend academic, cultural and other interests of students in within the BIA, in the government and internationally. The Student Parliament cooperates with student government bodies in other universities and with the Student Union of Latvia. It strives to create an unforgettable and interesting student life.

Young people of different nationalities are studying in the Academy. Moreover, many foreign students came to Latvia to the Academy. They are from Georgia, Moldova, Armenia, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, etc.

The functions of the Parliament include adaptation of foreign students, their integration and informing in order to avoid conflicts on ethnic ground. To reach these purposes the Parliament organizes international evenings, days of cultures, other cultural activities. Of course, the number of activities could be larger and various.

Unfortunately, there are not any seminars or courses for students on anti-discrimination education, diversity and intercultural learning.

Students have not any information about state or municipal level projects or programmes on anti-discrimination and intercultural learning.

The Baltic International Academy participated in the project “Compass for Living in Latvia for Students – Third-country nationals”, which described below.



The Project “Compass for Living in Latvia for Students – Third-country nationals”

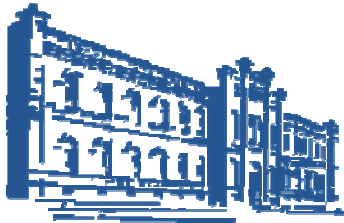
The project is implemented by NGO Workshop of Solutions, with a goal to promote the integration of students – third-country nationals in society of Latvia by providing students with necessary information, opportunities to become a part of social networks and by facilitating the communication and consultations with public and education institutions.



“Workshop of Solutions” hosted series of discussions for students – Third-country nationals in 2009. As a result an information material “Compass for living in Latvia” was published, responding to most common questions about foreign students’ life and studies in Latvia.

The project is supported by the European Fund for the Integration of third-country nationals.

It is an opportunity to solve important issues concerning your living in Latvia, but also get to know other foreign and Latvian students, to meet representatives from different universities and student associations, as well as lecturers informing about citizenship and immigration, health care and insurance, to meet state / local police expert, professionals in cultural integration, labor rights, social and voluntary sectors.



Riga State Gymnasium No.1

Presentation by Sergey Balonushkov and Ilana Shaposhnikova, students of 12th form, members of Student's Council

About the school

Riga State Gymnasium No.1 is an institution of general education established by Municipality of Riga and under the Department of Education, Culture and Sports. It accomplishes curriculums of general elementary and secondary education.

Currently there are 1010 students from various regions of Latvia. The students represent different nationalities living in Latvia.

There are 90 teachers in the school, out of them – 46 Masters, 2 Doctorates, 2 study in MA courses, one studies in doctoral programmes.

Student's Council

The Student Council is a creative group of the school students who make sure that there are different kinds of activities in the school, in other words, they make the mathematical life of the school more colorful, joyful and interesting. Participating in the Council includes a lot of things – chances to participate in and change the social life of the school, opportunities to fulfill ideas.

Activities

The basic education program is supplemented with the following extracurricular activity opportunities:

- Girls', boys', mixed choir;
- Computer science and programming studies;
- School literary magazine “Riga Gymnasium Times”;



- Local history studies;
- Chess classes;
- Experimental investigations of the laws of physics and chemistry;
- Sports teams.

Questions discussed during the visit

Does school curriculum include any subject on anti-racist or anti-discrimination education, intercultural learning, human rights education or anything similar?

There are no subjects or classes on aforementioned issues in both the Gymnasium and other schools in Latvia. Students just learned about constitution and other laws on Politics classes but this subject was optional and only few young people have chosen it.

Do you feel any tensions between people of different nationalities in the Gymnasium or any pressure by Latvians?

Young people do not feel any tensions or pressure in the Gymnasium. May be, because of very high level of motivation to education. Young people prefer studying rather than escalate the conflicts on ethnic ground.

However, the situation in other schools is not the same. Young people told about cases of conflicts between Russians and Latvians, about attacks on foreign students.

Does the Students' Council organize any intercultural activities?

The answer was negative.

Do you know about any state or city programmes, projects or initiatives devoted to combating racism and promotion tolerance?

The answer was negative.



Latvian Human Rights Committee

Presentation by Aleksandrs Kuzmins, Board member of the Committee

Latvian Human Rights Committee (LHRC) is a human rights NGO founded in 1992. Since then, LHRC has given legal aid to more than 50 000 visitors.

LHRC mostly deals with social, economical and minority rights. Most of our visitors come to us with the following problems: registration in the Population Register, acknowledging of citizenship of Latvia, receiving of person's identification documents, receiving status of a politically repressed person, residence permits, dwelling issues, social security, etc.



The Committee has issued brochures:

- Human rights and minorities in Latvia
- International and Regional Standards in minority rights
- Report on the implementation of the Framework Convention for the protection of national minorities in the Republic of Latvia
- Media Legislation, Minority Issues, and Implications for Latvia
- List of differences in rights of citizens and non-citizens of Latvia
- Non-citizens of Latvia
- Citizens of a Non-Existent State
- Issues of Rights of Ethnic minorities in Latvia and Estonia

The Committee provide legal assistance in the European Court of Human Rights and in the UN Human Rights Committee. In some cases the positives decisions were received. For instance, on October 28, 2010, the UN Human Rights Committee has adopted its views in case Raihman v. Latvia, finding a violation of the right to privacy (Article 17 ICCPR) in the mandatory adding of Latvian-language endings to personal names in Latvia-issued documents. Latvia was given 180 days to report on the implementation measures. As of April, 26, 2011 (180 days after adopting the views), no changes in the legislation are made. Moreover, no amendments to the Official Language Law are even submitted to the parliament.

Besides, the Committee provides UN, Council of Europe and OSCE bodies information about concrete questions regarding human rights, makes public statements, publications in mass media.

Aleksandrs also described the situation with the Status of Russian-speakers after Independence. The LHRC sees a lot of discrimination examples regarding Russian speaking population in Latvia. The LHRC is demanding to eliminate the State Language Inspection and make the Russian language the second official language of Latvia.



The Latvian Centre for Human Rights

The Latvian Centre for Human Rights (LCHR) was established in 1993 with a view to promoting human rights and tolerance in Latvia through monitoring, research, advocacy, legal assistance and training activities. In recent years, LCHR main focus has been on two broad areas: human rights in closed institutions, and social integration, which includes all minority-related and tolerance issues, as they represent the most important problem areas of human rights in Latvia.

The LCHR collects and analyses diverse materials and phenomena related to its main area of expertise, and is regularly involves in collecting data and closely following legislative, policy and real case development in the human rights area and the social integration area.



The LCHR has published numerous reports, book chapters, papers and articles both locally and internationally. Every year the LCHR publishes a Human Rights Report about the main developments and problems of the previous year in Latvia, which attracts significant media and public attention at the presentation event. The LCHR also provides an electronically available daily press digest on integration issues.

The LCHR is frequently providing expert opinions both locally (to government, parliament, media, educational institutions, courts, prosecutors and lawyers), as well as internationally (to embassies' and foreign ministries' representatives of various countries, and to regional and international organisations, such as European Commission, OSCE, Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly, ECRI, etc.). The LCHR has been also providing written expertise upon request to domestic prosecutors, security police, courts and lawyers (on incitement, hate speech, language restrictions in media, on Criminal Process Code requirements), as well as to the foreign lawyers and courts on refugee cases.

Apart from collecting data, providing analysis and expertise, the LCHR has been actively involved in advocacy for change, ranging from raising public awareness to specific policy or legislative change. Different LCHR staff members have also at various times been invited to participate in policy/legislative work groups at the Ministries of Justice, Welfare, Interior, at the former Secretariat of the Special task Minister of Social Integration affairs, at the national Board of Television and Radio, and at the President's work group.



NGO “Culture. Tolerance. Friendship.”

Presentation by Sergejs Matancevs, coordinator of projects

The non-governmental organization "Culture. Tolerance. Friendship." was established in 1996.

The overall objectives of the organization are promotion of tolerance and intercultural dialogue among young people; combating racism, xenophobia and discrimination; promotion of active participation of minority young people.

The organization implements educational and awareness-raising activities for young people: training activities, seminars, conferences, summer camps, dissemination of information, publishing of information and education materials, booklets and posters. We implement our projects both on national and international levels.

Sergejs told about two significant projects implemented within the framework of the projects “LED III” and “LED IV” and financed by EU programme Progress.



The project “Awareness raising activities for young people of the Baltic states on diversity and equality”

The project was devoted to issues of diversity, equality, tolerance and anti-discrimination. Youth workers and young people from three Baltic States raised awareness about aforementioned issues; contacts and links between schools and organizations are improved.

The project included training activities for youth workers and activists from the Baltic States, publishing of information booklet and poster. More than sixty youth workers and activists from Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia were trained in methods of anti-discrimination education, Human Rights education and diversity training programs and learn about different tools and approaches. They received practical experience in implementation of activities for young people devoted to anti-discrimination issues.

Youth workers, teachers, and youth activists from schools and organizations of Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia:

- become more aware and confident in anti-discrimination education and diversity issues;
- gained information and knowledge on Human Rights education and intercultural learning;
- have improved professional skills during implementation of local activities.

The project “Promotion of Diversity and Non-discrimination Education at Schools of Regions of Latvia”

60 schools of 27 cities of Latvia were involved in diversity education activities. Representatives of schools participated in the seminar and conducted activities in their schools for schoolchildren. The total number of children involved is about nine hundreds. 72 teachers and social pedagogues from 60 schools from 27 cities of Latvia have gained information and knowledge on intercultural learning and Human Rights education; become more aware and confident in anti-discrimination education and diversity issues; have improved their professional skills during implementation of activities for schoolchildren.

Sergejs also discussed actual questions of relations of young people of different nationalities, their attitude to ethnic tensions and other related issues.

Unfortunately, Latvians very often think that integration is issue of national minority. They do not consider it like a mutual process and confuse it assimilation. However, the integration and multicultural dialogue, combating racism and discrimination are issues of common concern.

The same perception exists towards multicultural and anti-discrimination education. Majority considered that multicultural education suitable only for national minorities. Nevertheless, such education is necessary for all, independently of ethnicity, language, gender or social position. What's more, multicultural education is more important for young people of majority because they very often received wrong idea about diversity of our society.

The Ministry of Culture prepared a new conception of social integration based on Latvian culture, Latvian language and Latvian values. And it is in the country with about 40% non-Latvian population.



Conclusions

Latvia is multicultural state where share of national minorities is about 40%. Latvia has a diverse population in terms of ethnicity, language and citizenship status.

The national legislation against racism and discrimination meets requirements of EU but is still incomplete.

The state and municipal authorities responsible for integration and anti-discrimination policy are existing. However, assessment of implementation of the principle of non-discrimination in Latvia is hampered by the lack of statistical and research data on the status of various groups within the society, including participation in public life and the economy.

There are state and municipal level programmes on anti-discrimination, for instance the National Programme „Roma in Latvia”. However, these programmes do not affect large sections of the young people.

School curriculum in Latvia does not include special subject or course on anti-discrimination or anti-racism.

There is also lack of non-formal educational activities on diversity and anti-discrimination for youth.

There are few NGOs in Latvia, which are engaged in combating racism and discrimination, raising public awareness, providing expertise and training.

Latvia’s civil society organisations differ significantly in terms of capacity and many NGOs are experiencing difficulties because of financial crisis.

We need more NGO in Latvia, which develop an anti-discrimination capacity and victim support networks; conduct awareness-raising activities on anti-discrimination; collect information on instances of discrimination.