

President of Latvia: Latvia is a democratic state that promotes social integration and respect towards different national cultures

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Today, President of Latvia Egils Levits met with the members of the Venice Commission working group in the Riga castle to discuss the on-going education reform in Latvia. President Levits told the Commission that Latvia is currently implementing two kinds of education reforms. One aimed at building cohesive society and the other one focusing on renewal of education methodologies.

Egils Levits underlined that implementation of reform promoting social integration will eliminate the consequences of systematic policy of segregation carried out during the Soviet occupation. 'Every child should have equal opportunities to fully integrate into Latvian society irrespective of their ethnic background and home language,' said the President.

President Levits pointed out that Latvia supports tuition in minority languages in schools. He referred to Sweden where public schools have similar mother tongue tuition programmes for children whose native tongue is other than Swedish. 'Many countries offer mother tongue tuition only in private school setting. I believe that state-supported school system where children are taught in official language and offered additional mother tongue and culture classes promotes greater social cohesion. Democracies do not support assimilation. We are against segregation and try to build cohesive society where all its members communicate in official language and minority cultures are respected,' said Egils Levits.

As regards to education reform, President of Latvia explained that the Ministry of Education and Science is currently committed to increasing the overall number of teachers in schools because schools offering tuition only in official language also often suffer from shortage of teachers. 'Generally speaking, reform began already 16 years ago. Schools have been given enough time to adapt to new requirements. Of course, there still are some teachers who struggle with teaching their subjects in official language. We need to respect that. At the same time, that should not delay the reform. Exam results show that the reform is on the right

track. Implementation of the reform or the switch to teaching of 80% of subjects in official language and 20% of curricula in one of the minority languages is absolutely crucial for building a cohesive society,' said President Levits.

Egils Levits also told the members of the Venice Commission about the forthcoming European Union constitutional court conference organised by Latvia's Constitutional Court this spring. Aim of this conference is to create a network of constitutional courts. Representatives of the Commission praised the initiative and expressed their commitment to become an active networking partner of such constitutional court network.

The European Commission for Democracy through Law (Venice Commission) is the Council of Europe's advisory body on constitutional matters.



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