

**ECRI CONCLUSIONS ON THE IMPLEMENTATION
OF THE RECOMMENDATIONS
IN RESPECT OF LATVIA
SUBJECT TO INTERIM FOLLOW-UP**

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¹ Any developments which occurred after 9 October 2014, date on which the response of the Latvian authorities to ECRI's request for information on measures taken to implement the recommendations chosen for interim follow-up was received, are not taken into account in this analysis.

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FOREWORD

As part of the fourth round of ECRI's monitoring work, a new process of interim follow-up has been introduced with respect to a small number of specific recommendations made in each of ECRI's country reports.

Accordingly and in line with the guidelines for the fourth round of ECRI's country-by-country work brought to the attention of the Ministers' Deputies on 7 February 2007¹, not later than two years following the publication of each report, ECRI addresses a communication to the Government concerned asking what has been done in respect of the specific recommendations for which priority follow-up was requested.

At the same time, ECRI gathers relevant information itself. On the basis of this information and the response from the Government, ECRI draws up its conclusions on the way in which its recommendations have been followed up.

It should be noted that these conclusions concern only the specific interim recommendations and do not aim at providing a comprehensive analysis of all developments in the fight against racism and intolerance in the State concerned.

¹ CM/Del/Dec(2007)986/4.1.

1. *In its report on Latvia (fourth monitoring cycle) published on 21 February 2012, ECRI strongly recommended that the Latvian authorities endow the Ombudsman's Office with sufficient funds and human resources and reverse the present trend of cutting its budget. It further reiterated its recommendation to improve the accessibility of this institution in different languages and in the different regions of Latvia.*

ECRI has received information from the Latvian Ombudsman's office that the trend of cutting its budget has been stopped and reversed. The budget increased from € 794 355 in 2010 to € 813 597 in 2011 and to € 1 007 911 in 2012. The budgetary planning for the period 2013 – 2016 foresees between approximately € 1 000 000 and € 1 150 000 per year. The number of staff in the Ombudsman's office increased from 39 in 2010 to 42 in 2012 and is scheduled to rise to 44 from 2014 onwards. ECRI cannot assess whether the funding and human resources provided will be sufficient in the future for the Ombudsman's office to fulfil its tasks fully, but ECRI trusts that the Latvian authorities will continue to evaluate the needs as and when necessary.

The accessibility of the Ombudsman has been improved, with the website now providing information in Latvian, Russian and English. The Ombudsman also accepts and responds to applications made in other languages. Although the Ombudsman has not opened offices in different regions of Latvia, outreach activities were conducted and staff members visited various regions to meet with interested persons and groups.

ECRI therefore considers that this recommendation has been implemented.

2. *In its report on Latvia (fourth monitoring cycle), ECRI recommended that the authorities ensure that the newly adopted Policy Guidelines for the Integration of Society in Latvia pave the way for a broad based programme focusing on anti-discrimination, an open and integrated society and concrete measures to implement it. ECRI further recommended that sufficient financial resources be allocated in a timely manner to implement the Guidelines and that civil society, national/ethnic minorities and local authorities be involved in its implementation. Coordination between all relevant actors who are involved in its implementation should be ensured.*

ECRI has received information from the Latvian authorities showing that some progress has been made with regard to this recommendation. An Action Plan for the implementation of the Policy Guidelines for the Integration of Society in Latvia has been formulated and is in the process of being implemented.

Awareness-raising campaigns have been organised notably for younger people, including members of national/ethnic minorities, and training seminars have been held for civil servants and local government staff. Seminars have also been organised for employers and journalists, on tolerance and social exclusion, management of diversity and intercultural competences. Furthermore, events for the general public have been organised to encourage tolerance towards foreigners and to promote their integration into society. NGOs have also been supported to enhance the access of Roma to public services.

These activities are funded or co-funded by the state budget, but it remains to be seen whether the funding is sufficient. While it is not a problem in itself to mobilise external funding in support of a national programme, it should be ensured that its implementation does not depend on it, and that the state authorities are ready to assume their responsibilities if necessary. A case in point is the Society Integration Fund's project called "Various people - Different experience - One Latvia", which has been implemented as part of the Action Plan in cooperation with the European Union. However, only € 80 000 of the total budget of € 304 000 came from the Latvian state budget. Similarly, the Society Integration Fund's NGO support activities in this field are largely funded by a grant received from the European Economic Area.

Outside of the Action Plan, the authorities provided a large number of free Latvian language courses with the aim of facilitating the better integration of national/ethnic minorities and immigrants. Approximately 9 000 persons benefitted from these courses annually over the past two years and the Latvian authorities, through the National Employment Agency, funded these activities with more than € 11,000,000 from 2010 to 2013. However, while Latvian language skills can be an important factor to facilitate better integration, they cannot be considered as sufficient on their own. A strategic and conceptual linkage with the Action Plan for the implementation of the Policy Guidelines for the Integration of Society in Latvia seems to be missing.

ECRI notes that more remains to be done to fulfil this recommendation fully. In particular, a stronger involvement of representatives of different vulnerable groups needs to be ensured. ECRI has received information that the Cabinet of Ministers is tasked with monitoring the implementation of the Guidelines and that a Council has been established for the implementation of the Action Plan. However, doubts have been expressed as to its inclusiveness and effectiveness.

Therefore, ECRI considers that this recommendation has been partially implemented.

3. In its report on Latvia (fourth monitoring cycle), ECRI reiterated its recommendation to close any remaining special classes for Roma and integrate Roma students in mainstream classes. To facilitate this, ECRI recommended that the authorities reinstate the Roma assistant teachers trained under the Plan for Roma. Finally, ECRI recommended to the authorities to address the high representation of Roma children in special needs' schools.

According to the information ECRI received from the Latvian authorities, progress concerning this recommendation has been made through the reinstatement of Roma assistant teachers at pre-school level and in general education institutions and through the provision of guidance material to teachers on how to integrate Roma children into mainstream classes better.

In this context, it is also noteworthy that the Latvian Ombudsman usefully recommended in 2013 to teach the language or culture of Roma, or other national/ethnic minorities, in addition to the general school curriculum and not to use this as a reason for segregating Roma children in separate classes.

The Latvian authorities informed ECRI that as of the academic year 2013/14 the practice of forming separate classes for Roma children has been stopped.

ECRI has been informed that many local authorities, for example in the Kuldīga region, have taken into account the Ombudsman's recommendations and discontinued separate Roma classes from September 2013 onwards; however, others, like the local education authorities in Ventspils, have not. Here separate classes for Roma children continued to exist. ECRI has been informed that negotiations are currently underway to change this situation.

In 2011, at the time of ECRI's last visit to Latvia, 10.6% of all Roma children attended special needs schools. According to the information provided by the Latvian authorities, this figure has even increased to 16.1% during the academic year 2013/2014. ECRI is concerned about this development.

In the light of these facts the recommendation can only be considered as having been partially implemented.

