



PERMANENT MISSION OF THE REPUBLIC OF LATVIA TO THE UN,
OSCE AND OTHER INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS IN VIENNA

**Statement by Ambassador Nils Jansons, Permanent Representative
of the Delegation of the Republic of Latvia in response to the
statement delivered by the Russian Federation**

Permanent Council No 748,
Vienna, January 29, 2009

Thank you, Madam Chairperson,

I would like to thank the distinguished Russian Ambassador for his remarks. It is, of course, interesting, why the Russian delegation starts to consider the OSCE's role in social-economic issues from the events in the EU countries, when demonstrations last December in Vladivostok and other Russian cities, which were dispersed by riot police, would seem to present ample opportunity for reflection.

However, since my country was mentioned, I would like to clarify a few issues, – in addition to what was just said by the Czech representative on behalf of the EU.

First, regarding the handling of public demonstrations. Latvia's approach is based on the understanding that basic freedoms in the OSCE countries include the right of expression, and the right to assembly, which are strictly observed. However, these rights do not imply impunity for violence and vandalism.

As to the events of 13th January in Riga, the distinction needs to be drawn between the officially sanctioned demonstration, and the vandalism that followed after the demonstration was finished and had already largely dispersed.

The protest demonstration, organized by opposition politicians, was attended by about 10,000 people and was conducted in a peaceful and orderly manner.

After the protest demonstration had finished, some groups of individuals, mostly drunk, resorted to violence and vandalism against the building of the Parliament and other public and private property, including attacks on police officers.

In the effort to secure public safety and order during the protest actions and the subsequent violence, police action was professional and restrained, urging residents to keep the peace and not to become involved in any acts of provocation or acts of vandalism.

The *OSCE Guidebook on democratic policing* recognizes that “the use of force is often indispensable to proper policing”. On 13th January in Riga force was used only as an exceptional measure.

The other subject, that was specifically raised, concerns the amendments to the Administrative Code of the Republic of Latvia, adopted by the Parliament on 18th December 2008, that deal with violations of the State Language Law and corresponding Governmental regulations.

Let me stress that Amendments do not change the legal norms that regulate the use of the state language. The purpose of the amendments is to specify administrative liability for violations of the existing norms of the State Language Law.

Let me remind you that the State Language Law and its implementing regulations have been elaborated in close cooperation with the OSCE and Council of Europe experts and are in compliance with international standards. Upon its adoption in the year 2000, the Law was welcomed by the High Commissioner for National Minorities, Secretary General of the Council of Europe and the President of the European Union.

To illustrate the character of the amendments, let me say that most of the amendments simply specify the minimum fines, which used to be as low as 1 Lat (1,5 EUR), which is half of the fine for travel in a public transport without the ticket in Riga city. It is obvious, that such low fines did not enhance the observance of the Law.

Since the adoption of the Law and the corresponding Regulations, the Government has put an emphasis on the educational measures, supporting training and education in the state language. However, to ensure full observance of the Law, encouragement and assistance need to be complemented with appropriate enforcement measures.

Madam Chairperson,

This discussion today can not replace the consideration of really important issues, such as protection of the human rights defenders, freedom of media, freedom of expression. It strikes us that just a week ago two human rights defenders – a lawyer and a journalist – were again murdered in public, in the centre of Moscow, but Russia rather chooses to beat the air than to pay attention to really serious problems in its own country, where only in December peaceful demonstrations on social-economic issues were dispersed by riot police, where people are killed each year because of their race or ethnic origin, where human rights defenders are subject to harassment, violent attacks and murders whereas lack of effective and impartial investigations of these attacks continue to create the climate of impunity. These are important issues that need to be considered by the OSCE in appropriate frameworks.

Thank you, Madam Chairperson.