

## **OSCE representative meets with the EAPL faction**

“I’ve come to Vilnius for a visit to update my information about the situation of ethnic minorities in Lithuania”, said Veronica Kristkova, a legal expert in the office of OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities at a meeting with MPs from the EAPL faction (Electoral Action of Poles in Lithuania).

As Ms Kristkova claims, the situation of ethnic minorities in Lithuania is constantly under close scrutiny and the Lithuanian government receives reports and advice on how to improve their situation.

“Our recent focus is on the draft of the ethnic minorities bill”, says the OSCE representative admitting she is unpleasantly surprised having familiarized herself with the draft after the spring session of the parliament as it is clear to her that Lithuania is taking a step backward in terms of human rights.

The chairperson of the EAPL faction in the parliament, Ms Rita Tamašunienė, finds it deplorable that the advice given to the government by OSCE has been ignored and that the authorities use as an excuse the country’s law which supposedly makes it impossible for the advice to be put into practice.

“A few days ago MPs from the EAPL submitted for discussion a new draft that puts the accent on the education system, which is quite good these days, but not flawless. We want every young citizen of Lithuania to have inalienable right to receive their education in their native language. Apart from education, the draft allows for names in original writing and dual language street signs. The draft also brings to light the issue of unstable constituency borders – we oppose artificial changes of constituency borders right before the election. The purpose of the changes is to eliminate ethnic minority parties from political life. First of all, ethnic minority parties should have a lower electoral threshold”, said Ms Tamašunienė at a meeting stressing that her postulates were not something unimaginable, and in other EU countries ethnic minorities have long enjoyed full rights.

The vice chairperson of the faction, Ms Wanda Krawczonok, informs that a letter containing all the postulates of the EAPL is soon going to be handed to the director of the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights in order to guarantee ethnic minority rights in Lithuania.

Ms Irina Rozova, a representative of the Russian Alliance, also a member of the EAPL faction, complains that the problems of ethnic minorities in Lithuania escalate and ethnic minorities are portrayed as public enemies. “It looks like we are unimportant here despite all the good work we have done for all Lithuanian citizens just because we belong to ethnic minorities”, says Ms Rozova.

The OSCE representative thanked the EAPL faction for putting forward the postulates which would be taken into consideration in the assessment of the current situation of ethnic minorities in Lithuania made by OSCE.