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Press release | 25.11.2009

EU should use Lisbon Treaty to support language rights

Press release from PCTVL MEP Tatjana Zdanoka

Latvian MEP and Member of the European Parliament's Civil Liberties Committee **Tatjana Zdanoka** has called on the European Commission to use changes under the Lisbon Treaty in order to protect the rights of linguistic minorities. The MEP suggested that the Commission should 'name and shame' EU member states who fail in their obligations to linguistic minorities.

Ms Zdanoka also called for more to be done to promote multilingualism in the EU institutions. She expressed regret that she is as yet not allowed to use her native Russian to address the European Parliament, even though it is the first language of 40% of the population of Latvia.

Speaking during the debate on a European Commission statement on the use of minority languages in the EU, Tatjana Zdanoka said:

"As of 1 December we shall have a clause in Article 2 of the Treaty on European Union stating that the Union is founded on the values of respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities. Whilst it may not immediately be established as a solid legal basis on which to build our own minority rights in the acquis communitaire, we do nevertheless deserve a more focussed statement from the Commission in respect of minority rights.

"And the message must be, in my opinion, very simple: one who acts against the rights of persons belonging to minorities (including linguistic rights), acts against the core values of the European Union.

"We are naming and shaming those countries outside the EU which have a bad human rights record, even though the EU cannot impose legally binding obligations upon them. Why, then, are we so reluctant to name bad examples inside the EU – even if we cannot impose obligations?

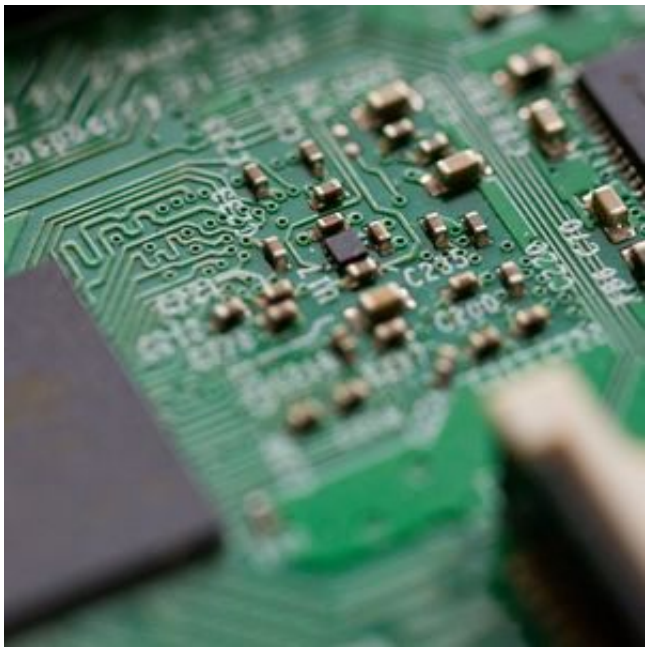
"The Commissioner recalled the Council of Europe and OSCE documents. Yes, the Member States should fulfil obligations under those documents and apply them in good faith. But the Commission should also undertake its obligation to monitor the situation.

"Finally, does the Commission promote multilingualism in the EU institutions? I, for example, can not use here my mother tongue. Russian is a native language for 40% of the population but still has no official status in Latvia."

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