

Statement by Ambassador Triin Parts, Permanent Representative of Estonia to the OSCE in response to the statement delivered by the Russian Federation

Permanent Council No 748

Vienna 29 January 2009

Madame Chairperson,

In addition to the EU statement, with which I fully subscribe, I would like to comment on some of the issues that were just raised by our Russian Colleague on Estonia.

First of all, I would like to thank Russian Delegation for their constant interest in the situation of human rights of persons belonging to Russian speaking minority in Estonia.

I can assure you that this issue is also a topic of great interest and importance to the Estonian Government. Meanwhile, I have to clarify, that in Estonia more than 100 different nationalities and ethnic groups are living, of which Russians, Ukrainians and Byelorussians are of course the largest groups.

As it is known, Estonia had to find suitable solutions to large group of persons with undetermined citizenship that remained on its territory after my country re-gained independence in 1991.

As a result of a consistent integration policy, I can report today, that the number of persons with undetermined citizenship in Estonia has decreased drastically- from 32 % in 1992 to 8% last year, or in other words - a fourfold reduction compared to the beginning of the 1990s.

My Russian colleague is right, that the number of persons who have acquired citizenship by naturalization in recent years has slightly decreased. (For example- if in 2007 the number was – 4228, then last year the number of persons, who acquired citizenship by naturalisation was 2124). There are several reasons for that. For example- the status of a EU long term resident and broadly equal rights guaranteed for both citizens and non-citizens have reduced the motivation of non-citizens to apply for the Estonian citizenship.

As I understand, this is our common concern, and Estonian Government continues to encourage these persons to apply for Estonian citizenship. But to be honest, we can not force anyone to do it. The Estonian position has been that everyone has the right to choose his/her citizenship.

At the same time it has to be mentioned that citizens and non-citizens in Estonia, no matter of their ethnicity, enjoy equal social rights.

Now I would also like to clarify some aspects of the whole range of possibilities to use Russian language in Estonian school system. First of all, Estonia is one of the few countries with a multilingual school system fully funded by public means. Education in Russian language is provided in public schools at all levels. There are no plans to change this policy. About 23% of all Estonian pupils are attending Russian language schools; there are altogether 63 secondary schools, where the language of instruction is Russian. The aim of enhanced instruction in Estonian language in Russian secondary schools (not in primary or basic schools), is to offer and guarantee equal study and working opportunities for graduates of all state schools.

For those colleagues, who are interested on this topic - additional information is available at the website of the Estonian Ministry of Education or you can just ask from me or my colleagues.

In conclusion, I can only once more express our readiness to discuss all Human Rights topics in all international organisations and with national and international monitoring bodies.

Thank you.