

Mr. Chairman,

Let me shortly inform you about the Estonian integration policy. In 2000 Estonian Government approved the State Programme “Integration into Estonian Society 2000-2007”. The first phase of the Programme has been successfully completed. Independent experts that carried out the monitoring of the implementation of the first phase found that the integration policy of the government has brought forward positive results in the society and has played an important role creating tolerance, cultural pluralism and maintaining ethnic diversity in Estonian Society.

The focus of the first phase of the integration programme was on language teaching, as the aspect of verbal communication is considered to be the precondition for successful integration. In 2004 Estonia spent 5,3 million euros on language education projects for non-Estonian speakers.

In May 2004 Estonian Government approved the new Action Plan of the Integration programme for the years 2004-2007. Second phase of the programme will concentrate on:

- supporting naturalization process,
- improving the minority population competition skills and creating venues for vocational training in the areas with a high unemployment rate,
- reducing the number of non-Estonian speakers among those most at risk
- in addition, improving language skills of the official language in the whole of Estonia will continue.

Mr. Chairman,

Estonia pays particular continuing attention to the naturalization of the persons with undetermined citizenship. Whereas the naturalization rate in the past few years has been 3,000-4,000 persons per year, before joining the EU the rate significantly increased. In fact, last year 6,523 persons were granted citizenship.

Between 1992 and May 1st, 2005, 133,555 persons have been granted citizenship by naturalization. That is 10% of the Estonian total population. As a positive trend, I would like to mention, that the share of young people among naturalized persons has increased remarkably.

The government is carrying out extensive campaigns in order better to inform people about the possibilities to acquire citizenship.

In conclusion I would like to mention a few legislative steps that Estonia has taken to facilitate integration process.

- In February 2004 Parliament passed a bill that speeds up the procedures necessary for getting Estonian citizenship.
- Several projects have been introduced to support the preparation for the application for citizenship, among them the project “Promoting the Integration of

Persons with Undetermined Citizenship” within the framework of the EU’s Transition Facility.

- According to the Amendments to the Citizenship Act, which came into force on January 1, 2004, the cost for the language courses will be 100% reimbursed to those who pass the language exam.

Thank you for your attention.