

**The Delegation of Estonia**  
**RIGHT OF REPLY**  
**(full text available only in written form)**

**Working Session 17 - Tolerance and non-discrimination II**  
**1.10.2015**

Thank you Mr Moderator,

I would like to use this opportunity to respond to the statements of the delegation of the Russian Federation, Russian School in Estonia and Legal Information Centre of Human Rights.

As concerns remarks on non-citizens and naturalization process, we would like to remind that Estonia's position has always been that citizenship cannot be forced on anyone and that everyone has the right to choose his or her citizenship.

In 1992 people with undetermined citizenship made up 32% (about 500 000) of the Estonian population. By 1<sup>st</sup> of September 2015 the number had decreased to 6,2% (83 364). Estonian authorities have continuously paid particular attention to citizenship issues. The amendments to the Citizenship Law which will enter into force 1 January 2016 provide the minors under 15 years of age right to acquire citizenship by naturalization, people over 65 are released from written part of Estonian language exam, and the third amendment lifts the obligation of beneficiaries of international protection to submit the proof of release from a former citizenship. These amendments are important bearing in mind the refugee crises in Europe.

The Russian Federation stated that non-citizens are not enjoying the same political, social and cultural rights as citizens, which is not correct with one small exception – they cannot participate in parliamentary elections. At the same time Estonia is one of the few countries where all legal residents, regardless of their citizenship, have the right to vote in local governments.

We are surprised about the allegations that we are closing down Russian language media channels. On the contrary – on 28 September the Russian language public broadcasting TV channel ETV+ started to work. Moreover, in Estonia there are 8 Russian language newspapers, a state financed professional Russian theatre, and a Russian language public broadcasting radio station.

As concerns Russian language education in Estonia, we would like to stress that authorities invest considerable attention and resources to enhance the quality of Estonian language education in Russian schools. The Government has not granted exemption to Russian language schools in order to give all students in Estonia, and not depending on their mother tongue, to have equal opportunities to continue their studies or enter the labour market. It can be mentioned that students of those secondary schools, which applied for exemption in order to continue only Russian language instruction, have good or very good command of Estonian language, therefore this is not necessary and not in the best interest of the students as claimed by some actors.

Thank you, Mr Moderator.