

## **OSCE**

High Commissioner  
on National Minorities

To the members of the Permanent Council of the OSCE

Reference:  
No 314/Bis/96/L

The Hague  
14 February 1996

I would like to draw your attention to the following matter concerning Estonia. On 9 January 1996 the Estonian Government decided to enable inhabitants of Estonia who are in possession of a residence permit but who do not have Estonian citizenship to obtain an aliens passport. This decision is of great importance for the approximately 300,000 mainly Russian speakers in Estonia who have not yet obtained Estonian citizenship. It enables them to be provided with a permanent travel document. This document permits them to freely leave the country and to return to Estonia. As the old system of temporary travel documents caused many difficulties for non-citizens of Estonia, I consider this to be a major step forward.

However, this important step forward would be of little practical consequence if the international community would not recognize this alien passport as a legal travel document. According to the Estonian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, so far only seven countries have recognized the validity of this document, notwithstanding the fact that Estonia has committed itself to permit the return of all those travelling with these documents. In practice, this means that holders of the aliens passport can only travel to seven countries. This could entail that potential applicants for this document would look for other means to be in a position to travel to a greater number of countries, such as applying for citizenship of a third country, notwithstanding the fact that they intend to continue living in Estonia.

Therefore, through you, I would like to appeal to all Participating States of the OSCE who have not yet recognized the Estonian Aliens Passport as a legal travel document, to do so at their earliest convenience.

Yours sincerely,

[signature]  
Max van der Stoep

OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities