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Permanent Mission of the Republic of Estonia
to the OSCE

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 795

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Mister Chairperson,

I would like to thank the Russian Delegation for their constant interest in the situation of persons belonging to Russian speaking minority in Estonia, thus giving us an opportunity to inform the Permanent Council of the recent developments in this field.

I would like to start with the words of the High Commissioner on National Minorities, Knut Vollebaek, when he was asked during the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly meeting last week by one parliamentarian about the minority situation in Latvia and Estonia, he answered, that there has been a lot of developments, that no country is perfect, even the Baltic states, and that active dialogue is going on.

Integration of peoples bearing different culture and tradition into Estonian society remains one the priorities of the Estonian authorities, as well as the reduction of the number of persons with undetermined citizenship and the promotion of Estonian citizenship.

As concerns the possibilities to use Russian language in Estonian school system, I would like to stress that Estonia has a multilingual school system fully funded by public means and education in Russian language is provided in public schools at all levels and there are no plans to change this policy.

As to citizenship issues I would like to reiterate that Estonia has been finding solutions to large group of persons with undetermined citizenship that remained on its territory after re-gaining

independence in 1991. Government's efforts during many years to increase the citizenship through naturalisation have borne fruit.

According to the latest statistics the number of persons with undetermined citizenship in Estonia has decreased from 494 000 persons or 32 % in 1992 to 101 041 persons or 7,4 % last year, or in other words – more than fourfold reduction compared to the beginning of the 1990s.

The number of persons who have acquired citizenship by naturalization has indeed decreased in recent years (in 2007 – 4228, in 2008 – 2124, in 2009 – 1414) and there are several reasons for this. For example - the status of an 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. This group is also not homogeneous- according to one survey 13% of questioned persons wanted to have Russian citizenship, 6% the citizenship of some other country, while 17% were not interested in getting any citizenship and were satisfied with their present status.

As the Russian delegation has made references to the concluding observations of UN human rights treaty bodies, I can assure you that my Government has had constructive dialogue with different UN Committees as well as with HCNM and Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights and we are willing to continue this constructive dialogue with all international Human Rights mechanisms. At the national level the recommendations made are carefully considered and broadly discussed in the society - for example the recent Parliamentary debate initiated by the Chancellor of Justice.

I would also like to clarify that citizen and non-citizens in Estonia enjoy equal social rights. It could also be stressed that persons with undetermined citizenship enjoy more rights than foreseen in 1954 Convention relating to the Status of Stateless persons as has been reaffirmed by the UNHCR on several occasions.

In conclusion - The Estonian position has been that everyone has the right to choose his or her citizenship. At the same time, my authorities actively promote the acquiring of Estonian citizenship through naturalization. Citizenship and minority issues are on the agenda of a public debate in Estonia.

Thank you.