

Human Dimension Implementation Meeting – Warsaw, 4 October 2011
WORKING SESSION 12: Tolerance and non-discrimination

Statement by Ambassador MARIIN RATNIK, head of the Estonian delegation
(Right of Reply)

Thank you Madam Chairperson,

Estonia would like to use the right of replay in order to highlight the positive steps Estonian government has taken related to this morning's topic on minorities and citizenship.

- Discrimination, including on grounds of ethnic or national origins is prohibited in Estonia under the constitution and the equal treatment act. The courts as well as several institutions such as the Chancellor of Justice and Commissioner on Equal Treatment and Gender equality can and do investigate and settle discrimination disputes.
- Reducing the number of persons with undetermined citizenship has been and is one of Estonia's priorities. As result of the consistent integration policy of the Government the number of persons with undetermined citizenship has decreased dramatically from 32% of 1992 to around 7% at present. From the day when Estonia regained independence in 1991- until today already more than 150 000 persons have obtained Estonian citizenship, which is more than 10% of the whole population of Estonia.
- More importantly, all people living in Estonia are documented and have the right and opportunity to enjoy fundamental freedoms and basic rights. The persons with undetermined citizenship have travel documents, resident permits, right to equal treatment and access to social services, as well as the right to vote at local elections, which can be used by all long term legal residents of Estonia. It should also be stressed that persons with undetermined citizenship enjoy more rights than foreseen in 1954 Convention relating to Status of Statelessness persons as has been reaffirmed by the UNHCR on several occasions.

In conclusion, Estonia has always held the view that everyone has the right to choose his or her citizenship rather than having one imposed on oneself. At the same time Estonia firmly believes that governments need to support people striving for nationality. Government of Estonia continues to encourage persons living in Estonia with undetermined citizenship to apply for Estonian citizenship.

Citizenship and minority issues are high on the agenda of the public debate in Estonia and will remain so.

Thank you for the attention.