



Le mouvement international des droits de l' homme **«Le Monde sans Nazisme»**

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STATEMENT **of the Vice-Chairman Dr. Valery Engel**

Some countries have restrictions on the passive and active electoral law, which applies to certain groups of the population. We know that the ethnic limitation existed until 2004, in Turkmenistan, but now it is legally cleared.

In Estonia there are still direct prohibitions in the law distributed passive suffrage for the election of the President of the country. It concerns a so-called naturalized citizens. They, cannot be elected to the Presidency. They can also be deprived of nationality for disloyalty to the State. Meanwhile, most of them are the people who were born on the territory of Estonia, but they have not been given citizenship after independence in 1991.

There is a ban on the right to elect and be elected to national parliaments for the non-citizens in Estonia and Latvia, which we consider to be discriminatory, because they are not immigrants who came to the country and had not been naturalized. Most of them were born in these countries, also their parents and sometimes grandparents/grandmothers were born in this country. All they regularly pay taxes.

All of that restricts the rights not only of non-citizens, but also the rights of national minorities. For example, during the famous Latvian referendum on giving the Russian language the status of a second State language in Latvia, more than 300'000 non-citizens of Latvia (all of them are Russian-speaking residents) did not have the right to take part in the referendum and could not express an opinion on a very important issue for them. It is approximately 17% of the population.

They certainly have a vested interest in giving the Russian language in Latvia the status of second State language, as it already is, for example, in Kazakhstan and other countries. So the statement made yesterday by the representative of Latvia that only 17% of the population (what is a lot) are in favour of Russian language is not correct, because so many people just did not have to vote on this issue. Their opinion was obvious.

I oppose a referendum on the rights of the minority, these issues should not be decided by a majority, I believe that these issues should be resolved in the Executive branch. But since the question was put to a referendum, all, especially those people who directly concerned in the result, must be able to express their opinion.

Another important issue is the absence of non-citizens in municipal elections. This right (active, but not passive) for non-citizens is in Estonia, but not available in Latvia. People who regularly pay taxes, who lived all her life in a municipality do not have the opportunity to elect and be elected in municipal elections. But citizens of other EU countries if they live more than 6 months in Latvia have the right to elect and to be elected to the local municipality. This is a blatant injustice.

All the words of the representatives of the Latvian authorities that these people can pass the naturalization cannot be regarded as satisfactory, because this procedure, as we heard yesterday

from representatives of Latvian NGOs is humiliating for non-citizens, and secondly, this procedure is opaque, having in mind the said exam 2-3 people out of 10.

I appeal once again to take the naturalisation in Latvia and Estonia under the supervision of the OSCE and to make a detailed monitoring of the electoral legislation in these countries.