

Human Dimension Implementation Meeting

Monday, 6 October 2008

Working Session 10: Tolerance and non-discrimination II (continued)

Written contribution of Estonia on the question of naturalisation

Integration of peoples bearing different culture and tradition into Estonian society remains a priority to the Estonian authorities. Estonia has been finding solutions to large group of persons with undetermined citizenship that remained on its territory after the country re-gained independence in 1991. Government's efforts during many years to increase the citizenship through naturalisation have borne fruit. The number of persons who have acquired Estonian citizenship through naturalisation has constantly increased year by year. In 1992 in Estonia there were 494 000 persons with undetermined citizenship making 32% of total population. **As of September 2008 there are 108 662 residents with undetermined citizenship making up about 8 %** of total population. That is fourfold reduction in number of persons with undetermined citizenship compared to the beginning of the 1990s. It is also important to stress 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.

Nearly all the persons with undetermined citizenship living in Estonia enjoy permanent resident status. Several legislative changes have been adopted throughout the years to make the acquisition of Estonian citizenship easier, especially for children and disabled persons. The Estonian position has been that everyone has the right to choose his/her

citizenship. Authorities continue to encourage persons with undetermined citizenship to apply for Estonian citizenship. Estonian constitution prohibits discrimination on any ground, and it has to be stressed that in Estonia citizens and non-citizens have equal access to all social benefits and services.