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Estonia: large number of stateless persons, higher unemployment among Russian speakers remain, despite integration policies, says Council of Europe

Strasbourg, 13.10.2015 - The European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) today published a new [report](#) on Estonia analysing recent developments and outstanding issues, and providing recommendations to the authorities. (link to the [Estonian version](#) of the report).

"The authorities have made efforts to integrate the Russian-speaking minority and reduce the number of stateless persons in Estonia; tangible results have been achieved through various strategies over the past few years," said ECRI's Chair, Christian Ahlund. "However, concerns remain, such as higher unemployment in regions which are predominantly Russian-speaking, or the unsatisfactory implementation of the new linguistic policy in the upper secondary school."

On the positive side, the report notes that a recent amendment of the Citizenship Act relaxes the language requirements for persons over 65 years of age who apply for Estonian nationality. Besides, starting from 2016, Estonian citizenship will be granted to all children born to parents of undetermined citizenship. A new integration programme covering the period up to 2020 was adopted. Finally, a new Cohabitation Act was passed, granting same-sex couples protection equal to that afforded to heterosexual couples.

On the other hand, in addition to the situation of the Russian speaking minority, ECRI has noted with concern the prevalence of racist remarks on Internet news portals and the failure to take action in response to homo- and transphobic speech by politicians. Incitement to racial hatred and violence, as well as racial discrimination are punishable only in cases where the victim's health, life or property are at stake. Discrimination on the grounds of citizenship, language and gender identity is not explicitly prohibited in all relevant legislative provisions. While there are two national authorities entrusted with combating racism, xenophobia, antisemitism, intolerance and racial discrimination, only the Chancellor of Justice can be considered an independent institution.

ECRI has made several recommendations to the authorities of Estonia. The following two require prompt implementation and will be reviewed by ECRI in two years' time:

- launch an information campaign for Russian speakers and persons of undetermined citizenship to encourage their participation in the integration programme covering the years up to 2020;
- remove restrictions which criminalise incitement to racial hatred and violence, as well as racial discrimination only in cases when the victim's health, life or property are at stake; and put in place a system for the collection of data on such acts;

The report, including Government observations, was prepared following ECRI's visit to Estonia in November 2014 [[Press release](#)] and takes account of developments up to March 2015.

ECRI is a human rights body of the Council of Europe, composed of independent experts, which monitors problems of racism, xenophobia, antisemitism, intolerance and discrimination on grounds such as "race", national/ethnic origin, colour, citizenship, religion and language (racial discrimination); it prepares reports and issues recommendations to member States.

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