

ORAL QUESTION WITH DEBATE O-0007/09

pursuant to Rule 108 of the Rules of Procedure

by David Hammerstein, on behalf of the Verts/ALE Group, Alexandra Dobolyi, on behalf of the PSE Group, Willy Meyer Pleite, on behalf of the GUE/NGL Group, Marian Harkin, on behalf of the ALDE Group
to the Commission

Subject: Voting rights for non-citizens of Latvia in local elections

The authors of a large number of petitions before the Committee on Petitions seek voting rights for non-citizens of Latvia in local elections.

After restoration of independence, only citizens of the pre-1940 Latvia and their descendants had their Latvian citizenship restored. Others are entitled to obtain citizenship only through naturalisation; some persons are not entitled to be naturalised. Only 127 786 persons were naturalised in 1995-2007. As of 1 January 2008, there remained 372 421 non-citizens (16.36% of the total population).

Less than 1% of non-citizens are ethnic Latvians; non-citizens are almost totally persons belonging to ethnic minorities (ethnic Russians, Belarusians, Ukrainians, Poles, Lithuanians, Jews). Non-citizens, who are 26.1% of the population in Riga, 22.6% in Daugavpils, 24.8% in Liepāja, 21.6% in Jūrmala, 21.8% in Ventspils, cannot participate in local politics in the biggest municipalities. Moreover, their share is 39.8% in the town of Seda, 31.6% in the parish of Piedruja, 31% in the town of Olaine and the parish of Dobeles. Given that the average turnout was 52.85% of eligible persons in the 2005 local elections, in some local governments the interests of less than 40% of the residents are represented.

The UN Human Rights Committee, the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe, the Commissioner for Human Rights of the Council of Europe, the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance and the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly have recommended making it possible for non-citizens to participate in local elections. In the resolution on the comprehensive monitoring report by the European Commission on the state of preparedness for EU membership of 11 March 2004 the European Parliament proposed that the Latvian authorities envisage the possibility of allowing non-citizens who are long-time inhabitants to take part in local self-government elections.

- Does the Commission agree with the abovementioned recommendation of the European Parliament?
- How did the Commission address the issue in order to follow up the recommendation of the European Parliament?
- Does the Commission agree that the democratic deficit in Latvia may represent a clear risk of a serious breach of the principles of democracy and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms?

Tabled: 21.01.2009

Forwarded: 23.01.2009

Deadline for reply: 30.01.2009