

**Question for oral answer O-000245/2011
to the Commission**

Rule 115

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

After the restoration of independence, only citizens of the pre-1940 Latvia and their descendants had their Latvian citizenship restored. Other people only have the right to obtain citizenship through naturalisation and some are not eligible. Only 136 293 people were naturalised in 1995-2011. At 1 January 2011, there were still 326 735 non-citizens (14.6% of the total population).

The people known as 'non-citizens' come almost entirely from ethnic minorities (ethnic Russians, Belarusians, Ukrainians, Poles, Lithuanians, Jews). Non-citizens, who make up 23.7% of the population in Riga, 18.9% in Daugavpils, 20.5% in Liepāja, 19.2% in Jūrmala, 18.9% in Ventspils, cannot take part in local politics. Given the average turnout in the 2009 local elections was 53.8% of those eligible, in some of the biggest Latvian municipalities the interests of less than half of the population 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 all recommended making it possible for non-citizens to participate in local elections. In its resolution on the comprehensive monitoring report of the Commission on the state of preparedness for EU membership of 11 March 2004, Parliament proposed that the Latvian authorities consider the possibility of allowing non-citizens who are long-time inhabitants to take part in local self-government elections. In its resolution on the deliberations of the Committee on Petitions during the year 2008 of 22 April 2009, Parliament urged the Commission to closely monitor and encourage the regularisation of the status of non-citizens in Latvia.

- How did the Commission address the issue in order to follow up Parliament's recommendations?
- Does the Commission agree that the situation of non-citizens should be closely monitored and, in particular, properly reflected in the Citizenship Report and the Report on the Application of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights?
- Does the Commission agree that the democratic deficit in Latvia may reveal a clear risk of a serious breach of the principles of democracy and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms?

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Forwarded: 14.10.2011

Deadline for reply: 21.10.2011