

**Question for oral answer O-000263/2011
to the Commission**

Rule 115

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on behalf of the GUE/NGL Group

Subject: Voting rights for non-citizens in Latvian local elections

Following Latvian independence, only citizens of the pre-1940 Latvia and their descendants had their Latvian citizenship restored. Others can obtain citizenship only through naturalisation, and some people are not eligible for this procedure. Over the period from 1995 to 2011 only 136 293 persons were naturalised. As of 1 January 2011, 326 735 people in Latvia were still non-citizens (14.6% of the total population). Non-citizens are mainly persons belonging to ethnic minorities (ethnic Russians, Belarusians, Ukrainians, Poles, Lithuanians and Jews). Non-citizens, who make up 23.7% of the population in Riga, 18.9% in Daugavpils, 20.5% in Liepaja, 19.2% in Jurmala and 18.9% in Ventspils, cannot participate in local political life. In some of the biggest Latvian municipalities the interests of less than half 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 Council of Europe's Commissioner for Human Rights, the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance and the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly have recommended steps to enable non-citizens to vote in Latvian local elections. In its resolution of 11 March 2004 on the comprehensive monitoring report of the Commission on Latvia's state of preparedness for EU membership the European Parliament proposed that the Latvian authorities envisage the possibility of allowing non-citizens who are long-time inhabitants of the country to vote in local government elections. In its resolution of 22 April 2009 on the deliberations of the Committee on Petitions during the year 2008 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 an effort to follow up Parliament's recommendations?

Does the Commission agree that the situation of non-citizens in Latvia should be closely monitored and properly reflected, in particular, 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 points to a clear risk of a serious breach of the principles of democracy and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms?

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Deadline for reply: 25.10.2011