




FIFTH OPINION ON ESTONIA

Advisory Committee
on the Framework
Convention for
the Protection of
National Minorities
(ACFC)



Adopted on 3 February 2022

COUNCIL OF EUROPE



CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

ACFC/OP/V(2021)5

Published on 9 June 2022

Secretariat of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities
Council of Europe
F-67075 Strasbourg Cedex
France

www.coe.int/minorities

TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|---|----|
| SUMMARY OF THE FINDINGS | 4 |
| RECOMMENDATIONS | 6 |
| Recommendations for immediate action | 6 |
| Further recommendations | 6 |
| Follow-up to these recommendations | 6 |
| MONITORING PROCEDURE | 7 |
| Preparation of the state report for the fifth cycle | 7 |
| Follow-up activities related to the recommendations of the fourth opinion of the Advisory Committee | 7 |
| Country visit and adoption of the fifth opinion | 7 |
| ARTICLE-BY-ARTICLE FINDINGS | 8 |
| Personal scope of application (Article 3) | 8 |
| Data collection (Article 3) | 10 |
| Anti-discrimination legislative and institutional framework (Article 4) | 11 |
| Promotion of national minority cultures (Article 5) | 12 |
| Cultural Autonomies (Article 5) | 13 |
| Integration Strategy and tolerance and intercultural dialogue (Article 6) | 14 |
| The media and minorities (Article 9) | 16 |
| Use of minority languages in contacts with local administrative authorities (Article 10) | 18 |
| The Language Board (Article 10) | 19 |
| Recording of patronyms and use of minority languages in official documents (Article 11) | 20 |
| Display of traditional local names, street names and other topographical indications (Article 11) | 20 |
| Access to education and intercultural dialogue, teacher training (Article 12) | 21 |
| Access of Roma to education (Article 12) | 23 |
| Access to education in the Covid-19 pandemic (Article 12) | 24 |
| Teaching in and of Russian language (Article 14) | 24 |
| Teaching in and of minority languages (Article 14) | 25 |
| Consultative bodies and participation in public affairs (Article 15) | 26 |
| Effective participation in economic life (Article 15) | 27 |
| Effective participation in social life – access to healthcare (Article 15) | 29 |
| Territorial and administrative reform (Article 16) | 29 |
| Cross-border cooperation (Articles 17 & 18) | 30 |

SUMMARY OF THE FINDINGS

1. Estonia continues to provide support for persons belonging to national minorities through various sources of funding, especially for cultural projects. Nonetheless, there remains a need to increase the engagement with them on issues besides cultural projects, including effective participation in economic, social and political life. Efforts towards the integration of society continue but are hampered by divides in the education system between Estonian and Russian language teaching, as well as in the media space, and the perception among some parts of the Russian minority of the disproportionate means used to promote the state language. There remains a large number of persons without citizenship belonging to the Russian minority, limiting their possibilities to fully and effectively participate in Estonia's cultural, economic and political life.

Scope of application

2. Estonia maintains its declaration made at the time of ratification, meaning the scope of application continues to be limited to citizens of Estonia. Important efforts have been made during the monitoring cycle to reduce the number of persons belonging to the Russian minority without Estonian citizenship, and significant developments have been noted to reduce the number of children without such citizenship. Nonetheless, there remains a significant percentage of persons belonging to the Russian minority with so-called "undetermined citizenship" – persons without citizenship. The authorities continue to make efforts to reduce this further, including by providing language courses, and the authorities report that there are certain advantages for those persons having the "undetermined status" which reduces their motivation to apply for Estonian citizenship, but the Advisory Committee has noted other inhibiting factors too.

3. There is a positive dialogue ongoing with persons belonging to the Seto community, who are not recognised as a separate ethnicity for the purposes of the census. The authorities maintain a flexible approach to minority rights with regard to this group.

Promotion of minority cultures

4. Estonia continues to offer broad support to national minorities on cultural aspects, funding traditional cultural events and diverse artistic projects and boosting knowledge about national minorities to the general public. However, sustainable funding is still needed to ensure continuity of national minority organisations' activities. In this respect, further consultations involving national minorities on fund allocation as well as capacity building on grant application could allow them to effectively take part in Estonian's cultural life, beside folkloric aspects. Though there are good relations between national minorities organisations and the authorities, more can be done to promote the culture, history and languages of national minorities to the wider population. Such recognition remains limited to a list of four groups, plus the Ingrian Finns, for whom a flexible approach has been adopted for their cultural autonomy body. Further flexibility could be shown in this regard to ensure fuller access to more sustainable cultural funding for a greater breadth of communities – including those of larger numerical size than the recognised communities.

Tolerance and intercultural dialogue

5. Estonia pursues its integration strategy, which it monitored extensively over the reporting period, before adopting a new one which will run until 2030. There has been a lack of proper consultation of civil society organisations in the monitoring of the former strategy and the drafting and adoption of the new one. In general terms, tolerance and intercultural dialogue are respected towards many minority groups. Nevertheless, there are examples of negative relations between different minority groups themselves, and the Russian minority's experience of national security policy by the Estonian authorities continues to raise concerns among this community, and in some cases inhibit their work. Furthermore, there is a general tendency in policy to expect minorities to integrate into society as a one-way process – whereby little is expected of the majority. Underpinning this issue is a lack of proper consultation with minorities regarding the integration strategy.

Media

6. Estonia has invested in minority language media, over the last five years increasing means provided to the Russian-language television channel and other national minorities' public channels, providing dedicated channels for them to showcase their cultures and languages. However, a severe divide between Estonian and "non-Estonian" media space persists, extending even to the digital space and affecting younger generations. The lack of media in national minority languages and about national minorities' culture, as well as interests and concerns, remains a significant issue.

Education

7. Estonia's education system remains *de facto* divided into Estonian-language schools and Russian-language schools. According to the authorities, the current education system receives support from some members of the Russian minority, who see it as crucial in protecting the Russian language in Estonia. Critics of the system – some of them among the Russian minority – point out that it contributes to perpetuating existing divisions in society and even weaker academic performance leading to lower educational outcomes for Russian-speaking students. Teacher shortages affect the entire education system, and a flexible approach to the strict state language requirements for teachers enacted for a limited time could help to remedy this. Furthermore, there is a need to increase knowledge through the curriculum of the historic presence, languages and contribution of national minorities in Estonia.

8. As regards access of Roma children to education, even though they constitute a numerically small minority, the Advisory Committee is troubled by the so-called "simplified programmes" in which Roma pupils appear to be overrepresented, as well as the perceived lack of meaningful consultation with Roma parents over their children's education.

Linguistic rights

9. No progress has been made on implementing the Advisory Committee's previous recommendations on the formal right of persons belonging to national minorities to

communicate with local authorities in minority languages, nor on the display of place names in minority languages. The high threshold for communicating with local authorities in minority languages remains in place and is particularly inhibiting for numerically smaller national minorities. As for the display of topographical indications, the law remains unchanged and low awareness of this right under the Framework Convention remains. The procedure is not open to all minorities and is complex for minorities to navigate. Further consultations, initiated by the authorities themselves, with minorities are needed to establish the demand for such indications, coupled with awareness raising as to this right. The Language Inspectorate was replaced by the Language Board in 2020, and the emphasis has shifted to pursuing positive incentives – although concerns still persist regarding the Board's power to impose fines. Further trust-building with the Russian minority is still required.

Effective participation

10. In a number of areas, including state integration policy, education and administrative reform, there is disagreement between persons belonging to national minorities and the

authorities as to whether consultation has taken place. The authorities also state that there are general rules in place obliging them to consult with the public. The Advisory Committee considers that any consultation Estonia carries out needs to be more active and needs to also target national minorities in particular – so that they may have their voice heard by policy makers.

11. There are also ongoing issues on the economic participation of the Russian minority, in particular women, whose unemployment rate is particularly high. Additionally, the region where the Russian minority lives most compactly faces continuing difficulties due to the transition to a greener economy, which are impacting persons belonging to national minorities there.

Cross-border cooperation

12. Estonia maintains good cross-border cooperation, but some difficulties regarding the cooperation between Estonian NGOs and organisations in the Russian Federation have been reported to the Advisory Committee. Additionally, the Covid-19 pandemic has made cross-border cooperation more difficult, including for the Setos.

RECOMMENDATIONS

13. The Advisory Committee considers that the present concluding remarks and recommendations could serve as the basis for the resolution to be adopted by the Committee of Ministers with respect to the implementation of the Framework Convention by Estonia.

14. The authorities are invited to take account of the detailed observations and recommendations contained in the present opinion of the Advisory Committee. In particular, they should take the following measures to improve further the implementation of the Framework Convention:

Recommendations for immediate action¹

15. The Advisory Committee urges the authorities to continue with their efforts to reduce the number of persons without citizenship by further facilitating access to citizenship for long-term residents and by making greater efforts to raise awareness of the benefits of citizenship.

16. The Advisory Committee urges the authorities to ensure access to Russian as a language of instruction at all levels of the public education system and intensify the related dialogue and consultation with representatives of the Russian minority. The authorities should also look into the causes of any educational disparities in academic performance from students in Estonian-language and Russian-language schools, assess and improve the quality of education with Russian as the language of instruction, and remedy any problems identified.

17. The Advisory Committee urges the authorities to ensure effective and meaningful access to education for persons belonging to the Roma national minority, including through improving and updating teacher training on understanding Romani culture and traditions, reviewing the potential discriminatory effect of the so-called "simplified programmes", and consulting with Roma on the design, implementation and review of any future model to support Roma students in education.

18. The Advisory Committee urges the authorities to expand its consultation structures with representatives of national minorities beyond the sphere of culture and provide adequate opportunities for persons belonging to national minorities to have their voice heard and have a substantial influence on all decisions and issues affecting them. Due account should be taken of the diversity of views within minority communities, and of gender and age balance.

Further recommendations

19. The Advisory Committee calls on the authorities to maintain an open and constructive dialogue with the Setos regarding the status of their official recognition and continued access to minority rights.

20. The Advisory Committee calls on the authorities to ensure that all relevant groups are provided with the stable, sustainable and sufficient funds necessary to preserve, develop and promote their culture, to increase capacity building for national minorities to access funding application processes, and to support cultural activities to increase

knowledge of national minorities and foster a positive attitude towards their participation in Estonian cultural life.

21. The Advisory Committee calls on the authorities to intensify efforts to promote tolerance and intercultural dialogue going beyond the promotion of proficiency in the Estonian language, for instance by fostering multilingualism and knowledge of national minority cultures, mutual respect and understanding among all persons living in Estonia.

22. The Advisory Committee calls on the authorities, whilst respecting editorial independence, to promote increased high-quality broadcasting in minority languages as well as about national minority cultures and their current concerns in the publicly funded media. This should be developed with the effective participation of persons belonging to national minorities and aim to raise general awareness about these aspects and counteract negative stereotypes.

23. The Advisory Committee calls on the authorities to apply a flexible approach for a limited time regarding the state language requirements for the recruitment of teachers, so that schools are able to remedy the shortage of minority language teachers, whilst more long-term solutions are developed.

24. The Advisory Committee calls on the authorities to provide more information about the positive contribution of persons belonging to national minorities to Estonian society and culture, as well as the history, culture, language, traditions and religion of national minorities in school curricula at all levels, and to more effectively pursue tolerance and intercultural dialogue through formal and non-formal education, including by promoting interaction between pupils from different linguistic backgrounds.

25. The Advisory Committee calls on the authorities to intensify their efforts to address the high unemployment rate affecting persons belonging to national minorities, and to take special measures to improve the position of minority women. The authorities should facilitate access to adequate training which goes beyond language proficiency and equips those concerned with the skills necessary in the current and future labour market. It further calls on the authorities to ensure that the regions affected receive the support necessary to address the specific effects of the economic crisis at municipal level.

Follow-up to these recommendations

26. The Advisory Committee encourages the authorities to organise a follow-up event after the publication of this fifth cycle opinion. It considers that a follow-up dialogue to review the observations and recommendations made in this opinion would be beneficial. Furthermore, the Advisory Committee stands ready to support the authorities in identifying possible ways of implementing the recommendations contained in the present opinion, drawing from its experience throughout states parties to the Framework Convention.

¹ The recommendations below are listed in the order of the corresponding articles of the Framework Convention.

MONITORING PROCEDURE

Preparation of the state report for the fifth cycle

27. The state report was received on 25 November 2019. Organisations representing and promoting the rights of persons belonging to national minorities were consulted in its preparation. Gender-related aspects of minority rights were addressed in two paragraphs of the report.²

Follow-up activities related to the recommendations of the fourth opinion of the Advisory Committee

28. The authorities did not translate the Fourth Opinion of the Advisory Committee on Estonia into Estonian, nor into minority languages and State reports are made available in Estonian through a dedicated webpage³ and through a link⁴ to the (English) website of the Council of Europe. In addition, very little information is found on the Estonian authorities' websites on the Framework Convention for the protection of National Minorities, although the text of the Convention is available in Estonian and English on the legislative database portal⁵ and in Russian on a secondary website.⁶

29. After the Advisory Committee's Fourth Opinion was published, it was sent to relevant Estonian authorities and to representatives of national minorities. No dedicated follow-up meeting with the participation of the Advisory Committee was organised.

Country visit and adoption of the fifth opinion

30. This fifth-cycle opinion on the implementation of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (hereinafter "the Framework Convention") by Estonia was adopted in accordance with Article 26(1) of the Framework Convention and Rule 25 of Resolution (2019)49 of the Committee of Ministers. The findings are based on information contained in the fifth state report, other written sources, as well as information obtained by the Advisory Committee from governmental and non-governmental sources during its visit to Narva, Värskä and Tallinn from 5 to 7 July 2021, complemented by online meetings with civil society and the authorities on 7, 8, 10 and 11 June 2021 and on 9 July 2021. The Advisory Committee expresses its gratitude to the authorities for their excellent co-operation before, during and after the visit. The draft opinion, as approved by the Advisory Committee on 6 October 2021 was transmitted to the Estonian authorities on 15 October 2021 for observations, according to Rule 37 of Resolution (2019)49. The Advisory Committee welcomes the observations received from the Estonian authorities on 14 December 2021.

31. These online meetings and the physical visit were held in coordination with the European Commission on Racism and Intolerance (ECRI), which is producing its sixth report on Estonia. Therefore, in addition to its own assessment, the Advisory Committee refers to ECRI's sixth report on Estonia.

32. A number of articles of the Framework Convention are not covered in the present opinion. Based on the information currently at its disposal, the Advisory Committee considers that the implementation of these articles does not give rise to any specific observations. This statement is not to be understood as signalling that adequate measures have now been taken and that efforts in this respect may be reduced or even halted. Rather, the Advisory Committee considers that the obligations of the Framework Convention require a sustained effort by the authorities. Furthermore, a certain state of affairs which may be considered acceptable at this stage may not necessarily be so in further monitoring cycles. Finally, it may be that issues which appear at this stage to be of relatively minor concern prove over time to have been underestimated.

² See state report, paras. 121 and 177 (relating to Roma women).

³ <https://vm.ee/et/inimoiqusalaste-konventsioonide-taitmine-0>.

⁴ <https://www.eesti.ee/en/culture-and-leisure/culture/national-minorities-and-their-cultural-activity>.

⁵ Eesti.ee, database webpage on national minorities in Estonia, available [here](#).

⁶ Secondary website with the text of the Framework Convention in Russian, available [here](#).

ARTICLE-BY-ARTICLE FINDINGS

Personal scope of application (Article 3)

33. There exists no legislative act defining the term 'national minority'. According to the declaration made upon ratification of the Framework Convention, Estonia considers as "national minority" those citizens of Estonia who reside on the territory of Estonia; maintain longstanding, firm and lasting ties with Estonia; are distinct from Estonians on the basis of their ethnic, cultural, religious or linguistic characteristics; and are motivated by a concern to preserve together their cultural traditions, their religion or their language, which constitute the basis of their common identity.⁷ In the fifth state report, the Estonian authorities reiterate that, in practice, an extensive and open approach to the application of the Framework Convention is applied and that the rights enshrined therein are accessible to all members of the national minorities living in Estonia.⁸

34. Russians are the numerically largest minority in Estonia, and there are numerically small numbers of other nationalities in Estonia, such as Ukrainians and Belarussians; the authorities report that 197 'nationalities' live in Estonia, most without having formed a cultural society. Those that have done so may be organised in an umbrella organisation, of which 17 exist in Estonia. One such organisation, the Estonian Union of National Minorities⁹ (*Eestimaa Rahvuste Ühendus*) comprises around 20 numerically small minorities (i.e. below 1000 persons) as well as some larger minorities. Such organisations facilitate the distribution of funding.

35. The Advisory Committee met with representatives of the Setos, who are a group of around 12 000 people who claim indigenous status. The Setos are not mentioned in the Estonian state report, and the authorities state that no indigenous people within the meaning of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples are present in Estonia and that Seto is a dialect of the Estonian language. Traditionally, the Seto communities are spread between South-Eastern Estonia and the Pechory district of the Russian Federation. In Estonia, they are seeking formal recognition as an indigenous people, and at the same time seeking protection under the Framework Convention.

36. In relation to previous recommendations made by the Advisory Committee calling for the authorities to reconsider the criterion of citizenship as it currently stands in the declaration made by Estonia upon ratification, the

authorities consider that these recommendations are complied with in practice. They underline the primary importance of ensuring that persons belonging to national minorities have a real opportunity to comprehensively exercise the rights provided by the Framework Convention in practice, rather than to amend the declaration Estonia made at the time of ratification.¹⁰

37. The Advisory Committee has made previous recommendations to the authorities to reduce the number of persons without citizenship on its territory, which is an issue concerning in particular the Russian minority. The authorities report having given priority to the reduction of the number of "persons with undetermined citizenship"¹¹ – i.e. persons without Estonian or other citizenship – and the enhanced integration of all residents in Estonia, through a series of amendments to the Citizenship Act as well as awareness raising activities. Between 2014 and 2021, the number of "persons with undetermined citizenship" living in Estonia under a valid residence permit has decreased from 91,288 to 67,898, with a significant decrease for children under the age of 15 (from 1,086 to 74).¹²

38. Concerning the recent amendments to the Citizenship Act, on 13 February 2015, the conditions for naturalisation were simplified for people over 65 years of age. When applying for citizenship, they do not need any longer to take a full Estonian language test, but only an oral test.¹³

39. From 1 January 2016, citizenship is automatically given to children under 15 born in Estonia both of whose parents had "undetermined citizenship" and had legally resided in Estonia for at least 5 years. According to the authorities, this amendment has led to 1301 children being automatically given Estonian citizenship between 1 January 2016 and 1 January 2019.¹⁴ Since February 2020, children under 18 born in Estonia with one parent "with undetermined citizenship" and one parent with citizenship of a 'foreign country', provided one parent or grandparent was a resident of Estonia on 20 August 1991, to be naturalised as Estonian citizens. Thus, the purpose of the 2020 amendment is to increase the number of children eligible for acquiring Estonian citizenship.

40. Other requirements have been simplified. Prior to 1 January 2016, a person having applied for naturalisation had to wait for 6 months before being required to "confirm of a continued desire" to obtain citizenship. Both the waiting

⁷ Council of Europe Treaty Office, [Declaration contained in the instrument of ratification](#), deposited on 6 January 1997 - Or. Est./Engl. See also, [the periodical State Report presented by Estonia for the second monitoring cycle of the Framework Convention](#), received on 16 July 2004, which explains in more details the authorities' position with regard to the scope of application of the Framework Convention with regard to Estonia.

⁸ In this respect, Estonia recognises more than 200 nationalities, the largest ethnic groups – with more than 1000 representatives living in Estonia – are Russians (322 700), Ukrainians (27 254), Belarussians (11 485), Finns (8 479), Latvians (3 572), Germans and Lithuanians (over 2000 persons) and Tatars, Poles, Armenians and Azerbaijanis (more than 1000 persons). See [Ministry of Culture](#) and [Statistics Estonia](#), accessed 21 September 2021.

⁹ <http://rahvused.ee/>; <https://agsm.fuen.org/en/member/Estonian-Union-of-National-Minorities>.

¹⁰ State report, para. 12.

¹¹ State report, para 13.

¹² State report, para. 16.

¹³ State report, para. 19.

¹⁴ State report, para. 18.

period and the obligation to “confirm of a continued desire” have been abandoned. The requirement of having resided in Estonia for 8 years, including 5 consecutively, has been simplified to the sole requirement of having resided in Estonia for 8 years.¹⁵

41. As regards policy measures, the authorities report the organisation of roundtables in 2015 focusing on citizenship issues, and having resulted in the adoption of an action plan in 2016, implemented by all relevant ministries in cooperation with civil society and local governments of Harju and Ida-Viru counties. The monitoring carried out by the authorities show a decrease in the number of persons who find the citizenship examination too complicated (57% in 2015 to 46% in 2017 and 29% in 2020) and in the number of persons “unable to learn Estonian” (51% in 2015 to 39% in 2017 to 31% in 2020).¹⁶ The fact that the lack of citizenship does not prevent living in Estonia is reported now as the most given reason not to apply for citizenship (34% in 2015 and 41% in 2017 and 47% in 2020).¹⁷ The acquisition of citizenship is also valued through official ceremonies as well as a Citizen’s Day on 26 November, during which a number of related events are organised.¹⁸

42. Concerning language requirements, which constitute a prerequisite for the acquisition of Estonian citizenship, the authorities report having paid special attention to regions inhabited by persons who have another first language. Training was offered, but also possibilities for practising Estonian in “culture clubs and language cafés”. Language studies were in particular offered to persons applying through the Integration Foundation website for preparation courses for the citizenship examination. The Integration Foundation provides also personal counselling for persons with “undetermined citizenship” in a number of aspects of social and economic life, including through a free helpline. Moreover, in 2018, new provisions were added to the citizenship Act to support efforts aimed at improving the command of Estonian language. As a result, since 2019, applicants for Estonian citizenship, who reside legally in Estonia for at least 5 years, can learn Estonian free of charge and are compensated for unpaid study leave (on average 20 calendar days).¹⁹

43. Persons belonging to the Russian minority reported that there were few practical difficulties in accessing basic services for those with “undetermined citizenship”. In general, those who hold this status also have a permanent residence card, meaning access to such services is assured, as well as their right to work and to vote in local elections. Persons belonging to the Russian minority and the authorities reported that the opportunity for visa-free travel across the Estonian/Russian border was a factor in maintaining this status and not applying for Estonian citizenship among those with “undetermined citizenship”. Moreover, the general climate of tolerance and intercultural dialogue in Estonia, running the risk of fomenting fear and

resentment among persons belonging to national minorities (see Article 6), contributed to the lack of will on the part of some members of this minority to apply for Estonian citizenship. Minorities also reported that the slow decrease in the number of persons with undetermined citizenship was due in part also to general demographic trends, as opposed to active state policy in this field.

44. Representatives of the Finnish community (separate from the Ingrian Finns) informed the Advisory Committee that their community of approximately 8 000 persons, many of whom are not citizens of Estonia – as dual nationality is not possible - are interested in forming a cultural autonomy (see Article 5). The authorities’ position is that this is not possible as members of the community wishing to form a cultural autonomy must be citizens of Estonia. They also state that no formal application has been launched.

45. The Advisory Committee reiterates its longstanding viewpoint that the personal scope of application should, where appropriate, also extend beyond citizens, particularly where exclusion on grounds of citizenship may lead to unjustified and arbitrary distinctions, such as when exclusion concerns persons without citizenship belonging to national minorities who permanently reside on a given territory.²⁰ It should be considered for each right separately whether there are legitimate grounds to differentiate its application based on citizenship. The Advisory Committee has always welcomed instances in which states parties have extended minority rights to persons without citizenship, thereby in practice disregarding an officially still existing precondition of citizenship.²¹

46. The Advisory Committee welcomes the authorities’ monitoring of measures taken to decrease the number of persons without citizenship, and of the reasons for which individuals do not apply. It also notes with satisfaction the simplification of the requirements to become a citizen, including through making the language exam simpler for the elderly, and working towards increasing knowledge of Estonian. The reduction by over 90% of children “with undetermined citizenship” is commendable, as are the successive legislative amendments with the purpose of increasing the number of children eligible to acquire Estonian citizenship. However, the effects of the current legislation requiring proof of residency of either parent(s) or a grandparent dating back to 1991 need to be carefully monitored.

47. The Advisory Committee however reiterates the strong symbolic significance among national minorities of the exclusion of persons without Estonian citizenship from the formal scope of application of the Framework Convention. Additionally, Estonia’s declaration coupled with the fact that many persons who belong to the Russian minority remain without citizenship, risks seriously restricting the scope of application. Moreover, despite the positive efforts outlined above, there still remains a large number of persons without

¹⁵ State report, para. 20.

¹⁶ State report, para. 22-23.

¹⁷ See also factsheet in English on Citizenship and Naturalisation (Kodakondsus): <https://kul.ee/media/3147/download>.

¹⁸ State report, para. 27-28.

¹⁹ State report, para. 24-26.

²⁰ ACFC [Thematic Commentary No. 4](#) ‘The Framework Convention: a key tool to managing diversity through minority rights. The scope of application of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities’, adopted on 27 May 2016, para. 15.

²¹ ACFC Thematic Commentary No. 4, para. 30.

citizenship residing permanently in Estonia, and the overall decrease over the years has been slow. The Advisory Committee considers that the long-standing efforts in place need to be continued and even intensified to ensure, on the basis of the monitoring carried out by the authorities, that all those individuals concerned are aware of the benefits of gaining citizenship.

48. The Advisory Committee strongly encourages the authorities to pursue an open and inclusive approach to the Framework Convention's personal scope of application and reiterates its call to consider also extending protection under the Framework Convention to long-term residents without Estonian citizenship.

49. The Advisory Committee urges the authorities to continue with their efforts to reduce the number of persons without citizenship by further facilitating access to citizenship for long-term residents and by taking greater efforts to raise awareness of the benefits of citizenship.

Data collection (Article 3)

50. The State report indicates that a register-based population and housing census was planned to take place in 2020 and should include all 38 features referred to in Regulation No. 763/2008 of the European Parliament and of the Council of the European Union on population and housing censuses.²²

51. The population census will now take place before the end of 2021, be register-based with a random sample of 60 000 people responding to the questionnaire – generally online with a small number of in-person questionnaires. There will be a possibility to identify two 'ethnicities', and two "mother tongues" from a closed though lengthy list of ethnicities and languages. The authorities also indicated that persons belonging to national minorities, especially persons belonging to the Russian minority, would be involved as interviewers in the survey part of the census – although official statistics on this would not be available.

52. As has been the case before, the Setos are not able to select 'Seto' as an ethnicity for the purposes of the census because the authorities consider the Setos to be of Estonian ethnicity, and in this regard they refer to scientific research. Instead, the census form gives the possibility to select an 'Estonian language form, dialect or subdialect' which the individual speaks. Seto representatives informed the Advisory Committee that this was a de facto way of identifying the size of the Seto community, even if not all of them speak Seto.²³ They also informed the Advisory Committee that, whilst their formal status was still a priority for them, along with raising awareness of Seto identity and self-determination among their people, the practical implementation of the rights and support they receive from

the Estonian authorities was also important and welcome, for instance in the spheres of culture (see Article 5) and education (see Articles 12 and 14), as well as in the negotiation of their Setomaa rural municipality (see Article 16).

53. The Advisory Committee affirms the strong importance of free self-identification among minority communities, including in data collection exercises such as the census. It reiterates that the right to free self-identification is a cornerstone of minority rights which must nonetheless be linked to some objective criteria. Lists of possible responses to identity-related questions should be open not closed, and the opportunity to express multiple affiliations should be provided explicitly. Given the importance attached in some states parties to the size of a minority population for access to minority rights, multiple affiliations must also not only be recorded but also adequately processed, analysed and displayed. These considerations on the collection, processing and reporting of data must also be applied to other situations that can imply self-identification. Results should be reassessed periodically and analysed flexibly, in close consultation with minority representatives. The Advisory Committee also reaffirms the importance of the effective participation of persons belonging to national minorities in the design of the census methodology and in the organisation and operation of such processes, including as interviewers.²⁴

54. The Advisory Committee welcomes the opportunity given for double affiliation of ethnicity and language, although it considers that this could be widened further to include more than just two affiliations in the future. It also welcomes the open dialogue the authorities maintain with Seto representatives as to their status and the flexible approach applied to this group in terms of their access to rights. The authorities could consider in the framework of this dialogue ensuring the Setos' right to free self-identification in census exercises and data collection. In the context of the population register, which may be updated at any time by all persons resident in Estonia, the Advisory Committee considers that possibilities for free self-identification on ethnicity and first language²⁵ – i.e. not through closed lists – should be fully respected by the authorities and implemented in practice.

55. The Advisory Committee calls on the authorities to maintain an open and constructive dialogue with the Setos regarding the status of their official recognition and continued access to minority rights.

56. The Advisory Committee invites the authorities to conduct the 2021 census and analyse the results in close cooperation with persons belonging to national minorities.

57. The Advisory Committee asks the authorities to create the possibility for free self-identification on ethnicity and first

²² Regulation (EC) [No 763/2008](#) of the European Parliament and of the Council of 9 July 2008 on population and housing censuses.

²³ For ease of reference, in this Opinion, the Advisory Committee will refer to 'Seto' and 'the Seto language' without prejudice as to its official recognition by the Estonian authorities, or drawing a conclusion as to its status.

²⁴ See also: 'Fundamental principles of official statistics in the context of population and housing censuses' of *UNECE recommendations of the Conference of European Statisticians Recommendation for the 2020 Censuses of Population and Housing*, United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, New York and Geneva, 2015.

²⁵ In Estonian, translated as "native language" or "mother tongue", in Estonian: "Emakeel".

language via an open list for the purposes of updating the population register.

Anti-discrimination legislative and institutional framework (Article 4)

58. The authorities report that, during the monitoring period, amendments were prepared (though not adopted) to the Equal Treatment Act which aimed, amongst others, at extending the competences of the Gender Equality and Equal Treatment Commissioner (hereinafter “the Commissioner”).

59. The Commissioner is appointed for five years by the Minister of Social Affairs.²⁶ The current mandate of the Commissioner²⁷ includes, *inter alia*, providing opinions concerning alleged cases of discrimination on the basis of the applications filed by persons or on his or her own initiative on the basis of the information obtained. The opinions of the Commissioner are not legally binding, but the Commissioner can give legal counselling to the victims, being able to participate in court as an ‘advisor’ to one of the parties. The Commissioner does not impose any penalties or determine any compensation in itself.²⁸

60. The authorities report a significant increase in the budget of the Office of the Commissioner, including a 45% increase in the state budget allocated to the office between 2018 and 2019²⁹, having been given its own section in the state budget since 2018, reinforcing transparency and independence of the institution.³⁰ In terms of statistics, for the period 2014 to 2018 inclusive, the Commissioner received 85 applications for alleged discrimination on grounds of race, nationality or ethnic origin, without disaggregating data allowing identification of request made specifically by persons belonging to national minorities. Out of 85, it concluded on four occasions at the possibility of an indirect discrimination on the ground of nationality.³¹ In 2019/20, 68 complaints on the grounds of “nationality”, citizenship status, “race” or language skills were received, with the majority (48) in the nationality category. A total of 3 possible cases of indirect discrimination were found – 1 on nationality and 2 on citizenship status.³² The Commissioner

may only make recommendations if she finds that a violation has occurred.

61. The Chancellor of Justice, among other functions, is charged with resolving discrimination disputes which arise between persons in private law via a conciliation procedure to which both parties must consent.³³ In 2019 and 2020, the Chancellor received 3 complaints of discrimination on the basis of nationality and ethnicity, 3 on language, 1 on religion or religious views. The Chancellor of Justice also carries out checks over conformity of legislation with the Constitution and laws as well as over the activities of representatives of public authority.³⁴ Since 1 January 2019, and pursuant to the adoption of the Act Amending the Chancellor of Justice Act by *Riigikogu* on 13 June 2018, the Chancellor of Justice performs the functions of Estonian national human rights institution.³⁵ The institution was also granted A-status under the Paris Principles in December 2020.

62. The Chancellor and Commissioner also receive complaints and communications in many languages, based on the linguistic expertise available and through translation services, although official responses are provided in Estonian. It was reported that unofficial translations may be provided if there was a clear need, and on a case-by-case basis.

63. The Commissioner also informed the Advisory Committee of the increasing awareness of her work³⁶, observed through the increasing number of complaints reaching her office. It nevertheless remains unclear to the Advisory Committee as to how many and to what extent persons belonging to national minorities are engaging with the institution. The authorities also report an increase in the awareness of the Chancellor of Justice.³⁷

64. Interlocutors of the Advisory Committee have informed it that there is generally low awareness of the bodies in their communities. According to information available to the

²⁶ State report, para. 15. See the Act for the full list of competencies.

²⁷ *Ibid*, para. 16.

²⁸ Source: website <https://volinik.ee/en/about-us/>. See also: European Network of Legal Experts [equality and non-discrimination report](#), p.47. See also Equinet, <https://equineteurope.org/author/estoniageet/>.

²⁹ State report, para. 43.

³⁰ Source: information received from the Gender Equality and Equal Treatment Commissioner.

³¹ State report, para. 44-48.

³² Information received by the Advisory Committee on 09/06/2021.

³³ Article 1(5), 19(2) and (3), and subchapter 3 of chapter 4 of the Chancellor of Justice Act: <https://www.riigiteataja.ee/en/eli/528052020006/consolide>. As this is rarely the case that both parties consent, the Commissioner’s mandate to resolve discrimination cases is limited.

³⁴ <https://www.eesti.ee/en/republic-of-estonia/chancellor-of-justice>. Chapter 3 of the Chancellor of Justice Act at <https://www.riigiteataja.ee/en/eli/528052020006/consolide#para15>. If the Chancellor of Justice finds that the legislation is unconstitutional and contrary to the law, he or she may propose to the body that passed the legislation to bring the legislation into conformity with the Constitution and the law. If the proposal is ignored, the Chancellor of Justice shall submit a request to the Supreme Court to declare the legislation of general application unconstitutional or invalid.

³⁵ State report, para. 9.

³⁶ [EU Medicis II Survey](#), Awareness among minority representatives of the existence of the National Equality Body, 2017, p. 123

³⁷ From 1 September 2020 to 31 August 2021, the Chancellor of Justice received 5018 different petitions, requests and letters. The year before, their number was about a thousand less, i.e. 4026. Annual Report 2021 of the Chancellor of Justice at <https://www.oiguskantsler.ee/ylevaade2021/>.

Advisory Committee, an inquiry was made by a Roma³⁸ representative to the Chancellor about the use of the term "mustlane" (meaning "gypsy" in Estonian). Although some members of the minority themselves consider the use of this term derogatory and human rights NGOs have called on the media to prefer the use of the term "Roma"³⁹, the Chancellor has responded to the issue by referring to the position of the Estonian Language Institute (*Eesti Keele Instituut*). The Institute considers that the meaning of the word in Estonian has changed over time from an allegedly derogatory term to a neutral term. The Chancellor also recalled in her answer that considering the recommendations of international Roma organisations, since the 1990s the word "Roma" has been used in Estonia, instead of the word "mustlane". It does not appear that Roma themselves were consulted in the Chancellor's process.

65. Amendments to the Equal Treatment Act which aimed to give a more general protection from discrimination on the basis of, inter alia, religion, have not been adopted by the government. This means that religion is only a protected ground as far as employment is concerned.⁴⁰ The Advisory Committee considers that, given the wide diversity of national minorities in Estonia, this current situation could have a negative impact on some national minorities whose religion distinguishes them from the majority population, and indeed other national minorities.

66. The Advisory Committee is of the opinion that giving NGOs or the Commissioner the power to bring cases to court would be one means of providing further assistance to victims of discrimination, especially in view of the reluctance among those exposed to discrimination to bring cases to court, for fear of losing and the high costs they would have to pay if they were to lose. The Advisory Committee also expresses its concern at the potential difficulties of having the Commissioner appointed by the Ministry of Social Affairs and asks the authorities to remain alert to the risks of politicisation this may bring.⁴¹

67. The Advisory Committee considers that the current number of complaints may indicate a low level of ethnic discrimination but may also point to a lack of public knowledge of the legal remedies available and to the potential need for training of those involved with the implementation of the relevant legislation. It considers that further awareness raising should be carried out about the Chancellor of Justice and the Commissioner, their standards and their procedures, particularly among persons belonging to national minorities. At the same time, these institutions ought to be made more aware of the specific problems of national minorities and increase their sensitivity to such issues. The institutions should also effectively and systematically consult with such minorities in their deliberations on issues of relevance to them.

68. The Advisory Committee reiterates its call on the authorities to consider broadening the powers of the Commissioner for Gender Equality and Equal Treatment so

that she can act more effectively against discrimination affecting persons belonging to national minorities. It further reiterates that measures should be taken to raise awareness of both the Commissioner and the Chancellor of Justice and their respective mandates, especially among persons belonging to national minorities.

Promotion of national minority cultures (Article 5)

69. The Integration Foundation, under the Ministry of Culture, provides funding for most cultural activities for minority and ethnic groups cultural umbrella organisations, cultural autonomies, and grants for "support for cultural societies of national minorities". Annual base-line funding received by national minorities' umbrella organisations has steadily increased over the years, starting from EUR 320 000 in 2014 to EUR 457 000 in 2020.⁴²

70. A Cultural Council for National Minorities has operated within the Ministry of Culture since 2008. It holds sessions four times a year and is competent to express opinions on issues related to the enhancement of cultural life and activities of national minorities in Estonia, in organising the related cultural policy and integration and, if necessary, making corresponding proposals to the Minister of Culture.

71. The Advisory Committee has been made aware of good practices to promote the conditions necessary for persons belonging to national minorities to maintain and develop their culture and preserve their identity. In Tallinn, the day of National Minorities has become an important moment of cultural life, showcasing traditional national minorities' arts and cultures and increasing knowledge on national minorities to the broader public. The Advisory Committee takes further note of positive cultural manifestations organised throughout the country, such as festivals, museums or support to theatres, funded by the Ministry of Culture or local authorities, allowing national minorities to preserve their cultural and linguistic identity, with project-based funding available to numerically smaller minorities. Sunday schools (which are non-religious education venues) are an important way for numerically smaller national minorities to continue to preserve their language via teaching, although the funding remains small, at 700 EUR per minority per year (through the baseline funding to the umbrella organisation of national minorities) and subject to annual renewal.

72. The Advisory Committee notes that base-line funding from the Integration foundation to national minority umbrella organisations is dispersed since 2015 through three-year framework agreements. However, interlocutors from national minority organisations have informed the Advisory Committee that funding provided by the Ministry of Culture, although increased, remains insufficient to enable the continuous and stable support of essential activities offered by the organisations. Indeed, some organisations reported to the Advisory Committee the difficulty of running cultural

³⁸ The Roma minority in Estonia accounts for around 649 persons (official estimate of the authorities (see state report, p.32) to over 2000 (which the Roma themselves report).

³⁹ For instance, the Estonian Human Rights Centre.

⁴⁰ <https://humanrights.ee/en/materials/inimoigused-eestis-2020/diskrimineerimise-keeld/>.

⁴¹ ECRI(2018)06 ECRI General Policy Recommendation no 2: Equality bodies to combat racism and intolerance at national level, adopted on 8 December 2017, Explanatory memorandum, para 95.

⁴² Additional information to the State report provided by the Estonian authorities on 09/07/2021.

activities, Sunday schools and to also assume their fixed costs under the only budget allocated by the Ministry of Culture to the umbrella organisations. Additionally, some minority representatives felt that they were not adequately involved in decision-making processes around cultural projects led by the authorities, and that such initiatives were “presented to” rather than “designed by” them.

73. The Advisory Committee observes that, in order to obtain sufficient funds to ensure the continuous running of their activities, national minority organisations have to apply for national or local grants through calls for applications on an annual basis. Some minorities reported that they may lack the capacity or time to adequately submit proposals. This includes the financing of Sunday schools which may be the only way some minority languages are taught in Estonia.

74. The Advisory Committee has been informed that the Setos (see Article 3) maintain good relations with the state authorities. To preserve the practice of Leelo, an ancient polyphonic singing tradition in the Seto language⁴³, which has been protected as Intangible Cultural Heritage by UNESCO since 2009, support to the practice of Seto is essential. Interlocutors of the Advisory Committee reported that a kindergarten class fully taught in Seto will open in September 2021 (see Article 12).

75. Interlocutors of the Advisory Committee reported that COVID-19 restrictions in force in Estonia made it harder for national minority organisations and organisations providing cultural services to non-Estonian speaking communities to maintain their activities. Some Sunday school leaders and national minority cultural organisations reported that they struggled to keep their structures afloat, the lack of sustainable funds, owing to their project-based nature, almost driving them to close down permanently. The Advisory Committee is, however, aware that cultural activities have resumed since spring 2021, being supported by state and local funds and allowing communities to come together again.

76. The Advisory Committee reiterates that national minorities, through their representatives, should be effectively involved in processes allocating public funding for their cultural activities, and designing projects aiming to maintain and develop national minority cultures, at local and national levels. Moreover, when specific institutions exist for channelling such support, persons belonging to national minorities should be adequately consulted and represented.⁴⁴

77. The Advisory Committee emphasises that persons belonging to national minorities must have access to all publicly available funding opportunities, in addition to the special support for the preservation and development of their identities and cultures. All such funds should be made available to persons belonging to national minorities in a sustainable manner, ensuring the continuation of the activities of national minority organisations on a foreseeable basis.

78. The Advisory Committee welcomes the number of initiatives taken by local authorities to familiarise broader

society with Estonian’s national minorities’ cultures and languages, through cultural events. Such initiatives, while praiseworthy in themselves, tend to limit the perception of national minorities, particularly numerically smaller national minorities, to their folkloristic aspects, without deeper reflection on their contribution as part of Estonian history and society. Attention should be paid to ensuring this deeper reflection in other cultural events.

79. Whilst welcoming the change to three-year framework agreements by the Integration Foundation, the Advisory Committee considers that the other annual procedures and project-based funding does not ensure regular funding and thus limits the possibilities for national minority organisations to develop more sustainable long-term projects in order for them to maintain and develop their culture – as per Article 5 of the Framework Convention. The Advisory Committee also praises Estonia for funding Sunday schools as a way to teach minority languages and protect and promote minority culture – especially of numerically small national minorities. Nevertheless, it considers that these especially vital services should be in receipt of sustainable, baseline funding to ensure their continuity over the years (see Article 14).

80. The Advisory Committee finds positive that a class, teaching materials and publications in Seto, as well as cultural activities such as festivals, are receiving state support, contributing to maintaining the practice of Seto language and culture.

81. The Advisory Committee also notes that Estonia has neither signed nor ratified the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, a treaty designed to protect traditionally used minority languages as part of Europe’s cultural heritage. It provides promotional measures for historical minority languages in different fields and could help the authorities to promote in a structured way the conditions necessary for persons belonging to relevant national minorities to develop their language and culture as essential elements of their identity.

82. The Advisory Committee calls on the authorities to ensure that all relevant groups are provided with the stable, sustainable and sufficient funds necessary to preserve, develop and promote their culture, to increase capacity building for national minorities in accessing funding application processes and to support cultural activities to increase knowledge of national minorities, and foster a positive attitude towards their participation in Estonian cultural life.

83. The Advisory Committee asks the Estonian authorities to consider ratifying the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages.

Cultural Autonomies (Article 5)

84. The Law on Cultural Autonomy of National Minorities of 1993 provides for the establishment of Cultural Autonomy Bodies to be elected by citizens who have registered as belonging to the relevant minority group. According to the State report, persons belonging to German, Russian, Swedish and Jewish national minorities, or to any national

⁴³ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), [Seto Leelo polyphonic singing tradition](#).

⁴⁴ See inter-alia, [Thematic Commentary No. 2](#), The effective participation of persons belonging to national minorities in cultural, social and economic life and in public affairs, adopted on 27 February 2008, paras. 15, 66.

minority with a population of over 3,000 persons, may establish cultural autonomy bodies of national minorities. Currently, the Ingrian-Finns (2007) and Swedes (2004) have set up a cultural autonomy body.

85. The Advisory Committee observes that a Russian minority organisation has applied to establish a Russian Cultural Autonomy since 2006. Estonian Courts have rejected this attempt on the grounds that the organisation applying was not representative of the Russian minority as a whole, as required by the law.⁴⁵

86. The Advisory Committee has been made aware by interlocutors that no attempts had been made since the previous monitoring cycle to establish a Russian Cultural Autonomy. The Advisory Committee heard no particular demand from Estonian Russian NGOs to obtain or establish cultural autonomy, nor did it hear any such demand from other national minority communities.

87. The Advisory Committee notes that the Cultural Autonomy Act has enabled Ingrian-Finns and Swedes to have received 114 300 EUR in 2019, 125 085 EUR in 2020 and 110 000 EUR in 2021⁴⁶ between them to develop cultural activities such as festivals, language courses and periodicals, despite the numerical size of the communities possibly not reaching the required threshold. Although cooperation with state authorities has been reported to be good, the Advisory Committee has been made aware that amendments to the Cultural Autonomy Act, aiming to better reflect the needs of national minorities, have been presented to the authorities by the two existing cultural autonomies, but no action has been taken on these proposed amendments.⁴⁷

88. The Advisory Committee has been made aware that to establish Cultural Autonomy according to the 1993 Law, some minorities may feel like they lack the capacities necessary to successfully manage such an undertaking, which may prevent some national minority groups from even considering achieving this status.

89. The Advisory Committee recalls that where states provide for cultural autonomy arrangements, the corresponding legislative provisions should clearly specify the competences of the autonomous bodies, the relations between them and relevant state institutions, the funding of the autonomy system. Moreover, the Advisory Committee considers that states should establish a dialogue with national minorities approaching them to set up a cultural autonomy, allowing for a transparent and fair treatment of the requests.⁴⁸

90. The Advisory Committee notes with interest that both Swedes and Ingrian-Finns Cultural Councils' benefit from

stable base-line funding⁴⁹ and that good cooperation with the authorities has been observed.

91. The Advisory Committee welcomes the authorities' flexibility regarding the strict enforcement of the numerical criteria to establish cultural autonomy, whilst it still considers that the scope of application of 1993's Law is limited and narrow, especially in terms of the groups covered. The Advisory Committee can only reiterate its position from the previous opinion that the benefits of the law remain inaccessible to most minorities (aside the Swedish and Ingrian-Finnish), either through numerical size or through being excluded *a priori* from the scope of the law – i.e. not named as one of the four entitled to a cultural autonomy. The Advisory Committee notes with interest the reported amendments suggested to the authorities by minorities themselves in the context of the ongoing discussion of the legislation and expects it to lead to a wider scope of application of this Law.

92. Finally, the Advisory Committee is concerned by the fact that some national minorities can feel put off from requesting the status of cultural autonomy due to the administrative requirements and proceedings of such a body and considers that capacity building measures for national minority organisations should be taken, in order to enable national minorities to avail themselves of the rights in the Cultural Autonomy Act.

93. The Advisory Committee invites the authorities to continue to foster good cooperation with the existing Cultural Councils, to facilitate the process for the establishment of new Cultural Councils by all the interested minority groups, and to proceed with the review of the existing legislation in order to cover all relevant groups, clarify the functions of the Councils and make the procedure by which one is established fast and transparent.

Integration Strategy and tolerance and intercultural dialogue (Article 6)

94. In continuation of previous plans implemented between 2000 and 2007 and between 2008 and 2013, relevant ministries and agencies have implemented "Integrating Estonia 2020", with the main objective to support the active participation of people with different language and cultural backgrounds in forming a cohesive society. The 2014-2020 plan was based on annual implementation plans revised every year and comprising funding, indicators, and responsible entities for each activity. The integration measures are also monitored through independent surveys, the last one being commissioned by the Ministry of Culture in 2017.⁵⁰

⁴⁵ See [Fourth Opinion](#) of the Advisory Committee on Estonia, para. 39.

⁴⁶ In 2019, the Finns received 52 000 EUR while the Swedes received 62 300 EUR. In 2020, 75 085 EUR for the Finns and 50 000 for the Swedes. In 2021, 60 000 EUR for the Finns and 50 000 for the Swedes. In 2020, the Finns received more for their Cultural Council elections, as the Swedes did in 2019 for their elections; Additional information to the State report provided by the Estonian authorities on 09/07/2021.

⁴⁷ Information received from Ingrian Finn Cultural Council, August 2021. Amendments included lowering the voting age, including electronic voting capabilities, extending the electoral cycle, and including the possibility for Ingrian Finns who had moved abroad to vote in Cultural Council elections.

⁴⁸ See ACFC Thematic Commentary 2, para 136.

⁴⁹ Additional information to the State report provided by the Estonian authorities on 09/07/2021.

⁵⁰ State report, para. 69-80.

95. The activities of “Integrating Estonia 2020” aim in particular at creating a common information space, raising general awareness about cultural diversity, as well as promoting values and attitudes of openness and mutual understanding in society and related values such as valuing cultural heritage, tolerance and equal treatment. Activities cover a variety of fields including media, youth, employment, sports, arts, and education.⁵¹

96. The authorities also report that a new integration development plan up to the year 2030, ‘Cohesive Estonia’, is awaiting adoption and final approval. The authorities report that its preparation involved cultural societies of national minorities and the wider public (see also Article 15).⁵²

97. The Advisory Committee notes the information received from the Eurobarometer attitudes survey, showing that tolerance of different ethnicities by wider society is increasing over the past years in Estonia.⁵³

98. The Advisory Committee is aware of the many efforts of the authorities to promote integration, including through boosting proficiency in the Estonian language through cultural projects, for instance through the Vaba Lava theatre company, with premises in Tallinn and Narva, and the Estonian Language Houses – one of which is in Narva – run by the Integration Foundation. Efforts have been made by the authorities to monitor their integration policies, as recommended by the Advisory Committee during the previous cycle. Whilst the Advisory Committee recognises the difficulties the authorities may face in effectively consulting with such a large community, it remains unclear as to the extent of the involvement of civil society and in particular the Russian minority in this process of monitoring and evaluation, in particular in view of the adoption of the next integration plan, ‘Cohesive Estonia’ (see also Article 15). The Estonian Union of National Minorities, bringing together over 20 numerically small national minority and cultural organisations, indicated to the Advisory Committee that it was consulted.

99. The Advisory Committee has heard reports from its interlocutors of tensions stirred up between different national minority communities, in some cases enflamed or instrumentalised by certain politicians for political gain. Often, this appears to have been the result of broader geopolitical tensions and concerns. In this context, the Advisory Committee recalls that politicians should strive to promote cohesion, tolerance and coexistence based on mutual respect and understanding. The Advisory Committee further recalls that all manifestations of intolerance and ethnically motivated hostility in political discourse should be condemned at the highest political level, and a sense of belonging to a shared country should be actively promoted by the authorities.

100. Interlocutors of the Advisory Committee belonging to the Russian minority stated that the integration plans of the past focussed on the needs of ethnic Estonians, rather than on the minorities themselves. They also claimed, along with other minority and human rights NGOs, not to have been

properly consulted during the drafting of the ‘Cohesive Estonia’ integration plan.⁵⁴

101. The Advisory Committee was also made aware that, according to some of its interlocutors, work on integration may be put at risk by certain aspects of national security policy, which may foment fear and resentment among persons belonging to national minorities, particularly among the Russian minority. Organisations and individuals reported that, being targeted under this policy could lead in practice to being inhibited from working for public services and cooperate internationally. The Advisory Committee was also informed by representatives of the Russian minority of a stated aim by the Estonian authorities to have Estonian as the only language of instruction in schools by 2035 (see Article 12 and 14), which also appeared to be having an impact on integration efforts.

102. The Advisory Committee recalls that it is essential that all segments of society, majorities and minorities alike, are addressed in order for integration strategies to effectively facilitate the formation of societal structures where diversity and respect for difference are acknowledged and encouraged as normal, through recognition, mutual accommodation and active engagement on all sides. It recalls furthermore that programmes promoting respect and intercultural understanding and societal integration need to be developed as an all-encompassing process, involving minorities and majorities alike and including all relevant spheres of life, based on the recognition of minority communities as an equal and integrated part of society. The task of integration must not be left to national minority communities alone.

103. With regard to the integration strategy, the Advisory Committee considers it necessary to ensure the effective participation through active consultation of the persons concerned, especially persons belonging to national minorities targeted by the integration strategy. This is especially important given the long time period over which the Strategy will be implemented, as it should continue to reflect and respond to evolving concerns of minorities. The Advisory Committee welcomes the monitoring of the integration policies, but is concerned that not all stakeholders may have been consulted in this process.

104. The Advisory Committee expresses its concern about intolerance expressed between different national minority communities. Furthermore, it is concerned at the perception among the Russian minority of national security policy of the state authorities which may have the effect of further alienating this minority from Estonian-majority society and may even have an inhibiting effect on the number of persons taking up Estonian citizenship (see Article 3). The Advisory Committee notes with concern the aim to have all-Estonian education by 2035, which appears to have created further distrust among the Russian minority and contributed to further polarising the situation.

105. The Advisory Committee asks the authorities to ensure that the Integration strategy is adapted to meet evolving concerns and priorities of persons belonging to national

⁵¹ State report, para. 81-106.

⁵² State report, para. 73.

⁵³ Estonian Human Rights Centre, 2020 Report, <https://humanrights.ee/en/materials/inimoigused-estis-2020/diskrimineerimise-keeld/>.

⁵⁴ https://www.siseministerium.ee/sites/default/files/elfinder/article_files/ulevaade_arengukava_koostamisest_j.pdf.

minorities, and that initiatives under the Strategy will be carried out in a manner that will promote and protect minority cultures as an essential part of Estonian society.

106. The Advisory Committee calls on the authorities to intensify efforts to promote tolerance and intercultural dialogue going beyond the promotion of proficiency in the Estonian language, for instance by fostering multilingualism and knowledge of national minority cultures, mutual respect and understanding among all persons living in Estonia.

The media and minorities (Article 9)

107. The media offer has considerably evolved in Estonia over the current monitoring period. There are now 19 TV channels registered, including 15 nation-wide out of which 4 are broadcasting in Russian. The Estonian Public Broadcasting - *Eesti Rahvusringhääling* (ERR), a publicly funded radio and television organisation, has launched a TV channel in Russian, ETV+, in 2015 and counts a regional studio in Narva since 2016. While providing 20 hours of original programme in Russian every week, its popularity remains limited. Foreign channels are also accessible via cable or digital TV.⁵⁵

108. There are 36 radio channels registered, including 5 public ones. 8 Russian language radio channels have an activity licence, of which one is public (Radio 4). Radio 4 has regular programmes in Ukrainian and Belarusian languages, monthly programmes in Azerbaijani, Tatar and Chuvash, and three times a month a programme presenting Jewish culture. In 2017, all radio stations taken together totalled more than 27% of their programmes in Russian language, which is in constant increase (23% in 2015).⁵⁶

109. The Internet has become the most important source of information for the younger audience. In 2020, 90% of the population used the internet, 88% used it once a week, including on a daily basis.⁵⁷ Numerous information portals are available in Russian language. ERR has a portal in Estonian, English and Russian, including web streaming and video on demand for programmes in Russian language.⁵⁸

110. Periodicals, magazines and newspapers are published in Russian language, at national, regional and local levels. Municipal newspapers and local governments' gazettes are also published in Russian,⁵⁹ although there is no longer a national daily newspaper in the Russian language.

111. Media supervision is exercised through media organisations, on the basis of the Code of Ethics for the Estonian Press. Persons wishing to complain of having been

unfoundedly portrayed in a negative manner may introduce complaints before the Estonian Press Council (*Pressinõukogu*, a self-regulation body established in 2002 by the Estonian Newspaper Association) or the Council of Public Word (*Avaliku Sõna Nõukogu*, offering a forum for public discussion of the media established in 1991), who have similar competences.⁶⁰ The board of the supervision mechanisms are composed, in the case of the Estonian Press Council, of members appointed by the Association of Estonian Media Companies, *Eesti Meediaettevõtete Liit*,⁶¹ and of delegated representatives of its member organisations, for the board of the Council of the Public Word.⁶² The public broadcaster has an ethics adviser monitoring the conformity of the operations with professional ethics and good practices of journalism.⁶³

112. The Advisory Committee observes that the Estonian Public Broadcasting Development Plan 2015-2018 has led to an increased development of Estonian Russian-language media such as Radio 4 and ETV+. However, representatives from other national minorities reported that, despite the original aims of the channels to offer content for other national minorities, besides the Russian, the content was often not suited to their needs, or did not reflect their concerns and interests. They also stated that there was little programming informing wider society about the historical and actual presence of national minorities in Estonia.

113. The obligation to translate into Estonian for public broadcasts has not been made more flexible. The failure to follow this obligation may still result in a large fine (3 200 EUR).⁶⁴

114. Interlocutors of the Advisory Committee raised the importance of local newspapers, primarily, of state funding to maintain local non-Estonian language media afloat. Worries were also expressed regarding the continuity of Russian-speaking journalism in Estonia due to retiring journalists not being replaced, and the challenging financial situation of many local news outlets limiting opportunities for apprenticeship/training of young journalists.

115. The Advisory Committee has been informed that the COVID-19 pandemic prompted a three-fold increase in viewership for ETV+, with persons belonging to the Russian minority relying on Estonian based media for key information rather than channels broadcast from the Russian Federation.⁶⁵

116. The Advisory Committee observes that the media space remains divided along linguistic lines, with differences also in cultural and political perspectives. The Advisory

⁵⁵ State report, para. 129-134.

⁵⁶ State report, para. 135-138.

⁵⁷ Eurostat, [Internet use](#) and [Frequency of internet access \(including every day\)](#).

⁵⁸ State report, para. 141-144 and 146.

⁵⁹ State report, 143-145.

⁶⁰ State report, para. 147-150.

⁶¹ "The Estonian Newspaper Association (ENA) shall invite representatives from both the press and outside it to the PC", [Statute](#) of the Press Council, Art. 5.1, accessed 17/09/2021.

⁶² Information available on the [website](#) of the Council of the Public Word, accessed on 17/09/2021.

⁶³ State report, para. 151.

⁶⁴ Language Act of 23 February 2011, § 18 as amended on 1 July 2013. See also ACFC's Fourth Opinion on Estonia, para. 60.

⁶⁵ S. Kondan, M. Sahajal, D. Trimbach, [Identifying the Needs of Estonian's Russian-speaking Minority: COVID-19, Data disaggregation, and social determinants of Health](#), Foreign Policy Research Institute, Baltic Bulletin, May 2021.

Committee's interlocutors underlined that this was linked to an often narrow perception among media organisations of the habits, interests and tastes of national minorities in terms of informational and entertainment or cultural media consumption. For example, a Russian minority representative reported that there was an attitude among media management that Russians were only interested in light entertainment, which resulted in a restriction of the content of the media offer to the minority. However, it was also reported by media organisations and the state report,⁶⁶ that relatively few ethnic Russians engage with the Estonian public broadcaster, with many persons belonging to the Russian minority choosing to get their news and media from abroad.

117. Interlocutors of the Advisory Committee reported that digital media consumption increased since 2017, for both Estonian and non-Estonian language media. Social media also became an informational source for youth, spreading to older generations, with media offering content through these platforms in order to reach a broader public, in Estonian and other languages. The Committee observes that even in the digital social media environment, a divide persists, notably in the choice of social media platforms used between the majority population and national minorities. The Advisory Committee has observed some good practice to counter this divide, aiming to bring together youth from the majority and minorities through digital social media and a print magazine. *Narvamus*⁶⁷ has a presence over several social media channels, aimed at all youth in several languages, covering issues of relevance to youth in general. The Advisory Committee notes that this is voluntary and created and led by young people themselves.

118. The Advisory Committee's interlocutors reported cases of stereotypical portrayal of national minorities in programmes broadcast by state-funded and private media.⁶⁸ The Chancellor of Justice received one complaint about discriminatory rhetoric concerning Ukrainians in the media, but owing to its lack of mandate to issue a formal decision in this area, could only condemn the rhetoric and explained to the complainant their rights. Minorities however report that little has been done concretely to address examples of xenophobia and stereotyping in the media. As a result, the Advisory Committee's interlocutors pointed out that this could discourage persons belonging to national minorities from using media complaints mechanisms or anti-discrimination remedies (see Article 4). The Advisory Committee has been informed in this regard that the press supervision mechanisms mentioned above comprise no persons belonging to national minorities on their board.

119. The Advisory Committee recalls that in order for public service broadcasting to reflect the cultural and linguistic

diversity existing within society, it must guarantee an adequate presence of persons belonging to national minorities and their languages, including numerically smaller national minorities. This entails granting support to the media and programmes for, by, and about national minorities in minority and majority languages, as well as in bi- or multi-lingual formats.⁶⁹

120. The Advisory Committee reaffirms the role of the media as a tool for the promotion of intercultural understanding and a sense of solidarity in society⁷⁰ and recalls that "it is important for the formation of an open and pluralist media environment that issues of concern to minority communities generally are given weight in the broader public media debate and that persons belonging to such minorities are portrayed as integral members of society".⁷¹ The possibility to receive information in a minority language is a precondition for equal and effective participation in public, economic, social and cultural life. In addition, it encourages self-identification of persons belonging to national minorities, including in censuses. In order to reach out to the national minority as a whole, media in minority languages should cover content from various genres, including local and national news, entertainment and culture, and address different generations. The availability of print, broadcast and electronic media in minority languages has very specific emblematic value for national minorities, in particular for those which are numerically smaller. Through them, persons belonging to national minorities not only gain access to information, but minority language media also raise the visibility and prestige of the minority language as an active tool of communication.⁷² The Advisory Committee lastly wishes to reaffirm that "the division of media audiences according to linguistic background may enhance the formation of separated and mutually exclusive public spheres".⁷³

121. It further reiterates that "Member states should, while respecting the principle of editorial independence, encourage the media to supply the public with a diversity of media content capable of promoting a critical debate and a wider democratic participation of persons belonging to all communities".⁷⁴ The Advisory Committee also reiterates that the media itself has a responsibility – including through self-regulatory bodies - to promote tolerance, safeguard against xenophobia and intolerance in the media and to avoid stereotyping and negative portrayal of persons belonging to different ethnic and religious groups in the media. It reaffirms too that "the more minority representatives take part in shaping their image in the public media, the more the negative effects of [...] stereotyping can be reduced".⁷⁵

122. The Advisory Committee welcomes that there is state broadcasting in the Russian language, and also a few

⁶⁶ State report, para. 134.

⁶⁷ www.narvamus.ee, with VitaTiim, www.vitatiim.ee.

⁶⁸ See for example: ERR Russian online: '[MuPo complains of big problems from migrant workers from Ukraine](#)'; also: '[Like mother, like son: another Roma goes to jail for drug dealing](#)'. Other examples are available in the [Roma civil society monitoring report](#).

⁶⁹ ACFC [Thematic Commentary No. 3](#), The Language Rights of Persons Belonging to National Minorities under the Framework Convention, adopted on 24 May 2012, ACFC/44DOC(2012)001 rev para. 41. Also available in [Estonian](#).

⁷⁰ Thematic Commentary No. 4, para. 63.

⁷¹ Thematic Commentary No. 4, para. 63.

⁷² See also Thematic Commentary No. 3, paras. 40-41; Thematic Commentary No. 4, para. 69.

⁷³ Thematic Commentary No. 4, para. 70.

⁷⁴ Recommendation CM/Rec(2007)2 of the Committee of Ministers on media pluralism and diversity of media content, para. II.2.1.

⁷⁵ Thematic Commentary No.4, para. 70.

broadcasts in other minority languages, but considers that more could be done in this regard to increase minority language broadcasting and thereby increase awareness of national minorities among the general population. Further consultation between media organisations and national minorities in this regard could prove useful, especially in determining the level of demand for programming in minority languages. In this respect, the Advisory Committee is also concerned about the possibilities offered by state-funded media to raise awareness about national minorities among the broader public, while at the same time offering national minorities the possibility to be provided with content tailored to their informational, cultural and linguistic needs.

123. While reaffirming its attachment to the principle of freedom of expression and independence of media, the Advisory Committee encourages the authorities to increase the presence of national minorities in Press Councils and other media complaint and monitoring mechanisms, and to organise consultations with national minorities on cases related to ethnic, linguistic or cultural discrimination, with a view of both developing trust in those instances and the aim to facilitate integration of national minorities in society.

124. The Committee reiterates its concerns expressed in the previous opinion⁷⁶ about the obligation to translate and considers that this rigid approach may not be proportionate to the legitimate aim of promoting the Estonian language and making broadcasts available to a wide audience. It asks the authorities to adopt a more flexible approach to this issue.

125. The Advisory Committee calls on the authorities, whilst respecting editorial independence, to promote increased high-quality broadcasting in minority languages as well as about national minority cultures and their current concerns in the publicly funded media. This should be developed with the effective participation of persons belonging to national minorities and aim to raise general awareness about these aspects and counteract negative stereotypes.

126. The Advisory Committee encourages the authorities to cooperate with the Press Council and the Council for the Public Word, whilst preserving their independence, to ensure the presence of national minorities within their boards.

Use of minority languages in contacts with local administrative authorities (Article 10)

127. The legal framework remains unchanged since the previous monitoring period. Article 6 of the Constitution prescribes that the official language of Estonia is Estonian. The Language Act⁷⁷ further details the language policy and provides the framework for the use of “foreign languages” in oral and written form, in particular in contacts with the administration (Chapter 3, para. 8 to 15).

128. According to the Language Act,⁷⁸ only in local governments where at least fifty percent of the permanent residents belong to a national minority, does everyone have

the right to approach local state agencies and the local authorities (hereafter: authorities) in the language of the national minority and receive from the authorities a reply in that language and in Estonian (§9.1). If this numerical threshold is not met and a (written) application, request or other document is submitted to an authority in a “foreign language”, the authority has the right to request a translation into Estonian (§12.1). If no translation is submitted, the authority may return the document or have it translated with the consent of and at the expense of the person having submitted it (§12.2). Should that person wish to get the reply in a “foreign language”, the reply may be translated into that language at their expense. On the agreement between that person and the authority, the reply may be given in a “foreign language” understood by both parties (§12.3). In oral communication with authorities, a “foreign language” may be used by agreement of the parties. The authorities report that this is often the case. If no agreement is reached, communication shall take place through an interpreter and the costs shall be borne by the person who is not proficient in Estonian (§12.4). Moreover, they report that most state agencies and local government authorities have websites in Russian, besides Estonian, and that public services are “offered” in these languages “everywhere in Estonia”.⁷⁹

129. As previously, representatives of the Russian minority have confirmed that, in practice, in municipalities where the majority of the residents belong to the Russian minority it is possible to use Russian in contacts with the local authorities. The national authorities have translated the census form into Russian and published information concerning the Covid-19 pandemic in this language.

130. The Advisory Committee reiterates that Article 10.2 of the Framework Convention provides the conditions under which minority languages may be used in relations with administrative authorities. This use is without detriment to the official language(s). While states enjoy a margin of discretion with regard to the identification of areas where minorities live “in substantial numbers”, they have a duty to provide clear criteria as to what constitutes “sufficient numbers” or a “sufficiently large number”. The possibility of using minority languages in dealings with the administration in all areas where the criteria established by Article 10.2 of the Framework Convention are met may not be left solely to the discretion of the local authorities concerned.⁸⁰

131. The Advisory Committee reiterates that numerical thresholds must not constitute an undue obstacle to the use of certain minority languages in areas inhabited by persons belonging to national minorities either traditionally or in substantial numbers. The requirement that at least half of the permanent residents of a local government belong to a national minority in order to permit use of the minority language in contacts with authorities is not compatible with the Framework Convention as it completely excludes numerically smaller national minorities which do not inhabit certain areas in substantial numbers.⁸¹

⁷⁶ See Fourth Opinion of the Advisory Committee on Estonia, para. 60.

⁷⁷ [Language Act](#), Chapter 3, para. 8-15.

⁷⁸ Passed on 23 February 2011, RT I, 18 March 2011, 1, entry into force 1 July 2011.

⁷⁹ State report, para. 154.

⁸⁰ Thematic Commentary No.3, para. 55.

⁸¹ See Thematic Commentary No. 3, paras. 57, 65-66.

132. The Advisory Committee reiterates also that, provided persons belonging to national minorities inhabit traditionally, or in substantial numbers, the areas concerned, the rights of Article 10.2 apply if there is a request by these persons, and that such a request corresponds to a real need. States should carefully study the demand and assess existing needs in the geographical areas where there is substantial or traditional settlement of persons belonging to minorities, taking also into account the specific local situation.

133. In light of the above, the Advisory Committee considers that the threshold contained in §9.1 of the Language Act is not compatible with Art. 10.2 of the Framework Convention. It notably does not take into account that the demographic situation of the national minorities has traditionally been very different and that at present only persons belonging to the Russian minority inhabit certain areas “in substantial numbers”. However, Art. 10.2 applies also in areas inhabited “in substantial numbers” by persons belonging to national minorities or “traditionally”. Furthermore, it considers that the question of “need” should be carefully studied by the authorities, and steps should be taken to ensure that the ongoing functionality of minority languages is ensured in this context. It is troubled by some of the measures pursued by the authorities to strengthen the position of the official language. It is worried by the impact this situation has on the general climate of tolerance, and considers that this could rather hinder integration efforts, as opposed to advancing them. Further incentives should be pursued in order to, in consultation with persons belonging to national minorities targeted by these policies.

134. Concerning the obligations to provide and finance translation or interpretation and to reach an “agreement of the parties”, the Advisory Committee considers that they discourage the use of the minority language. Financing sworn translators or interpretation creates a high financial burden, and the need to “negotiate” the use of a minority language may be uncomfortable for the person concerned. These requirements appear disproportionate in light of the linguistic situation in Estonia. The fact that some local governments issue their gazettes in Russian⁸² or use minority languages on their official websites as well as the availability of translation applications suggests that processing written requests in these languages does not cause major difficulty. In addition, the authorities could take organisational measures (recruitment and internal mobility of officials speaking such languages, language courses) to create a pool of officials who would be, when needed, able to handle also oral requests in such languages.

135. The Advisory Committee reiterates its call on the authorities to ensure that persons belonging to national minorities, in areas where they reside traditionally or in substantial numbers, have the right and effective possibility to use their minority languages in relations with the local authorities. It again calls on the authorities to lower the 50 percent threshold contained in the Language Act.

The Language Board (Article 10)

136. Until August 2020, the Language Inspectorate⁸³, in accordance with Chapter 6 of the Language Act, supervised compliance with the language requirements, ensuring that the linguistic rights of consumers to receive information are respected and verifying the quality of language classes for adults. The authorities indicate that persons found as not complying with the language proficiency requirements are given time to remedy the situation and that penalty payments are applied in exceptional cases – where an individual repeatedly refuses to follow the measures directed to improve their Estonian language proficiency. According to the state report, in 2018, 8.4% of cases led to a penalty payment (195 out of 2323 persons inspected), with an average fine of 68 EUR. The maximum penalty payment is 640 EUR, the penalty being determined taking into account, *inter alia*, the will of the person to learn Estonian, the availability of language classes and the level of income. A lower rate is applied, or no penalty is imposed, if a person attended language classes, even if they fail at the language exam.⁸⁴ The authorities have informed the Advisory Committee that in August 2020 the Language Board was created, which joined together the tasks of the former Language Inspectorate with the tasks of other institutions in language policy. It coordinates instruction of the Estonian language for adults, cooperates with employers, informs the public on opportunities for language learning, and advises them on which courses to take. The authorities state that this Board’s focus is on increasing the quality of learning Estonian as a second language and supporting learners. However, according to the Language Act, the Language Board can still impose fines of up to 640 EUR for non-compliance with its directives and precepts, although this no longer falls within criminal law.⁸⁵

137. Representatives of local authorities and schools reported to the Advisory Committee that the role of the Language Inspectorate, now Board, was restricting possibilities to improve the offer of education in the Russian language. It also heard from minority representatives how the approach of this body contributes to an atmosphere of distrust between minorities and the authorities.

138. The Advisory Committee emphasises that states may adopt laws and policies aimed at strengthening and protecting the official language. This legitimate aim, however, must be pursued in a manner that is in line with the rights contained in the Framework Convention, and its general spirit of encouraging tolerance and mutual understanding within society. Measures aimed at promoting official languages must be implemented in a way that respects the identity and the linguistic needs of persons belonging to national minorities. Promotional and incentive-based measures such as promoting multilingualism are an effective approach towards strengthening the knowledge

⁸² State Report, para. 145.

⁸³ See Fourth Opinion of the Advisory Committee on Estonia, para. 66

⁸⁴ State report, para. 155-157.

⁸⁵ See para. 156-7 of State report, see section 32 of Language Act: <https://www.riigiteataja.ee/en/eli/ee/521072020005/consolide/current> [accessed 1 February 2022]

and use of the official language by all members of the population.⁸⁶

139. The Advisory Committee remains concerned about the powers the Board has to fine those not in compliance with its directives, and emphasises again that coercion is less effective at building language competence than incentive-based measures. However, the Advisory Committee welcomes that the approach⁸⁷ taken by the Language Inspectorate has been reviewed with a view to emphasising positive incentives. Against this background, trust-building measures targeting national minorities in particular may be necessary to ensure the Language Board plays a role in fostering a climate of tolerance where minority languages and cultures are seen as valuable elements of society.

140. The Advisory Committee encourages the authorities to review the approach taken by the Language Board, including its powers to impose fines, and promote the positive emphasis of the Language Board in supporting persons belonging to national minorities to learn Estonian, and to consider further positive incentives, such as promoting multilingualism, and trust-building measures in this respect.

Recording of patronyms and use of minority languages in official documents (Article 11)

141. The legal framework remains unchanged since the previous monitoring period. The matter is governed by the Names Act (2005), which states that a personal name is composed of a given name and a surname. The authorities indicate that patronyms have not been used historically as part of personal names in Estonia and are therefore not an official part of a person's name.⁸⁸

142. The authorities indicate however that the use of patronyms is not prohibited as such. Their use in private relationship is not governed or prohibited by law, and persons are free to use patronyms in their contacts with the authorities. Persons may also apply to the authorities to use their patronym in official documents as an additional name.

143. Representatives of the Russian minority however indicated that there continued to be barriers to using patronyms in passports and official documents.

144. The Advisory Committee recalls that the right to use one's personal name in a minority language and have it officially recognised is a core linguistic right, linked closely to personal identity and dignity, and authorities should make sure that individuals are free from obstacles or pressure on

the use and recognition of their names in their own language.

145. The Advisory Committee reiterates its call on the authorities to seek appropriate legislative solutions for the registration of patronyms in official personal documents, in consultation with persons belonging to national minorities.

Display of traditional local names, street names and other topographical indications (Article 11)

146. The legislative framework remains unchanged since the previous monitoring period. The matter is governed by the provisions of the Place Names Act. The authorities underline in their reporting that the purpose of this Act is to ensure the harmonised use of Estonian place names and the protection of place names of cultural and historical value. They highlight in particular Estonian-Swedish place names in Vormsi and Ruhnu, and in Noarootsi and the coastal areas in North-western Estonia, as well as place names in Russian in Võru County⁸⁹ and alongside Lake Peipus. The authorities further indicate that in the cities of North and Northeast Estonia such as Sillamäe, Kohtla-Järve and Narva, there are no cultural and historic Russian names of symbolic value and the establishment and use of place names in Russian language would be misleading. The state report indicates also that local governments are competent to establish place names in their territories and that if a local government has not used historic place names as authorised by law, the State cannot intervene in the competence of local authorities.⁹⁰ However, the Place Names Act also lists the government and ministers as 'names authorities [...] competen[t] to establish place names'.⁹¹

147. According to the Place Names Act⁹², a place name may be adopted in a language other than Estonian if this is "historically or culturally justified" and "tak[ing] into account" the language of the residents of the area as of 27 September 1939 (§9.3).⁹³ The Act excludes the adoption of a name in a minority language for an administrative or address unit.

148. Persons belonging to national minorities did not indicate to the Advisory Committee that place names in minority languages are a priority for them. During the country visit, the Advisory Committee itself witnessed the complete absence of public signage in Russian in areas inhabited by a majority of Russians. It did however take note of commercial signage in Russian, reflecting the local demographics.

149. Additionally, the Advisory Committee has been informed that place names in the Setomaa municipality are

⁸⁶ Thematic Commentary No.3, para. 53.

⁸⁷ See Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR), [Concluding Observations](#) of the third periodic review of Estonia's human rights situation, para 50 (a), March 2019. See also Fourth Opinion of the Advisory Committee on Estonia, para. 66.

⁸⁸ [Names Act](#), Passed on 15 December 2004, RT I 2005, 1, 1, entry into force on 31 March 2005, para. 3.

⁸⁹ For example, Beresje village in Setomaa Municipality, Võru County.

⁹⁰ State report, para. 158-160.

⁹¹ Place Names Act, sections 5.1 and 6. See also the Local Government Organisation Act (1993, as amended 2017) and Territory of Estonia Administrative Division Act (1995).

⁹² Passed on 5 November 2003, RT I 2003, 73, 485.

⁹³ Based on the results of the Estonian census of 1934, see Riigi statistika keskbüroo, Rahvastiku koostis ja korterilud, 1. III 1934 rahvaloenduse andmed, Vihk II, Tallinn 1935, pp. 104-109.

displayed in Seto, with the possibility to do so by bringing forward such a demand to the rural municipality council.

150. Nevertheless, in view of the authorities' integration efforts (see Article 6) the Advisory Committee recalls the importance of promoting multilingualism via signs and inscriptions as a means of conveying the message that a given territory is shared in harmony by various population groups.⁹⁴ The Advisory Committee further recalls that Article 11.3 applies where there is 'sufficient demand' for such topographic indications.

151. The Advisory Committee welcomes that the Place Names Act provides for the possibility to officially adopt place names in minority languages and that such names shall be used in topographical indications. The registration of place names in minority languages, including non-official ones, in the Place Name Register helps to raise awareness of this heritage and facilitates their adoption as principal or alternative names and signposting. The Advisory Committee is pleased that the names of many villages are signposted also in Swedish, also bearing in mind the small size of the Swedish minority. Two names in German, but none in Russian or other minority languages have been adopted.

152. With regard to the conditions set out in §9.3 and §11.3 of the Place Names Act, the adoption of a *traditional* place name in a minority language should generally be regarded as "historically justified". As place names belong to the language and cultural heritage of national minorities which Estonia has undertaken to preserve pursuant to Art. 5.1 of the Framework Convention, the adoption of such a name in a minority language should also be considered "culturally justified". Moreover, the adoption of a place name in a minority language also aims to "preserve" the name, as required by §11.3 of the Act.

153. The Advisory Committee considers that the current conditions for recognising place names in minority languages are too narrow given the historical and cultural diversity of Estonia, especially given the exclusion of place names being changed in administrative or address units. In this regard, place names in minority languages provide an opportunity to advance integration by showcasing the presence of national minorities in the country, and in this regard, it notes with satisfaction the possibilities for the Setos, residing in the Setomaa municipality. Opportunities for the display of signs should therefore be expanded in light of Estonia's integration efforts. Moreover, it appears no efforts have been made to assess levels of demand for topographic indications. The Advisory Committee considers that any attempt to assess the level of demand needs to be pre-empted by public consultation and awareness-raising of the rights contained within the Framework Convention, and specifically Article 11. This is especially the case given the complexity of the Place Names Act, and the low awareness

of this right contained in the Framework Convention among persons belonging to national minorities met by the Advisory Committee during its visit to Estonia. Active consultations followed by an assessment of the demand for bi- or multi-lingual topographic indications are therefore needed.

154. The Advisory Committee reiterates its call on the authorities to expand the opportunities to introduce minority language place names, and allow topographical indications in minority languages, alongside Estonian. The authorities should also take steps to raise awareness of this right among persons belonging to national minorities and assess the level of demand for such indications on this basis.

Access to education and intercultural dialogue, teacher training (Article 12)

155. The legal framework remains unchanged since the previous monitoring period. Access to education is governed by legislation related to each level of education.⁹⁵ Despite the changes reported in the previous opinion,⁹⁶ including the transition to 60% of teaching being given in Estonian, the education system remains *de facto* divided between Estonian-language and Russian-language schools.⁹⁷

156. Immersion schools at basic level, have Estonian as a language of instruction, and primarily aim at Russian-speaking children in order to boost their Estonian-language fluency and promote integration, according to the authorities.⁹⁸ The aim is for graduates of these primary schools to go on to attend 'integrated' secondary schools, where the majority of classes are in Estonian, with just some subjects taught in Russian (e.g. Russian literature). There is an increased interest in this programme and the number of pupils enrolled has more than doubled in a decade.

157. The authorities reported that measures are taken in the framework of the education system to increase levels of intercultural dialogue between different groups. For instance, a new integrated Estonian-Russian Gymnasium (secondary) school has opened in Kohtla-Järve, and projects relating to the integration of new migrants have been carried out by the University of Tartu.⁹⁹ Additionally, cultural projects also target students of minority and majority background in order to promote intercultural dialogue (see Article 5).

158. Interlocutors of the Advisory Committee reported an overall shortage of teachers, although this was particularly felt among the management of "Russian-language schools". They stated that short-term remedies for this such as recruiting retired teachers or students as teachers were not sustainable and may even lead to further problems concerning the language requirements of public-service employees, whereby teachers must be proficient in Estonian even if they only teach in Russian at Russian-language

⁹⁴ Thematic Commentary n° 3, para. 67.

⁹⁵ Education Act, [Preschool Child Care Institutions Act](#), [Basic Schools and Upper Secondary Schools Act](#), Institutions of Professional Higher Education Act, and Acts governing universities. See, state report, para. 169.

⁹⁶ See Fourth Opinion on Estonia, para. 77-92.

⁹⁷ 'Russian-language schools' is the term used by the authorities, for instance in the state report, to describe schools with Russian as a language of instruction.

⁹⁸ See OECD [Reviews of School Resources](#): Estonia 2016:, p.55.

⁹⁹ State report, para. 168.

schools. This risked being fined or sanctioned by the Language Inspectorate (see Article 10),¹⁰⁰ meaning that the numbers of any retired teachers or students willing to be employed as teachers is very low too. Additionally, regarding immersion schools and the pathway to integrated schooling at upper secondary level, the Advisory Committee has heard dissatisfaction at the levels of Russian teaching offered, restricted only to Russian literature, and that high numbers of students with Russian as a first language drop out of these integrated schools.

159. The Advisory Committee has heard that the education system, in dividing into Russian-language schools and Estonian-language schools, is not conducive to promoting intercultural dialogue, with Russian youth learning Russian, and ethnic Estonian youth learning Estonian. Indeed, it is reported that the education system may enforce and entrench dividing lines between communities, risking the creation of parallel societies. This is also relevant for the Roma and other Russian-speaking minorities who attend the Russian-language schools.¹⁰¹ Other minority representatives believe that, due to the low presence of minorities in school curricula, the general population in Estonia knows very little about national minorities.

160. While it has generally pointed to the substantial research that suggests noticeable benefits of first language learning for the learning of other languages, including official languages, and has expressed its general preference for multilingual approaches in education, the Advisory Committee reiterates its standpoint that the exercise of pressure by state authorities may have an unfavourable effect on the promotion of integration, and that the relevant strategies meant to promote skills in the official language must not rely disproportionately on efforts to be made by persons belonging to national minorities. Furthermore, where states have introduced measures to promote the official language, it is particularly important that these go hand in hand with measures to protect, develop and use national minority languages (see Article 14).

161. The Advisory Committee recalls that adequate information about the composition of society, including national and other minorities, must form part of the public curriculum and of textbooks and education materials used in all schools throughout the states parties, not only to promote intercultural understanding and respect among all students, but also to raise the prestige and self-awareness of persons belonging to numerically smaller or socially or economically disadvantaged groups. It recalls further that the possibility for majority language speakers to learn minority languages can enhance intercultural understanding and cooperation.

162. The Advisory Committee considers that the strict state language requirements for teachers may be hampering the solution of the problem of the shortage of minority language teachers in Estonia. It is concerned by this shortage which seems to be affecting Russian-speaking students in

particular, and considers that a time-limited flexibility for the recruitment of teachers in relation to the strict language requirements might help to solve the problem in the short term, whilst still working on more long-term solutions which take into account the state language requirements fully – i.e. provide Estonian language skills for future trainee teachers. For instance, this could mean allowing retired teachers with a more limited knowledge of Estonian to teach nonetheless in Russian-language schools without the risk of being fined or sanctioned, to ensure that Russian-speaking students receive education in Russian.

163. Whilst acknowledging that persons belonging to the Russian-speaking minorities may choose which school to send their children, the Advisory Committee finds that more targeted efforts are needed to meaningfully reinforce integration via the education system. The dual school system risks creating parallel societies, even while minority students learn the state language. Further efforts to enable minority students to learn the state language outside of the classroom through extracurricular activities could be of use here, and the Advisory Committee praises measures already taken in this regard. Reports of Russian minority students dropping out of education due to insufficient knowledge of Estonian are troubling in this regard; further, the restricted scope of subjects taught in Russian at ‘integrated’ secondary schools does not appear sufficient, nor reflective of the full richness of Russian culture which could be taught. Other classes in advanced Russian language or broader Russian culture – even if elective – could help remedy this situation and provide Russian minority students and Estonian students alike with a richer curriculum and a broader understanding of Russian culture.

164. The Advisory Committee considers that more should be done to teach all children at all schools about the historical place of minorities in Estonian society, and the value they bring to Estonian society. In this connection, the Advisory Committee reminds the Estonian authorities of Recommendation CM/Rec(2020)2 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on the inclusion of the history of Roma and/or Travellers in school curricula and teaching materials of July 2020.¹⁰² More generally, the Advisory Committee is troubled here too that the emphasis in state integration policy is placed firmly on the minorities themselves, while the majority is not required to learn about minority culture or languages, nor encouraged to learn those languages. The Advisory Committee refers here to its findings under Article 6.

165. The Advisory Committee calls on the authorities to apply a flexible approach for a limited time regarding the state language requirements for the recruitment of teachers, so that schools are able to remedy the shortage of minority language teachers, whilst more long-term solutions are developed.

¹⁰⁰ See OECD Reviews of School Resources: [Estonia 2016](#).

¹⁰¹ The Advisory Committee was informed that other national minorities, for instance Belarussians or Ukrainians, may choose to send their children also to Russian-language schools as Russian may be their first language. The Advisory Committee will therefore refer to ‘Russian-speaking minorities’ for ease of reference in this context.

¹⁰² Adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 1 July 2020 at the 1380th meeting of the Ministers’ Deputies, available [here](#).

166. The Advisory Committee calls on the authorities to provide more information about the positive contribution of persons belonging to national minorities to Estonian society and culture, as well as the history, culture, language, traditions and religion of national minorities in school curricula at all levels, and to more effectively pursue tolerance and intercultural dialogue through formal and non-formal education, including by promoting interaction between pupils from different linguistic backgrounds.

Access of Roma to education (Article 12)

167. The authorities report that educational attainment of Roma remains an issue in Estonia, with 8.2% with only basic or primary education, 35% achieving secondary education, 15% vocational and 2% higher education.¹⁰³

168. Two Roma mediators have been employed in the cities of Valga, where many Estonian Roma live. These mediators are not tasked exclusively with ensuring access to education for Roma children, but have a broader role in the community. They are hired and employed by the Ministry of Education and Research and the Integration Foundation, a state agency supported by the Ministry of Culture. It was reported to the Advisory Committee that there was a lack of clarity over the appointment of these mediators among the Roma community.

169. The Advisory Committee was alerted by civil society organisations to so-called “simplified programmes” being run in schools in Estonia.¹⁰⁴ These are school curricula modified for children with special educational needs and include only a limited (two) number of subjects, but students remain in the same school. The authorities state that in 2017/18, the number of primary-age Roma children studying on these programmes is five out of 55 children who identified as using Romani as their first language.¹⁰⁵ This number may in fact be higher, though, according to Roma activists. According to the authorities, children are always placed in these programmes based on identified need by the teachers who will refer a pupil to the *Rajaleidja* network for counselling. This service will then assess further options, including potentially “simplified programmes”, for which parents are consulted and must agree. They also point out that this affects a very small number of Roma children in Estonia – around 10% of those Roma enrolled in the education system. However, interlocutors also pointed out that the consent of parents may not always be free and informed, and some may feel pushed into agreeing to putting their child into such programmes. Such a programme also means that a student cannot study beyond secondary level

(grade 9), as they would not have the adequate qualifications to do so.

170. Roma representatives also informed the Advisory Committee of high levels of absenteeism among Roma pupils, as well as higher dropout rates. They reported that this may also lead to Roma children being placed in “simplified programmes”.¹⁰⁶ The Advisory Committee has not been able to ascertain the levels of either of these issues or the influencing factors behind them, as data does not seem to be collected. However, the majority of Roma reported in the population register that they either finished up to 6 or 9 years of education.¹⁰⁷ In this connection, Roma representatives reported a reluctance by Roma parents to register their children officially as Roma when enrolling in school, owing to fears of prejudice or being treated differently. They also stated that the “simplified programmes” had the result of contributing to the stigmatisation of Roma in Estonian schools by separating them and treating them differently.

171. Roma representatives informed the Advisory Committee that, due to their relatively small numerical size in Estonia, there may be very few Roma pupils in a given school. According to them, this may mean that teachers and educators do not fully understand Romani culture or traditions, or indeed the specific needs of Roma children in the education system.¹⁰⁸ Existing resources produced for teachers to improve knowledge and understanding of Roma¹⁰⁹ were reported to be outdated and may even reproduce harmful stereotypes about Roma. It was reported that this then may lead to Roma children being more likely to be put into so-called “simplified programmes” and potentially also to higher rates of drop-out and absenteeism. For the Roma, placement in a “simplified programme” stemmed from a lack of consultation with them in the education system, and the passive nature of consultation which the authorities used.

172. The Advisory Committee is deeply concerned at the low educational attainment of Roma students. Furthermore, it is troubled at the apparently disproportionate number of Roma students placed in so-called “simplified programmes” which appear to have a serious impact on the overall educational opportunities of Roma children.¹¹⁰ These programmes should be urgently reviewed to assess whether they serve a purpose and whether they have any discriminatory effect, and in this context the existing cases of Roma pupils placed in “simplified programmes” should be investigated. If a purpose is served and they are non-discriminatory, they should be systematically carried out with the free and informed consent of the parents and the consultation of the children involved. The Advisory

¹⁰³ Information received 9/7/2021.

¹⁰⁴ In Basic and Upper Secondary Schools, “a student with special educational needs means a student whose talent, specific learning difficulties, health status, disability, behavioural and emotional disorders, longer-term absence from studies or insufficient proficiency in the language brings about the need to make changes or adjustments in the subject matter, process, duration, workload or environment of study.” Roma Civil Society Monitoring report, p.60.

¹⁰⁵ State report, p.32. Figures for 2017/18. In exchanges with the Advisory Committee, the authorities indicated that the situation had not changed substantially. Additionally, the use of Romani as first language is how the Information System of Estonian Education monitors the background of students and applies for all students alike.

¹⁰⁶ See Civil Society monitoring report, p.60.

¹⁰⁷ See Civil society monitoring report on implementation of the national Roma integration strategy in Estonia, p. 7 2018

¹⁰⁸ See also Roma Civil Society Monitoring Report, p.19.

¹⁰⁹ State report, para. 176.

¹¹⁰ See *D.H. v Czech Republic*, ECtHR, app. No. 57325/00, GC, 13 November 2007, <http://hudoc.echr.coe.int/fre?i=001-83256>.

Committee welcomes however the two mediators who have been employed as a positive example which could be followed elsewhere in the country, coupled with increased teacher training and awareness of Roma culture. The effective participation of Roma children and parents in the education system is however a prerequisite for any successful action in this field, as is the adequate training of teachers in understanding Romani culture and traditions for taking steps to lower absenteeism and drop-out rates.

173. The Advisory Committee urges the authorities to ensure effective and meaningful access to education for persons belonging to the Roma national minority, including through improving and updating teacher training on understanding Romani culture and traditions, reviewing the potentially discriminatory effect of the so-called “simplified programmes”, and consulting with Roma on the design, implementation and review of any future model to support Roma students in education.

Access to education in the Covid-19 pandemic (Article 12)

174. The Estonian authorities report that there have been difficulties faced by children with lack of access to hardware to follow online lessons. They report that citizens initiatives were organised to provide disadvantaged pupils with such equipment as is necessary to continue their education.

175. Interlocutors of the Advisory Committee reported some issues faced by economically disadvantaged children, including those belonging to the Russian-speaking and Roma minorities. In general, such issues were linked to a lack of hardware or internet connection, making it impossible to follow online lessons during school closures.

176. In general, Estonian teachers and students were well prepared for the move to online education.¹¹¹ However, it has been noted that the Russian minority, owing to structural economic disadvantages (see Article 15, below), may have required further targeted measures to facilitate this move to online education.¹¹² Additionally, no data on the impact of the pandemic on Roma is available yet.

177. The Advisory Committee considers that accurate data and analysis concerning the impact of school closures or online education on national minorities is vital in coming to terms with the long-term effects of Covid-19 and the measures taken in response, as well as countering any negative trends identified. On this basis, the authorities will be able to take the concrete and resolute measures to ensure that all children, including those belonging to national

minorities, catch up on any learning they missed. The Advisory Committee is therefore pleased to note that such a study will be published in the coming months.

178. The Advisory Committee encourages the authorities to analyse the impact of school closures and online education during the Covid-19 pandemic on pupils and students belonging to national minorities, and to take resolute measures to address any negative trends identified, in close consultation with pupils or students, parents and teachers.

Teaching in and of Russian language (Article 14)

179. The 2007 reforms to upper secondary education (grades 10-12) and the 2011 ‘National curriculum for upper secondary schools’ brought about the transition to at least 60% Estonian teaching. The authorities state that, in upper secondary education, the transition to 60% of studies being taught in Estonian has been completed. In addition, a language immersion programme at basic school level (grades 1-9) aims at ensuring that pupils become functionally proficient in Estonian, Russian and at least one foreign language (see Article 12).

180. Pursuant to the Vocational Educational Institutions Act (§57.1),¹¹³ at least 60% of studies based on vocational secondary education curricula shall be conducted in Estonian as of 1 September 2020. The authorities also report that, for the purpose of developing an action plan for teaching Estonian as a second language at preschool level, a mapping of study materials, trainings and hindrances was carried out in 2017. As a result, Estonian language training and counselling were developed for teachers working in Russian-language preschools.¹¹⁴

181. Russian is used as the only language of instruction in pre-school education (10,117 children in the academic year 2020/2021),¹¹⁵ basic education (21,510 pupils), upper secondary education (26 pupils in private schools), vocational education (5,035 pupils¹¹⁶) and higher education (first and second stages, 510 students).¹¹⁷ Russian is also taught as a foreign language. The large drop-off of Russian-speaking students from basic education to upper secondary education is attributed to the fact that, at upper secondary level at least 60% of teaching must be in Estonian¹¹⁸ for which the Advisory Committee issued a recommendation in its third opinion on Estonia.¹¹⁹

182. Representatives of the Russian minority have informed the Advisory Committee that in general, Russian-speaking parents are interested in their children having improved opportunities for acquiring full proficiency in Estonian and

¹¹¹ OECD, Estonia Country [Note](#), ‘School education during Covid-19: Were teachers and students ready?’.

¹¹² OECD, [Education Policy Outlook](#) – Snapshot Estonia.

¹¹³ State Report, paras. 191, 196.

¹¹⁴ State report, para 186-187.

¹¹⁵ Preschool Child Care Institutions Act, para. 8. According to the Estonian Education Information System, in 2017/2018, out of 628 preschools, 516 have Estonian as language of instruction (52,345 students), 106 use Russian (11,247 students) and 6 use English (89 students) - State report, para. 183.

¹¹⁶ Data from the academic year 2017/2018, see Fifth State Report, para. 194.

¹¹⁷ Information provided by the Estonian authorities in their replies to the Advisory Committee’s questionnaire. See also Fifth State Report, paras. 183, 185, 189.

¹¹⁸ National curriculum for upper secondary schools, 06.01.2011 <https://www.riigiteataja.ee/en/eli/524092014009/consolide>, section 11(2).

¹¹⁹ ACFC, Third Opinion on Estonia, para. 151. This was the point at which the transfer to 60% teaching in Estonian began.

support extending teaching in Estonian in public schools. This positive and constructive attitude notwithstanding, there is a strong wish among one part of the Russian minority to maintain Russian as a medium of instruction for a substantial part of the curriculum, in addition to Estonian. Reports and studies showing attendees of Russian-language schools 1-1.5 years behind their Estonian-school attending counterparts in terms of education outcomes have also been shown to the Advisory Committee.¹²⁰ Representatives of the Russian minority however claim that these results are a consequence of the increased prominence of Estonian in public schools since 2007 putting students with Russian as a first language at disadvantage, rather than a fault in the system itself. Furthermore, the Russian minority is particularly worried about recent public speculations that, by 2035, all Russian-language schools will have to introduce Estonian as the sole language of instruction, which could end Russian-language education completely (see Article 6).¹²¹

183. The Advisory Committee reiterates that it is legitimate to promote the state language and its teaching as an instrument for integration in society, but also considers that the authorities should ensure that effective consultations are held with the national minorities when decisions are adopted affecting the scope of minority language education. In addition, the Advisory Committee underlines again the importance of ensuring that measures aimed at increasing the amount of education in the state language do not negatively impact the quality of education in minority language schools.

184. The Advisory Committee is concerned about the unequal learning outcomes for Russian-speaking students compared to the majority and considers that independent research into the causes of these disparities is needed in order to provide targeted solutions. The Advisory Committee, and the Committee of Ministers, have previously raised these concerns with the Estonian authorities when the transition to Estonian as a language of instruction began. It warned then that the lack of analysis of the quality of education raised questions about the compatibility of the transition with the right to education for students studying at Russian language schools.¹²²

185. Against this background, the Advisory Committee considers that the ongoing educational reform, and any future reform, should be accompanied by a dialogue between the authorities and minority representatives as well as measures which guarantee the continued use of minority languages as languages of instruction for a substantial part of the curriculum while ensuring quality education at all levels. The promotion of bilingual and multilingual education

would ensure conditions for the proficient learning of both Estonian and minority languages.

186. The Advisory Committee urges the authorities to ensure access to Russian as a language of instruction at all levels of the public education system and intensify the related dialogue and consultation with representatives of the Russian minority. The authorities should also look into the causes of any educational disparities in academic performance from students in Estonian-language and Russian-language schools, assess and improve the quality of education with Russian as the language of instruction, and remedy any problems identified.

Teaching in and of minority languages (Article 14)

187. The situation of the other minority languages in education differs. There is neither minority language nor bilingual pre-school education in minority languages besides Russian. In the academic year 2020/2021, primary education with Finnish as the language of instruction was offered in Tallinn (56 pupils). German is the language of instruction of certain subjects at two secondary schools in Tallinn and taught as a first foreign language *inter alia* in Tartu. Hebrew is used in pre-school education and taught at primary, secondary and university levels.¹²³ Some minority languages are taught in the area traditionally inhabited by the respective national minority, for example Swedish in Lääne-Nigula and Latvian in Valga. A number of minority languages, such as German, Finnish and Swedish are taught widely as foreign languages. Sunday schools (see Article 5) are also an important venue for learning minority languages for pre-school age children, especially for those numerically small national minorities in Estonia.

188. Seto representatives reported that from September 2021 a preschool teaching in Seto would be opened in the Setomaa municipality, which they reported as a very positive development for the protection and promotion of their culture. Swedish and Finnish minority representatives reported that, whilst they were satisfied that teaching in minority languages could take place, the Finns regretted it was not accompanied by teaching of the particular Ingrian Finnish culture.

189. The Advisory Committee reiterates that one of the purposes of minority language education is to ensure a degree of fluency and mature literacy which enables the learner to use the language in daily public and private life and transmit it to the next generation, thereby contributing to the preservation of the language as an essential element of the identity of the national minority. Education in such languages is important to achieve these objectives, in particular for minority languages that are not the first

¹²⁰ See, for example, Ministry of Education and Research (2019): [Annual analysis](#) by the Ministry of Education and Research 2019, annex 2, point 5, measure 2 'Share of students with top-level skills (PISA level 5 and 6) in a school with a different language of instruction from the Estonian language compared to an Estonian school', p.23, demonstrating approximately 10% difference in the number of students receiving top PISA scores in sciences and reading between students learning in Estonian and in another language.

¹²¹ See Ministry of Education [Strategic planning for 2021-2035](#) and see also Statement of the Prime Minister on the transition to Estonian-language education by 2035, available [here](#), accessed 22/09/2021.

¹²² Third Opinion on Estonia, para. 151 and 154. See also CM/ResCMN(2012)9 on the implementation of the Framework Convention by Estonia (Adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 13 June 2012 at the 1145th meeting of the Ministers' Deputies; https://search.coe.int/cm/Pages/result_details.aspx?ObjectId=09000016805cac8f).

¹²³ Information provided by the Estonian authorities in their replies to the Advisory Committee's questionnaire.

language or are spoken by small numbers of people. Pre-schools are crucial for learning minority languages as language acquisition begins at an early age and the absence of minority languages at pre-school level reduces the likelihood of enrolling in minority language education at primary level. Whilst being aware of the financial implications, the Advisory Committee reaffirms that the formal system of teaching remains the principle means in respect of minority language teaching and that informal education must only be supplementary to this system.¹²⁴

190. Considering the available information, the Advisory Committee notes that the relevant legislation recognises education in minority languages as a standard educational model for persons belonging to national minorities, including in pre-school. As far as policy and practice are concerned, some extent of teaching in minority languages other than Russian, is organised. However, pre-school education is generally not available in these languages.

191. In light of its observations above, the Advisory Committee considers that the authorities, in consultation with the representatives of the national minorities, should make bilingual preschool education more widely available in minority languages. In addition, the authorities should ensure continuity in access to teaching in or of these languages at all levels and coherence in the educational model (teaching in or of the language) applied. More resolute support to Sunday Schools is needed to ensure they are sustainable and viable arenas for the teaching of the minority languages of numerically smaller national minorities.

192. The Advisory Committee encourages the authorities to intensify the dialogue with minority representatives on making education in other minority languages available at all levels and in different areas traditionally inhabited by persons belonging to national minorities, and to more resolutely and sustainably support Sunday schools.

Consultative bodies and participation in public affairs (Article 15)

193. The “Integrating Estonia 2020” strategy (see Article 6) had the strategic objective to support persons with different language and cultural backgrounds in their participation in social life and public affairs. The design phase of the strategy included in particular seminars, sometimes held in Russian language, with the representatives of national minorities, aimed at better assessing their needs and potential challenges. The authorities underline that the information collected through these seminars were subsequently used to map the situation, develop concepts and solutions, as well as draw up the implementation plan of the strategy.¹²⁵ Expert opinions were completed by the possibility for anyone to contribute online, in Estonian, Russian or English, during the preparation of the strategy.

The “Cohesive Estonia 2030” strategy, the design for which started in 2018, according to the state report, included consultations with representatives of cultural societies of national minorities, as well as public consultations, including online, although these consultations are not clarified on the website of the strategy.¹²⁶

194. In parallel, in 2018, the Ministry of Interior started preparing a new Civil Society Programme 2021-2030, continuing the 2015-2020 Civil Society Development Plan. Activity and discussion seminars were organised for that purpose and representatives of national minorities were invited and attended these events.¹²⁷ In 2019, a new cultural policy development plan “Culture 2030” also started for the period 2021-2030. It is planned to integrate minority cultures as well, and invitations were sent to the Cultural Councils of National Minorities and national cultural societies.¹²⁸

195. The Presidential Roundtable on National Minorities, dissolved in 2006, gave national minorities the opportunity to discuss their issues and concerns with decision-makers, and exchange between themselves. Currently, no replacement is foreseen. A roundtable of national minorities exists within the Ministry of Culture (see Article 5) and in late 2015 an Advisory Council for Roma Integration was set up within the same ministry. In Ida-Viru county a roundtable on national minorities serves as a platform for dialogue, bringing together some minority representatives and civil servants from the Ministry of Culture as well as representatives of the municipal governments in the area.

196. As previously, no formalised national structure or mechanism for the consultation of persons belonging to national minorities exists. The Cultural Councils (see Article 5) remain open only to a select few minorities, and only enacted by two. It appears that the two Cultural Councils in existence are not routinely consulted by the authorities. The Estonian Union of National Minorities functions as an umbrella organisation, uniting over 20 national minority and cultural societies in Estonia. This Union also receives baseline funding to be distributed among its members.

197. In terms of the representativity of public institutions, the Ministry of Finance in its civil service 2019 report stated that around 11% of civil servants in Estonia “had a foreign language as their mother tongue”, of which 10.8% were Russian.¹²⁹ There are very small numbers of other ethnicities represented. The authorities have pointed out that an internship program for non-Estonian-speaking students in Estonian government institutions is in place.

198. Representatives of national minorities reported a desire to have a higher-level and regular opportunity to have their voice heard and be consulted, as well as one which was not limited to issues within the competence of the Ministry of Culture. They reported a wide range of issues, beyond those relating to culture, for instance involving the immigration of Ukrainians into Estonia as seasonal workers,

¹²⁴ See inter alia Thematic Commentary No. 3, The Language Rights of Persons Belonging to National Minorities under the Framework Convention, adopted on 24 May 2012, ACFC/44DOC(2012)001rev, paras. 69-71, 73-75; Thematic Commentary No. 1, Education under the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, adopted on 2 March 2006, ACFC/25DOC(2006)002, p. 36.

¹²⁵ State report, para 212-217.

¹²⁶ State report, para. 210. The Estonian Union of National Minorities (<http://rahvused.ee/>) also informed the Advisory Committee that it had taken part in these consultations (see Article 6 also).

¹²⁷ State report, para. 222.

¹²⁸ State report, para. 223-224.

¹²⁹ See: https://www.rahandusministeerium.ee/system/files_force/document_files/atar_2019.pdf?download=1 (in Estonian).

which the Ukrainian national minority organisation would wish to assist. It lacks the funds however to do so. There are also issues relating to participation on the labour market of Roma and Russian-speaking workers (see below), for example, and other issues which extend beyond the field of culture.

199. Some minorities were reportedly happy with their level of involvement, while others reported that decisions – even on cultural matters where there is a clear mechanism for consultation – were taken without their adequate involvement in the decision-making process (see Article 5). Additionally, Russian minority organisations informed the Advisory Committee that persons with the “underdetermined citizenship” status belonging to the Russian minority are excluded from participating in political life stemming (see Article 3); this prevents individuals from voting in national elections, being local councillors or members of parliament. It also prevents them from being a state or municipal official, among other public-sector positions.

200. The Advisory Committee recalls that persons belonging to national minorities should be given real opportunities to influence decision-making, the outcome of which should adequately reflect their needs.¹³⁰ Particular attention should be paid to equal participation of women and men belonging to national minorities, as well as youth perspectives.¹³¹

201. The Advisory Committee reiterates that consultation of persons belonging to national minorities is particularly important in countries where there are no arrangements to enable participation of persons belonging to national minorities in parliament and other elected bodies. Consultation alone does not, however, constitute a sufficient mechanism for ensuring *effective* participation of persons belonging to national minorities.¹³² Authorities should also aim to ensure that national minorities’ participation has a substantial influence on decisions which are taken, and that there is, as far as possible, a shared ownership of such decisions.¹³³ The Advisory Committee reaffirms that the involvement of representatives of national minorities in decision-making should encompass a wide range of areas, not only culture, including those not exclusively or directly concerning minority issues.

202. The Advisory Committee also reiterates that the “public administration should, to the extent possible, reflect the diversity of society. This implies that state parties are encouraged to identify ways of promoting the recruitment of persons belonging to national minorities in the public sector [...]. Participation of [such] persons [...] in public administration can also help the latter better respond to the needs of national minorities”.¹³⁴

203. The Advisory Committee is concerned by the lack of participation of persons belonging to national minorities in public affairs and through consultation mechanisms. It emphasises the importance of the effective participation of

all persons in a genuinely democratic society. This participation should cover all areas of public affairs, and persons belonging to national minorities should feel they have an impact on decisions taken. The narrow focus of participation on cultural issues is not reflective of the broad spectrum of issues persons belonging to national minorities face in Estonia, and the *ad hoc* opportunities for participation offered by different ministries does not offer the sort of structural or long-term opportunity for consultation or participation which is required to address those issues. Whilst cultural development is vital, participation in public affairs must mean their voice is heard on all issues affecting them, not only those dealing exclusively with cultural issues. A wider forum for consultation on matters besides those relating to culture, for instance on socio-economic issues, security concerns or health problems, would allow minorities to bring the important issues of their communities to the table themselves. The Advisory Committee also considers it essential that the diversity of views within minority communities is heard by the authorities. The Advisory Committee refers to its findings under Article 3 relating to the “undetermined citizenship” status and considers that further efforts to reduce the number of persons with this status will only increase their opportunities for participation in Estonian society. Finally, the Advisory Committee would appreciate greater efforts to increase the representativity of the civil service in relation to Estonian society, including taking active steps to recruit further persons belonging to national minorities.

204. The Advisory Committee urges the authorities to expand its consultation structures with representatives of national minorities beyond the sphere of culture and provide adequate opportunities for persons belonging to national minorities to have their voice heard and have a substantial influence on all decisions and issues affecting them. Due account should be taken of the diversity of views within minority communities, and of gender and age balance.

Effective participation in economic life (Article 15)

205. The authorities report a number of programmes aimed at improving the situation on the labour market, in particular with regard to the Ida-Viru County, which is majority Russian-speaking, where the level of unemployment is the highest. Here, in 2019, the employment rate was 71% compared to around 80% for the general population. The programmes imply national measures but also additional measures at regional and county levels. The authorities state that in 2019 and 2020, around 200 persons in Ida-Viru county were employed by one specific regional programme, and that future funding of this is assured through 2023 with EU funds. The authorities describe an improved situation on the labour market over the monitored period, in the general population, and to a slightly lower extent in the non-Estonian

¹³⁰ Advisory Committee, Thematic Commentary No.2, para 71.

¹³¹ Advisory Committee, Thematic Commentary No.2, para. 70.

¹³² Advisory Committee, Thematic Commentary No.2, para. 106.

¹³³ See Advisory Committee, Thematic Commentary No.2, para. 19.

¹³⁴ ACFC, Thematic Commentary No.2, para. 120.

speaking population.¹³⁵ For example, non-Estonian speakers made up 41% of those seeking unemployment services (careers advice, training) in 2019, and 34% in 2020. However, women belonging to national minorities have a consistently significantly lower employment rate than men belonging to national minorities. Although this gap has been slowly closing, it still stands at around 9%.¹³⁶ The authorities further state that access to training for professional skills and qualifications is available to all residents of Estonia, and that a particular focus is placed on improving Estonian language proficiency in this context – as this is identified as a key inhibiting factor for national minorities in accessing the labour market.

206. The Covid-19 crisis affected general employment rates, with the drop in employment affecting “non-Estonians”¹³⁷ more than Estonians. In Ida-Viru county, the unemployment rate increased by more than the national average, reaching 12.3% in 2020 (up from 8.7% in 2019). Across the country, “non-Estonians” also saw a larger increase in unemployment than Estonians (3% v 2%). The authorities also report that this affected minority women in particular, with approximately one third more women speaking a language other than Estonian being unemployed than their male counterparts.¹³⁸ Minority youth have also been particularly affected by this, with the number of them unemployed rising by some 59% by March 2021.¹³⁹

207. For helping the entry on the labour market of persons whose first language is not Estonian, individual labour market services are provided by the Unemployment Insurance Fund, including training, career counselling and job-seeking workshops. Estonian language courses are in particular offered through dedicated programmes, such as the “Work and Learn” programme launched in 2017 and which is also opened to employers who wish to help their employees improving their proficiency of Estonian.¹⁴⁰

208. The authorities state that, based on the experience of the previous financial crisis, it might be expected that the employment rate of “non-Estonians” will take longer to recover than that of Estonians.

209. The Advisory Committee’s interlocutors stated that the labour market in Ida-Viru in particular remained very challenging. They also informed it that in Ida-Viru, where the economy is based upon oil shale mining and other forms of industry, the transition to a greener economy will hit the labour market particularly hard without any mitigating actions from the authorities. Some also pointed out that women are in a more difficult position on the labour market than men, predominantly through indirect discrimination in job advertisements.

210. As for Roma, it was reported to the Advisory Committee, though official statistics are not available, that according to a small-scale survey conducted with Roma interviews, the Roma community experiences a rate of unemployment of almost 50%.¹⁴¹ The authorities report that the unemployment rate of Roma is less than this. However, it was also reported by Roma representatives themselves that the lack of studies conducted on the socio-economic situation of Roma means it is difficult to accurately assess their situation – although the authorities point out that statistical surveys attempt to gather the relevant data every three years.

211. The Advisory Committee recalls that state parties should ensure that economic rehabilitation programmes and regional development initiatives targeting depressed regions are designed and implemented in a manner that also provides benefits to those in need among persons belonging to national minorities who live in such regions. In order to ensure this, studies should be undertaken to assess the possible impact of development projects on persons belonging to national minorities. Particular attention should be paid to the situation of women and youth from national minority backgrounds.

212. As for the transition to the green economy, the Advisory Committee recognises the need for such a transition in the current context, but recalls that persons belonging to national minorities living in areas affected should have access to new training and programmes to ensure they do not fall into unemployment as a result of such a transition. The Advisory Committee reiterates that states parties should take specific measures to increase the opportunities for persons belonging to minorities living in peripheral and/or economically depressed areas, such as rural, isolated and border areas, or regions affected by de-industrialisation, to participate in socio-economic life.¹⁴²

213. The Advisory Committee welcomes the continuing efforts of the authorities to tackle the high unemployment rate among persons belonging to national minorities. Nevertheless, these efforts need to be intensified and expanded in order to meet the needs of the developing economy and the green transition, which it appears will impact areas inhabited by persons belonging to national minorities in Estonia particularly. Moreover, significant efforts to improve the position of minority women on the labour market are needed.

214. Although they are welcome in themselves, the existing grants for cultural projects given to the Roma community (see Article 5) will not suffice to overcome the structural barriers to full economic participation they face. The Advisory Committee also highlights the importance of

¹³⁵ State report, para. 226-230.

¹³⁶ Information received from Ministry of Social Affairs, July 2021: Over the period 2014-20, employment of Estonian males increased from 67.5% to 71.4%, for Estonian females from 62.2% to 65.1%; for “non-Estonian” males from 66.9% to 68.1%, and “non-Estonian” females from 52.6% to 59.7%. Across these categories, employment rates in 2020 were lower than in 2019 by 1-2%.

¹³⁷ According to [Statistics Estonia](#), in 2020, “unemployment rates of Russians” was of 9.4% and the “unemployment rate of persons with other ethnic nationalities” was of 6.9%. In addition, the rate of “employed person with Russian as home language” dropped by 5.6% in 2020.

¹³⁸ Information received from Ministry of Social Affairs, July 2021.

¹³⁹ *Idem*.

¹⁴⁰ State report, para. 238.

¹⁴¹ [Civil Society Monitoring report on implementation of the national Roma integration strategy in Estonia](#), Estonian Human Right Center, 2018.

¹⁴² Thematic Commentary No.2, para 42.

gathering accurate data on the economic participation of socially and economically disadvantaged groups, including national minorities, in this context.

215. The Advisory Committee calls on the authorities to intensify their efforts to address the high unemployment rate affecting persons belonging to national minorities, and to take special measures to improve the position of minority women. The authorities should facilitate access to adequate training which goes beyond language proficiency and equips those concerned with the skills necessary in the current and future labour market. It further calls on the authorities to ensure that the regions affected receive the support necessary to address the specific effects of the economic crisis at municipal level.

216. The Advisory Committee encourages the authorities to gather more disaggregated data about the economic participation of the Roma, in close cooperation with their representatives, in order to adequately assess their situation and design appropriate measures to remedy their particular difficulties.

Effective participation in social life – access to healthcare (Article 15)

217. The authorities reported no difficulties in accessing healthcare for national minorities.

218. From information available on the Estonian Health Board's website, it is clear that Ida-Viru county, where over 70% of the local population belong to the Russian minority, had high rates of coronavirus cases during the pandemic. The authorities state that this was in part due to the border crossing and issues with the self-isolation requirement. Furthermore, according to data available in July 2021, the rates of vaccination in this county are 20% lower than in other counties in Estonia.

219. Concerning the higher case rates among the Russian minority, it was reported to the Advisory Committee that this was linked to socio-economic disadvantage and structural inequalities, whereby the Russian minority is more exposed to a risk of infection by working in jobs where social distancing is a challenge,¹⁴³ as well as other reasons to do with media consumption and mistrust in the authorities. It was also reported that Roma in particular, but also national minorities more generally, were more reluctant to get vaccinated against Covid-19 than Estonians in general.¹⁴⁴ Indeed, the unemployment of many in the Roma community (see above), or their employment in informal labour markets, means they do not have a family doctor or healthcare insurance.¹⁴⁵ There is currently no data available on inequalities in health outcomes for national minorities. Minorities also reported that information about Covid-19, hygiene recommendations and restrictions was made available in Estonian, Russian and English.

220. The Advisory Committee recalls that states parties should ensure the effective involvement of persons

belonging to national minorities concerned in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of measures taken to address problems affecting their healthcare. The Advisory Committee considers that this extends also to vaccination strategies, communication strategies, and any measures or restrictions implemented with regard to Covid-19. Such involvement is necessary to enable health services to respond most effectively to their specific needs.

221. The Advisory Committee is concerned that there is a disparity in vaccination rate in Ida-Viru county and Lasnamae district affecting the Russian minority.¹⁴⁶ It would welcome any research which could investigate any disproportionate impact of the pandemic on persons belonging to national minorities and asks that the authorities provide better information about vaccination to national minorities. It also points out that health mediators or assistants belonging to national minorities can help contribute to improve communication with persons concerned.

222. The Advisory Committee invites the authorities to gather data and conduct research on the health outcomes of persons belonging to national minorities, and to target awareness-raising campaigns on health issues including Covid-19 vaccination at persons belonging to national minorities, also in minority languages.

Territorial and administrative reform (Article 16)

223. In the state report, the authorities reported no changes affecting persons belonging to national minorities in the territorial administrative units of Estonia.

224. The Advisory Committee's interlocutors informed it of the administrative reform of 2017, which reduced the overall number of local municipalities in Estonia. It heard that this resulted in the merging of Estonian-majority with Russian-speaking majority administrative units, which ultimately led to the loss of teaching in Russian in schools in said units (as the demand is set by the local population and parents). The Advisory Committee was informed that this affected both Russians and Old Believers (who are also ethnic Russians), and that these communities were not consulted during the reform process. The authorities state however that they were consulted as a matter of course.

225. During the same reform, the authorities instituted the Setomaa rural municipality, which Seto representatives praised as a measure which has helped them to better organise education in Seto (see Article 14) and which has united Setos in one administrative unit.

226. Without taking a position on whether or not minorities were consulted in the instance described, the Advisory Committee wishes to emphasise the importance of consultation with persons belonging to national minorities during administrative reform processes, and of ensuring that

¹⁴³ Protecting the right to health through inclusive and resilient health care for all, Issue paper, Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, Chapter 4, p. 45, February 2021.

¹⁴⁴ S. Kondan, M. Sahajal, D. Trimbach, [Identifying the Needs of Estonian's Russian-speaking Minority: COVID-19, Data disaggregation, and social determinants of Health](#), Foreign Policy Research Institute, Baltic Bulletin, May 2021.

¹⁴⁵ [Civil Society Monitoring report on implementation of the national Roma integration strategy in Estonia](#), Estonian Human Rights Center, 2018

¹⁴⁶ Lasnamae district vaccination coverage rate were, on 10/09/2021, of 52%, against an average of 64% in the Harjuma county.

there is no negative impact on minority rights in such reforms.

227. The Advisory Committee encourages the authorities to ensure that the rights of persons belonging to national minorities are duly taken into account in territorial and administrative reforms. It further encourages the authorities to enter into a dialogue with representatives of the Russian minority about the teaching of Russian in the schools located in the areas concerned by the 2017 administrative reform and minimise any negative effects of this reform.

Cross-border cooperation (Articles 17 & 18)

228. The authorities consider cooperation between Estonia and the Russian Federation as a success, primarily within cooperation programmes co-funded by the European Union, including cross-border projects, mostly supporting the development and competitiveness of the border regions. Five large cross-border infrastructure projects were in particular funded over the period 2014-2020, including development of small enterprise, socio-economic and environmental development of Lake Peipus, including water tourism, small craft harbours and wastewater treatment equipment, as well as the reconstruction of the Narva-Ivangorod fortress and promenade, and the reconstruction of the Luhamaa Shumilkino border-crossing points. Exchange programmes for students are also reported, at university level. Finally, Estonia and the Russian Federation have signed agreements including cultural provisions. The support programme of the Ministry of Culture for umbrella organisations of national minorities allows organisations to use state funding for promoting international cultural and educational cooperation.¹⁴⁷

229. Interlocutors of the Advisory Committee also reported good cooperation between Estonia and Finland regarding the Ingrian Finns.

230. Representatives of the Russian minority reported some difficulties at an organisational level in exchanging and cooperating with NGOs in Russia. They believe that national security concerns (see Article 6) affect the cooperation of the Russian minority with organisations in the Russian Federation.

231. The Advisory Committee has received some reports of difficulties in crossing the border between Estonia and the Russian Federation caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, and the border closures which were ordered in response. This was the case also for the Setos, who lost the possibility to cross the border to maintain and visit family graves, home churches and family property across the border.

232. While underlining that the primary responsibility for protecting the rights of persons belonging to national minorities rests with the authorities of the state where they reside, the Advisory Committee nonetheless recalls that bilateral agreements as well as informal cross-border cooperation can contribute to the promotion of the rights of persons belonging to national minorities and of tolerance, stability and peace in the region.

233. In this context, the Advisory Committee considers the ability to cooperate across borders as highly significant for persons belonging to national minorities, and any

restrictions on this should be carefully considered and proportionate to the aims. Furthermore, persons belonging to national minorities concerned should be consulted before any restrictions are imposed, whether they be in the context of the pandemic or otherwise.

234. The Advisory Committee invites the authorities to cooperate more closely with representatives of national minorities regarding their cross-border contacts and ensure that any restrictions imposed on these contacts are proportionate and do not unduly prevent persons belonging to national minorities from accessing their rights.

¹⁴⁷ State report, para. 244.

The Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities is an independent body that assists the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe in evaluating the adequacy of the measures taken by the Parties to the Framework Convention to give effect to the principles set out therein.

The Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, adopted by the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe on 10 November 1994 and entered into force on 1 February 1998, sets out principles to be respected as well as goals to be achieved by the states, in order to ensure the protection of national minorities. The text of the Framework Convention is available, among other languages, in Estonian and Russian.

This Opinion contains the evaluation of the Advisory Committee following its 5th country-visit to Estonia.

www.coe.int/minorities

The Council of Europe is the continent's leading human rights organisation.

It comprises 46 member states, including all members of the European Union.

All Council of Europe member states have signed up to the European Convention on Human Rights, a treaty designed to protect human rights, democracy and the rule of law.

The European Court of Human Rights oversees the implementation of the Convention in the member states.

COUNCIL OF EUROPE



CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE