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Estonia

Country Reports on Human Rights Practices - 2003

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Estonia is a constitutional parliamentary democracy with a unicameral legislature (State Assembly), a prime minister as head of government, and a president as head of state. Free and fair parliamentary elections were held in March, and a new coalition government comprised of the Res Publica, Reform, and People's Union Parties took office in April. The judiciary is independent.

The police and security police are subordinate to the Ministry of Internal Affairs, and corrections personnel are subordinate to the Ministry of Justice. The security service (Security Police) is subordinate to the Ministry of Internal Affairs but also reports to the Prime Minister. Police and corrections personnel continued to commit human rights abuses.

The country has a market economy and a population of approximately 1.4 million. Services, particularly financial, transit, and tourism, grew in importance compared to the historically more prominent light industry and food production. In the year's third quarter, the growth rate was 4.3 percent, compared with 5.5 percent in 2002. While wages and benefits kept up with inflation, there was a growing disparity between Tallinn (where one-third of the population resides) and the slower-growing rural southeast and industrial northeast.

The Government generally respected the human rights of its citizens and the large ethnic Russian noncitizen community; however, there were problems in some areas. There were some reports of police mistreatment of prisoners and detainees and use of excessive force. Prison conditions remained poor, although there were some improvements, including renovations in facilities nationwide. There was continued criticism of the discriminatory nature of the Citizenship and Aliens' Law due to its Estonian language requirements. Violence against women was a problem, and there were reports that women were trafficked for prostitution.

RESPECT FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

Section 1 Respect for the Integrity of the Person, Including Freedom From:

a. Arbitrary or Unlawful Deprivation of Life

There were no reports of the arbitrary or unlawful deprivation of life committed by the Government or its agents.

b. Disappearance

There were no reports of politically motivated disappearances.

c. Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment

The law prohibits such practices; however, there were some reports of police use of excessive

force and verbal abuse during the arrest and questioning of suspects. Charges were brought against two police officers for use of excessive force: In one case, the officer forcefully subdued a suspect resisting arrest; in the other case, police assaulted a person who had failed to make a scheduled court appearance. Two former police officers and one current police officer charged in 2001 for use of excessive force were awaiting trial at year's end.

Prison conditions remained poor, although there were some improvements. The outdated and unsafe Central Prison was closed. In December, there were 4,579 prison inmates. Overcrowding was reported in the major prisons for men. A lack of funds and trained staff continued to be serious problems. The percentage of prisoners suffering from tuberculosis was much higher than in the general population.

In December, three pretrial detainees were charged in the killing of their cellmate.

The Government continued renovating and restructuring all of the country's prisons. A prison built in Tartu in 2002 held 900 prisoners and improved the overall conditions of prisoners. Modest gains were made in hiring new prison staff and retaining existing personnel. Work and study opportunities for prisoners continued to increase. During the year, 329 prisoners were released under the Government's early release program. Men and women were held separately; juveniles also were held in separate penal facilities. Pretrial detainees and convicted prisoners were held in the same prisons but in different sections. The Penal Code offers the possibility of replacing prison sentences with community service in some cases.

The Government permitted prison visits by independent human rights observers. In October, the Council of Europe Human Rights Commissioner visited Maardu prison.

d. Arbitrary Arrest, Detention, or Exile

The Constitution and laws prohibit arbitrary arrest and detention, and the Government generally observed these prohibitions.

The police, with an ethnically mixed police officer staff of 3,800, are under the supervision of the Ministry of Internal Affairs. There are four national police units: The Central Criminal Police, the Personal Protection Service, the Forensic Service Center and the Police School. A police reform effort aimed to increase the effectiveness of the police forces and to cut the number of regional prefectures. Corruption, mostly reported among the traffic police, was generally not a problem.

Under the Constitution, warrants issued by a court are required to make arrests. Detainees must be informed promptly of the grounds for the arrest and given immediate access to legal counsel. There is a functioning bail system. A person may be held for 48 hours without being charged formally; further detention requires a court order. Police rarely violated these limits. A person may be held in pretrial detention for 2 months; this term may be extended for a total of 12 months by court order. Lengthy pretrial detention was not a problem, and the average detention time was 3.5 months. At year's end, 1,309 of the 4,579 prisoners were awaiting trial.

The Constitution prohibits forced exile, and the Government did not employ it.

e. Denial of Fair Public Trial

The Constitution provides for an independent judiciary, and the Government generally respected this provision in practice.

The judiciary operates through a three-tier court system: Rural and city courts, district courts, and the State Court (which functions as a supreme court). The district and State courts are also courts for "constitutional supervision." At the rural and city levels, court decisions are made by a majority vote, with a judge and two lay members sitting in judgment. All judges and lay judges must be citizens. The President nominates and the State Assembly confirms the Chief Justice of the State Court. The Chief Justice nominates State Court judges who are subject to confirmation by the State Assembly. He also nominates the district, city, and rural court judges, who are appointed by the President. Judges are appointed for life.

The Constitution provides for the right to a fair trial, and an independent judiciary generally

enforced this right. It also provides that court proceedings shall be public. Closed sessions may be held only for specific reasons, such as the protection of state or business secrets, and in cases concerning minors. The Constitution further provides that defendants may present witnesses and evidence as well as confront and cross-examine prosecution witnesses. Defendants have access to prosecution evidence and enjoy a presumption of innocence. If a person cannot afford an attorney, the State provides one.

There were no reports of political prisoners.

f. Arbitrary Interference with Privacy, Family, Home, or Correspondence

The Constitution prohibits such actions, and the Government generally respected these prohibitions in practice. The law requires a search warrant for the search and seizure of property. During the investigative stage, the prosecutor issues warrants upon a showing of probable cause. Once a case has gone to court, the court issues warrants. The Constitution provides for the privacy of the mail, telegrams, telephones, and other means of communication. Police must obtain a court order to intercept communications. Illegally obtained evidence is not admissible in court.

Section 2 Respect for Civil Liberties, Including:

a. Freedom of Speech and Press

The Constitution provides for freedom of speech and of the press, and the Government generally respected these rights in practice.

The Law on Language prohibits the use of any foreign language on public signs, advertisements, and notices, including election posters. Translation may be provided into other languages.

The independent media were active and expressed a wide variety of views without government restriction.

There were two commercial Estonian-language television channels and a wide range of private radio stations. State (public) broadcast media, including one nationwide television channel (Estonian Television—ETV), continued to receive large government subsidies. ETV stopped broadcasting commercials in July 2002. During the year, an individual who sued a television journalist in civil court claiming that he was insulted lost his case.

In August, the Eesti Meedia group (which holds all shares of Postimees daily, the leading quality daily, and half of the shares of SL Õhtuleht, the top circulation tabloid, and is also the owner of the private television channel Kanal 2 and Tartu Raadio) bought Trio radio group. This gave Eesti Meedia group the largest share in the radio market. Eesti Meedia and rival Ekspress Group competed with one another, as well as with a number of smaller, independent media.

Some Russian-language programs, mostly produced domestically, were broadcast over state and private or commercial television channels. The Government played a large role in encouraging Russian-language programs on state television. However, in proportion to the size of the Russian-speaking minority in the country, the amount of Russian-language programming remained small, due in part to the Russian service's limited budget. Russian state television and Russian commercial channels were available widely via cable.

Internet access was available and generally unrestricted.

The Government did not restrict academic freedom.

b. Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and Association

The Constitution provides for freedom of assembly and association, and the Government generally respected these rights in practice. Permits for all public gatherings must be obtained 3 weeks in advance. The authorities have wide discretion to prohibit such gatherings on public

safety grounds but seldom did so. Noncitizens are prohibited from joining political parties, although they may form social groups.

c. Freedom of Religion

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respected this right in practice.

The law requires all religious organizations to have at least 12 members and to be registered with the Department for Religious Affairs of the Ministry of Internal Affairs. Leaders of religious organizations must be citizens with at least 5 years' residence in the country.

Beginning in 1993, a group of ethnic Estonian and Russian parishes, preferring to remain under the authority of the Russian Orthodox Church structure, attempted to register under names similar to the registered Estonian Apostolic Orthodox Church (EAOC), which is independent. In April 2002, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs registered the church under the name Estonian Orthodox Church, Moscow Patriarchate (EOCMP).

The majority of citizens are nominally Lutheran; relations between the various religious communities generally were amicable. The Orthodox Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia, Alexy II, visited the country in September to mark the registration of the EOCMP. Despite this step forward, differences over the disposition of Orthodox Church property continue between the EAOC and the EOCMP. Three churches and two graveyards were vandalized during the year. In April, two boys destroyed 48 plaques in an East Viru graveyard, which is under protection as a cultural-historic memorial; the boys were under the age for prosecution. In June, a set of communion service dishes was stolen from a Polva church; in July, candlesticks were stolen from a Narva church, and a painted glass window was broken in a Viljandi church; in November, a tombstone and part of a fence were broken in a Rakvere cemetery. Authorities initiated misdemeanor proceedings in the four cases.

For a more detailed discussion, see the 2003 International Religious Freedom Report.

c. Freedom of Movement Within the Country, Foreign Travel, Emigration, and Repatriation

The law provides for these rights, and the Government generally respected them in practice. Passports served as identification but need not be carried at all times. There were no exit visas.

The Government did not restrict the right of noncitizen residents—persons who are citizens of another country or stateless persons—to foreign travel, emigration, or repatriation, although some noncitizens complained of delays in obtaining travel documents. The majority of noncitizens were ethnic Russians (see Section 5). The Government issued alien passports to resident aliens not in possession of other valid travel documents, including: Persons who are designated as stateless, foreign citizens who cannot obtain travel documents from their country of origin or from another state, persons who file for Estonian citizenship and pass the language examination if required (pending receipt of citizenship), and aliens who are departing the country permanently. The Government approved the issuance of alien passports to noncitizens intending to study abroad and agreed to issue them to former military personnel who could not or did not want to assume Russian citizenship.

The law provides for the granting of refugee status or asylum to persons who met the definition in the 1951 U.N. Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol. In practice, the Government provided protection against refoulement and granted refugee status or asylum. The Government cooperated with the office of the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees and other humanitarian organizations in assisting refugees. The Citizenship and Migration Board has authority over domestic refugee issues and oversees the state registry for asylum. There was a standard procedure for processing refugee applications for persons inside the country, in addition to the procedure at the border. Temporary residence permits may be granted to persons whose applications for a residence permit were based on an international agreement.

The Citizenship and Migration Board is responsible for asylum and refugee issues. During the year, 14 persons applied for asylum, 1 was awaiting a reply from the Citizenship Board, and 2

applicants took negative decisions of the Citizenship Board to the Tallinn Administrative Court. No applicant was granted asylum. In 2000-2002, nine residence permits were granted on humanitarian grounds. The Citizenship and Migration Board turned down the remaining applications on the grounds that the applicants did not fulfill the criteria for refugee status as defined in the 1951 U.N. Convention or its 1967 Protocol. The Government deported 67 illegal aliens during the year, usually persons caught in criminal acts. In December, six illegal aliens were held as internees pending deportation or a court order granting them residence.

The Government also provided temporary (subsidiary) protection to certain individuals who did not qualify as refugees or asylees.

Section 3 Respect for Political Rights: The Right of Citizens to Change Their Government

The Constitution provides citizens with the right to change their government peacefully, and citizens exercised this right in practice through periodic, free, and fair elections held on the basis of universal suffrage. Parliamentary elections, held in March, were free and fair; they led to the formation of a three-party coalition government comprised of the Res Publica, Reform, and People's Union parties that took office in April. Reform of the country's political and economic structure led to an invitation in 2002 to join the European Union (EU) in May 2004. In April, the country signed the EU Accession Treaty, and in a September referendum, 67 percent of citizens supported accession to the EU.

Only citizens may vote in parliamentary elections and be members of political parties. However, resident noncitizens and those who have lived permanently in the area for at least 5 years preceding the election may vote in local elections, although they may not run for office. Approximately 124,000 of the country's 1.1 million citizens received their citizenship through the naturalization process. There were approximately 263,200 holders of permanent or temporary residence permits, 80 percent of whom were ethnic Russians (see Section 5). Estimates of the number of illegal residents, primarily ethnic Russians, ranged from 10,000 to 30,000; they were not included in the census figures.

There were 18 women in the 101-seat legislature. One of the 13 cabinet ministers was a woman.

Ethnic Russians, who made up 28 percent of the population, held 6 of the 101 seats in the State Assembly.

Section 4 Governmental Attitude Regarding International and Nongovernmental Investigation of Alleged Violations of Human Rights

A number of domestic and international human rights groups generally operated without government restriction, investigating and publishing their findings on human rights cases. Government officials were usually cooperative and responsive to their views. A nongovernmental legal information center in Tallinn provided free legal assistance to individuals—citizen and noncitizen alike—seeking advice on human rights-related issues.

The Government's Human Rights Institute monitored human rights and provided information to the international community. It investigated reports of human rights violations, such as allegations of police abuse and the inhumane treatment of detainees. The Institute operated an information center in Johvi, in the northeastern part of the country where the Russian speaking community is in the majority.

A presidentially established roundtable composed of representatives of the State Assembly, the Union of Estonian National Minorities, and the Russian-speaking population's Representative Assembly discussed and made recommendations on social integration issues, as did an analogous but independent roundtable that met monthly in the county of East Virumaa. The chancellor-ombudsman, who also operated a branch office in the heavily ethnic Russian northeastern town of Narva, handled complaints by private citizens against state institutions.

Section 5 Discrimination Based on Race, Sex, Disability, Language, or Social Status

The Constitution prohibits discrimination for any reason; however, reports of discrimination

against ethnic Russian residents continued.

Women

Violence against women, including spousal abuse, reportedly was common and continued to be the subject of discussion and media coverage. Neither domestic violence nor marital rape is criminalized, although they could be prosecuted under existing law. Rape and attempted rape occurred infrequently. In the first 9 months of the year, there were reports of 73 rapes and 18 attempted rapes, compared with 67 rapes and 10 attempted rapes for all of 2002. However, studies showed that 40 percent of crime, including domestic violence, went unreported. Even when the police were called, the abused spouse often declined to press charges due to societal pressure.

There were reports that women were trafficked for prostitution (see Section 6 f.).

Sexual harassment existed but was not reported officially. Although sexual harassment is not specifically mentioned in the penal code, it is possible to prosecute such cases under Code provisions on "Violation of Gender Equality." Although women have the same legal rights as men under the law and are entitled in theory to equal pay for equal work, this was not the case in practice. While women's average educational level was higher than that of men, their average pay in general was lower, and there continued to be female- and male-dominated professions. Women constituted slightly less than half of the work force; they also carried most major household responsibilities.

The Estonian Women's Studies and Resource Centre, Civil Training Center, Round Table of Harju County Women, and other nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) worked to promote women's rights.

Children

The Government was strongly committed to education and gave a high priority to building and refurbishing schools. Education is free and mandatory for 9 years. Approximately 97 percent of those eligible attended school, with attendance in proportion to the breakdown by gender in the population. The Government provided free medical care for children and subsidized school meals.

A Tartu University study published during the year reported that a significant proportion of children experienced at least occasional violence at home, in schools, or in youth gangs, although there was no societal pattern of child abuse. The Ministry of Education and Research, which identified the fight against school violence as one of its priorities, organized a seminar and published a handbook for teachers on how to recognize violence at school and at home and what to do about it. In the first 11 months of the year, there were reports of 28 rapes and 3 attempted rapes committed against minors. The police registered 56 cases of sexual abuse committed against persons less than 18 years of age. Eight cases were registered involving victims of sexual abuse below the age of 14.

There were reports that children engaged in prostitution. Trafficking of children for prostitution was a problem (see Section 6.f.). There was also evidence that children were involved in drug trafficking and that there was a connection between drug use and children engaged in prostitution.

Persons with Disabilities

While the Constitution provides for the protection of persons with disabilities against discrimination, and both the Government and some private organizations provided them with financial assistance, little has been done to enable persons with disabilities to participate normally in public life. There is no public access law, but some effort was made to accommodate persons with disabilities; for example, ramps were installed at curbs on new sidewalk construction, and public transportation firms acquired some vehicles that are accessible, as have some taxi companies. The law allows for persons with serious sight, hearing, or speech impediments to become naturalized citizens without having to pass an examination on the Constitution and language.

National/Racial/Ethnic Minorities

During the years of the country's forced annexation by the Soviet Union, large numbers of non-Estonians, predominantly ethnic Russians, were encouraged to migrate to the country to work as laborers and administrators. These immigrants and their descendants made up approximately one-third of the total population, about 40 percent of whom were born in the country.

Investigations in two cases of discrimination against minorities resulted in prosecution: In June, three skinheads were sentenced to conditional imprisonment for activities that publicly incited hatred on the basis of national origin and race; a second court case was pending at year's end.

The Law on Cultural Autonomy provides for the protection of cultures of citizens belonging to minority groups. Some noncitizens alleged that the law is discriminatory, because it restricts cultural autonomy only to citizens; however, noncitizens may participate fully in ethnic organizations, and the law includes subsidies for cultural organizations. In districts where more than one-half of the population speak a language other than Estonian, the law entitles inhabitants to receive official information in that language.

All residents, whether or not they were citizens, could complain directly to the State Court about alleged violations of human or constitutional rights. The State Court justices review each case. All decisions are issued in Estonian, but if a complaint is received in a language other than Estonian (usually Russian), the court provides a translation.

Some noncitizen residents, particularly ethnic Russians, continued to allege job, salary, and housing discrimination because of Estonian language requirements. For naturalization, the Citizenship Law includes a residency requirement of 5 years and requires knowledge of the Constitution and the Citizenship Law, as well as Estonian language capability. The law allows the Government to waive the language and civic knowledge requirements for applicants who have Estonian-language elementary or higher education, or who have performed valuable service to the country. The Citizenship Law grants citizenship to stateless children born to legally resident stateless parents after February 26, 1992 (upon the parents' or guardians' application). During the year, parents submitted 1,331 such applications of which 1,211 were approved; since July 1999, 3,237 of the 3,536 such applications have been approved.

Although the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe and other international organizations, such as the Finnish Helsinki Committee, have found the Citizenship Law to be satisfactory, the Russian Government and members of the local ethnic Russian community continued to criticize it as discriminatory, notably for its Estonian language requirements. In September, a visiting NATO Parliamentary Assembly delegation concluded that the country had no major problems in treatment of its Russian minority.

The Citizenship Law makes ineligible for naturalization persons who have acted against the State and its security; who work or have worked in the intelligence or security services of a foreign state; or who served as career soldiers in the armed forces of a foreign state, including those discharged into the reserves or retired. The latter category includes spouses who came to the country in connection with the service member's assignment, the reserves, or retirement. A provision of the law allows for the granting of citizenship to a foreign military retiree who has been married to a native citizen for 5 years. During the year, 3,706 persons received citizenship by naturalization. As of December, 211,668 persons held permanent residence permits, and 51,569 held temporary residence permits. Bureaucratic delays also were cited as disincentives for securing citizenship.

The Law on Aliens provides that the annual immigration quota does not apply to non-Estonian spouses and close relatives of citizens or resident aliens if the application for the issue of a residence permit is justified.

Other than for land ownership, the law does not distinguish between citizens and noncitizens for purposes of business or property ownership, and land ownership by foreigners is restricted only in certain strategic areas. All legal residents of the country may participate equally in the privatization of state-owned housing.

The Language Law requires that all public servants and public sector employees, service

personnel, medical professionals; and sole proprietors must use the Estonian language, with actual proficiency determined through examination. Non-Estonian citizens who have obtained at least primary education proficiency in the language are exempted from the requirement to pass a language examination. Seven prison officials were fired for noncompliance with the language requirement. The Language Law conforms with EU recommendations regarding language requirements for persons working in the private sector. For employees of private enterprises, nonprofit organizations, and foundations, as well as sole proprietors, the law establishes a requirement of Estonian language proficiency if it is in the public interest.

The language office liberally granted extensions to persons who could explain their failure to meet the requisite competence level. The Government established language training centers; however, they lack qualified teachers, financial resources, and training materials. There were allegations that the examination process, which 75 to 90 percent of persons pass, was arbitrary. Some ethnic Russians asked for free language training. In December, the Citizen Act was amended to provide for government reimbursement to successful examinees of up to 50 percent of the costs connected with the language and citizenship examinations; the EU stated that it would reimburse the other 50 percent. The reimbursement program was scheduled to continue through 2005.

The President's roundtable continued to seek practical solutions to the problems of noncitizens. The Government continued implementing an integration program for the years 2000-2007 aimed at fostering the integration of the non-Estonian-speaking population into society. At least 10 NGOs developed and implemented local programs to assist the integration of non-Estonians into society.

Section 6 Worker Rights

a. The Right of Association

The Constitution provides for the right for workers to form and join a union or employee association, and they exercised this right in practice. The largest trade union is the Central Organization of Estonian Trade Unions (EAKL); it was wholly voluntary and had approximately 50,000 members. Another trade union, the Organization of Employee Unions, split from the EAKL and had approximately 35,000 members. A third central union represented food processing and rural workers. Approximately one-third of the country's labor force belonged to one of the three labor federations. Unions were independent of the Government and political parties.

The Labor Code prohibits antiunion discrimination, and employees may go to court to enforce their rights. The law provides for collective bargaining, collective dispute resolution, and shop stewards.

Unions could join federations freely and affiliate internationally.

b. The Right to Organize and Bargain Collectively

While workers have the legal right to bargain collectively, collective bargaining has not developed fully. According to EAKL leaders, few collective bargaining agreements have been concluded between the management and workers of a specific enterprise. However, the EAKL has concluded framework agreements with producer associations, which provide the basis for specific labor agreements, including the setting of the minimum wage (see Section 6.e.). The EAKL also was involved with developing the Labor Code, which covers employment contracts, vacation, and occupational safety.

The law provides for the right to strike, and the Constitution and statutes prohibit retribution against strikers. The country's first major strike since regaining independence took place in December. Approximately 20,000 employees participated in the 1-day strike organized by the Organization of Employee Unions. Strikers demanded higher salaries for teachers and cultural workers and binding of their salaries to average monthly wages. Railway workers supported the strike with a 1-hour warning strike.

There are no export processing zones.

c. Prohibition of Forced or Bonded Labor

The Constitution prohibits forced or bonded labor, including by children; however, trafficking of persons was a problem (see Section 6.f.).

d. Status of Child Labor Practices and Minimum Age for Employment

The Employment Contract Act sets the minimum age for employment at 18 years, although children 15 to 17 years of age may work with the consent of a parent or guardian, and children 13 to 15 years old may work with the consent of a parent or guardian and a labor inspector. Children under age 18 may not perform hazardous or dangerous work. The Working and Rest Time Act limits the hours that children under age 18 can work and prohibits overtime or night work. The Occupational Health and Safety Act gives enforcement responsibilities for labor laws to the Labor Inspector Service. The Government adopted a Regulation appointing competent authorities for the supervision of the worst forms of child labor as defined by ILO Convention 182. No cases of child labor violations were submitted to the courts.

e. Acceptable Conditions of Work

The Government, after consultations with the EAKL and the Central Producers Union, sets the minimum wage. The monthly minimum wage was approximately \$155 (EEK 2,160). The national minimum wage was received by 5 to 6 percent of the workforce and was not sufficient to provide a decent standard of living for a worker and family. The average monthly wage in the third quarter was approximately \$461 (EEK 6,431).

The standard workweek is 40 hours, and there is a mandatory 24-hour rest period per week. According to EAKL sources, legal occupational health and safety standards are satisfactory in theory; however, they were extremely difficult to achieve in practice. The National Labor Inspection Board is responsible for enforcement of these standards, but it has not been very effective. The labor unions also had occupational health and safety experts who assisted workers to bring employers into compliance with legal standards. Workers have the right to remove themselves from dangerous work situations without jeopardizing their continued employment.

f. Trafficking in Persons

The law prohibits trafficking in persons; however, women were trafficked from the country, and there were reports of victims of trafficking younger than 18 years old.

Articles 133 and 134 of the Penal Code criminalize enslaving and abduction and enable prosecution for trafficking. The maximum penalty for trafficking is 12 years' imprisonment. As of December, one trafficking case was pending in court. Another 5 cases involving 15 individuals were under investigation.

Women were trafficked from the country to Nordic countries and Western Europe. Some NGOs speculated that there were 500 trafficking victims per year, although there were no reliable statistics available on the extent of the problem. Reportedly job advertisements placed in local newspapers to recruit women were in some cases associated with international prostitution rings. The International Organization for Migration and local NGOs believed that girls were trafficked to Nordic countries and Western Europe.

The Government established a national roundtable headed by the Ministry of Internal Affairs to draft a national action plan and to report the Government's action to combat trafficking. The Government continuously participated in the work of an Expert Group on Trafficking in Women of the Task Force on Organized Crime in the Baltic Sea Region.

The Ministry of Social Affairs in cooperation with the Nordic Council of Ministers initiated a large-scale anti-trafficking campaign, mostly geared towards prevention. The campaign drew public attention to the issue of trafficking in persons and promoted international cooperation to address the problem. International organizations and NGOs carried out several anti-trafficking projects in collaboration with the Government.

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