

## **Estonia is acceding to a convention protecting children from sexual exploitation and abuse**

**The Ministry of Justice has sent the Ministry of Foreign Affairs the draft for accession to the Lanzarote convention protecting children from sexual exploitation and abuse for the Government to approve the draft. Acceding to a convention is helping to protect children even more in case of cross-border crimes.**

“Sexual exploitation of children is one of the most serious crimes, as it is targeted against completely defenceless little people. As such crimes, especially the child porn related ones, are often of international dimension, we want to send a clear message to the international public by accession to the Lanzarote convention that we are protecting our children from such things. Even if these crimes cross the borders of Estonia,” said Urmas Reinsalu, the Minister of Justice.

“Even though the Estonian law is already in compliance with the requirements of the convention, this is still a meaningful event for other countries as well and it is our intention to ratify the convention during Estonian Presidency of the Council of the European Union,” the Minister added.

The corner stones of the Convention are prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse, ensuring of protection of the rights of the children who have fallen victim to sexual exploitation or abuse, and promotion of domestic and international cooperation in combating sexual exploitation and abuse of children.

The document in question is of very high significance in the battle against sexual crimes against children, in harmonization of child-friendly court procedures, and in improvement of the quality and efficiency of social services. The recurrent principle of the Convention is integration of various fields of activity in protection of children, which is why compliance with the provisions of the Convention requires continuous efforts by the fields of social work, healthcare, education, and legal protection.

The Lanzarote Convention was opened for signing on the 25<sup>th</sup> of October, 2007, and entered into force on the international level on the 1<sup>st</sup> of July, 2010. Estonia signed the Convention on the 17<sup>th</sup> of September, 2008. The Ministry of Justice is the ministry responsible for ratification of the Convention. However, other ministries, primarily the Ministry of Social Affairs and the Ministry of the Interior, have also very substantial roles in development of the services and measures prescribed in the Convention.

Estonian law is already in conformity with the criminal law provisions of the Lanzarote Convention. The activities required for ratification of the Convention are specified in the “Development Plan for Children and Families for 2012–2020” and in the “Violence Prevention strategy for 2015–2020”. The draft is also related to the “Action Programme of the Government of the Republic for 2015–2019”, which highlights combating sexual crimes related to minors and targeting minors as a criminal policy.

From the 18<sup>th</sup> of May to the 22<sup>nd</sup> of November, 2016, Estonia is also the Chair of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe and the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Estonia is serving as the political head of the organization. Estonia acceded to the Council of Europe on the 14<sup>th</sup> of May, 1993, as the 27<sup>th</sup> Member State. The Council of Europe includes 47 Member States that take turns chairing the Committee of Ministers by serving six months at a time. Protection of children’s rights, including the battle against sexual exploitation and abuse of children, is one of Estonia’s priorities while chairing the Council of Europe.

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