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07.07.2004 124/1

Research about NGO in Estonia

Estonian legislation does not set limits or specify the purposes for which the NGO can be established. Special registration departments of the county and city courts hold the register of non-profit organizations and foundations. Entries in the register are public and everyone has the right to examine and obtain copies of the register and the files of non-profit organizations and foundations. About 20 000 NGO-s are registered in Estonia today. More than 15 000 from these NGO function actively and declare about their financial activities to the Tax and Customs Board.

In the Concept of Developing Civil Society which is a document designed by participation of many Estonian NGO-s, the civil society is defined as a free, democratic, peaceful, just, prosperous society which is able to develop, and involves all persons, based on their interests and capabilities, in social life and in the process of developing policies

[http://www.ngo.ee/eng/Concept%20English%2012\[1\].03.2002.pdf](http://www.ngo.ee/eng/Concept%20English%2012[1].03.2002.pdf) .

In 14-th of December 1999 there was signed a Cooperation Memorandum between political parties and third sector umbrella organizations
<http://www.riigikogu.ee/rva/rito1/artiklid/summary.htm#10-1>.

The parties agreed to:

- Work together on the Concept of Developing Civil Society
- Hold regular meetings
- Maintain continual dialogue

In 2001 the survey was conducted among the members of Riigikogu and among other questions they were asked what would be the best possible way to implement the Cooperation Memorandum. Majority of the leaders of factions and committees (80%) and the ordinary MP-s (57,1%) answered that the best way would be to invite target-groups to participate in the meetings of committees.

The Paper on Drafting Technique in the Riigikogu obliges to consider the opinions of all target groups of any legislative act

(http://www.riigikogu.ee/rva/ecprd/html/appendix_A-12.html) .

In the official Journal of the Estonian Parliament the opinion of civil society is valued. There is special sector published: "Civil Society and State Authority"
(<http://www.riigikogu.ee/rva/rito4/artiklid/31summaries.htm>).

Every citizen can comment and make suggestion to all legislative acts proceeded in Riigikogu - on the website of Riigikogu, there is special section for opinions and proposals. If needed the representatives of different target groups are invited to the

sessions of relevant committees. NGO-s are invited most often to the sessions of the Cultural Affairs Committee, Social Affairs Committee and Constitutional Committee.

NGOs pay no taxes on grants and enjoy exemptions or deductions for income earned on the investment of grant funds or endowments. The law requires a very detailed report covering the management, action plan and financial activities of NGOs (read about NGO sustainability index at <http://www.ngo.ee/eng/3sectsust.html>).

Following acts regulates civil society:

- Non-profit Associations Act <http://www.legaltext.ee/text/en/X1013K5.htm>
- Foundations Act <http://www.legaltext.ee/text/en/X1014k3.htm>
- Trade Unions Act <http://www.legaltext.ee/text/en/X30087.htm>
- Apartment Associations Act <http://www.legaltext.ee/text/en/X1005K2.htm>
- Cooperatives' Act (not available in English)
- Act of Churches and Congregations (not available in English)

Riigikogu Chancellery has financed several researches about civil society that have given valuable information for both MP-s and NGO-s. On that topic see also: http://www.riigikogu.ee/rva/ecprd/html/oole_kasemets.html

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