



INTRODUCTION

The opinion survey “Freedom of Religion in Estonia 2013” was carried out by the Estonian Institute of Human Rights in cooperation with the Turu-uuringute AS market research firm.

Pursuant to the Constitution of the Republic of Estonia and international acts, everyone in Estonia has the freedom of conscience, freedom of religion and freedom of thought. As to how people construe and interpret the freedom of religion and related aspects, this has not, to the knowledge of the authors of this survey, been investigated in full.

Naturally, in the last few decades (we should recall that this year marked the 20th anniversary of the passage of the first Churches and Congregations Act in newly independent Estonia) the state and theoreticians and practitioners – legal scholars, theologians and sociologists among others – have treated issues related to the exercise of religious freedom from several different aspects. To name just a few of these, the information obtained from national censuses is certainly very important. As with previous censuses, respondents in the 2011 census of the population had the option of answering questions on religion. The question was worded as follows: “Do you profess any faith (religion)?” It was asked of those over the age of 15 and it was not a required question. Statistics Estonia published the consolidated answers to this question on 29 April 2013 and, insofar as in this survey as well, respondents answered the question “Which religion or faith do you profess?”, this report will certainly provide interesting material for analysis for those who want to compare the data gathered.

A second area of interest is the valuable material gathered by the Estonian Council of Churches (ECC) as a result of regularly conducted surveys. Since 1995, the ECC has conducted many different kind of sociological surveys on religion, among them the population survey conducted every five years “Life, religion and religious life.” This study was last conducted in 2010 and the questionnaire included questions on people’s expectations of churches and opinions on different social and ethical topics. ECC has put together an overview of religion sociology surveys in a volume published in 2012: “Astu alla rahva hulka” (Step Down Among the People).

A third important source of information on the exercise of religious freedom is the opinions and observations of international organizations



and other countries, among which the US State Department's annual reports on the freedom of religion in all countries of the world should be mentioned. Reports on Estonia are available in Estonian and English on the US Embassy's website.

In certain more specialized aspects, sources of information on religious freedom include the "Estonian Human Rights Report 2012" compiled by the Estonian Institute of Human Rights and annual reports compiled by the Human Rights Centre.

The results of the survey "Freedom of Religion in Estonia 2013" are presented in this report, which is divided into four parts.

The first part is a public opinion survey, in which 1,000 respondents were interviewed as part of an omnibus survey. The purpose of the survey was to determine:

- how the population views freedom of religion;
- how informed the population is regarding freedom of religion topics;
- what religion or faith is professed by respondents;
- attitudes toward religion as a subject at general educational schools and other issues in relation to freedom of religion.

The second part of the report is a survey of experts, consisting of in-depth interviews conducted with 17 experts (religious societies, non-profit associations, media and government representatives, theologians and legal scholars) and conclusions drawn on the basis of these. The goal of the survey of experts was to determine:

- how experts view the freedom of religion situation in Estonia and problems guaranteeing freedom of religion (including problems stemming from government and society);
- how heads of religious societies view their relations with the authorities, including legal acts, and what are their proposals for changes;
- what have been the changes in the extent of freedom of religion over the last 20 years;
- experts' comments on the results of the survey of the population.

The third part of the report includes assessments from international organizations and other countries as to the status of freedom of religion in Estonia.



The fourth part of the report sets out proposals and recommendations for government agencies arising above all from the interviews with experts (part II of the report) and international opinions (part III of the report).

It is currently difficult to project what the best time would be for conducting a similarly structured survey on the status of freedom of religion in Estonia. As the survey shows, Estonia is considered to be a country where freedom of religion is guaranteed, and in principle these guarantees have existed in a uniform, stable manner for the last 20 years. It would presumably be considered optimal for the next such survey on the status of freedom of religion in Estonia to take place no earlier than five years and no later than 10 years from now.