

Estonia Denies Politics Behind Taking Russian Girl Into Care

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A Russian couple living in Estonia have had their custodial rights restricted and their daughter taken into care after social services said their child's living conditions were unsanitary, Estonia's [ERR](#) news outlet reported.

An Estonian social worker told the Harju county court that district services had attempted for eight years to "improve the situation with the family."

"Still, the father continues to deny any problems" the social worker said, "while the mother doesn't strive to make changes."

The decision stirred controversy in Russia, where speculation circulated that the ruling was politically motivated.

Violetta Volkova, the defense lawyer, told the TASS news agency that Estonian custody services were trying to bar the parents' attempt to send the daughter to Moscow with her

mother.

Volkova said the decision reflected the “fact of oppression of the Russian-speaking population in Estonia.”

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The family, which according to Volkova lives on welfare of 460 euros, has lived in the Estonian capital Tallinn since 1978. The parents, who were absent from the hearing, have had their custodial rights restricted until mid-October.

Eight-thousand Russian speakers in Estonia have been unable or unwilling to gain full citizenship rights following the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Approximately 365,000 Russian speakers were living in Estonia in 2016. A UN Human Rights Council report from 2007 said little concrete action was being taken on issues around statelessness in Estonia.

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