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Estonia Wants to Ban Russian Residents From Voting

By AFP

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The Narva River on the border between Estonia and Russia. **Aleksander Kaasik (CC BY-SA 4.0)**

Estonia's coalition government on Monday said it hoped to amend the constitution to ban Russian and Belarusian residents from voting in municipal polls next year, to prevent potential meddling by Moscow and Minsk.

More than 80,000 Russian citizens hold a residence permit in the former Soviet republic of 1.3 million people, which gained its independence in 1991 and is home to a large Russian-speaking minority.

"Today, we agreed in the coalition council that we will recommend our parliamentary groups amend the constitution as a matter of urgency so that citizens of aggressor states will no longer be decision-makers in local elections," Estonian Prime Minister Kristen Michal told state broadcaster ERR on Monday.

Permanent residents of the Baltic country currently have a constitutional right to vote in local elections in the constituency they live in.

Various Estonian political parties since the start of the Russian invasion of Ukraine have proposed excluding Russians and Belarusians, and sometimes stateless individuals living in Estonia, from elections, fearing foreign interference.

The coalition said it hoped to alter the constitution swiftly "so that the citizens of the aggressor states and the stateless persons couldn't vote at the municipal elections next October," said Helir-Valdor Seeder, head of the Isamaa (Fatherland) parliamentary faction, in a statement.

The draft amendment could be ready as early as Thursday.

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