

ESTONIA'S UN DIPLOMATS LESS LAW-ABIDING THAN NEIGHBORING COUNTRIES'

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A research by two US economists shows that Estonia averaged 10.5 unpaid parking tickets per each UN diplomat per year in 1997-2002 whereas Latvian diplomats paid up all their tickets.

Estonian diplomats' law-abidance fell short also of their colleagues from the Nordic countries, Lithuania and Russia.

Raymond Fisman from Columbia University and Edward Miguel from the University of California aimed to study UN diplomats' unpaid parking tickets as an indicator of cultural norms related to corruption levels of their countries.

Estonia had three diplomats accredited to the United Nations in 1998. Basing on this number and the national representation's unpaid fines, the unpaid tickets per diplomat per year averaged 10.5, giving Estonia 57th place in the scoreboard.

Compared to the worst offenders, Estonian diplomats were relatively law-abiding -- Kuwait, for instance, averaged 246.2 unpaid tickets per diplomat per year, followed by Egypt with 139.6, Chad with 124.3, Sudan with 119.1 and Bulgaria with 117.5. On the other hand, a comparison with neighboring countries and other central and East European states shows Estonian diplomats in a less favorable light. True, Bulgaria and the Czech Republic ranked ahead of Estonia, but Lithuania's seven diplomats ran up two unpaid tickets each per year and the 18 Finnish diplomats, just 0.1.

Twenty-two countries averaged zero unpaid tickets per year, including Sweden, Norway and Denmark, as well as Estonia's southern neighbor Latvia which had five diplomats accredited to the UN in 1998.

The US researchers observed that since diplomatic immunity made it difficult for New York City to enforce diplomatic parking violations in the period under review they could examine the role of cultural norms in determining who felt free to flout parking rules.

Their main finding was that diplomats were more likely to run up unpaid parking fines if they came from countries with a high level of corruption. The economists also found that those least likely to pay up were from countries where people hold a dim view of the United States.