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NATURALISATION PROCEDURES FOR IMMIGRANTS LITHUANIA

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March 2013



European University Institute, Florence
Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies
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EUDO Citizenship Observatory
Migration Policy Group
in collaboration with
Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies
Naturalisation Procedures Report, RSCAS/EUDO-CIT-NP 2013/29
Badia Fiesolana, San Domenico di Fiesole (FI), Italy

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Published in Italy
European University Institute
Badia Fiesolana
I – 50014 San Domenico di Fiesole (FI)
Italy
www.eui.eu/RSCAS/Publications/
www.eui.eu
cadmus.eui.eu

Research for EUDO Citizenship Observatory Reports has been jointly supported by the European Commission grant agreement HOME/2010/EIFX/CA/1774 ACIT and by the British Academy Research Project CITMODES (both projects co-directed by the EUI and the University of Edinburgh).

The financial support from these projects is gratefully acknowledged.

For information about the project please visit the project website at <http://eudo-citizenship.eu>

Naturalisation Procedures for Immigrants

Lithuania

Ramute Ruškyte

1 Introduction

The policy regarding the granting of citizenship (*inter alia* through naturalisation) in Lithuania is primarily dependant on the geopolitical situation of the State of Lithuania, its legal and cultural traditions, political influences and the activity of the public. Since the restoration of the state in 1990, the conditions for the granting of citizenship under the naturalisation procedure have changed negligibly, although there have been a good few attempts notably to liberalise them.

The current legal framework is marked by the tendency to change as a result of economic and social factors; if the scale of immigration increases, whilst the level of emigration does not fall, then the issue of granting citizenship to immigrants would become more topical in Lithuania.

2 Naturalisation procedures

2.1. Promotion

It should be noted that the number of persons wishing to acquire Lithuanian citizenship under the naturalisation procedure is small. The primary reason for this is that in Lithuania the Constitution, according to the Constitutional Court, only allows for dual citizenship in rare circumstances. The second reason is that, although it is not difficult to acquire a permit for permanent residence in Lithuania, citizens of other states are not inclined to stay in Lithuania for a long time due to the fact that in Lithuania the minimum wage and average work remuneration are very low,¹ and, as a result of that, few seek to acquire Lithuanian citizenship. Lithuanian citizenship has been actively sought by descendants of former Lithuanian citizens who were exiled from Lithuania by the occupying regimes or who fled Lithuania prior to 11 March 1990.² The procedure for acquisition of citizenship through naturalisation is not applicable to this latter group of persons, as they may have their Lithuanian citizenship reinstated. This is reflected by statistical data, e.g. during the first half of 2012, citizenship of the Republic of Lithuania was granted through naturalisation to 93 persons, while it was reinstated for 375 persons.

¹ The minimum wage in Lithuania in 2011 was EUR 231.70, while the average work remuneration in 2010—EUR 569. See http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=earn_mw_cur&lang=en and http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=earn_ses10_19&lang=en, respectively.

² See Paragraphs 2 and 3 of Article 2, Items 2 and 3 of Article 7 and Article 9 of the Law on Citizenship.

The relatively small numbers of persons wishing to acquire citizenship of the Republic of Lithuania (with the exception of the rise in 2011)³ may account for the reason why the Parliament (the last time the Law on Citizenship was modified on 2 December 2010)⁴ and other institutions have not laid down in legal acts⁵ any obligation for state institutions to organise or finance a state-run or state-funded naturalisation campaign, nor to establish a specific information service.

Information and consultations about the requirements set in legal acts for the acquisition of citizenship of the Republic of Lithuania through naturalisation are provided by the appropriate state institutions. The information about the conditions for granting citizenship of the Republic of Lithuania under the naturalisation procedure is available on the websites of the Ministry of the Interior,⁶ the Ministry of Foreign Affairs⁷ and the Migration Department,⁸ which are public and freely accessible.

In my opinion, on the website of the Migration Department, the conditions for granting citizenship as well as the procedure for submitting applications are clearly specified. A list of the documents that must be enclosed with applications is provided and a description of the procedure for submitting applications is included along with a reference to the websites of territorial police establishments and an indication as to the language in which the documents must be written. The procedure for approval of copies and legalisation of documents is clearly set out. Also, it is described where, when and how the state fee for the consideration of an application for granting citizenship can be paid, and the precise amount of the fee is indicated. Persons may also obtain the relevant information by telephoning the Migration Centre or by sending their questions by email. It is also possible to inquire at the Migration Department and receive the information about the implementation of the conditions established for the acquisition of citizenship of the Republic of Lithuania (*inter alia* the conditions for granting citizenship of the Republic of Lithuania under the naturalisation procedure).

Applicants may obtain application forms online or in paper form. The forms can be obtained at the Migration Department in Vilnius as well as at the police station responsible for the place of residence for persons living in Lithuania, and at diplomatic representations and consulates for persons living abroad.

The website of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, among other things, provides the means for learning the Lithuanian language (manuals that can be downloaded from the internet) as well as information about Lithuanian language courses.

The information about the time and place of examinations in the Lithuanian language and the fundamentals of the Constitution, which are organised in municipalities,⁹ as well as

³ In 2011, if compared to 2010, the grant of citizenship through naturalisation in Lithuania nearly doubled—from 162 persons in 2010 to 311 persons in 2011.

⁴ Article 46 of the law came into force on 9 December 2010. That article is related to the proposals for the Government to adopt the legal acts necessary for the implementation of the law. Article 12 of the law came into force on 1 January 2013. That article is related to the delivery of documents confirming the right to restore citizenship of the Republic of Lithuania.

⁵ Law No. XI-1196 came into force with certain exceptions on 1 April 2011.

⁶ www.vrm.lt.

⁷ www.urm.lt.

⁸ www.migracija.lt.

⁹ At present, in Lithuania there are 57 such commissions. The commissions are composed independently by the municipalities, but the number of their members is not less than 7 and there is a requirement that one of the members must be a historian or a lawyer, while other members must be specialists of the Lithuanian language

the contact information of chairpersons of state language qualification commissions,¹⁰ is on the website of the Education Development Centre¹¹ (a reference to this website can be found on the website of the Migration Department) prior to the start of the calendar year in which they are scheduled to take place. The latter website gives a list of state language qualification commissions (57) (with the addresses (emails) and telephone numbers of the municipalities) and provides an explanation as to where the first category of knowledge of the state language can be gained, as this is necessary for the acquisition of Lithuanian citizenship. The website also specifies the legal acts regulating the Lithuanian language requirements and indicates certain publications (21 in total) helpful in learning the Lithuanian language. In addition, it includes a sample Category I state language test, which may be taken by any person with access to the internet in order to check their level of knowledge of the language. This information is public and freely accessible throughout the whole year.

Chairpersons of the aforesaid commissions in municipalities and one civil servant from the Education Development Centre provide information and give consultations on examinations in the Lithuanian language and the fundamentals of the Constitution. It should be noted that in Lithuania the examination in the fundamentals of the Constitution does not require applicants to possess any other particular knowledge (that of history, etc.) except that directly drawn from the Constitution.¹²

All the aforementioned institutions provide consultations and information free of charge.

In recent years, no Lithuanian language courses or courses designed to prepare persons for the examination in the fundamentals of the Constitution, which must be passed in order to acquire citizenship under the naturalisation procedure, have been organised in Lithuania by the state from the funds of the state budget (with the exception of state-funded courses for refugees).

In Lithuania an official fee of LTL 179 (approximately EUR 52) is charged for applying for citizenship of the Republic of Lithuania. This is similar to other charges of that kind. The cost of the language assessment and the citizenship/integration assessment is LTL 10 for each (less than EUR 3).¹³ In cases where the applicant hands the documents over to an establishment performing the functions of a consulate, a charge of EUR 50 for the receipt and dispatch of documents concerning acquisition of citizenship of the Republic of Lithuania must be paid. In Lithuania the state charge for the applicants in question has not been reduced and no exemptions have been made from it.

Persons wishing to obtain Lithuanian citizenship after the decree of the President of the Republic of Lithuania on the grant of citizenship comes into force must within a fixed

(this requirement is laid down in the order No. ISAK-286 of the Minister of Education and Science of 1 March 2004 (a new wording—21 March 2006, subsequent amendments—4 June 2009 and 31 August 2009).

¹⁰ The same state language qualification commissions, which organise the state language examinations, are commissioned to organise examinations in the fundamentals of the Constitution of the Republic of Lithuania (resolution No.1687 of the Government of the Republic of Lithuania of 24 December 2003 (actual wording—17 April 2009); order No. ISAK-286 of the Minister of Education and Science of 1 March 2004 (a new wording—21 March 2006, subsequent amendments—4 June 2009 and 31 August 2009)).

¹¹ www.upc.smm.lt.

¹² The programme for the examination in the fundamentals of the Constitution of the Republic of Lithuania is approved by the joint order (No. ISAK-208/1R-43) of the Minister of Education and Science and the Minister of Justice of 11 February 2004. The programme includes topics and questions. From these questions and topics, a test of 20 questions is prepared. The examination is passed by those who answer correctly at least 14 questions.

¹³ Both these state charges were established by the Government resolution No. 1458 of 15 December 2000.

time period (6 months or 2 years) take an oath¹⁴ to the Republic of Lithuania. The oath must be taken at the Ministry of the Interior or at diplomatic representations or consulates of the Republic of Lithuania. The Minister of the Interior or his/her Deputy administers the oath. At diplomatic representations or consulates the oath is administered by the head of the establishment. Close relatives and guests of the person taking the oath as well as media representatives may be present.¹⁵ The Migration Department specifies the day and hour for taking the oath on its website in advance. When the oath is taken by well-known persons, representatives of the media, as a rule, attend the ceremony and the fact of taking the oath is reported in the mass media.

Every person who wishes to acquire Lithuanian citizenship may receive, relatively simply, all the necessary information about the conditions for acquisition of citizenship at those institutions that take the decisions or assist in the adoption of the corresponding decisions regarding the grant of citizenship under the naturalisation procedure.

The information is sufficiently comprehensive and clear, subject to the following two reservations. First, it could be useful for persons wishing to acquire citizenship of the Republic of Lithuania if the information that can be found on the website of the Migration Department were supplemented by an explanation as to which documents establish that the person has the legal means of subsistence. In addition, it would be helpful if the requirements relating to knowledge of the state language and the fundamentals of the Constitution could be consolidated into 1 or 2 legal acts. At present, the relations in question are regulated by 6 legal acts,¹⁶ which may cause applicants to have difficulties in understanding them.

2.2. Documentation and decision-making process

According to Article 40 of the Law on Citizenship, the following documents must be enclosed with an application for citizenship of the Republic of Lithuania under the naturalisation procedure:

1) a personal identification document; 2) a document confirming that, at the time of filing the application, the person has the right of permanent residence in the Republic of Lithuania; 3) documents confirming that the person has been legally and permanently resident in the Republic of Lithuania for the last ten years;¹⁷ 4) documents confirming that the person has the legal means of subsistence; 5) documents¹⁸ certifying that the person has

¹⁴ Paragraph 4 of Article 23 of the Law on Citizenship.

¹⁵ The Government Order (No. 488) on the Oath Procedure of 20 April 2011.

¹⁶ The programmes for examinations in the state language and the fundamentals of the Constitution are approved by two orders of the Minister (order No. ISAK-209 of 11 February 2004 and order No. ISAK-2008/1R-43 of 11 February 2004). The Description of the Procedure for the Examinations is approved by the Government resolution No. 1687 of 24 December 2003. The fourth act, which also regulates the organisation and implementation of the said examinations, is the order No. ISAK-286 of the Minister of Science and Education of 1 March 2004. The fifth act is the order No. 49 of the Director of the National Examination Centre of 9 June 2004, whereby *inter alia* the Instructions for Implementation of the Examination in the Fundamentals of the Constitution and the First Category of the State Language are approved. The sixth act is the Government Resolution No. 1688 “On the Approval and Implementation of Categories of Knowledge of the State Language” of 24 December 2003.

¹⁷ In cases where a person applies for citizenship of the Republic of Lithuania under the naturalisation procedure by virtue of marriage to a citizen of the Republic of Lithuania, he or she must submit the above mentioned documents, including the documents confirming that the person has been legally and permanently resident in the Republic of Lithuania for the last seven years and an additional document certifying the conclusion of marriage.

¹⁸ These documents are not required from persons who have reached 65 years of age, persons whose capacity for work has been rated at 0-55 per cent, persons who have reached pensionable age and been assessed in

passed the examinations in the state language and the fundamentals of the Constitution of the Republic of Lithuania.

The legal acts do not specify in greater detail what is considered as a personal identification document. In practice, these are identity documents required by the country of residence; the birth certificate is not required from the country of origin. The legal acts provide for no alternative means to prove identity.

A permit for permanent residence in Lithuania, which has been issued to the person, could be considered as a document confirming that, at the time of filing the application, the person has the right of permanent residence in the Republic of Lithuania. The conditions and procedure for the issue of this permit are established in the Republic of Lithuania Law on the Legal Status of Aliens.

The website of the Migration Department describes the conditions of “legal permanent residence in Lithuania”: 1) a citizen of another state or a stateless person holds a document entitling or attesting to the right of residence in the Republic of Lithuania, which is prescribed by law, as well as 2) a person is considered as being resident in the Republic of Lithuania for an uninterrupted one-year period, provided he or she has been resident in the Republic of Lithuania for at least six months during that year.

At present, the legal acts regulating the relations of citizenship do not specify which documents could prove that the person has the legal means of subsistence. In practice, documents such as an employment contract, payslip, bank statement, tax declaration or student grant are currently recognised as appropriate documents. Article 27 of the Law on the Legal Status of Aliens can be used as a guide to the amount of means of subsistence. It is indicated therein that the means of subsistence that may be considered adequate for an alien applying for a residence permit in the Republic of Lithuania are established by the Minister of Social Security and Labour.¹⁹

The documents confirming that a person has passed the examinations in the state language and the fundamentals of the Constitution of the Republic of Lithuania are indicated in Item 10 of the Rules for Examinations in the State Language and the Fundamentals of the Constitution of the Republic of Lithuania and for Issuance of Certificates,²⁰ approved by the resolution (No.1687) of the Government of the Republic of Lithuania of 24 December 2003 (with subsequent amendments).

The persons who, at the time of acquiring citizenship of the Republic of Lithuania, held citizenship of another state take the oath of allegiance to the Republic of Lithuania only after providing the Ministry of the Interior or a diplomatic representation or consulate of the Republic of Lithuania with proof that they are no longer citizens of that another state²¹ (except in the rare cases allowed by the law where dual citizenship is permitted). The said

accordance with the procedure laid down by legal acts as having high or moderate special needs, as well as persons with serious chronic mental disorders.

¹⁹ The order No. A1-22 of the Minister of Social Security and Labour of 29 January 2007 establishes 0.5 MMW (LTL 400—EUR 113) for persons who are under the age of 18 or intend to study, while for other aliens 1 MMW (LTL 800—EUR 230) is established.

²⁰ The title was changed by the resolution No.260 of the Government of the Republic of Lithuania of 8 April 2009 as follows: “On Approving the Description of the Procedure for Examinations in the State Language and the Fundamentals of the Constitution of the Republic of Lithuania as well as for Issuance of Documents Attesting to the Passing of These Examinations”.

²¹ See Paragraph 9 of Article 23 of the Law on Citizenship.

persons must submit evidence (a document) from a competent institution of the state whose citizenship they have renounced.

It is necessary to note that Article 22 of the Law on Citizenship prescribes that citizenship of the Republic of Lithuania is not granted under the naturalisation procedure to persons who: 1) prepared to commit, attempted to commit or committed international crimes such as aggression, genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes; 2) prepared, attempted to commit or committed criminal acts against the Republic of Lithuania; 3) prior to residing in the Republic of Lithuania, were sentenced to imprisonment in another state for a premeditated crime that is a serious crime under the laws of the Republic of Lithuania, or has been punished for a serious crime in the Republic of Lithuania. From the information provided on the website of the Migration Department, it is clear that the applicants themselves bear the responsibility for denying the circumstances referred to in Article 22, as a result of which citizenship of the Republic of Lithuania is not granted. The applicants must enclose with their application a note issued by a competent institution of the foreign state where the person had resided prior to coming to Lithuania, which confirms that, prior to residing in the Republic of Lithuania, the person had not been sentenced to imprisonment in another state for a premeditated crime that is considered a serious crime under the laws of the Republic of Lithuania, also a document confirming that the person has not been punished for a serious crime in the Republic of Lithuania.

Persons residing in the Republic of Lithuania should submit their applications for citizenship of the Republic of Lithuania via territorial police establishments according to the person's place of residence in the Republic of Lithuania; persons residing abroad should do so via diplomatic representations and consulates of the Republic of Lithuania or the Migration Department within the Ministry of the Interior.²²

The aforementioned institutions assess whether the applications received are complete. The Citizenship Commission has the duty to check whether the documents are complete and correct. As a rule, this function is performed by two employees of the Migration Department, who are members of the Citizenship Commission. If necessary, the said civil servants obtain and check the information from other state institutions about an applicant. Upon the adoption of a positive decision by the Citizenship Commission, the Migration Department has the right, prior to the adoption of the decree of the President of the Republic, to check the documents once again.

At the request of the state institutions referred to in Article 29 of the Law on Citizenship, state and municipal institutions and establishments must, within their competence, provide all the available information necessary for considering and deciding issues concerning citizenship of the Republic of Lithuania. Every applicant may apply also to the appropriate state institutions in writing concerning the granting of citizenship. Under the Law of Public Administration, an answer from the said institutions must be sent to the applicant within 1 month.

A decision to satisfy or reject an application is taken by the President of the Republic.²³ The Citizenship Commission has a duty to inform the applicants²⁴ whose applications for citizenship are rejected, as well as a duty to specify the reasons for rejection. There is a practice that the applicants whose applications for citizenship have been rejected

²² Article 37 and 40 of the Law on Citizenship.

²³ Item 1 of Paragraph 1 of Article 30 of the Law on Citizenship.

²⁴ Item 3 of Paragraph 3 of Article 31.

are informed not by the Citizenship Commission, but by the Office²⁵ of the President of the Republic of Lithuania.

2.3. Discretion

All the conditions that must be met by the applicant are listed in the Law on Citizenship.

The Law on Citizenship, as mentioned above, contains no legal indications establishing which documents provide proof that the applicant has the legal means of subsistence in Lithuania (in order to establish an amount of means of subsistence one may apply the Law on the Legal Status of Aliens, which contains a reference to an amount established by the Minister of Social Security). Therefore, a certain amount of discretion is possible.

The legal framework for the passing of examinations in the state language and the fundamentals of the Constitution, as mentioned before, is regulated by 6 legal acts, which were passed by the Government, the Minister of Education and Science, the Minister of Justice and the Director of the National Examination Centre. Taking account of the fact that at times these legal acts regulate the same relations in a different manner, conditions for the emergence of a certain amount of discretion may arise.

The applicant can use a number of legal means to prove his/her knowledge of the language (e.g. the school or university diploma, certified language test). A category of the state language (I, II or III), to which the knowledge acquired at school, universities or in courses may be ascribed, is explicitly established by Government resolution No. 1688 of 24 December 2003, therefore, discretion is impossible in this case.

The applicant who cannot provide a document certifying his/her knowledge of the state language may take a specific language test for naturalisation. The Description²⁶ prescribes that, in determining whether a candidate has passed the examination, a criteria-based evaluation is carried out. The said criteria-based evaluation is an evaluation according to the pre-set standards, which are prepared together with the exercises of the examination. It is difficult to assess whether such an instruction can give the persons conducting those examinations too wide a discretion. It is clear that complaints filed by the applicants regarding the evaluation of their knowledge are very rare.²⁷

Perhaps a certain amount of discretion is possible when implementing Paragraph 5 of Article 18 of the Law on Citizenship. That paragraph stipulates that persons who meet the conditions laid down in the article may obtain citizenship so long as this is in accordance with the interests of the Republic of Lithuania. It is only in rare cases that the Citizenship Commission puts forward a proposal to the President not to award citizenship on these grounds.

The Law on Citizenship does not provide for any exemptions with respect to the conditions of the procedure. Exceptions are only established in the Law on Citizenship itself, as, for instance, as it has been mentioned, in cases of exemption of certain applicants from

²⁵ As is clear from the judgment of the Supreme Administrative Court of Lithuania of 16 March 2012, the Office of the President of the Republic specifies by letter the record of the meeting of the Citizenship Commission and that of the decision of the President of the Republic.

²⁶ The Description of the Procedure for Organising and Conducting Examinations in the State Language, as approved by the order No. ISAK-286 of the Minister of Science and Education of 1 March 2004.

²⁷ The percentage of persons who have passed an examination in the state language and examination in the fundamentals of the Constitution is large (85-87 per cent on average).

passing the examination in the state language, as well as the exemption of persons having the refugee status in the Republic of Lithuania from the duty to renounce their citizenship of another state. In this case, discretion is impossible. The exercise of discretion is also excluded when deciding on the grant of citizenship for a period exceeding 6 months. In practice, it takes about 3 months.

2.4. Review

The applicant may file an appeal with the Vilnius Regional Administrative Court against a decision of the Citizenship Commission, as well as with the Supreme Administrative Court, which has jurisdiction of higher instance, in the cases where the President decides not to grant citizenship to the applicant and a decree of the President is not issued. The court may annul a decision of the Citizenship Commission not to propose to the President of the Republic to grant citizenship and it may investigate whether the decision-making procedure provided for in legal acts was followed.

If the applicants do not agree with the evaluations (results) of the examination in the Lithuanian language or examination in the fundamentals of the Constitution, they may file an appeal with the same commission requesting reconsideration and re-evaluation of the results. The chairperson of the commission must, within the period of 5 working days from the date of submission of the applicant's appeal, convene the commission for the consideration of the appeal and provide the applicant with a written reasoned response. The applicant may file an appeal against that response with the institutions supervising examinations. No institutions that supervise examinations could indicate any such cases where an applicant would have filed a complaint against a response of the chairperson of the commission with a higher institution.²⁸ The applicant may file an appeal against decisions of such higher institutions regarding the examination results within the period of one month with an administrative court, however, no such cases have been found. This can be explained by the circumstance that every applicant may himself or herself become acquainted in detail with the evaluation of the examination taken and ascertain its validity.

3 Conclusion

The procedure (*inter alia* conditions and requirements) for acquiring citizenship through naturalisation is clearly regulated by legal acts, save two minor exceptions. All the information related to the acquisition of citizenship is public and published free of charge on several websites of appropriate state institutions. Any applicant may apply to the relevant state institutions for a consultation either orally or in writing. The said state institutions are under an obligation to reply to the applicant. The Citizenship Commission has a duty to notify in writing all unsuccessful applicants for the granting of citizenship as well as to specify the reasons for the rejection.

All state institutions are, by law, obliged to provide any available information which the applicant is unable to submit, if such information is requested by the institutions participating in the process of granting citizenship, *inter alia* the Migration Department, the Citizenship Commission. The decision-making process concerning the grant of citizenship in Lithuania takes approximately 3 months. The applicant has the right to file a complaint with a

²⁸ The order No. ISAK-286 specifies four institutions of such a kind: the Ministry of Education and Science, the education subdivisions of municipal administrations, the Education Development Centre and the National Examination Centre.

higher institution or a court against decisions of any state institution participating in the decision-making process concerning the granting of citizenship, as well as against the actions of officials of these institutions, including their failure to act.

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