



PERMANENT MISSION OF THE REPUBLIC OF LATVIA TO THE UN,
OSCE AND OTHER INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS IN VIENNA

**Statement by Ambassador Nils Jansons, Permanent
Representative of the Republic of Latvia, delivered in
response to the statement by the Russian Federation**

Permanent Council No 795,
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Mr. Chairman,

I should like to respond to the intervention by the Russian Ambassador. The issue that he raised is, of course, known and has been discussed in the OSCE before. Let me recall that the Latvian Government has pursued policy in two general directions – first, in easing the naturalization requirements and second, in reducing the differences between the citizens and non-citizens.

The naturalization process in Latvia is open for everybody. The Government of Latvia has adopted numerous legislative and proactive measures to encourage the naturalization, including simplifying of exams, reducing fees, sponsoring informative campaigns and providing free of charge language courses for naturalization applicants. To give just one illustration, I can say that children born in Latvia after 21st August 1991 can acquire the citizenship upon a very simple application submitted by their parents. In this way more than 8000 children have been registered as citizens of Latvia.

Every effort has been made to make the naturalization process efficient, user-friendly and desirable. However, one should also bear in mind that naturalization is an individual process, based on an expressed desire of the applicant to become a citizen.

Over the past years a large number of non-citizens have taken up this opportunity and have become citizens. As the result, the number of non-citizens in all likelihood this year will drop below 15% of population.

The effectiveness of the naturalization process is confirmed by the continuously high passing rates of naturalization tests – almost 90% of the applicants have passed in their first attempt.

There is very little difference in rights between citizens and non-citizens, and we recognize that any restrictions here must have strong justification and shall be in accordance with international standards. However, I should note in this context the researches carried out in this field, which have revealed that one of the major obstacles for applying for Latvian citizenship is the lack of practical motivation, including the negligible differences between the rights of citizens and non-citizens.

74% of non-citizens believe that it is even beneficial to be a non-citizen, because, for example, it is possible to travel to the Russian Federation without a visa, whereas citizens of Latvia do need a visa. I would like to say though that Latvia prefers citizens with full rights to non-citizens with many rights, and the state offers full opportunities for naturalization.

As to the administrative set-up, indeed, the Naturalization Board has been recently integrated within the Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs. This is one of many decisions that the Government had to take in order to optimize the public administration and make it more effective. All of the functions of the Naturalization Board are being fully retained. In fact, due to the wider presence of the Office of Citizenship and Migration on the local level, the availability of naturalization will even increase in geographic terms (there will be 30 local offices instead of 8).

Let me repeat that Latvian legislation allows practically every non-citizen to become a citizen of Latvia and it is an individual decision whether to do so.

Finally, I should thank many Participating states that care about this issue and have in one form or another supported the process of naturalization. We believe that political support for this process is important, including support from the Russian Government.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.