

Political participation without citizenship.

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It was discussed on the length that softening of citizenship laws and granting migrants the right to elect and be elected, particularly in local elections could be an effective tool to integration. In this respect I would like to share some Latvian experience and lessons learned from it.

Because of continuity of the pre-war state Latvia refused to grant automatically citizenship to former soviet citizens migrated into Latvia after Second World War, as well as to their descendants. Instead Latvia has created a temporally status of non-citizen and as strategy for reducing of their number chosen the naturalization. Since 1999 we can speak about liberalization of naturalization legislation. Now the citizenship requirements are five year permanent leaving in Latvia, basic knowledge of the language, the history and the institutions. However in 10 years through naturalization Latvia reduced the number of non-citizens for 20%. For last four years only 1% of non-citizens goes through naturalization each year. The strategy of naturalization seems to be exhausted.

Reflecting causes of such situation we concluded that the participation in political life would be much more important as citizenship itself. If people have no interest in politic and public life, they have also no true motivation for naturalization. If the motivation for naturalization is just work permit or some benefits in everyday life, than it has very low impact on integration. In case of Latvia the non-citizens are in fact good integrated in social life, but participation culture is quite low. They was not active in 90ties by regaining of Latvian independence and stay passive in regaining of their rights trough naturalization. Therefore the state has to be more active by encouraging non-citizens to participate in public life and to provide appropriate democratic forms. Apart from election rights on municipal elections we recommend to develop modern form of democratic participation such as local referenda or participatory budgeting.

In our view the naturalization should be the last step of integration. In times of dynamic labour market person can change the country of residence many times. One of the solutions is double citizenship, but it works for two countries. For three or four countries it looks strange. We believe that in long-term perspective the participation without citizenship is more preferable solution for integration of migrant and developing of democracy. Therefore we encourage OSCE to develop detailed international standards about criteria for enjoyment of political rights by non-citizens, and to discuss the division between core issues reserved for nationals and other issues opened for wide democratic participation.