

UPDATE: Amendments in the Greek citizenship legislation, March 2010
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On 11 March the Greek Parliament approved a bill proposed by the Greek government that comprehensively reforms Greek citizenship law. The law will come into force upon publication in the Official Gazette. The main points of the reform are:

1. **Double ius soli.** Automatic acquisition of Greek citizenship if one of the parents is born and permanently resides in the country (Article 1, par. 2, al.a).
2. **Citizenship by declaration.** A new mode of citizenship acquisition is introduced. According to the new article 1a, par. 1 *“the child of foreigners born and living in Greece from parents residing both legally and permanently for five years in the country acquires the Greek citizenship if the parents submit a common declaration and application for registration to the municipality of permanent residence within three years after the child’s birth. (...)”* If the child is born before the completion of the five years ...it acquires the Greek citizenship” once both parents complete five years of lawful residence in the country. According to par. 2 of the same article *“the child of foreigners who has completed successfully at least six classes of Greek school in Greece acquires the Greek citizenship ... with a common declaration and application for registration to the municipality of permanent residence.”* According to par. 6 of article 1a, if this application has not been submitted by the parents until the child reaches the age of majority, then citizenship can be acquired through a personal declaration before the municipality between age 18 and 21.
3. **Seven years of lawful residence for naturalisation of EU long term residents.** In the future, an EU long-term residence permit becomes a precondition for an application for naturalisation after seven years of lawful residence in the country (Art. 2, par. δ, and par. ε, al. aa).
4. **Transitional five year residence requirement.** According to a transitional provision (Art. 25) *“foreigners having completed five years of lawful residence in the country may request their naturalisation upon submitting any valid residence title, except provisional ones”*. Their application should be dealt with within a period of two years.
5. **Three years of lawful residence for facilitated naturalisation for certain categories.** EU citizens, parents of Greek children, spouses of Greek citizens with a child, refugees and stateless individuals can apply for naturalisation already after three years of residence.

6. **One year limit for administrative decisions on naturalisation.** According to Art. 12, new deadlines are introduced for administrative decisions about naturalisation: a. *six months after the submission of an application with the regional administration until an invitation for an interview before the Naturalisation Committee.* b. *four months from the interview until the submission of the Committee's report to the Minister of Interior, and* c. *two months for the issuing and publication of the decision in the Official Gazette.* For the so-called "citizenship definition procedure" a deadline of 18 months is introduced.
7. **Justification of the decision.** According to Art. 8, par. 2. "*the decision on an application for naturalisation is justified according to the provisions of the Code of Administrative procedure*".
8. **Exhaustive list of substantial requirements for naturalisation and possibility to introduce an 'integration test'.** Article 5a, par.1 provides for an exhaustive list of substantial requirements for naturalisation, such as "*sufficient knowledge of the Greek language*", which will enable the applicant to "*fulfil the duties emanating from Greek citizenship*" and allow for "*smooth integration into the country's economic and social life*". For verification of these conditions, the following elements are evaluated: "*familiarity with Greek history and Greek civilization, professional and general economic activity, charitable activities, participation in social organizations members of which are Greek citizens, kin relation with a Greek citizen (...). Recommendations provided by Greek citizens born in Greece have a particular importance for the evaluation of the degree of integration.*" Additionally, for the verification of the substantial requirement the law provides the possibility of introducing an integration test (Art. 5a, par. 2).
9. **Fees of 700 Euro for foreigners and 100 Euro for "homogeneis, refugees and citizens of the EU** (Art. 4, par. 3, al. η). It should be noted, however, that this fee is foreseen for the holders of long term residence cards, the fee for the issuing of which is 600 Euro. That raises the whole fee to 1300 Euro in two instalments within two years (five years for the long term residence status and then seven years for the naturalisation application).
10. **Decentralization of the procedure to the level of the region** (art. 10, par. 3, art. 5) and creation of a Naturalisation Committee at the regional level (art. 8).
11. **Option of voluntary renunciation of citizenship acquired by extension of parental naturalisation or declaration of the parents.** If children have acquired Greek citizenship by a declaration made by their foreign parents or by the extension of their parents' naturalisation, they can renounce their citizenship within a year after the age of majority (Art. 9). "The application will not be accepted if the applicant becomes stateless" (par.3).
12. **Citizenship statistics.** According to Art. 10, par. 4, data about naturalisation will be published on the Ministry's website and will include date of birth, civil status, sex, place of residence, duration of residence in Greece, mode of acquisition and previous citizenship.
13. **Local franchise.** Along with the comprehensive reform of Greek citizenship, the new law provides in its second chapter for voting rights for ethnic Greeks and legally residing migrants in municipal elections, starting from the forthcoming elections in October 2010.