

## BULGARIAN CITIZENSHIP ON THE BASIS OF NATURALISATION

Since 1 January 2007, Bulgaria has been a member state of the European Union (EU) and thereby of the European Economic Area (EEA).

This has coincided with a rise in economic growth, making it even more attractive for individuals and businesses from around the world to establish in Bulgaria, invest and work locally and benefit from the country's freer and deeper connections with the rest of the European continent.

As EU citizens, Bulgarian citizens now have the right to freely offer services, set up in business or relocate for the sake of employment, retirement, studies or simply as persons of independent means throughout the EEA.

Now, 6 west European and 9 east European EEA countries have opened their labour markets to Bulgarian citizens seeking employment fully. 8 further countries will do so by 1/1/2009, with the remainder by the end of 2011. In all cases, self-employment or establishment for business, retirement, as a student or as a person of independent means are all in place.

### *The attractions of Bulgarian citizenship*

- *Visa-free travel to Europe, Latin America and much of Asia*
- *Right to establishment and employment in the EU*
- *Right to establishment and employment in Bulgaria itself*
- *Citizenship of a modern European society with a high human development attainment*
- *Bulgarian and EU public services encouraging and funding education, enterprise and culture*

### **Bulgarian Citizenship:**

- Allows ownership of land in Bulgaria and other EU states that restrict ownership by foreigners
- Permits retaining multiple nationalities, but following a renunciation and reacquisition of the original nationality(ies)
- Perceived as reputationally more attractive than other non-EU nationalities with similar travel regimes
- No personal taxation of non-residents
- No compulsory voting, conscription or other obligations

Acquiring Bulgarian citizenship requires the building of connections with Bulgaria and the passage of time

This brochure deals with the law and practice of acquiring Bulgarian nationality on the basis of investment, residence or marriage. Please see our separate brochure 'Bulgarian Nationality on the Basis of Origin' for information on an alternative route.

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## Requirements

To naturalise, an applicant with no relevant Bulgarian family connections must meet requirements (a) - (d) below:

### (a) Residence:

- (i) She or he received a permanent residence permit in Bulgaria no less than 5 years before the date of the application and is in possession of such a permit at the time of the application; *or*
- (ii) She or he received a permanent residence permit in Bulgaria no less than 3 years before the date of the application and either:
  - has been married to a Bulgarian citizen for 3 years or more (not necessarily the same 3 years as the period of residence in Bulgaria);
  - was born in Bulgaria; or
  - received a permanent residence permit for Bulgaria before reaching majority.

*Please contact New Balkans Law Office (details on p3) for details of qualifying for residence.*

### (b) Character:

The applicant has not been convicted in a Bulgarian court following a public prosecution and there is no ongoing prosecution of him or her.

### (c) Financial circumstances:

The person has an income or profession that provides sufficiently for living in Bulgaria.

### (d) Knowledge of Bulgarian:

Conversational Bulgarian is required of applicants for naturalisation of non-Bulgarian origin. Proof can be provided by passing a standard test set by the Bulgarian Ministry of Education and offered on a regular basis.

## Documents

New Balkans Law Office will advise further in detail on the required documents. The list for an application not on the basis of origin includes:

- a completed application form
- a (certified copy of a) birth certificate
- copy national ID from the applicant's current country of citizenship

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- certificate of good character from the countries of nationalities of the applicant and the country or countries of current residence
- evidence of conversational competence in Bulgarian
- evidence of available financial means
- evidence of the relevant circumstances of residence, marriage, or birth unless contained elsewhere in the documentation.

### **Timescale**

Compared to Italy, Spain or Greece, the Bulgarian procedure is quick. The Ministry of Justice is required to issue an Opinion within 12 months (but may in practice take up to 24 months). A passport can then be issued immediately.

### **Contacts and Further Information:**

Feel free to contact us for further information on the citizenship requirements, the mechanics of the application and the concrete circumstances of your case or for other immigration law questions.

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