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Operation Naturalization

Revisiting the debate and legislation

The rules and principles that define the formation of Lebanon's citizenry have been an important political and sectarian concern since the emergence of the modern Lebanese state in 1920. Further complicated by the country's border expansion (to include former Syrian territory) at the time of independence, unresolved matters concerning who is entitled to citizenship persist.

Shortcomings of the 1932 census

Questions regarding the territorial identity and citizenry of the Lebanese state can be traced back to the population census of 1932, which excluded numerous territories, notably in the frontier areas, i.e. areas bordering on Palestine under British mandate or Syria under French mandate. This is the case of residents of the 'Seven Villages' of south Lebanon as well as Wadi Khaled, which includes roughly 16 villages in the northern region of Akkar, bordering Syria.

Since then, the debate persisted between conflicting confessional and political camps; one advocating the naturalization of the population in those areas with the other camp calling for the inclusion of emigrants and their offspring as citizens, but this enumeration was limited and based on demographic, sectarian and political considerations.

Naturalization Law

Regulation 2825 of 30 August 1924 (which established Lebanese citizenship for the first time) determined that any person who was an Ottoman subject and resided in the territories of Greater Lebanon at the time of the regulation would be regarded as a Lebanese citizen.

Based on this, the French High Commissioner issued a Lebanese citizenship law, known as Regulation 15, on 19 January 1925 (with later amendments, in

particular Regulation 3633 of 4 May 1926) that determined the conditions for Lebanese citizenship as follows:

- n Every person born to a Lebanese father.
- n Every person born on the territory of Greater Lebanon who was not proved to have a foreign nationality by descent at the time of birth.
- n Every person born on the territory of Greater Lebanon of unidentified parents or parents of unidentified origin.
- n A foreigner is entitled to Lebanese citizenship by a presidential decision after having proven a residency period of 10 consecutive years, or by marriage to a Lebanese woman and a proof of residency for five consecutive years (in contrast, a female foreigner who weds a Lebanese is entitled to citizenship after one year), or by performing important services to the country.

In addition, the regulation stated that any citizen who acquires another nationality without the express permission of the head of state will lose his or her Lebanese citizenship.

However, owing to the lack of modernization and implementation of the citizenship law, foreigners who wed Lebanese women have not been receiving the nationality, with the exception of those who received it through a decree. Many individuals of Palestinian, Syrian, Armenian or European origin were granted such citizenship, based on sectarian or financial considerations. **Table 1** on the following page illustrates some of the decrees issued in past years.

Naturalization in 1994

In 1992, various organizations, including religious and political groups, started to

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document cases of individuals and fami-