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RECENT CHANGES IN THE PROCESS OF OBTAINING ISRAELI
CITIZENSHIP. A VALIDATION OF THE «ETHNO-REPUBLICAN»
DISCOURSE?

*To define the State of Israel as a Jewish State is
the key to its end¹.*

Introduction

This article intends to discuss the notion of citizenship in Israel, in order to highlight the difficulty of a state that is defined both in religious-ethnic and in democratic terms. To do that, this article analyzes recent developments as far as the granting of citizenship is concerned and puts them into a theoretical context.

Three events that occurred in the last years have substantially changed - or at least challenged - the mechanisms through which the Israeli citizenship is acquired. They are the *Nationality and Entry into Israel Amendment Law*, approved by the *Knesset* in July 2003 and extended until June 2009; a Government decision related to granting citizenship to foreign workers' minor children, adopted in 2006; and a proposal of law dealing with non-Jewish relatives of

¹ A. Burg, interviewed by Ari Shavit, *Haaretz Magazine*, 08.06.07. See also A. Burg, *Sconfiggere Hitler. Per un nuovo universalismo e umanesimo ebraico*, Vicenza, Neri Pozza ed., 2008.

Abstract

This article intends to discuss the notion of citizenship in Israel, in order to highlight the difficulty of a state that is defined both in religious-ethnic and in democratic terms. To do that, this article analyzes recent developments as far as the granting of citizenship is concerned and puts them into a theoretical context.

Three events that occurred in the last years have substantially changed - or at least challenged - the mechanisms through which the Israeli citizenship is acquired. They are the *Nationality and Entry into Israel Amendment Law*, approved by the *Knesset* in July 2003 and extended until June 2009; a Government decision related to granting citizenship to foreign workers' minor children, adopted in 2006; and a proposal of law dealing with non-Jewish relatives of Israeli citizens who have acquired citizenship under the Law of Return, which has not been transformed in a Law, yet. Despite addressing very different cases, these three juridical acts are related to the unique sensitive issue of granting the Israeli citizenship to non-Jews, either Palestinians from the West Bank and Gaza, foreign workers' minor children, or non-Jews mainly coming from former USSR countries.

By analysing different definitions of citizenship, I will present what Yoav Peled defined *ethno-republican* discourse, since it is the most useful tool to understand the Israeli citizenship's case. The article aims at demonstrating that the three changes to the process of obtaining Israeli citizenship analysed are strengthening the ethno-nationalist discourse, by minimizing the number of non-Jewish people who are entitled to get the citizenship.

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