

Frieden sets out dual nationality criteria

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More clarity has been given to the issue of dual nationality by justice minister Luc Frieden, but still questions remain as to how this will work in practice and whether the measure will have the desired effect of boosting immigrant integration.

Speaking at a Chamber of Commerce conference on this subject last week, Frieden revealed the language requirements; the aspect of this measure which has proved to be the most controversial. He said candidates would need to be able to understand radio and TV news bulletins in Luxembourgish, but that their spoken proficiency should run to just being able to give basic personal details. An exception would be made for people arriving before Luxembourgish was made an official language in 1984 and for those having completed a local secondary education.

In addition, there would be a seven-year residency requirement (up from the current five years needed for full nationality) and applicants would need to attend "two or three" civics courses, but there would be no test. In an aside, Frieden also indicated his desire to see English taught in primary school.

Sixteen months have passed since the draft law was originally tabled, and public and political opinion has divided mainly on the language issue. Some see Luxembourgish as a key aspect of national identity that should not be toyed with, but others fear that having this language requirement will hamper efforts at integration. With over 40 percent of the population currently being non-Luxembourgish, some see the



potential for social and political dislocation if more is not done to favour integration and that the language requirement will deter most from seeking joint nationality.

Some argue that knowledge of any of the official languages (French, German and Luxembourgish) should suffice. Others have pointed to the high failure rates at Luxembourgish classes organised nationally and locally, indicating there may be a problem with the teaching methods. Also, courses will need to be redesigned to fit the tests.

Frieden did not reveal any details of how, if at all, the government plans to encourage and enable more foreigners to learn Luxembourgish. When they delivered their verdict on the draft law last Spring, the four professional chambers representing employees and workers in Luxembourg argued that language

classes should be conducted during working hours and that the state and/or employers should compensate employees for any loss of salary incurred by attending classes.

The impression given is of the government seeking to broaden participation in public life, but that joint-nationality is unlikely to solve all the problems in one. But some bodies such as the Cercle Joseph Bech (CJB), a traditionally conservative think-tank, argue that all EU citizens should be given the same rights as Luxembourgers irrespective of nationality. Indeed, with EU citizens now eligible thanks to a European Commission directive – to work in the civil service and also able to vote in local government elections, the only argument for a foreign EU citizen to take on Luxembourgish nationality is that it would allow them to vote and stand in national parliament elections.