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Foreword

Most North Atlantic nations today, whether they regard themselves as "nations of immigration" or quite the opposite, have large and growing noncitizen populations. Those immigrants who eventually become full members of society (i.e., citizens) have powers, rights, and privileges that nonmembers do not possess. How a government handles the membership-nonmembership question determines the very fabric of the nation.

Some Western democracies today make it easy (and quick) for an alien resident to become a citizen; others erect substantial barriers. Some offer the resident alien many rights and privileges (such as social security, health insurance, voting privileges); others provide more limited access. The range of policy choices and the economic and social effects consequent upon each choice were the subject of an international conference hosted in November 1987 by the German Marshall Fund of the United States.

Since the Fund began in 1972—as an independent American institution supported by a gift from the German people as a memorial to the Marshall Plan—it has sought to address problems common to industrialized societies, especially those problems most troubling to the Atlantic community. This has meant keeping watch for innovative solutions being pursued on one side of the Atlantic that might be adapted for use on the other.

The 1987 conference on comparative citizenship and naturalization policies grew out of this programmatic concern. Six nations—Canada, France, Sweden, West Germany, the United Kingdom, and the United States—sent a select group of their senior administrators and policymakers. Leading academic experts and critics of some current practices also took part. GMF Program Officer Anne Heald, assisted by consultant David North, organized the conference, which was held at Coolfont, West Virginia.