

WRITTEN QUESTION P-3298/09
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to the Commission

Subject: Purchases of land and other real estate by buyers from outside the EU

In the EU Member States, various disparate rules apply to purchases of land and other real estate by buyers from outside the EU. In some Member States, particularly at local level, there seem to be problems in ascertaining buyers' background and intentions and the lawfulness of their financing.

As overall information about purchases of land and other real estate is lacking, it is difficult to be sure how widespread the problems are. However, large-scale acquisitions may even affect Member States' national security and security of supply. This is particularly the case if the ownership of areas which are important to communications and electricity or water distribution is transferred outside a Member State. It is questionable whether it makes sense for EU Member States to surrender such areas of their territory or other areas which are important in different ways.

The EU should consider issuing instructions to its Member States concerning legislation and supervision in this field. Some Member States do not even have an authority whose responsibilities include ascertaining the background of purchasers. For example it is no longer possible to obtain information about the possible criminal background of Russian nationals.

The EU should require Member States to keep a register of all land and other real estate owned by people or companies from outside the EU. At present many registers only contain information about holiday flats and homes owned by individual aliens. Keeping registers is a basic precondition for monitoring control over areas and even, if need be, restricting sales.

It is also necessary to draw attention to the reciprocity of trade. I have learned that, despite many attempts, EU citizens have found it either extremely difficult or completely impossible to buy land or other real estate, for instance, in Russia.

Member States should also be able to ascertain the origin of the money of a purchaser from outside the EU. Laundering of money derived from prostitution, drugs trafficking or economic crime should be prevented. Within the EU there should be an absolute rule that when the vendor is a public body of an EU Member State, it must be possible to ascertain precisely the background of the purchaser and of the money before the transaction is performed.

In the light of the above, what measures will the Commission take to harmonise the rules on purchases of land and other real estate in EU territory by parties outside the EU?