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EU citizenship for sale

European Parliament resolution of 16 January 2014 on EU citizenship for sale (2013/2995(RSP))

The European Parliament,

- having regard to Articles 4, 5, 9 and 10 of the Treaty on European Union,
 - having regard to Article 20 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union,
 - having regard to Rule 110(2) and (4) of its Rules of Procedure,
- A. whereas every Member State is expected to act responsibly in preserving the Union's common values and achievements, and whereas those values and achievements are invaluable and cannot have a price tag attached to them;
- B. whereas a number of Member States have introduced schemes which directly or indirectly result in the sale of EU citizenship to third-country nationals;
- C. whereas an increasing number of Member States are issuing temporary or permanent residence permits to third-country nationals who make investments in the Member State concerned;
- D. whereas in some Member States permanent residency with access to the whole Schengen Area can be obtained; whereas in certain Member States steps are being taken that may lead to the effective sale of citizenship of that Member State;
- E. whereas in some cases these investment programmes have possible negative side-effects, such as distortion of local housing markets;
- F. whereas the Maltese Government, in particular, has recently taken steps to introduce a scheme for the outright sale of Maltese citizenship, which automatically entails the outright sale of EU citizenship as a whole without any residency requirement;
- G. whereas such outright sale of EU citizenship undermines the mutual trust upon which the Union is built;
- H. whereas EU citizens in particular have the right to move and reside freely within the EU, to vote and stand as candidates in municipal and European Parliament elections wherever they live in the EU, under the same conditions as nationals, and to be assisted by another Member State's embassy or consulate outside the EU under the same conditions as a citizen of that Member State, if their own is not represented;
- I. whereas the EU is based on mutual trust between Member States, built on years of gradual work and goodwill on the part of Member States, as well as on the part of the Union as a whole;
- J. whereas concerns have also been expressed about criminal abuse of these investment

programmes, including issues such as money laundering;

- K. whereas concerns exist as regards possible discrimination because these practices by Member States only allow the richest third-country nationals to obtain EU citizenship, without any other criteria being considered;
- L. whereas it is not clear whether Maltese citizens will really benefit from this new policy, for example through the collection of taxes, as the foreign investors concerned will not be required to pay taxes; recalls that citizenship involves not only rights but also responsibilities;
- M. whereas EU citizenship is one of the EU's major achievements and whereas, according to the EU Treaties, matters of residency and citizenship lie within the exclusive competence of the Member States;
 - 1. Is concerned that this way of obtaining citizenship in Malta, as well as any other national scheme that may involve the direct or indirect outright sale of EU citizenship, undermines the very concept of European citizenship;
 - 2. Calls on Member States to recognise and live up to the responsibilities they hold in safeguarding the values and objectives of the Union;
 - 3. Calls on the Commission, as the guardian of the Treaties, to state clearly whether these schemes respect the letter and spirit of the Treaties and the Schengen Borders Code, as well as the EU rules on non-discrimination;
 - 4. Reiterates that Article 4(3) of the Treaty on European Union enshrines the principle of 'sincere cooperation' between the Union and the Member States, which are, in full mutual respect, to assist each other in carrying out the tasks which flow from the Treaties;
 - 5. Expresses concern at the implications of some of the investors' and citizenship schemes that have recently been established by various EU Member States;
 - 6. Acknowledges that matters of residency and citizenship are the competence of the Member States; calls on the Member States, nevertheless, to be careful when exercising their competences in this area and to take possible side-effects into account;
 - 7. Notes that EU citizenship implies the holding of a stake in the Union and depends on a person's ties with Europe and the Member States or on personal ties with EU citizens; stresses that EU citizenship should never become a tradable commodity;
 - 8. Underlines the fact that the rights conferred by EU citizenship are based on human dignity and should not be bought or sold at any price;
 - 9. Emphasises that access to funds should not be the main criterion in conferring EU citizenship on third-country nationals; calls on the Member States to take account of fraud-related criminal concerns such as money laundering;
 - 10. Notes that ongoing competition for more attractive investment conditions or financial resources may lead to a lowering of the standards and requirements for obtaining Schengen Area residence permits and EU citizenship;

11. Calls on the Commission to assess the various citizenship schemes in the light of European values and the letter and spirit of EU legislation and practice, and to issue recommendations in order to prevent such schemes from undermining the values that the EU has been built upon, as well as guidelines for access to EU citizenship via national schemes;
12. Calls on Malta to bring its current citizenship scheme into line with the EU's values;
13. Calls on the Member States that have adopted national schemes which allow the direct or indirect sale of EU citizenship to third-country nationals to bring them into line with the EU's values;
14. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission and the governments and parliaments of the Member States.