

Beat: Politics

EU citizenship should not be for sale, European Parliament says

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USPA News - European Union (EU) citizenship should not be for sale at any price, the European Parliament said in a resolution on Thursday, but the Maltese government which plans to do just that showed it was not impressed and vowed to go ahead with its plans. In the resolution, Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) voiced their concern about emerging schemes in which EU member states plan to sell citizenship to their country at a hefty price.

Citizens of EU member states automatically become EU citizens, meaning countries allowing the sale of citizenship are effectively putting EU citizenship up for sale. The resolution, passed with 560 votes to 22 with 44 abstentions, said citizenship to the union of 28 states is invaluable and "cannot have a price tag attached." It also called on the European Commission to determine whether citizenship-for-sale schemes respect the letter and spirit of EU treaties and EU rules on non-discrimination. Parliament stressed that the rights conferred by EU citizenship, such as the right to move and reside freely within the EU, should not be treated as a "tradable commodity." EU citizenship implies having a stake in the EU and depends on a person's ties with the EU and its member states or on personal ties with EU citizens, the resolution stated. "These practices by Member States only allow the richest third-country nationals to obtain EU citizenship, without any other criteria being considered," which implies discrimination, Parliament noted. The resolution specifically took aim at the tiny country of Malta that is planning to sell passports, a plan that has been met with heavy criticism. But Maltese Prime Minister Joseph Muscat showed during a news conference on Thursday that he was not impressed by the resolution and vowed to continue with the scheme. "We have taken note of what has been said. Now let's move on," the prime minister said, as quoted by the Deutsche Presse-Agentur (dpa). Muscat said the government had already received a number of applications from people who are interested in buying citizenship at a price of 1.15 million euros (\$1.58 million). "My government was elected to govern in the national interest. It was elected to bring about change and raise living standards," he said, according to dpa. The Maltese government expects it can raise at least a billion euros (\$1.36 billion) through the scheme, but the European Parliament expressed doubts that the new policy will actually help benefit Maltese citizens. It noted that those who buy Maltese citizenship would not be required to pay taxes if they do not live in Malta. In Thursday's resolution, the European Parliament called on the European Commission to state clearly whether the citizenship-for-sale schemes respect EU treaties and the Schengen Borders Code, as well as EU rules on non-discrimination. It asked the Commission to issue recommendations to prevent such schemes from undermining the EU's founding values, as well as guidelines on granting access to EU citizenship via national schemes.

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