

Press release – Member states must stop selling EU passports immediately, MEPs demand



In a plenary debate with Justice Commissioner Didier Reynders, MEPs stressed the inherent risks that these programmes give rise to, namely money laundering, tax evasion and corruption. They insisted that Europe must not have “a fast-track entrance for criminals”.

MEPs underlined that granting EU citizenship to third-country nationals without proper checks and transparency has negative consequences in other member states, eroding mutual trust and undermining common values.

Several speakers referred to the recent scandal in Cyprus, where high-ranking officials – including the Speaker of the national parliament – were secretly recorded offering to assist a fictional Chinese executive with a criminal record in getting a Cypriot passport through the national “citizenship by investment” scheme. They also acknowledge the Commission’s decision to [open infringement procedures against Cyprus and Malta](#), though some complained that it has taken too long to act.

Some MEPs noted that the share of revenues from these programmes is significant for countries such as Cyprus, whilst many argued that EU values and rights should not be for sale.

Background

Cyprus, Malta, and Bulgaria are the three EU countries where it is possible to get citizenship in exchange for an investment, the so-called “golden passports”. As many as 19 EU countries operate “residence by investment” programmes, known as “golden visas”.

In January 2019, the European Commission established [a group of experts](#) with representatives from all EU member states to develop common standards and guidelines in this area. After four meetings last year, the group has so far not met in 2020.