
EU Commission: illegal passport trade, infringement procedures against Cyprus and Malta

Infringement procedures have been launched against Cyprus and Malta over the so-called “golden passport” schemes, that is, the selling at exorbitant prices of Cypriot and Maltese (and thus EU) citizenship to third-country nationals. The Commission has issued letters of formal notice to the governments of the two countries concerned, since this practice “is not compatible with the principle of sincere cooperation enshrined in Article 4(3) of the Treaty on European Union”, a statement from Brussels reads. “Such schemes have implications for the Union as a whole” in that when a Member State grants citizenship, the person concerned becomes an EU citizen and enjoys all rights linked to this status (the right to move, reside and work freely within the EU, and to vote in municipal and European Parliament elections). The Cypriot and Maltese governments will now have two months to reply to today’s letters. If the replies are not satisfactory, the Commission may issue a “Reasoned Opinion”. This illegal trade in passports has long been investigated by the European institutions: in January 2019, the Commission had already exposed the risks inherent in such practice, relating in particular to security, money laundering, tax evasion and corruption, and in April 2020, it had formally raised its concerns with the countries concerned. A similar letter has also been sent to Bulgaria over the “investor citizenship scheme” run by Sofia. According to today’s edition of The Times of Malta newspaper, “golden passports” have generated more than €800 million in revenue for the Maltese government between 2014 and July 2020 and €7 billion for Cyprus.

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