

Transparency International EU

The global coalition against corruption

Press release: European Commission sees corruption risks but needs to get tougher on golden visas

Alessandro · Wednesday, January 23rd, 2019

The European Commission said today that schemes that sell citizenship and residency to the super rich, known as ‘golden visas’, threaten the EU’s collective security and integrity.

The Commission’s report states that the citizenship schemes are “deliberately marketed and often explicitly advertised as a means of acquiring EU citizenship” with Bulgaria, Cyprus and Malta disregarding Union Law by selling passports without requiring applicants to live in their country.

A day ahead of the report’s release, the Bulgarian government announced they would suspend their citizenship scheme.

Anti-corruption watchdogs Transparency International and Global Witness warn that the report from the Commission falls short of the urgent action needed to clean up the shady industry.

“The tide is turning on the golden visa industry with the EU recognising the unacceptable security and corruption risks they create. However, the Commission’s report tells us nothing about what Member States actually need to do – now they’ve sounded the alarm, they need to offer solutions,” said Naomi Hirst, Senior Anti-Corruption Campaigner at Global Witness. *“It’s now time for Member States to take responsibility for their golden visa schemes and, following Bulgaria’s lead, suspend them until it is clear they are no longer threatening the security of the EU.”*

Global Witness and Transparency International say these measures are not adequate for what is needed and are calling for stricter due diligence measures and an EU-wide enforcement of these standards.

“This report firmly puts the spotlight on dubious schemes in Member States, which is a good first step.” said Laure Brillaud of Transparency International. *“However, we see little incentive for countries like Malta to scrap these lucrative schemes without strong action from international institutions such as the EU.”*

The Commission is not the only European body that has expressed concern with golden visas. In a [draft report](#) published in September, the European Parliament’s Special Committee on Financial Crimes and Tax Evasion (TAX3) called for the schemes to be phased out.

#ENDS#

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Notes to Editors:

Global Witness and Transparency International's report [European Getaway – Inside the Murky World of Golden Visas](#), details the corruption risks inherent with 'golden visa' programmes. It found that these schemes open the EU to the criminal and corrupt, as a result of insufficient due diligence, conflicts of interest, and wide discretionary powers.

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