# EU citizenship-for-sale schemes threaten security and undermine sanctions enforcement



Russian businessman Albert Avdolyan, despite facing European Union sanctions tied to Moscow's war in Ukraine, continues to elude the full impact of EU travel restrictions owing to his Maltese citizenship—acquired through a widely criticised “golden” visa programme. This scheme, which remains under fierce legal challenge at the European Court of Justice (ECJ), exemplifies the dangerous loopholes exploited by politically exposed figures connected to malign activities. The forthcoming ECJ ruling will be pivotal in addressing how such investor citizenship schemes undermine EU security and sovereignty.

Avdolyan’s acquisition of Maltese citizenship in 2015, under a programme thoroughly condemned for ‘selling’ EU citizenship, has allowed him and others similarly sanctioned to maintain unrestricted European travel and financial privileges, despite their problematic ties. These loopholes not only facilitate the evasion of sanctions but also expose the EU to serious security risks. The programme’s requirements—a minimum €600,000 investment, property transactions, charitable donations, and brief residency—are cynically designed to prioritise financial gain over genuine ties to the EU.

The Maltese government continues to defend this scheme, despite having become the last EU state to persist in selling citizenship—practices vehemently opposed by the European Commission, which rightly asserts that “EU values are not for sale.” The commission’s ongoing legal battle against Malta underscores the urgency of shutting down such ethically dubious initiatives that offer a backdoor for questionable individuals to obtain full EU rights, including freedom of movement and access to financial systems.

Notably, Avdolyan’s case is far from isolated. Several other recipients of Maltese passports have faced sanctions or legal woes—such as Evgeniya Vladimirovna Bernova, accused of facilitating exports to Russian military entities, and Pavel Melnikov, a convicted fraudster whose citizenship was revoked. The presence of politically sensitive individuals, including members of foreign royal families, further highlights the risky entanglement between these citizenship-for-sale schemes and international political influence.

While Malta asserts it has tightened screening and banned Russian and Belarusian applicants, the evidence shows that residency requirements can be superficially met—as demonstrated by brief stays and contrived documentation—raising questions about the integrity of these checks. Campaign groups warn that these schemes amount to an "insurance policy" for illicit actors, enabling them to bypass legitimate sanctions and embed themselves within the EU.

The continuation of such programmes represents a direct challenge to EU security and legal standards. The newly elected UK government has expressed strong opposition to similar ‘golden visa’ schemes, reinforcing the need for tougher immigration controls that do not sacrifice national and regional security for unvetted foreign investment. With the UK now under leadership challenging the status quo, policies will pivot firmly against such backdoor entry and financial secrecy that compromise public safety and economic stability.

The anticipated ECJ verdict will signal whether the EU will maintain robust standards against nationality commodification or allow a damaging precedent that may trigger a “race to the bottom” in citizen integrity standards. Any validation of Malta’s programme would embolden other nations to exploit these schemes further, undermining the European Union’s capacity to enforce sanctions and uphold its foundational values.

Ultimately, this issue exemplifies the critical intersection of geopolitics, security, and regulatory governance—one that demands firm and immediate action. As the UK progresses with a clear agenda to protect its borders and fight corruption, scrutiny must intensify against all attempts to weaponize citizenship schemes for strategic and financial gain, solidifying the stance that citizenship is a privilege—not a commodity for sale.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

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