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Deconstructing Citizenship

If I were the President of Malta, I would prefer resigning than signing such unannounced, significant and divisive legislation, unless it is approved by referendum



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The Labour Government had parliamentary legitimacy to introduce its cash-for-citizenship law. But through this policy, Labour has unintentionally opened a Pandora's box and manufactured a risk scenario, on various aspects.

First, by saying that the funds generated from the IIP will be used for social development can raise questions about Malta's state of public finances and about the general state of the economy. Looking at the reaction, globally and nationally towards this policy, will Malta be effectively associated with Southern European near-bankrupt welfare states and with Caribbean tax havens? Perception is very important in economics.

Second, by guaranteeing anonymity to those who purchase citizenship, inevitable questions are asked. Why should such persons remain anonymous? Is there a link with party financing, given Malta's lack of legislation in this area? What argument can be used to justify a person's expensive purchase of full access to the EU whilst remaining anonymous?

Third, the fact that cash-for-citizenship was not in Labour's electoral manifesto raises questions as to why it was left out from pre-electoral debate, both within the party and also within society in general.

In an otherwise strong showing in his budgetary reply earlier this week, Prime Minister Joseph Muscat did not convince me when he justified cash-for-citizenship by saying that 7,000 foreigners were granted Maltese citizenship in the past years. What Muscat did not say was that everyone could have applied for this, that it was transparent, and that there was no €650,000 price tag. Hence, the new law is discriminatory in favour of those who can afford to buy citizenship.

So my concern on the issue does not regard 'nationalism'. Citizenship itself is not a monolithic term, and it can be deconstructed and interpreted in various ways. My concern is that anonymous millionaires are now entitled to purchases rights in Malta and the EU, something which, because of class inequality is denied to others.

This policy legitimizes class inequality and discrimination, rendering 'citizenship' to another commodity in the endless capitalist quest for the commodification of everything, and in the State's attempts to avoid fiscal crisis. Malta has already had enough of this through the privatization of public land.

If I were the President of Malta, I would prefer resigning than signing such unannounced, significant and divisive legislation, unless it is approved by referendum. It is now up to civil society to stand up to be counted and call for one.