



GERMAN GOVERNMENT SEEKS TO EASE RULES FOR NATURALIZATION - ASSOCIATED PRESS

Posted on November 27, 2022 by GEIR MOULSON | Associated Press



Photo: Nancy Faeser, Federal Minister of the Interior and Home Affairs talks to members of the press in Emden, Germany

Germany's socially liberal government is moving ahead with plans to ease the rules for obtaining citizenship in the European Union's most populous country, a drive that is being assailed by the conservative opposition.

Chancellor Olaf Scholz said in a video message Saturday that Germany has long since become "the country of hope" for many, and it's a good thing when people who have put down roots in the country decide to take citizenship.

"Germany needs better rules for the naturalization of all these great women and men," Scholz said.

The overhaul of citizenship rules is one of a series of modernizing reforms that the three-party coalition of Scholz's center-left Social Democrats, the environmentalist Greens and the pro-business Free Democrats agreed to tackle when it took office last December. The Interior Ministry said on Friday that draft legislation is "as good as ready."

Last year's coalition agreement calls for people to be eligible for German citizenship after five years, or three in case of "special integration accomplishments," rather than eight or six years at present. German-born children would automatically become citizens if one parent has been a legal resident for five years.

The government also wants to drop restrictions on holding dual citizenship. In principle, most people from countries other than European Union members and Switzerland currently have to give up their previous nationality when they gain German citizenship, though there are some exemptions.

Interior Minister Nancy Faeser argued that reducing the waiting time to be eligible for citizenship is "an incentive for integration."

The aim is to reflect reality, she said Friday. "We are a diverse, modern country of immigration, and I think legislation must reflect that."

Official statistics show that about 131,600 people took German citizenship last year, a quarter of them citizens of other EU countries. The number was 20% higher than the previous year, in part because an increasing number of Syrians were naturalized. Germany's total population is around 84 million.

The main center-right opposition Union bloc rejects the plans to liberalize naturalization laws.

"Selling off German citizenship cheap doesn't encourage integration — it aims for exactly the opposite and will trigger additional 'pull effects' for illegal migration," senior conservative lawmaker Alexander Dobrindt told Saturday's edition of the Bild daily.

"Five years is a very, very short time" for people to be eligible for citizenship, Union chief whip Thorsten Frei told ZDF television.

Among other liberalizing plans, the government has removed from Germany's criminal code a ban on doctors "advertising" abortion services. It has reduced the minimum age for voting in European Parliament elections from 18 to 16 and wants to do the same for national elections.

It also wants to scrap 40-year-old legislation that requires transsexual people to get a psychological assessment and a court decision before officially changing gender, and replace that with a new "self-determination law." And it aims to decriminalize the possession of limited quantities of cannabis and allow its sale to adults for recreational purposes in a controlled market.

Some of the plans may run into difficulty in parliament's upper house, which represents Germany's 16 state governments and where Scholz's coalition doesn't control a majority. It had to water down elements of an overhaul of unemployment benefits to get that passed this week.