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Ukraine allows multiple citizenships

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On 18 June, the Verkhovna Rada (VR) passed, at second reading, a law regulating the holding of multiple citizenships. The bill was supported by 243 deputies, with 19 voting against and 9 abstaining. The new legislation allows certain foreign nationals to acquire Ukrainian citizenship through a simplified procedure, without being required to renounce their existing citizenship. Until now, obtaining Ukrainian citizenship was conditional on relinquishing any ties to a foreign state. However, the adopted provisions apply only to selected countries listed in an official register. Citizens of states designated as aggressors, occupiers, or those that do not recognise Ukraine's territorial integrity are excluded from eligibility.

Ukrainians, in turn, will be permitted to acquire a foreign passport without having to renounce their Ukrainian citizenship, even if this occurs voluntarily (i.e. through naturalisation). This measure is likewise limited to countries included in the list. Judges and public officials will not be allowed to hold multiple citizenships. Previously, a Ukrainian national who voluntarily obtained a foreign passport was required to notify the authorities and relinquish Ukrainian citizenship.

The legislation forms part of a new government policy towards Ukrainians residing abroad. Although President Volodymyr Zelensky is widely expected to sign the bill, its entry into force remains uncertain owing to potential constitutional inconsistencies. The bill's approval was aided by the government's decision to incorporate concerns raised by the opposition and non-governmental organisations, which had typically been disregarded.

Commentary

- **The adopted legislation is part of Kyiv's broader efforts to improve relations with Ukrainian citizens living abroad.** In December 2024, the government established the Ministry of National Unity (see '*Ukraine's new ministry for communication with the diaspora*'), and in April this year, it approved measures to facilitate passport renewal for men of conscription-age residing abroad. This marks a significant shift from the previously inconsistent and often unsympathetic approach towards Ukrainian refugees and pre-war emigrants. The newly adopted law on multiple citizenships is the fifth such proposal put forward by President Zelensky. He has justified its introduction as necessary to maintain ties with ethnic Ukrainians living outside the country. The aim is to encourage their eventual return and, at least in part, to mitigate Ukraine's worsening demographic situation (see '*Ukraine in the face of a demographic catastrophe*').

- **The bill has raised legal concerns, as Article 4 of Ukraine's Constitution stipulates that only one citizenship is permitted.** For this reason, the Verkhovna Rada has referred the law to the Constitutional Court, which has yet to issue a ruling, having been paralysed for several months by an insufficient number of sitting judges. The Rada's Chief Scientific and Expert Department has also expressed reservations, warning that multiple citizenship could create difficulties in resolving matters such as military service obligations (including the potential weakening of national defence if individuals with multiple citizenships evade conscription), taxation, or the provision of diplomatic protection. In practice, the existing regulations have long been largely symbolic, as Ukrainians acquiring a second citizenship rarely notified the authorities. Citizens have generally been aware that the state lacks the tools to verify how many passports an individual holds. At the same time, in most EU countries multiple citizenships – even those acquired through naturalisation – are allowed and generally do not lead to the kinds of complications raised by the Department.
- **The law was supported by both the ruling party and the opposition, with the exception of Yulia Tymoshenko's Batkivshchyna**, which condemned it as unconstitutional and described it as a 'project to eliminate the Ukrainian nation'. Initially, Petro Poroshenko's European Solidarity also voiced disapproval. Its MPs demanded that applicants for citizenship under the simplified procedure be required to pass an examination on the Ukrainian language, history, and political system. This proposal was ultimately accepted, prompting European Solidarity to back the bill. As a result of the amendments, some of the provisions criticised by NGOs and parts of the opposition were also softened. In particular, amendments were introduced to prevent the automatic revocation of citizenship for individuals subjected to forced passportisation in Russian-occupied territories. The success of the vote can therefore be attributed to the ruling majority's decision to incorporate opposition demands – constructive ones in this case – a practice rarely seen in the Verkhovna Rada.