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Obtaining a second passport is an excellent flag-planting/diversification agenda. However, your agenda shouldn't be, in fact, a second passport. It should be a second citizenship. That's the appropriate first step. With a second citizenship, you can then apply for and obtain a second passport. A bunch of people around the world approach this the other way around. They put the second passport itself first, and they don't have to look too far to find someone somewhere happy enough to sell them one.

Unfortunately, obtaining a passport that way could well land you in a jail cell, if not when you actually buy the thing then when you try to use it. Years ago, a colleague told me that he could get me a Romanian passport. This was before Romania entered the EU. His pitch was that getting the passport before EU entry would be easier than it would be after that event... and, once Romania was in the EU, the passport would allow for free travel within that zone. His one caveat was that the passport shouldn't be used to enter Romania, as that would be a problem.

More recently, here in Panama, I had a very entertaining encounter with a supposed immigration official who told me he could get me and all my friends Panamanian passports. All he needed was the names of everyone who wanted a passport and US\$20,000 per person. Get him the list and the money by Saturday, and he would make the passports for me on Monday. Monday, it seemed, was a government holiday, meaning he could be alone in the office to do his work. Obviously, neither of these offers was a path to citizenship. Sure, I could have jumped on this quick and easy passport opportunities (I didn't), and maybe I would have gotten some use out of them.

But I never would have been able to renew either of them, and the likelihood that, traveling on them, I'd be picked up by some immigration official in some random country was high. These offers qualify as what are called in the business "black market" and "grey market" passports. You come across them in many countries. In some cases, it can be a real immigration guy making the passport off the books. In others, a case of passport blanks may have been "misplaced" and found its way to a guy with a process for putting your photo and details into the blank document. Whatever the method of

procurement, unless you're on the run from the mob or a vindictive ex-wife, these passports aren't worth the risk.

One group in the Dominican Republic is currently offering a "quick-route" passport that they claim takes but six to eight months to acquire. With three trips to the country, you can have your passport for a mere US\$25,000. They even state they will get you a certificate of naturalization. For that to be possible, they must be paying off some guy in the immigration office. Even if the passport you obtain is valid, someone at some point is going to figure out what's going on. Once that happens, that passport will be revoked. Even if you don't end up in jail, you'll end up stranded.

## How This Should Work

Every country provides for a path to naturalization through its constitution and law of nationality. In most countries, eligibility for citizenship and a passport requires a period of extended legal and physical residence of 3 to 10 years or more. The applicant must also demonstrate good conduct, full compliance with immigration rules, typically some degree of language proficiency, as well as substantial integration into the local culture. This is the world of the "white market" passport, whereby the applicant obtains citizenship and a passport through normal means set forth in the law.

A country's nationality laws may reduce or even eliminate the required residence period before naturalization and issuance of a white-market passport by:

- Permitting citizens the right to bring a non-resident spouse into the country as a legal resident. After a shorter than normal period of residence, the spouse is eligible to apply for citizenship and passport. For instance, in Belize the period of normal residence required to obtain a passport is five years. However, the non-citizen spouse of a Belize citizen is eligible for citizenship and passport after only one year.
- Permitting citizens the right to bring an adopted child into the country as a legal resident. Again, after

a shorter than normal period of residence, the parent may sponsor the child for citizenship and passport.

- Providing that descendants of persons born in that country who emigrated from it can, in effect, reclaim their forefather's nationality. Many countries give the children of emigrants this privilege, and a few, including Ireland and Italy, extend it to grandchildren.
- Allowing residents of overseas territories of that nation to acquire a citizenship and passport. For instance, individuals legally resident in one of the Dutch Caribbean island territories for a period of five years or longer may qualify for a Dutch passport. Successful applicants must also demonstrate good conduct and substantial integration, including oral and written fluency in the Dutch language.
- Giving the government the right to bypass normal naturalization requirements if a person applying for citizenship has provided extraordinary services. The services may be artistic, cultural, sports-related, or financial. The economic citizenship programs of St. Kitts & Nevis and Dominica fit under this category. In most other countries, there is no economic citizenship program as such, yet the government will occasionally award citizenship and passport based on extraordinary service. In a few of those countries, those criteria are negotiated in advance so that an applicant knows in advance with reasonable certainty the likely outcome.

To obtain a white-market passport using one of these provisions, you must prove entitlement to citizenship. For instance, if you apply for naturalization after marrying a local citizen, you'll need to submit to an interview and an investigation of your family life. Both you and your spouse will be interviewed. If the answers don't match, or don't add up, your application will be rejected. You—and especially your spouse—may also be liable to civil and criminal penalties.

## Second Passport Due Diligence

In conducting due diligence on second passport offerings, look for the following red flags:

**Too cheap.** The total cost of the least expensive white-market economic citizenship program, in the Commonwealth of Dominica, comes to about US\$100,000 for a single applicant or US\$130,000 for a married applicant with up to two children under the age of 18. Any passport issued for much less than that

amount should be presumed to be greymarket, unless the person offering can point to specific black-letter law authorizing its issuance.

**Too easy.** No country issues a certificate of nationality and a passport without a detailed application process, including completion of official application forms, a background check, and in virtually all cases, at least one personal visit. (St. Kitts & Nevis is an exception in that no personal visit is required for its economic citizenship program.)

**Too fast.** No government can approve an application for citizenship and passport in only a few days. The fastest authorities can conduct a reasonably complete investigation and move the application through several layers of bureaucracy is two or three months, and usually much longer.

**Too anonymous.** Any promoter that tells you that you have to pay cash for your passport, that the ability to issue the passport is based on a secret law or regulation, or that promises to issue you a passport in any name you choose, falls into this category.

**Too limited.** Passports that come without a certificate of nationality fit into this category. The instant passport from Panama is an example, although an ordinary Panamanian passport issued with nationality after an extended period of residence is an acceptable travel document.

**Too good to be true.** Diplomatic passports are almost always in this category. This type of passport is often marketed as providing the bearer the right to bypass border controls and local taxation. Some categories of diplomatic passports convey these rights, but the vast majority of those offered to the public involve grey-market documents. International travel on a diplomatic passport may also require that the diplomatic service of the issuing country apply for an official visa listing the purpose for every country visited. With a grey market diplomatic passport, it's virtually impossible to apply for, much less receive, the official visa.

**Too late.** Some promoters continue to market now defunct economic citizenship programs in Belize and Grenada. Each terminated its economic citizenship program more than a decade ago, although there have been recent discussions about reviving it in both countries visited. With a grey market diplomatic passport, it's virtually impossible to apply for, much less receive, the official visa.

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