

The Metaverse as a Gate for a Global Citizenship

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Abstract: *By using the Metaverse, people are granted a new opportunity to gain citizenship in the cloud. Given the growing interest of states in granting citizenship by investment, the Figment citizenship carries serious existing or potential risks of eradicating deepening ties between states and their members. This article is largely dedicated to evaluating the tricky question of how to become ready for a legal and fair balance between interests and concerns regarding money - based citizenship in the Metaverse.*

Keywords: Global citizenship, digital citizenship through investment, the Figment citizenship, financial technologies, the United Metaverse Nation.

1. Introduction

In the new global economy, financial turmoil and economic crisis has become a central issue for almost every single country. Citizenship Investment Programs (CIPs) have been an important aspect of national economic development programs. Indeed, there has been a growing interest in granting citizenship on the grounds of investment. The main idea behind CIPs is to attract large investments to the country concerned.

There has been a renewed interest in technology - based tools such as Metaverse. The metaverse represents a new way of playing, living, working and even socializing in 3D spaces. From one hand, it is a technological utopia that is created by the Internet. On the other hand Metaverse, as will be discussed below, already represents a reality for billions of people to some extent.

The purpose of this paper is to review recent developments on citizenship by investment programs together with Metaverse storm. It is intended to answer the tricky question of whether global citizenship is possible in the near future through new improvements regarding Metaverse. The importance and originality of this study are that it explores an increasing linkage between the discipline of citizenship through investment and the increasing trend for the use of Metaverse. What is more, a fresh legal approach is developed by addressing the question of how the national or international legal system should respond to global citizenship based on Metaverse.

Emerging International Issue: Citizenship by Investment

Keeping in mind that there is no universally agreed meaning of "citizenship", citizenship is accepted in this work to mean 'the state of being a member of a particular country and having rights because of it'.¹ CIPs are often applied as a citizenship type based on naturalization. Investment - based citizenship is currently carried out all over the world. Investment programs without residency requirements are described as "golden passport", investment programs with

residency requirements are regarded as "golden visa" such as the United States and United Kingdom.²

It is significant to emphasize here that CIPs have been broadly criticized on many grounds. In general criterias used for ordinary citizenship such as language skills or residence requirements are not applied. The economic contribution of coming investment is considered as the pure criteria in CIPs. Rather than individual qualifications, the potential economic contribution of aliens to the relevant state is preferred here. The rationale of states behind the investor citizenship is to maximize financial benefit or minimize financial burden on their economies owing to or because of "the naturalized individuals".³ Accordingly, that method is regarded, in that sense, as "commodification of citizenship",⁴ "supranational citizenship",⁵ or "selling citizenship for money"⁶. According to another perspective, fast - track naturalization of aliens on the grounds of investment is a pure implementation of "ius pecuniae". The word "ius pecuniae" implies "citizenship by investment"⁷, to be more specific, "right of money".⁸

Such understanding on money - based citizenship may have a detrimental impact on the nature of citizenship. The absence of a genuine link between state and citizen undermines the focal point of citizenship.⁹ The use of pure economic criterion as an integral part of direct evaluations

² See for this categorisation and different examples of such programs, Talat Kaya, A Critical Review of the Application of Citizenship By Investment In the Light of the Examples in the World, *Inönü University Law Review*, 12(1), 2021, 115-132, at 1119-122.

³ Jelena Dzankic, 'The Pros and Cons of Ius Pecuniae: Investor Citizenship in Comparative Perspective', *European University Institute Working Papers: Robert Schuman Centre For Advanced Studies*, 2012/14, at. 2.

⁴ Kaya, 2021, at 126.

⁵ İlyas Gölcüklü, 'Obtaining Turkish Citizenship by Investment: Problems and Solutions' (in Turkish), *Public and Private International Law Bulletin*, 40(1), 125-141, 2020, at 126.

⁶ See for instance., Şit Köşgeroğlu, 'General Principles on Extraordinary Acquisition of Citizenship and Extraordinary Acquisition of Turkish Citizenship in the Light of Recent Amendment (in Turkish)', *Hacettepe HFD*, 169-198, 7(1), 2017, at 193.

⁷ Athanasia Andriopoulou, The "ius pecuniae": The Prize of Citizenship, *Bridge Working Paper: The "ius pecuniae": The Prize of Citizenship*, June 2020, at 1.

⁸ Andriopoulou, June 2020, at 4.

⁹ Gölcüklü, 2020, at 126.

¹ See Cambridge Dictionary, <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/tr/sözlük/ingilizce/citizenship>, accessed 18 April 2022.

on the granting of citizenship through naturalization, is not compatible with the principle of rule of law and its core principles such as equality.¹⁰ Therefore, CIPs presents certain concerns because of the possibility of discriminatory, unfair and unequal practices.

Last but not least, CIPs, particularly in the absence of substantial requirements, leave a very flexible margin of discretion for a positive or negative decision on "natural" integration of the candidate into the recipient country.

Despite its above - mentioned handicaps, since the inception of CIPs, there has been an emerging trend among people to obtain another citizenship over the years. CIPs play a pivotal role in increasing global mobility in a physical manner. Currently CIPs have become commonplace all over the world.

2. The Power of Metaverse Impact in the Redesign of Law

There has been a growing interest in acquiring citizenship in Metaverse platforms based on virtual collectibles (NFTs). A recent development shows the speed of such a trend. Indeed a first figment country was established in cloud and its citizenship was opened to sales, as of 3 March 2022.¹¹ Citizenship will be limited to 10.000 members. There will be only one financial prerequisite: the candidate should pay for founding citizenship of the Figment on time. Like CIPs, there will not be any kind of naturalization limitations such as language or residency requirements. Because there is no need for a proof of a genuine link or a legal bond between the Figment country and its citizens. Consequently, the Figment citizenship seems nothing but a different example of implementation of "ius pecuniae". But this article asserts that it is much more than this.

It is true to put forward that Metaverse is boundless and expansive in many aspects. Indeed it is inspiring that there will be no limitation because accessible to the Figment citizenship through Metaverse will be anywhere and anytime. Therefore, it cannot be seen as a value - based citizenship; albeit a global - based citizenship. From every nation, every country, every region, every race and every religion any individual has an opportunity to participate in the Figment country. Therefore, it represents multiculturalism and richness in values. The Figment country will be characterized by a globally - minded value: a global citizenship. The Figment Country Club declares its intention to build 'a country in the cloud for global citizens to belong everywhere'.¹²

¹⁰ Note that 'the notion of non-discrimination and equality represent the essential foundations of democratic societies': Kutlay Telli, 'The Right to Prohibition of Discrimination Under the Practice of the European Convention on Human Rights', *LHD*, Volume: 12, Issue: 143, 37-54, 2014, at 38.

¹¹ See 'Figment Finds The First-Ever Metaverse Country For Global Citizens Powered By Citizenship NFTs', <https://metaverseinsider.tech/2022/03/03/figment-finds-the-first-ever-metaverse-country-for-global-citizens-powered-by-citizenship-nfts/>, accessed 9 June 2022.

¹² Official Website of the Figment Country Club, 'About', <https://country.figment.live/citizenship-nft/>, accessed 26.6.2022.

What is more, the United Metaverse Nation, as the first nation in Metaverse, is newly established.¹³ All national activities including governance, political and financial policies, are declared transparent and fully public. Citizenship will depend on acquiring an ERC - 721 passport giving citizenship and voting rights to its owners. The United Metaverse Nation will be composed of 3, 333 exclusive Passports.

Taking into account recent progress in the integration of financial technologies (FinTech) into the Metaverse, it is not easy to imagine next potential steps. In that context, the usage of FinTech presents a broad range of challenges especially where crypto - currencies such as bitcoin are preferred as payment methods. The invention of digital money and digital payment services platforms and crypto wallets including Trust Wallet and MetaMask pave the way for paying the price of citizenship in the virtual world. In that case, not only the ownership of the citizenship but also the necessary payment for it will be done virtually.

What is really interesting is that Figment Citizens will also be granted access to Figment's physical Embassy Houses. The first Embassy House will be planned to open in 2023 in Singapore. It necessarily follows that the impact of first - ever citizenship will not only be virtual but also physical, to be more specific, concrete. Of course this requires a legal response. What if a Turkish person, who is a Figment citizen but is not a Singapore citizen, would like to participate in the opening ceremony of the Figment Embassy that will be situated in Singapore? It looks easy to answer that question today; but that will not be the case in due course.

Moreover, having regard to the aforementioned discussions about CIPs, legal specialists are required to take preparatory measures in integrating CIPs through Metaverse into the real world. Potential legal gaps and legal requirements need to be analyzed for striking a fair balance between margin of discretion and the discipline of citizenship. Particularly, aforementioned criticisms sheds light on the fact that there is a clear danger of losing all legal, political, religious or similar sort of bonds between states and their own citizens. It is time for a legal action. Much things to be done.

3. Conclusion

There are two recent legal challenges facing the international community: increasing interest in citizenship by investment and digital citizenship in Metaverse. According to the internationally recognized principles, every state has an absolute margin of appreciation for the decision on the citizenship of any candidate. Hence it is normal to observe that access criteria to citizenship change from country to country.

Immersive technologies are attracting significant and growing interest. In this context, this article essentially analyzes the question of to which extent the Metaverse era may impact the design of citizenship concept in the digital era. The underlying question of the present work is how

¹³ 'The First Nation in the Metaverse', <https://united-metaverse-nation.org>, accessed 11 June 2015.

investor citizenship programmes will be implemented or will have to be implemented soon in Metaverse platforms in compliance with law.

This study has shown that the Figment Members (Citizens) will also gain access to Figment's Embassy Houses in a physical manner. This will have a vital impact on the future of mankind's legal system. The acquisition of Figment citizenship through investment - namely by a (digital) money payment - will happen in the virtual world, but such citizenship will have concrete impacts on the real world. Indeed, the findings of the present article indicates that the CIPs through FinTech payment in the Metaverse will change all legal doctrines. Overall, this approach strengthens the idea that virtual ownership of the Pigment citizenship together with the United Metaverse Nations country will be at the centre of emerging international law issues on the way forward.

Blurring meetings of physical and virtual realities may make legal specialists confused in the near future. That is why the international community should take necessary steps in the integration of digital citizenship into Metaverse lawfully. Such steps may require a robust strategic plan on legal amendments at both national and international level. A fair balance should be kept between the nature of citizenship and the essence of Metaverse life based on FinTech.

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