

RESIDENCY AND CITIZENSHIP

“Frustrated by the system”

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By Robert Carry

WHILE FREEDOM of movement between member states is a central pillar of the European Union, immigrants can find themselves being hindered by bureaucracy when attempting to relocate from one European country to another – even when they hold citizenship of a member state.

This has been the experience of Nigerian-born Osa Godwin-Osaghae, who left his country of birth to come to Europe some 20 years ago, when he was 17.

Godwin-Osaghae originally settled in Austria and was granted Austrian citizenship. But he later decided to relocate to Ireland in 2002, where he found a job and started an undergraduate degree course in Business IT and German at Blanchardstown College. He quickly settled into Irish life, and went on to further study at the Dublin Institute of Technology.

However, the Cabra resident found himself hindered at times by his lack of an Irish passport, particularly when travelling to and from the continent.

“I am a big fan of Bayern Munich and it causes difficulties for me when I go to Germany,” says the soccer-mad Nigerian. “That’s part of why I want to get an Irish passport to make life easier for me when I am travelling around Europe.”

He decided to apply for Irish citizenship in 2008, and was taken aback by the waiting period he would have to face. “I went online and was told to get proof of residency for the past five years. I got a letter from my college, proof of address, went to a lawyer to sign off on the forms and sent it all into the Department of Justice,” he recalls. “About two weeks later, in November 2008, I got a letter saying it was going to take 28 months to process. “I was frustrated. They said in the letter that I should give them the 28 months and that I should not call them in the meantime. So for the past year and a half I’ve just been waiting with no contact from them.”

Godwin-Osaghae’s dealings with the Irish citizenship system contrast with his experiences of residency elsewhere in Europe. “In Austria I got my residency in three months. It doesn’t take that long there if you don’t have any criminal convictions and you are free to check your application on their system. In the UK it takes about four months and in Canada it takes as little as two months.”

The Nigerian believes the blame for the delays fall firmly at the door of the Justice Department. “It seems like the people in that office are not doing their work. Right now they are dealing with applications from 2007 and 2008 – that is way too slow.” Although some may have reservations about pledging allegiance to a country not of their birth, it is a process Godwin is willing to undergo.

“I did it in Austria – you put your hand up and swear before the flag. You take an oath to abide by the laws of the land and vow to step up and defend the country at any time. This is something you have to be prepared to do.”

Godwin-Osaghae thinks that both the State and immigrants hoping to secure citizenship stand to benefit from a faster, more efficient citizenship application process.

“This is a fine country and a lot of good people would like to make it their home,” he says. “If someone is not involved in crime, then they should be given citizenship. It will make their stay here a better one.” He adds: “When the Irish team is playing you can see the pride they feel when they wear the Irish colours. It’s the same with citizenship. I feel more Austrian and Irish than Nigerian, because I’ve spent 20 years in Europe.”

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