

# THEY CHOOSE TO LIVE THERE

## (The Real Picture)

Often is heard the argument that since “They Choose to Live There,” they can’t complain (referring to retirees living overseas). This position is simplistic and belies the realities. As you know, millions of servicemen and servicewomen have been stationed in Europe over the past 45 years. Some of them have served several tours and many sailors have been in 6<sup>th</sup> Fleet ships (Mediterranean based) most of their careers. Because of the exigencies of their duties and the long periods of time spent in foreign lands, they naturally develop relationships and eventually family bonds with local nationals. Both the U.S. Government and Government contractors find these people especially desirable as employees upon retirement from active duty. It is easily seen, therefore, that their presence in Europe is almost always a direct result of their active duty assignments. These are not classic “Ex-pats” who decide to live in Spain or Italy or Germany because they prefer the European ambiance. They are loyal, dedicated, American sailors, marines, soldiers, and airmen, who gave the extra measure while on active duty, serving in foreign lands, often at substantial risk. It does not seem right to make their lives more difficult than their fellow service members who spent most, if not all, their service time in the relatively safe-haven of the continental United States.

Let us look realistically at the picture of a retired E-6 married to a non-English speaking wife with 4 children, none of whom have ever lived in the United States. Does the retired E-6 actually have the choice to uproot his entire family and start anew in Topeka?

His Real choice is to leave the family in Europe and return to the U.S. alone or keep the family unified in Europe. We should support this kind of pro-family choice, not denigrate it with discriminatory policies and attitudes, denying the overseas retiree benefits in his old age or a good college preparatory education to his children.

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Date: October 1994 (Revised August 2009)*