

The European Commission adopts its fourth report on visa waiver non-reciprocity with third countries

The European Commission has adopted its fourth report on certain third countries' maintenance of visa requirements in breach of the principle of reciprocity. The report shows that further progress towards full visa reciprocity has been achieved.

Vice-President Jacques Barrot, Commissioner responsible for Justice, Freedom and Security underlined the usefulness of the reciprocity mechanism: *"This Report clearly demonstrates that the dialogue with third countries under the new visa-reciprocity mechanism has once again proven effective, resulting in visa free travel for all our citizens to another 3 countries. The Report however also proposes retaliatory measures where insufficient progress has been achieved. It is unacceptable that nationals from some third countries can benefit from visa free travel to the EU whilst some of our fellow EU citizens can't travel visa free to those countries. This is at the heart of our visa reciprocity mechanism and I am committed to ensuring that that principle is fully respected".*

Main conclusions of the report show that full visa reciprocity has now been accomplished with Israel, Malaysia and Paraguay. The Commission has achieved significant progress in the dialogue with Canada, which lifted the visa requirement for six Member States over the last ten months. In the dialogue with Australia the Commission has achieved access for nationals of all Member States to the "autogrant facility" and ensured equal treatment for the nationals of all Member States from October 2008 onwards once the Australian e-Visitors system is in place. The implementation of the Australian eVisitors system will be carefully monitored. With regard to Brazil, negotiations for a short-stay visa waiver agreement between the European Community and Brazil have started.

No progress has been achieved with Japan, Panama, Singapore and the United States of America (USA). The Commission notes that Japan is currently examining an extension of the short-stay visa waiver to Romanian nationals but reiterates its request for full visa waiver reciprocity for the citizens of all EU Member States. The Commission will monitor Panama's intention to waive the visa requirement for citizens of Bulgaria and Romania. With regard to Singapore, the Commission suggests that retaliatory measures should be considered if within a reasonable time full reciprocity is not achieved.

No tangible progress has been made regarding the USA despite all efforts of the Commission and individual Member States. Citizens of twelve EU Member States continue to require a visa when travelling to the USA. The USA committed at the June 2008 EU-USA Summit to include additional EU Member States into its Visa Waiver Program (VWP) this year. Therefore, the Commission will propose retaliatory measures – e.g. temporary restoration of the visa requirement for USA nationals holding diplomatic and service/official passports – as from 1 January 2009 if no progress is achieved.

The Commission will submit its next report before 30 June 2009.

JLS web-site:

http://ec.europa.eu/justice_home/doc_centre/freetravel/visa/doc_freetravel_visa_en.htm