



EU visa reciprocity mechanism - Questions and Answers

Brussels, 2 May 2017

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What is the visa reciprocity mechanism?

The EU has a common list of countries whose citizens must have a visa and of countries whose citizens are exempt from that requirement (see [Council Regulation \(EC\) No 539/2001](#)).

In the spirit of reciprocity, the EU seeks that third countries on the visa-free list grant a visa waiver to citizens of all EU Member States. For this reason, a visa reciprocity mechanism has been set up.

The current mechanism was introduced by [Regulation \(EU\) 1289/2013](#) and entered into force in January 2014.

Visa reciprocity is a principle of the EU's common visa policy and an objective which the Union should pursue in a proactive manner in its relations with third countries, thus contributing to improving the credibility and consistency of the Union's external relations. This principle means that the EU, when deciding on lifting the visa requirement for citizens of a third country, takes into consideration whether that third country reciprocally grants visa waiver to nationals of all Member States (except the UK and Ireland who do not participate in the common visa policy) to every non-EU country whose citizens can travel to the EU/Schengen area without a visa.

Why is the Commission reporting on visa reciprocity with the U.S. and Canada again?

The Commission today reverted to the matter to define its position following the European Parliament resolution of 2 March 2017. The European Parliament's non-legislative Resolution called on the Commission to adopt a delegated act to suspend the visa waiver for Canadian and U.S. nationals. Under the Treaties, the Commission is bound to respond to the Parliament within two months.

The Commission also reports regularly on progress made in achieving visa reciprocity and will report again in December 2017.

What is the Commission's position on the obligations in the field of visa reciprocity?

In view of the significant progress achieved during the last year and the positive momentum of ongoing work, the Commission believes that the adoption of measures temporarily reintroducing visa requirements for Canadian and U.S. nationals would be counterproductive and would not serve the objective of achieving visa-free travel for all EU citizens. On the contrary, it would immediately result in retaliatory measures by the U.S., leading to the visa requirement being imposed on all EU citizens. The five Member States concerned and the United States have agreed to engage in a more result-oriented process in order to accelerate the work on the outstanding Visa Waiver Program requirements.

The Commission considers that progress can be achieved with continued engagement and diplomatic contacts – the decision taken by Canada in October 2016 following extensive political and technical discussions is the best proof of that.

Following the European Parliament Resolution of 2 March 2017, this is the position of the European Commission, provided in line with the provisions of Article 265 TFEU.

What progress has been made in the discussions with Canada and the U.S. on visa reciprocity?

Canada

Ahead of the 16th EU-Canada Summit held on 30 October 2016 in Brussels, Canada provided a **clear timeline for achieving full visa reciprocity**. In accordance with its commitment, on 1 May 2017 Canada lifted the visa requirement for Bulgarian and Romanian citizens who have held a Canadian temporary resident visa in the past 10 years or who currently hold a valid U.S. non-immigrant visa. These travellers are now able to travel to or transit through Canada with an Electronic Travel

Authorization (eTA) instead of a visa. Other travellers from these countries will no longer need a visa as of 1 December 2017, marking the achievement of full visa reciprocity with Canada.

The United States

As regards the U.S., the Commission notes the **result-oriented process** that has been launched aiming to accelerate the work on the outstanding Visa Waiver Program requirements for the five Member States concerned (Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Poland and Romania).

During the last months, political and technical contacts have been stepped up with the new U.S. Administration. Commissioner Avramopoulos reiterated the EU call for full visa reciprocity at his meeting with Secretary for Homeland Security John Kelly held in Washington on [8 February 2017](#). In addition, he organised a meeting on [27 March](#) with Ministers of the five Member States concerned to discuss a way forward towards achieving full visa reciprocity with the United States.

At technical level, visa reciprocity was discussed during the EU-U.S. Justice and Home Affairs Senior Officials' Meeting held in Malta on 1-2 March 2017. During this meeting the United States reconfirmed its commitment to admit the five Member States to the Visa Waiver Program once they meet all the requirements set out by U.S. legislation.

The latest tripartite meeting with the United States took place on 25 April 2017, during which it was agreed to accelerate the work on the outstanding Visa Waiver Program requirements in the coming weeks.

What are the next steps?

The Commission will remain in close contact with Bulgaria, Romania and Canada to ensure that the 1 December 2017 deadline for achieving full visa waiver reciprocity is met.

The Commission will continue pursuing a constructive dialogue with the United States and the Member States concerned in order to achieve full visa waiver reciprocity. In the weeks to come, the EU side will work in close cooperation with the United States on a way forward to be endorsed in a Joint Statement by the EU-U.S. Justice and Home Affairs Ministerial Meeting in June 2017.

The Commission will also continue to work closely with both the European Parliament and the Council and will report on the further developments before the end of December 2017.

For more information

[Press release](#) - Visa reciprocity: recent developments reported by the Commission, Brussels, 21 December 2016

[Communication](#) adopted on 21 December 2016 - State of play and the possible ways forward as regards the situation of non-reciprocity with certain third countries in the area of visa policy (Follow-up to the Communication of 12 April)

[Canadian press release to allow Romanian and Bulgarian citizens to travel to Canada visa-free on December 1, 2017](#)

[Communication adopted on 13 July 2016](#)

[Communication of 12 April 2016](#) - State of play and way forward as regards the situation of non-reciprocity

5 November 2015 – [Report](#) from the Commission assessing the situation of non-reciprocity with certain third countries in the area of visa policy

22 April 2015 - [Report](#) from the Commission assessing the situation of non-reciprocity with certain third countries in the area of visa policy

10 October 2014 - [Report](#) from the Commission assessing the situation of non-reciprocity with certain third countries in the area of visa policy

Council Regulation listing those countries whose nationals must be in possession of visas when crossing the external borders and those whose nationals are exempt from that requirement ([Council Regulation \(EC\) No 539/2001](#))

Regulation amending Council Regulation (EC) No 539/2001 listing the third countries whose nationals must be in possession of visas when crossing the external borders and those whose nationals are exempt from that requirement ([Regulation \(EU\) 1289/2013](#))

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Press contacts:

[Natasha BERTAUD](#) (+32 2 296 74 56)

[Tove ERNST](#) (+32 2 298 67 64)

[Kasia KOLANKO](#) (+ 32 2 296 34 44)

[Markus LAMMERT](#) (+ 32 2 298 04 23)

General public inquiries: [Europe Direct](#) by phone [00 800 67 89 10 11](#) or by [email](#)