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A7-0290/2013

23.9.2013

RECOMMENDATION

on the draft Council decision concerning the conclusion of the Agreement between the European Union and the Republic of Armenia on the facilitation of the issuance of visas
(05835/2013 – C7-0112/2013 – 2012/0334(NLE))

Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs

Rapporteur: Edit Bauer

Symbols for procedures

- * Consultation procedure
- *** Consent procedure
- ***I Ordinary legislative procedure (first reading)
- ***II Ordinary legislative procedure (second reading)
- ***III Ordinary legislative procedure (third reading)

(The type of procedure depends on the legal basis proposed by the draft act.)

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DRAFT EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT LEGISLATIVE RESOLUTION

on the draft Council decision concerning the conclusion of the Agreement between the European Union and the Republic of Armenia on the facilitation of the issuance of visas (05835/2013 – C7-0112/2013 – 2012/0334(NLE))

(Consent)

The European Parliament,

- having regard to the draft Council decision (05835/2013),
 - having regard to the draft Agreement between the European Union and the Republic of Armenia on the facilitation of the issuance of visas (16913/2012),
 - having regard to the request for consent submitted by the Council in accordance with Article 77(2), point (a) and Article 218(6), second subparagraph, point (a), of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (C7-0112/2013),
 - having regard to Rules 81 and 90(7) of its Rules of Procedure,
 - having regard to the recommendation of the Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs and the opinion of the Committee on Foreign Affairs (A7-0290/2013),
1. Consents to the conclusion of the Agreement;
 2. Instructs its President to forward its position to the Council, the Commission and the governments and parliaments of the Member States and of the Republic of Armenia.

EXPLANATORY STATEMENT

In accordance with the Treaty on the European Union, "the Union's action on the international scene shall be guided by the principles which have inspired its own creation, development and enlargement, and which it seeks to advance in the wider world". This commitment should be fulfilled through developing and building partnerships with third countries, with a main emphasis on enlarging the area of democracy, the rule of law and good governance. After the 2004 and 2007 enlargements, the external borders of the EU changed and a clear need arose to strengthen the relations with the EU's new "neighbours".

The Partnership and Cooperation Agreements (PCA), which played an important role, started to govern mutual relations between EU and certain third countries even before the mentioned waves of enlargement. Since the end of the 1990s, ten PCAs were concluded by the European Union, one of them with Armenia, which entered into force on 31st May 1999. The agreement provided a framework for cooperation in a variety of areas, however, there are no provisions on facilitation of the issuance of visas.

The creation of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) was a clear signal towards the new neighbouring countries, also towards South Caucasus, which now, with the new enlargement got much closer to the borders of the EU. The inclusion of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia in the ENP also implied that the partners are willing to deepen their cooperation laid down in the PCA. The new ENP Action Plan for Armenia opened new partnership perspectives, including the establishment of a dialogue on matters related to the movement of people, including readmission and visa policy. However, the objective at that stage was limited to exchange information on visa issues, as a lot of work had to be done to align the procedures with European standards.

A further step was taken by the establishment of the Eastern Partnership, a special dimension of the ENP. The ambition of this new framework is to accelerate further economic and political integration between EU and Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine. Through this tool, greater emphasis is placed on people-to-people contacts, what goes hand in hand with making travel easier through visa liberalisation. The Eastern Partnership Summit Declaration from May 2009 therefore contained a strong commitment of the parties to make a progress on liberalisation of the visa regimes.

In September 2011, the European Commission finally proposed to open negotiations on visa facilitation agreement, which was signed on 17th December 2012, but the consent of the European Parliament is needed before it can take effect. The EU has already concluded visa facilitation agreement with nine non-EU countries. From countries of South Caucasus there is such agreement concluded only with Georgia so far, but the negotiations with Azerbaijan are already under way.

In the Joint Declaration on a Mobility Partnership between the EU and Armenia of 27 October 2011, the parties have decided to establish a Mobility Partnership based on reciprocity, with a purpose of better managing legal and labour migration, including circular and temporary migration.

The rapporteur is of the view, in line with the opinion of the European Commission and of the

Council that after several rounds of negotiations Armenia is now ready to conclude the visa liberalisation agreement.

The simplified visa regime can bring a new impetus to cooperation, mainly to mobility of citizens, which will be simplified thanks to liberalised visa regime. The new rules will make the procedures quicker (the decision will have to be taken within 10 days, in urgent cases two days or less), cheaper (the visa fee for processing applications of Armenian citizens shall amount to 35 €) and less bureaucratic (the documents to be presented regarding the purpose of the journey have been simplified for some categories of persons, in particular for close relatives, members of official delegations, students, teachers, business people, scientists, etc) and there are also simplified criteria for issuing multiple-entry visas). The Armenian government already abolished the visa obligation for EU citizens, with effect from 10 January 2013.

The conclusion of the visa liberalisation and readmission agreements is a very important step in mutual relations of Armenia and the EU. However, more integration is needed. The European Parliament in its resolution of 20 May 2010 on the need for an EU strategy for the South Caucasus also called on the EU to be more active in the area of South Caucasus. Another, deeper level of integration in form of an Association Agreement is recently negotiated between the parties, which will strengthen the cooperation between Armenia and the European Union.

Regarding the conclusion of the visa liberalisation agreement,

- the rapporteur invites and approves the conclusion of the agreement, which will facilitate mainly the mobility of citizens, what is essential in building people-to-people contacts,
- the rapporteur calls on the Commission to monitor the implementation of the two agreements in order to identify potential burdensome provisions that should be corrected to fully exploit the advantages of the simpler visa regime,
- the rapporteur calls on the Commission to step up negotiation efforts on concluding the same agreements with Azerbaijan, as the last country from the South Caucasus region,
- furthermore, the rapporteur calls on the Council, the Commission and the European External Action Service to consistently emphasize, during the current negotiations, the recommendations contained in the EP resolution of 18 April 2012 on the negotiations of the EU-Armenia Association Agreement.

27.6.2013

OPINION OF THE COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS

for the Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs

on the proposal for a Council decision concerning the conclusion of the Agreement between the European Union and the Republic of Armenia on the facilitation of the issuance of visas (05835/2013 – C7-0112/2013 – 2012/0334(NLE))

Rapporteur: Tomasz Piotr Poręba

SHORT JUSTIFICATION

In its Communication on Strengthening the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) of 4 December 2006¹, the Commission had recommended that negotiations on readmission and visa facilitation should be initiated with ENP countries.

The Prague Summit Joint Declaration of 7 May 2009 establishing the Eastern Partnership has set the long term objective of visa liberalisation, a gradual process that has to be accompanied by improvement in security conditions to fight cross border crime and irregular migration. At the Warsaw Summit of 29-30 September 2011, the Heads of State and of Government renewed their commitment to the objectives and continued implementation of the Eastern Partnership.

The proposed decision takes into account and reflects the existing framework for cooperation with Armenia, in particular Partnership and Cooperation Agreement which entered into force in 1999, the EU-Armenia European Neighbourhood Policy Action Plan adopted in November 2006, the Declarations from the Eastern Partnership Summit, as well as the ongoing negotiations for the EU-Armenia Association Agreement.

The negotiating directives for the conclusion of a visa facilitation agreement with Armenia were adopted by the Council on 19 December 2011. The negotiations were opened in Yerevan on 27 February 2012 and the final text of the Agreement was initialled on 18 October 2012. By the decision of the Government of Republic of Armenia of 4 October 2012, as of 10 January 2013, EU citizens, as well as those from the Schengen associated countries, are exempt from the visa obligation.

¹ COM(2006)0726

The proposed decision concerning the conclusion of the agreement includes standard elements of EU visa facilitation agreements, establishing the delays for the decision on issuing the visa, the fees and exemptions thereof, the required documentation and the exemptions, as well as simplification of criteria for certain categories of persons. Furthermore, the proposal includes Declarations on cooperation on travel documents and regular exchange of information on travel document security and on documents to be submitted when applying for short-stay visas. The provisions do not apply to the United Kingdom, Ireland and the Kingdom of Denmark, which are invited to conclude bilateral visa facilitation agreements, as are the countries non EU Members, but party to the Schengen agreement.

The improvement of mobility will facilitate people-to-people contacts, an essential element for development of economic, social, cultural and other ties. It is thus a key for the realisation of Eastern Partnership, recalling that the long-term objective is full visa liberalisation.

The Committee on Foreign Affairs calls on the Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs, as the committee responsible, to propose that Parliament give its consent.

RESULT OF FINAL VOTE IN COMMITTEE

Date adopted	27.6.2013
Result of final vote	+: 28 -: 0 0: 2
Members present for the final vote	Bastiaan Belder, Michael Gahler, Ana Gomes, Anna Ibrisagic, Liisa Jaakonsaari, Anneli Jäätteenmäki, Jelko Kacin, Tunne Kelam, Nicole Kiil-Nielsen, Eduard Kukan, Vytautas Landsbergis, Marusya Lyubcheva, Ria Oomen-Ruijten, Bernd Posselt, Hans-Gert Pöttering, Tokia Saïfi, José Ignacio Salafranca Sánchez-Neyra, Marek Siwiec, Charles Tannock, Eleni Theoharous, Geoffrey Van Orden, Boris Zala
Substitute(s) present for the final vote	Antonio López-Istúriz White, Marietje Schaake, Traian Ungureanu, Ivo Vajgl, Janusz Władysław Zemke
Substitute(s) under Rule 187(2) present for the final vote	Leonidas Donskis, Danuta Jazłowiecka, Gabriel Mato Adrover

RESULT OF FINAL VOTE IN COMMITTEE

Date adopted	18.9.2013
Result of final vote	+: 45 -: 2 0: 0
Members present for the final vote	Jan Philipp Albrecht, Roberta Angelilli, Edit Bauer, Rita Borsellino, Emine Bozkurt, Arkadiusz Tomasz Bratkowski, Salvatore Caronna, Philip Claeys, Carlos Coelho, Ioan Enciu, Cornelia Ernst, Tanja Fajon, H�el�ene Flautre, Kinga G�al, Kinga G�oncz, Sylvie Guillaume, �Agnes Hankiss, Anna Hedh, Salvatore Iacolino, Sophia in 't Veld, L�ivia J�ar�oka, Timothy Kirkhope, Juan Fernando L�opez Aguilar, Svetoslav Hristov Malinov, Clemente Mastella, V�eronique Mathieu Houillon, Claude Moraes, Georgios Papanikolaou, Carmen Romero L�opez, Judith Sargentini, Birgit Sippel, Csaba S�ogor, Renate Sommer, Rui Tavares, Nils Torvalds, Wim van de Camp, Axel Voss, Renate Weber, Josef Weidenholzer, Tatjana �Zdanoka, Auke Zijlstra
Substitute(s) present for the final vote	Alexander Alvaro, Cornelis de Jong, Marian-Jean Marinescu, Salvador Sed�o i Alabart, Janusz Wojciechowski
Substitute(s) under Rule 187(2) present for the final vote	Nuno Teixeira