

Brussels, 17 September 2007

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

The European Commission adopted its third report on certain third countries' maintenance of visa requirements in breach of the principle of reciprocity. The report shows that progress has been achieved despite a new challenge with the notifications by Bulgaria and Romania.

Vice-President Franco Frattini, Commissioner responsible for Justice, Freedom and Security underlined the effectiveness of the new reciprocity mechanism: " *Since its establishment in June 2005 – in little more than two years – full visa reciprocity has been achieved or is on the way to be achieved with a number of important third countries. This is the case also despite a new challenge with the notifications by Bulgaria and Romania of their cases of non-reciprocity.*"

Main conclusions of the report show that full visa reciprocity has now been achieved with Mexico and New Zealand. Consultations are going on with several third countries: Brunei, Israel, Japan, Malaysia, Panama, Paraguay and Singapore. With regard to Brazil, the Commission has proposed a Recommendation to the Council to authorize the Commission to open negotiations for the conclusion of a short-stay visa waiver agreement between the European Community and Brazil.

While recognising that visa reciprocity with Australia has not been fully achieved, the Commission has registered progress in the sense that Bulgaria and Romania now have access to the e676 Visitor tourist visas which are free of charge for stays up to three months. Furthermore, Cyprus, Lithuania and Hungary benefit from the "autogrant facility". In addition, the new eVisitors system would be ready by mid 2008. All Member States will enter into this system, which would provide equal treatment.

After considerable delay Canada has provided clarifications on its thresholds and will have technical talks with the Member States concerned in November 2007 and February 2008. Nevertheless, the Commission urges Canada to show some tangible progress by lifting the visa requirement for one or two Member States by the end of this year, otherwise appropriate measures could be proposed.

The United States of America has modernized its legislation on the Visa Waiver Program. However, not all elements are yet fully worked out. Therefore the Commission will closely monitor the implementation of these elements and the consequences for the EU and the Member States, in particular the introduction of an electronic travel authorization (ETA) system. This Commission expects that assessment missions with Member States concerned will start during the implementation period. Furthermore the Commission expects the USA to fulfil President Bush's intention that this modernization should enable an accelerated expansion of the Visa Waiver Program to the EU Member States not yet covered.

The Commission will submit its next report before 30 June 2008.

JLS web-site:

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