



**EUROPEAN COMMISSION**

**STATEMENT**

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## **Commissioner Malmström on visa-free travel for Moldova**

Following the European Commission's proposal, today the European Parliament and the Council have taken the final formal step to transfer Moldova to the list of third countries whose nationals are exempt from visa requirement. It is expected that the amendment of Regulation 539/2001 will enter into force on 28 April, thereby abolishing visa requirements for Moldovan citizens who want to travel to the Schengen zone for a short-stay and hold a biometric passport.

Commissioner for Home Affairs Cecilia Malmström said: *"By the end of the month Moldovan citizens with a biometric passport will not need a visa anymore to travel to the Schengen zone for short-stays. This is a great achievement and the beginning of a new chapter in our relations. We launched our Visa Dialogue with Moldova on June 2010, and less than four years later travelling to the Schengen zone without a visa will become a reality for Moldovan citizens. This shows that the efforts by the Moldovan authorities have paid off and that the EU is committed to deliver on engagements with third countries wishing to work with us. The possibility to visa-free travel to the Schengen area for short stays will further facilitate people-to-people contacts and strengthen business, social and cultural ties between the European Union and Moldova. This is also an excellent example for other countries of the region, demonstrating that a strong political commitment and the effective implementation of reforms bring tangible results".*

### **Background: from visa facilitations to visa free regime for Moldova**

As a first step towards the long term goal of visa-free travel, Moldovan citizens already enjoyed the benefits of a **Visa Facilitation Agreement** with the EU since 1 January 2008 (an upgraded Visa Facilitation Agreement entered into force on 1 July 2013).

The visa facilitation agreement set a lower visa fee (€35 instead of €60) for all Moldovan visa applicants, and waived fees for broad categories of citizens such as children, pensioners, students, people visiting family members living in the EU, people in need of medical treatment, economic operators working with EU companies, participants in cultural exchanges, journalists, etc. The visa facilitation agreement also simplified and accelerated procedures and provided for easier access to multiple-entry visas of longer duration.

The Republic of Moldova lifted the visa obligation on EU citizens on 1 January 2007.

The EU-Republic of Moldova **Visa Liberalisation Dialogue** was launched on 15 June 2010 and the Visa Liberalisation Action Plan (VLAP) was presented to the Moldovan authorities in January 2011 ([IP/11/59](#)).

In its latest report on the implementation of the VLAP, the Commission considered that the Republic of Moldova met all the benchmarks needed ([IP/13/1085](#)).

In particular the Republic of Moldova has successfully completed the reform of the Ministry of Interior, modernised its Border Police, continued smooth judicial cooperation in criminal matters with EU Member States and international police cooperation, and put in place a solid framework for deepening the cooperation with Ukraine in the area of border management. The Moldovan authorities have made serious implementation efforts with regard to the Law on Ensuring Equality and the National Human Rights Action Plan, and the strengthening of the Ombudsman's office.

Building on this assessment, the Commission proposed to abolish visa requirements for Moldovan citizens holding a biometric passport (by transferring the country to the list of third countries whose nationals are exempt from visa requirements - [IP/13/1170](#)).

On 27 February 2014 the European Parliament approved this proposal ([STATEMENT/14/20](#)) and on 14 March the Council of the EU adopted the revised Regulation.

Today, the European Parliament's President Martin Schulz and the Greek Deputy Foreign Minister Dimitris Kourkoulas signed the amendment of Regulation 539/2001, allowing for the transfer of Moldova to the list of third countries whose nationals are exempt from visa requirement. Today's signature is the final formal step in the procedure.

The Schengen area visa waiver for short stays will apply to Moldovan citizens holding a biometric passport on 28 April (20 days after the publication of the revised Regulation in the EU Official Journal). The upgraded Visa Facilitation Agreement will continue to apply to the holders of non-biometric travel documents.

The number of short-stay Schengen visa applications from Moldovan citizens has remained stable over the past four years (oscillating between 50,000 and 55,000). At the same time, the refusal rate for visa applications has sharply decreased from 11.4% in 2010 to 4,8% in 2013.

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