Green Paper: diplomatic and consular protection of Union citizens in third countries

2007/2196(INI) - 12/11/2007

The Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs adopted a report drawn up by Ioannis **VARVITSIOTIS** (EPP-ED, EL) on the Green Paper on diplomatic and consular protection of Union citizens in third countries. Members began by wholeheartedly endorsing the Commission's initiative which rejects a shallow interpretation of Article 20 of the EC Treaty and is intended to lay the foundations for a genuine harmonised fundamental right to diplomatic and consular protection for each and every European citizen. They called on the Commission to refer to its Legal Service the question of whether the EC Treaty or EU Treaty contains a legal basis for approximating Member State arrangements in the field of diplomatic and consular protection. The committee supported the Commission in its efforts to establish an ambitious long-term strategy and suggested that the Commission should propose without delay to the Council (over and above the requirement for it to report every three years on EU citizenship pursuant to Article 22 of the EC Treaty) that common concepts and binding guidelines enabling common standards to be established in the field of consular protection be adopted.

At the same time, the report encouraged the Commission to begin work immediately on a rationalised structure to enable resources to be pooled and on greater sharing of best practices by carrying out an inventory of all relevant public and private resources which can be marshalled and by establishing varied forms of cooperation amongst the many parties which in their response to the Commission consultation have offered to contribute to the project (Member States and also Honorary Consuls, local authorities and NGOs).

It called on the Commission to intensify its communication and information efforts, and suggested a series of measures, inter alia:

- establishing a single European emergency telephone number for inclusion in the passports of EU citizens together with the text of Article 20 of the EC Treaty, enabling any EU citizen to be connected to a call centre which will provide him with full information in the event of a critical situation triggering the consular-protection process - in particular an up-to-date list of the contact details for the Member States' embassies and consulates to which he is entitled to apply. The number could be administered on a central basis by the Commission in Brussels;
- raising awareness among those professionally involved in the (short- or long-term) stay of EU citizens in third countries by distributing booklets tailored to their area of activity;
- drawing up a recommendation on good practice in the drafting of advice to travellers, with a view to ensuring that it is clearly and unambiguously worded;
- creating under its own responsibility a harmonised website containing information for travellers and compiling and/or summarising each Member State's advice to travellers;
- raising awareness among EU citizens travelling outside the EU, notably in airports and ports, through travel agents and operators, on travel tickets and through national agencies involved in travel and tourism;
- setting up a working party made up of representatives of the European institutions and highly qualified diplomats from each Member State to exchange information on the assessment by each Member State of the risks involved in travelling in third countries and work towards a common approach to advice to travellers.

Members went on to endorse wholeheartedly the establishment of 'joint offices' in four 'test' areas (the Caribbean, the Balkans, the Indian Ocean and West Africa) and encouraged the Commission to launch (at

the same time as the ‘joint offices’ are established) an information campaign targeted at EU nationals resident in those areas in order to ensure that they complete the necessary registration formalities. Pending the advent of joint offices performing all the most important consular tasks (issue of visas, legalisation of documents, etc.), the Commission should make a contribution to the efforts being made by the Member States in order to enhance their cooperation, in particular:

- as regards the assessment of exercises undertaken under the aegis of ‘Pilot States' in order to improve their coordination and reaction skills should exceptional circumstances arise;
- to ensure greater consultation of interested third parties, particularly in the transport and tourism industries;
- as regards the coordination and provision of logistical capacity and civil defence resources.

The Commission should also marshal its resources in order to finance specific training courses given by experienced diplomats and consular staff for the benefit of Honorary Consuls who are already established in third countries. Such training should subsequently be given to EU staff as well, once the 'joint offices' and then the EU delegations are actually responsible for the consular tasks which these days are performed exclusively by the Member States' representations.

The Committee encouraged the Commission to extend consular protection to the family members of Union citizens who are third country nationals, as well as recognised refugees and stateless persons and other persons who do not hold the nationality of any country but who reside in a Member State and are holders of a travel document issued by that Member State.

Lastly, it asked the Commission to submit to it, once the Lisbon Treaty has been ratified, a proposal for amendments to Decision 95/553/EC, so that the latter expressly includes: diplomatic protection; the identification and repatriation of mortal remains; simplification of the procedures for advancing money.