

Visas: procedures for applying for and issuing visas for members of the Olympic family taking part in the 2006 Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games in Torino

2005/0169(COD) - 17/01/2008 - Follow-up document

This report has been prepared by the Commission in accordance with provisions set out in Regulation (EC) No 2046/2005 concerning visa conditions for members of the winter Olympic team, Turin 2006. To recall, the Regulation was based on a similar, successful, Regulation adopted for the 2005 Athens summer Olympics in Greece. The main purpose of both the Turin and Athens Regulations was to facilitate the procedures for applying for, and issuing visas to, those participating in the Olympic games. In short, a specific, temporary system was adopted that derogated from the normal procedure for issuing visas.

Article 10 of the Turin Regulation requires Italy to forward a report to the Commission on the functioning and implementation of Regulation (EC) No 2046/2005. The Commission received the Italian response on 27 September 2006. The contents of the Italian report form the basis of this Commission staff working paper. In addition, the Commission received responses from most of the EU Member States, Norway and Iceland concerning the Regulation's implementation.

In summary, the report finds that the total number of pre-accreditation applications submitted was 36 323, 5 282 of which were applications for the Paralympics Games. Out of this number 2 710 were submitted by third country nationals subject to the visa obligation under Regulation (EC) No 539/2001 (2 384 for the Olympic Games and 326 for the Paralympics Games). During the period of the Games 26 428 people were actually accredited as members of the Olympic family, 2 425 of them requiring visas. Out of the total number 22 441 people (of which 2 137 required visas) were accredited to the Olympic team and 3 987 (of which 288 required a visa) to the Paralympics Games. Thus approximately 9 % of the total number of accredited Olympic family members benefited from the visa facilitation procedure provided by Regulation (EC) No 2046/2005. In addition to the numbers quoted above, around 70 000 accreditations were issued to members of the workforce and about 20 000 to members of law enforcement agencies (not specified by the Italian report), who were not considered to be Olympic family members. Members of the workforce subject to visa requirement obtained their visas from Italian consulates and did not come under the provisions of Regulation (EC) No 2046/2005.

The report finds that high security standards were met at all times during the application of the Regulation and that no specific violations were observed. Once the Games had finished no members of the Olympic family remained in Italy unlawfully. Further, during the Olympic Games (covering a three week period in February 2006) an operational cooperation programme was established at an EU level, with the support of FRONTEX, in order to strengthen security at external borders. Twenty-four airports in 16 Member States were involved in the project and a FRONTEX liaison officer was assigned to Turin to help the Italian authorities on border management. The Italian authorities reported only one applicant who failed to meet the conditions set by the Regulation for entering the Schengen area. Checks showed that an alert was issued against this one individual on the SIS.

To conclude, on the basis of information submitted by the Italian authorities and 13 Member States, the Commission finds that in spite of some minor incidents, the Regulation was a success. It succeeded in

reconciling visa requirements for members of the Olympic team with the right of the Olympic team to gain access to the territory of the host country. The provisions offered an effective and flexible visa regime that proved capable of offering a high level of security.

The report does note, however, that to prepare separate Regulations that derogate from the standard visa requirements, for every Olympic event held in the EU would be both time consuming and superfluous. The Commission has, as a result, tabled a proposal (in the framework of establishing a Community Code on Visas), to establish permanent provisions for facilitating procedure for members taking part in the Olympic Games.