

Visas: third countries whose nationals are subject to or exempt from a visa requirement

2009/0104(CNS) - 12/11/2009 - Text adopted by Parliament, 1st reading/single reading

The European Parliament adopted by 550 votes to 51 with 37 abstentions a legislative resolution amending, under the consultation procedure, the proposal for a Council regulation amending Regulation (EC) No 539/2001 listing the third countries whose nationals must be in possession of visas when crossing the external borders and those whose nationals are exempt from that requirement. Parliament points out that the exemption from the visa requirement should also apply to Albania and Bosnia and Herzegovina after an assessment by the Commission that each meets all the benchmarks set in the relevant roadmap for visa liberalisation and in accordance with the Treaty, since Albania and Bosnia and Herzegovina have made further progress with regard to the majority of the relevant benchmarks since the assessment of the Commission in May 2009.

The main amendments were as follows:

Including Albania and Bosnia in the proposed exemption regime: Parliament recalls that the Commission initiated the current visa liberalisation dialogue with a regional approach and a European perspective, involving countries of the Western Balkans on an equal footing and without any discrimination. In this context, Albania and Bosnia and Herzegovina, should be transferred from Annex I to Annex II (visa exemption) of Regulation (EC) No 539/2001, together with the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia. Members stipulate that the same criteria laid down in the roadmaps for visa liberalisation should be applied to all countries concerned.

Postponing visa exemption if criteria are not met: Parliament states that all the Western Balkan countries that have met the benchmarks should be admitted to the visa-free travel regime from the beginning of 2010. Those countries that, despite having made substantial progress, have not fully met the benchmarks should be granted the same privilege as soon as they meet the benchmarks as set out in the corresponding roadmaps for visa liberalisation. The exemption from the visa requirement should apply to Albania and Bosnia and Herzegovina after an assessment by the Commission that each meets all the benchmarks set in the relevant roadmap for visa liberalisation and after approval of that assessment by the Council. The Commission should, without delay and no later than in the early 2010, present a report on the achievements made by Albania and Bosnia and Herzegovina in meeting all the benchmarks set in the roadmap. Parliament asks the Commission to assist the relevant authorities of Albania and Bosnia and Herzegovina in this respect.

Kosovo: lastly, with the aim of furthering the implementation of the Thessaloniki agenda and as part of its regional approach, the Commission, within the limits of its competence and in the light of UN Security Council Resolution 1244 (1999), should start a visa dialogue with Kosovo with a view to establishing a roadmap for visa facilitation and liberalisation similar to those established with Western Balkan countries.