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

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The Mixed Committee (the EU plus Norway, Iceland, Liechtenstein and Switzerland) discussed the **post-visa liberalisation monitoring for the Western Balkan countries** and, in particular, the Commission's third report on the subject.

Delegations expressed concern about a considerable increase in mostly unfounded asylum applications from nationals of several Western Balkan countries and underlined the importance of taking forward measures to remedy the situation. Among other things, dialogue with the countries concerned was seen to be of major importance, and the Commission confirmed that the subject will be addressed at the forthcoming ministerial forum on justice and home affairs between the EU and the Western Balkan countries (5 and 6 November 2012 in Tirana, Albania).

In this context, a large number of delegations also asked to **speed up current negotiations** with the European Parliament on amendments to the rules governing the EU's visa-free regime. The discussions between Council and Parliament focus on the introduction of **a safeguard clause allowing the temporary reintroduction of the visa requirement – in specific circumstances - for nationals of a third country who can normally travel to the EU without a visa** (those countries in Annex II). The new rules would also strengthen the notion of reciprocity, i.e. how to deal with situations where a country in Annex II reintroduces a visa requirement for citizens of particular EU Member States or the EU as a whole.