EU/Samoa Agreement: short-stay visa waiver

2015/0056(NLE) - 16/11/2015 - Committee report tabled for plenary, 1st reading/single reading

The Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs adopted the report by Mariya GABRIEL (EPP, BG) on the draft Council decision on the conclusion, on behalf of the European Union, of the Agreement between the European Union and the Independent State of Samoa on the short-stay visa waiver.

The committee recommended the European Parliament to **give its consent** to the conclusion of the Agreement.

To recall, the Agreement signed on 28 May 2015 provides for **visa-free travel** for the citizens of the European Union and for the citizens of Samoa when travelling to the territory of the other Contracting Party for **a maximum period of 90 days in any 180-day period**. The visa waiver covers all categories of persons (ordinary, diplomatic, service/official and special passport holders) travelling for all kinds of purposes, except for the purpose of carrying out a paid activity.

The report is accompanied by a short justification stating that this Agreement on the waiver of short-stay visas simultaneously represents a culmination of the **deepening of relations** between the European Union and the Independent State of Samoa – which is politically highly significant in the context of the Cotonou Agreement – and is an **additional way of stepping up economic and cultural relations** and intensifying political dialogue on various issues, including human rights and fundamental freedoms.

- **Samoa's economy**, Samoa has one of the most dynamic economies of all the Pacific islands. Two thirds of the work force are employed in agriculture, which accounts for 90% of exports. The EU is currently negotiating Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreements with 14 Pacific countries, including Samoa. Generally speaking, trade and investment between the European Union and the Pacific countries remain weak both as regards their value and in relative terms, but they have strong potential for development. The visa waiver agreement could in particular have a positive impact on investment and on the development of tourism.
- **As regards the political situation**, Samoa has been a stable parliamentary democracy since it gained independence in 1962. Fundamental rights and freedoms are protected by the Constitution and generally respected in practice. The Union's political dialogue with Samoa focuses, on the one hand, on environmental issues and climate change and, on the other hand, on human rights and gender equality. This agreement will create additional opportunities to intensify cooperation with regard to human rights, including gender violence and domestic violence.
- **With regard to mobility**, the rate of refusal of visas being low. Most migrants currently make the United States their destination, while very few of them go to the European Union. The country does not present any threat in terms either of irregular migration or of security and public policy. Given that no EU Member State has a **Consulate** in Samoa, the visa waiver will constitute a definite advantage for travel to the European Union for purposes of tourism or business.

As regards the **implementation and monitoring of the agreement**, the rapporteur:

- called on the Commission to observe any developments in relation to the **criteria** regarding clandestine immigration, public policy and security, including, considerations relating to human rights and fundamental freedoms;
- urged the Commission and the authorities of Samoa to ensure **full reciprocity of the visa waiver**, which should permit equal treatment of all citizens, particularly all citizens of the Union;

- encouraged the Commission to **review the composition of the joint management committees** for future agreements to enable the European Parliament to be involved in the work of these committees.

Lastly, the rapporteur also queried the practice of signing visa waiver agreements and applying them provisionally before the European Parliament has approved them, a practice which is liable to reduce Parliament’s room for manoeuvre.