EU/Saint Lucia Agreement: short-stay visa waiver

2015/0060(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 Saint Lucia 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 Saint Lucia 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 Saint Lucia – 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.

- **In the economic sphere**, Saint Lucia is a young country, with limited resources and a small population, which has nonetheless succeeded in attaining or even exceeding some of the Millennium Development Goals, thereby attesting to its commitment to fundamental rights. Although its economy is mainly based on farming, Saint Lucia is seeking to create an environment favourable to investment and development of the private sector. The country is also increasingly trying to develop tourism, which is gradually replacing its previously flourishing agriculture. This being so, this agreement will make it possible to step up relations further between the two parties, to impart fresh impetus to trade and to dynamise tourism.
- **As regards the political and institutional situation**, Saint Lucia is a stable, democratic country, which, like the European Union, defends the values and principles of democracy, good governance and respect for human rights and the rule of law. The country has made considerable progress with regard to gender equality, trafficking in persons and prostitution. The conclusion of this agreement will make it possible to step up cooperation and intensify dialogue in many fields.

- **With regard to mobility**, the visa refusal rate in 2014 being around 0.6%. Saint Lucia is therefore a country which does not present any risks of clandestine immigration into the EU or any threat to security and public policy.

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 Saint Lucia 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.