EU/United Arab Emirates Agreement: short-stay visa waiver

2015/0062(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 United Arab Emirates 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 6 May 2015 provides for **visa-free travel** for the citizens of the European Union and for the citizens of the United Arab Emirates 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 represents a culmination of the **deepening of relations** between the European Union and the United Arab Emirates 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**, the United Arab Emirates are the only one to be classified as a high-income industrialised country. More than 150 000 European nationals live in the United Arab Emirates, the vast majority of whom have seized opportunities to engage in economic activities. As regards trade relations, the EU is currently the principal trading partner of the United Arab Emirates, while the UAE is ranked 14th among the trading partners of the EU and its Member States. Trade was valued at EUR 51 million in 2014. Trade relations are therefore highly developed, and can only benefit from the visa waiver agreement.
- **Concerning political relations** between the European Union and the United Arab Emirates, they have been based on the cooperation agreement between the European Union and the Gulf Cooperation Council since 1988. The visa waiver agreement must be viewed in a wider context as a tool for intensifying cooperation, in which context both parties have a shared interest in stabilising the macro-region and acting as sound and reliable partners in various fields such as combating terrorism, trafficking in persons and climate change.
- **With regard to mobility**, the UAE does not present any risk of clandestine immigration or threat to public policy or security, and it has supplied the European Institutions with the necessary evidence to this effect. In addition, the UAE issues biometric passports to its citizens.

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 the United Arab Emirates 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.