EU/Saint Vincent and the Grenadines Agreement: short-stay visa waiver

2015/0061(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 Vincent and the Grenadines 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 Vincent and the Grenadines 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 Vincent and the Grenadines – 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 Vincent and the Grenadines has been through a difficult period, marked in particular by natural disasters and a deterioration in the terms under which its main agricultural product, the banana, is exported. Thanks to the macroeconomic policies pursued, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines has been able to initiate with success a programme to diversify its economy, which is still focused on bananas, but also accompanied by measures to increase the volume of exports, boost tourism and improve the level of social development. This agreement will make it possible to step up relations further between the two parties and to impart fresh impetus to trade.
- **As regards the political and institutional situation**, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines is now a plural and open democracy where civil and political rights and fundamental freedoms are protected by the Constitution. Saint Vincent and the Grenadines has made considerable progress towards attaining the Millennium Development Goals. The conclusion of this agreement will create opportunities for cooperation in fundamental areas such as human rights and to conduct a regular and balanced political dialogue on more specific issues such as domestic violence or gender equality, which remain priorities for the Union.
- **With regard to mobility**, with the rate of refusal of visas being low, this country does not present any threat in terms either of irregular migration or of 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 Vincent and the Grenadines 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.