

EU/Vanuatu Agreement: short-stay visa waiver

2015/0052(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 Republic of Vanuatu 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 the Republic of Vanuatu 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 Republic of Vanuatu – 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.

- **Vanuatu's economy** is dominated by farming, which contributes 19% of GDP, and services (particularly tourism and financial services), which account for 72% of GDP. The EU is currently negotiating Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreements with 14 Pacific countries, including Vanuatu. 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**, Vanuatu is a stable parliamentary democracy where fundamental rights and freedoms are protected by the Constitution and generally respected in practice. The Union's political dialogue with Vanuatu on this subject emphasises preventing torture, combating corruption and promoting political participation and the development of civil society. This agreement will make it possible to maintain the dialogue and to cooperate on such issues as promoting human rights and combating gender violence.
- **As regards mobility**, a very low refusal rate and the limited number of applications are two factors which make it possible both to discount any security risks.

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 Vanuatu 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.