EU/Peru Agreement: short-stay visa waiver

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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 Peru 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 14 March 2016 and applied provisionally pending the consent of the European Parliament - provides for visa-free travel for the citizens of the European Union and for the citizens of Peru 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 which states that the agreement marks a significant milestone in the deepening of relations between the European Union and Peru 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.

On an economic level: the agreement will boost tourism and help to intensify trade and investment relations. Peru has recorded one of the highest rates of economic growth in Latin America (5% in 2013, 2.4% in 2014). The EU is the Peru's third-largest trade partner in terms of imports (mainly machinery and transport equipment) and the principal destination of its exports (agri-food and mining products). Furthermore, the EU continues to be the biggest investor in Peru, accounting for over 50% of total foreign direct investment in sectors such as the extractive industries, banking and finance.

As regards the political and institutional situation, Peru is a relatively stable democracy which, like the European Union, upholds the values and principles of democracy, good governance, respect for human rights and the rule of law. The agreement will make it possible to pursue a balanced, regular, in-depth political dialogue on human rights and on specific issues such as the situation of women.

On the question of mobility, data on entry refusals, arrests and returns shows that irregular migration has been a risk factor in recent years in the case of Peru. At the same time, however, a marked improvement regarding the situation has been observed The vast majority of Schengen visa applicants were granted short-stay visas, the rejection rate being around 6.1% in 2014 and 3.0% in 2015. In addition, 43% of applicants were granted multiple-entry visas in 2014. These figures reflect the Member States' increased trust in the applicants. The agreement also contains a joint declaration on cooperation on illegal immigration, in which the EU and Peru stress their commitment regarding the readmission of their irregular migrants.

Peru may also become a key partner in the **fight against organised crime**, including drug trafficking and human trafficking, which can be important areas of cooperation.

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

- called on the Commission to observe any developments in relation to the criteria on clandestine immigration, public policy and security, and also the Union's external relations with the third countries concerned, including, in particular, considerations relating to respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms;
- called on the Commission and the authorities of Peru 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 so that the European Parliament may be involved in the work of the Joint Committee.

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.