EU/Tuvalu Agreement: short-stay visa waiver

2016/0100(NLE) - 15/11/2016 - 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 Tuvalu on the short-stay visa waiver.

The committee recommended that Parliament **give its consent to conclusion of the agreement**.

To recall, the agreement provides for **visa-free travel** for the citizens of the European Union and for the citizens of Tuvalu 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 agreement was signed on 1 July 2016 in Brussels. Since that date, the agreement has been applied provisionally.

The report is accompanied by a short justification stating that the agreement represents a culmination of the deepening of relations between the European Union and Tuvalu - 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.

- **Tuvalu's economy** is primarily based on services (more than 60% of GDP), including Internet services, with the sale of licences to use the .tv domain name constituting a major source of government revenue. Agriculture and fishing account for more than 20% of GDP. Tourism is relatively limited. Tuvalu also remains dependent on international development assistance, and there are still major economic disparities between the islands in the archipelago. The EU is currently negotiating Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreements with 14 Pacific countries, including Tuvalu.
- **Politically,** Tuvalu is a stable parliamentary democracy; it is a member of the Commonwealth. The two main issues in the political dialogue between the EU and Tuvalu are, firstly, environmental protection and climate change and, secondly, protection of human rights and gender equality. The agreement allows a balanced, regular and in-depth political dialogue on these issues, which remain priorities for the EU.
- **With regard to mobility**, the data available show that the visa refusal rate for nationals of Tuvalu and of the other Pacific island states is very low. However, it is complicated for Tuvalu nationals to make visa applications because Schengen Area countries' consulates are so far away. Migration is directed more towards Australia and New Zealand. The country does not therefore pose any threat in terms of irregular migration, migration flows, security or public policy.

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

- called on the Commission to observe any developments in relation to issues of clandestine immigration, public policy and security, but 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 Tuvalu to ensure full reciprocity of the visa waiver, which should permit equal treatment of all citizens, particularly all citizens of the Union;
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- encouraged the Commission to review the composition of the joint management committees for future agreements so that Parliament might 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 that is liable to reduce Parliament’s room for manoeuvre.