Third countries whose nationals are subject to or exempt from a visa requirement: suspension mechanism

2016/0142(COD) - 20/12/2017 - Follow-up document

The Commission submitted its first report under the mechanism for the visa suspension mechanism.

This report follows up on the Commission's duty to monitor the continuous fulfilment of visa liberalisation requirements by third countries and to report on those matters to the European Parliament and the Council, at least once a year in accordance with Regulation (EC) No 539/2001.

The assessment of the visa liberalisation benchmarks applies to countries which have successfully concluded visa liberalisation dialogues according to relevant action plans and roadmaps, i.e. the countries of the **Western Balkans** (Albania, Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Bosnia - Herzegovina, Montenegro, Serbia) and the **Eastern Partnership** (Moldova, Georgia, Ukraine).

The Commission considers that **the visa liberalisation requirements for the concerned countries continue to be fulfilled**:

- the Western Balkan and Eastern Partnership countries continued to take measures to address the still persisting **irregular migration** challenges, in particular Albania. Cooperation on readmission continues smoothly for all Western Balkan and Eastern Partnership visa-free countries with overall high return rates;
- on the other hand, as regards the **prevention and fight against organised crime**, despite continuous efforts, organised crime groups from these countries are still active in trafficking in illicit fire arms, property crime and trafficking of various illicit commodities (in particular drugs and tobacco), money laundering, trafficking in human beings, smuggling of migrants and cybercrime in EU Member States. Efforts in this respect need to be strengthened;
- as regards the **prevention and fight against corruption and money laundering**, Moldova needs to take immediate actions to ensure the continuous implementation of the benchmark and the sustainability of the reforms and Ukraine also needs to take immediate actions to safeguard anti-corruption measures introduced with previous reforms and to allow further progress to be made.

Implementation of the visa liberalisation benchmarks is a continuous ongoing process. The Commission will report again to the European Parliament and the Council on the continuous fulfilment of visa liberalisation requirements by third countries in 2018.