Third countries whose nationals are subject to or exempt from a visa requirement: Kuwait, Qatar

2022/0135(COD) - 27/04/2022 - Legislative proposal

PURPOSE: to amend Regulation (EU) 2018/1806 listing the third countries whose nationals must be in possession of visas when crossing the external borders of the Member States and those whose nationals are exempt from that requirement (Kuwait, Qatar).

PROPOSED ACT: Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council.

ROLE OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT: the European Parliament decides in accordance with the ordinary legislative procedure and on an equal footing with the Council.

BACKGROUND: Regulation (EU) 2018/1806 lists the third countries whose nationals must be in possession of visas when crossing the external borders of the Member States and those whose nationals are exempt from that requirement. It is applied by all Member States except Ireland, as well as by Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Switzerland. The Regulation is part of the EU's common visa policy for short stays of 90 days in any 180-day period.

Kuwait and Qatar present low risks for irregular migration to the EU and issue biometric passports in line with the standards of the International Civil Aviation Organisation. In recent years, security cooperation with these countries has intensified. As regards economic interests, Kuwait and Qatar are important economic partners for the EU, particularly in the field of energy.

Although challenges remain in the area of human rights and fundamental freedoms, Kuwait and Qatar have undergone societal transformations and improvements regarding women’s rights, labour rights and freedom of religion and interfaith dialogue and are expected to continue making progress and reforms. The long-term benefits of visa-free travel to the EU can reinforce positive trends in these areas.

In the context of the strengthening of overall relations between the EU and the Gulf, the EU should pursue a more strategic orientation with this region by developing a stronger, comprehensive and multi-sector partnership. Visa-free status plays a key role in promoting the partnership between both regions.

CONTENT: the Commission proposes to amend Regulation (EU) 2018/1806 by transferring the reference to Kuwait and Qatar from Annex I (list of third countries whose nationals must be in possession of visas when crossing the external borders of the Member States) to Annex II (list of third countries whose nationals are exempt from the visa requirement when crossing the external borders of the Member States for stays of no more than 90 days in any given 180-day period).