Issuance of and technical standards for digital travel credentials based on identity cards

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PURPOSE: to facilitate the exercise of the right to free movement of Union citizens in a secure environment by providing them with authentic digital travel credentials based on the identity cards issued to them by the Member States.

PROPOSED ACT: Council Regulation.

ROLE OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT: the Council adopts the act after consulting the European Parliament but without being obliged to follow its opinion.

BACKGROUND: the current Union legal framework does not allow for the use of digital solutions in the context of the exercise of the right to free movement. Due to the nature of the problem and the need to ensure interoperability, Member States themselves cannot effectively introduce a Union-wide uniform format for digital travel credentials based on identity cards, and therefore cannot facilitate the exercise of free movement on the basis of such digital travel credentials.

Since 2016, ICAO has been working to digitalise travel documents to facilitate air travel. The result of this work by ICAO is the development of a digital travel credential standard that makes use of the personal data (excluding fingerprints) stored on the chip of a travel document. The first version of the ICAO digital travel credential technical standard 2 has already been finalised and tested in pilot projects. This technological progress in the field of travel documents could be harnessed to facilitate the exercise of the right to free movement, by using the data in the contactless chip of physical documents to create digital travel credentials.

Because Union citizens may use their identity cards to cross the external borders of the Schengen area, such digital travel credentials would allow them to pass through border controls more quickly and more smoothly.

For this purpose, this initiative goes side-by-side with a proposal for a regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing an application for the electronic submission of travel data (“EU Digital Travel application”).

CONTENT: this Commission proposal aims to facilitate the exercise of the right to free movement by giving Union citizens the option to obtain and use digital travel credentials based on their national identity cards.

Digital travel credentials

When issuing a new identity card, Member States should provide applicants, at their request, with a corresponding digital travel credential. Holders of compatible identity cards should also be able to request a corresponding digital travel credential from the Member States having issued the identity card at a later stage.

In addition, holders of an identity card should be able to create a digital travel credential based on that card. It should be possible for holders to be issued with a digital travel credential remotely by means available to the person concerned, such as a mobile phone capable of reading the contactless chip of the identity card together with a mobile phone application.

Before a digital travel credential is created, Member States should put in place a system to confirm the authenticity and integrity of the chip of the identity card and to match the facial image of the person seeking to create the digital travel credential against the facial image stored on the chip.

Digital travel credentials issued or created pursuant to this Article should:

- be based on the technical specifications adopted pursuant to the proposed regulation;

- be in a format that enables their storage in European Digital Identity Wallets;

- be free of charge;

- contain the same personal data, including facial image, as the identity card based on which they are issued or created.

Contact point

Each Member State should designate an authority as the contact point for the implementation of this Regulation and communicate the name of that authority to the Commission and the other Member States.

Technical specifications, procedures and requirements

The Commission should adopt the necessary technical specifications, procedures and requirements for digital travel credentials issued on the basis of identity cards, including those regarding their: (i) data schema and format; (ii) issuance and disclosure process; (iii) validity; (iv) trust model; (v) authentication and validation; and (vi) revocation.

These technical specifications should, as far as possible, be based on the relevant international standards and practices agreed upon at the level of ICAO to ensure both a consistent approach at international level and the global interoperability of digital travel credentials.