

EC REQUIRED TO SUSPEND VISA EXEMPTION OF U.S. CITIZENS



Last week, the European Parliament (EP) has demanded that the European Commission (EC) takes measures and suspends the visa exemption of United States nationals traveling to EU for twelve months, in response to the US insistence to continue demanding this document from Europeans of four member states: Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus and Romania.

With 367 votes to 269 and 43 abstentions, the EP Chamber reminded the Commission that it is their obligation to activate the so-called 'reciprocity mechanism' if a third country demands European visas despite the system being exempt for other EU countries.

"Respecting the fundamental principle of solidarity among EU members, we call on the Commission to act as established in European legislation and table a proposal to suspend the visa waiver for US nationals. It will then be up to the Parliament and the Council to assess the political consequences of this move," said Chair of Civil Liberties Committee and EP reporter Juan Fernando López Aguilar.

US citizens are exempt of the visa requirement when traveling to EU territory, but the United States maintains this requirement for European nationals of these four member states, from which it demands changes in security and other matters.

Brussels has maintained open diplomatic dialogue with the US for several years to remove the visa policy with these countries, and has also threatened in the past to take measures if this is not the case, but has never used the 'reciprocity mechanism' before.

The European Union laws provide a mechanism to suspend the visa exemption in the case of countries that do not comply with the conditions of the agreement, for example, with the principle of reciprocity. This principle states that if a third country does not lift visa requirements within 24 months of being notified of a non-reciprocity situation, the EU Commission must approve the reintroduction of visa requirements for said country's nationals for one year, a measure that both the Council and the European Parliament could object to.

In the case of the United States, visa exemption for all European Union countries should have been applied about six years ago, but the US has continued to uphold this requirement for Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus and Romania nationals, without the European Commission taking any actions.

The EU already notified the United States of the breach in April 2014, and in a 2017 resolution the Parliament reminded the European Commission of its obligation to act.

In the negotiations, Brussels did manage to get the US to remove the visa waiver for Poland, thus joining the majority of member states whose travelers can make stays of up to 90 days in the United States without the need for a tourist visa.

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