

Euro lawmakers press EU to impose visas on U.S. citizens

The European Parliament called on the EU executive on Thursday to force Americans to apply for visas before visiting Europe this summer, stepping up pressure to resolve a long-running [transatlantic](#) dispute on the issue.

The European Commission stressed it was pursuing a diplomatic resolution to the row, leaving it unlikely that it would act on the vote by lawmakers setting a May [deadline](#) to impose visas - a move that could hurt Europe's tourism sector.

Washington refuses to grant visa-free access to people from four east European states and Cyprus, while those from the other 23 member states can enter using the U.S. visa [waiver](#) program. EU rules call for equal treatment for all Union citizens.

Commission officials noted a planned EU-U.S. ministerial meeting on June 15 to try and resolve the issue, which has been running since 2014. The EU executive already allowed a deadline for a solution to pass nearly a year ago, without taking action.

"We will report on further progress made before the end of June and continue to work closely with both the European Parliament and the Council," a Commission spokeswoman said, referring to the council which groups the governments of the 28 EU member states.

A Commission official said contacts are ongoing with the U.S. administration "to push for full visa reciprocity," but fell short of saying that immediate action would be taken.

Former Communist countries Poland, Croatia, Bulgaria and Romania, as well as the Mediterranean island of Cyprus, have been calling on Brussels to end U.S. discrimination against their citizens.

But the economic cost of imposing visa restrictions on the millions of American tourists and business travelers who visit Europe each year is a major disincentive.

Most EU countries are part of the Schengen zone that allows people to travel freely inside Europe without passport checks.

The Parliament, by a show of hands, urged the Commission to adopt restrictive measures against U.S. citizens "within two months". Lawmakers have little immediate power to ensure that the executive complies with such demands.

Canada also imposes visa requirements on Bulgarian and Romanian citizens, but it has announced that they will be lifted in December.

(Reporting by Francesco Guarascio; Editing by Alastair Macdonald and John Stonestreet)

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EU escalates 'visa war' with US with Americans set to lose visa-free travel to Europe

Americans wishing to visit Venice will be forced to pay for a visa under proposed rules

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Americans should be forced to apply for visas to travel to Europe, the European Parliament has said, in response to Washington refusing to allow all Europeans to travel to the States visa-free.

The vote by show of hands is the latest in the ongoing **“visa war”** between Brussels and the US capital, which now looks set to come to a head after MEPs today agreed **that US nationals crossing the Atlantic should require additional travel documents as long as citizens from five EU countries (Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Poland and Romania) are kept from entering America without a visa**. A European Parliament source told Telegraph Travel this was a “serious negative step in the EU-USA visa war”.

The US requires nationals from five EU countries to apply for visas

The EU Commission now has two months to reintroduce visas for Americans wishing to travel to Europe, after MEPs agreed the EU is now “legally obliged” to suspend the Visa Waiver Programme (VWP) with the US for a year after the US administration failed to meet a deadline to respond something called visa reciprocity. *Parliament and the European Council will have the chance to object to anything put forward by the Commission. Their concerns are:*

Issue #1:

The need to apply for a visa to travel to a country is widely seen as a turn-off to potential visitors, given the extra cost and time an application requires. A country looking to boost its tourism industry will often look at loosening any existing visa requirements.

Issue #2:

The resolution was passed despite warnings from the European Travel Commission (ETC) of the damage a visa war with the US might have on the continent’s tourism industry.

“We fully understand and respect the visa waiver reciprocity mechanism embedded in European legislation to ensure that all nationals of Member States part of Schengen can benefit on equal terms from exemption of visa requirement,” said Eduardo Santander, executive director of the ETC, in a joint letter with Michael de Blust, secretariat of the Network for the European Private Sector in Tourism, to MEPs.

“However, we are very concerned about the economic and political impact of a suspension of visa waiver for US nationals.

Visa applications are seen as off-putting by potential visitors

“Making it more difficult for US citizens to travel to Europe would certainly deprive the European travel and tourism sector of essential revenue, and put thousands of European jobs at stake in one of the few sectors which experiences a strong growth in employment.”

Background:

It was in April 2014 the European Commission was first made aware that the US - along with Australia, Brunei, Canada and Japan - was failing to ensure the same visa waiver rights for its citizens that Europe offered in return. The Commission then gave the countries a deadline of two years before retaliating. Since, Australia, Brunei and Japan

have all lifted their visa requirements, with Canada set to do the same by the end of the year, but the US has failed to act.

US RESPONSE: There has not yet been a response to today's vote from the US but the State Department's Bureau of Consular Affairs has said in the past that Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Poland and Romania do not yet meet security requirements for the US VWP.

STATEMENT from the European Travel Commission

Some 30 million American tourists visit Europe each year, spending more than \$54billion (£44bn).

István Ujhelyi, MEP and chair of the Tourism Task Force, said: "The effect of terrorism in Europe in recent years emphasised how fragile our appeal is as a destination in long-haul markets.

This is not a time to put unnecessary obstacles in the way of one of the sectors most capable of generating employment."

Most British nationals do not require a visa to enter the US, but must apply for an ESTA that costs \$14 (£11.50) if arriving by air.

The countries Britons must pay to visit

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Parliament asks EU Commission to press for full US-EU visa reciprocity

PLENARY SESSION Press release - Visa policy – 02-03-2017 - 11:57



MEPs urge the Commission to act so that all EU citizens can travel to the US without visas©AP Images/European Union-EP

The EU Commission is legally obliged to take measures temporarily reintroducing visa [requirements](#) for US citizens, given that Washington still does not grant visa-free access to nationals of five EU countries. In a resolution approved on Thursday, MEPs urge the Commission to adopt the necessary legal measures “within two months”.

The text prepared by the Civil Liberties Committee was adopted by a show of hands.

Visa reciprocity

Citizens of Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Poland and Romania still cannot enter US territory without a visa, while US citizens can travel to all EU countries visa-free.

According to the visa reciprocity mechanism, **if a third country does not lift its visa requirements within 24 months of being notified of non-reciprocity, the EU Commission must adopt a delegated act - to which both Parliament and the Council may object - suspending the visa waiver for its nationals for 12 months.**

*****Following a notification of non-reciprocity on 12 April 2014, the Commission should have acted before 12 April 2016 but it has yet to take any legal measure. Canada also imposes visa requirements on Bulgarian and Romanian citizens, but it has announced that they will be lifted on 1 December 2017.**

Background

In April 2014, the European Commission was notified that five [countries](#) were not meeting their obligations towards the EU with regard to reciprocity of visa-free travel: ***Australia, *Brunei,** Canada, *Japan and the US.**

*Australia, Brunei and Japan have since lifted their visa requirements for all EU citizens and **Canada will do so in December this year.

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