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Conclusion of two EU agreements with Georgia on visa facilitation and readmission

The Council of the EU concluded today two agreements with Georgia: one on visa facilitation and one on readmission. Both agreements will enter into force on 1 March 2011.

Visa facilitation agreement

The visa facilitation agreement makes it easier and cheaper for Georgian citizens, in particular those who travel most, to acquire short stay visas for travels to and throughout the EU. A short stay visa is a visa for an intended stay of no more than 90 days per period of 180 days. EU citizens are already exempt from the visa obligation when travelling to or transiting through Georgia since 1 June 2006.

The agreement substantially simplifies the necessary supporting documents for a visa application for certain categories of persons, e.g. close relatives who are visiting Georgian citizens residing in the EU, businessmen, scientists, students and journalists. For some categories of frequent travelers and under certain conditions, member states are supposed to issue multi-entry visas with long periods of validity. Holders of diplomatic passports are exempted from the visa obligation.

As a general rule, the agreement stipulates that a decision upon the request to issue a visa must be taken within 10 calendar days. The agreement also reduces the visa handling fee from €60 to €35 for all Georgian citizens and provide a total exemption from the visa fee for certain categories of applicants, e.g. close relatives who are visiting Georgian citizens residing in the EU, pensioners, children below the age of 12, disabled persons, scientists, students and journalists.

P R E S S

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On 28 November 2008, the Council gave the European Commission the mandate to start the negotiations of the visa facilitation agreement with Georgia. They were concluded in the first half of 2010 and the agreement was signed in June 2010. The European Parliament gave its consent in December 2010.

It must be noted that the United Kingdom and Ireland are not taking part in the agreement.

Readmission agreement

Visa facilitation agreements go usually hand-in-hand with readmission agreements between the EU and third countries. Readmission agreements set out clear obligations and procedures for the authorities of EU member states and the third countries concerned as to when and how to take back people who are illegally residing on the territories of the parties. They cover not only the illegally staying nationals of both parties but also third country nationals and stateless persons being in an irregular situation provided they have a clear link with the requested party (e.g. visa or resident permit).

The agreement also includes a number of other procedural rules, such as the time-limits for the readmission applications, the modalities for the transfer of the returnees, the cost of the transfer and the protection of personal data of the returnees. A Joint Readmission Committee is established so as to monitor the application of the agreement and decide on certain technical arrangements.

Full respect of Human Rights as provided by the European Convention of Human Rights is guaranteed during the application of readmission agreements.

On 28 November 2008, the Council gave the European Commission the mandate to start the negotiations of the readmission agreement with Georgia. They were concluded in the second half of 2010 and the agreement was signed in November 2010. The European Parliament gave its consent in December 2010.

It must be noted that Ireland and Denmark are not taking part in the agreement.

Visa facilitation and readmission agreements with other third countries

So far, the EU has signed visa facilitation and readmission agreements with eight countries: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM), the Republic of Moldova, Montenegro, Russia, Serbia and Ukraine.

A readmission agreement also exists with Pakistan, Hong-Kong, Macao and Sri Lanka.

Besides that, negotiations are ongoing with Cape Verde (on visa facilitation and readmission), Turkey (readmission) and Morocco (readmission).