

EU/China Agreement: short-stay visa waiver for holders of diplomatic passports

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The Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs adopted the report by Bodil VALERO (Greens/EFA, SE) on the draft Council decision on the conclusion, on behalf of the European Union, of the Agreement between the European Union and the People's Republic of China on the short-stay visa waiver for holders of diplomatic passports.

The committee recommended Parliament to give its **consent to the conclusion of the agreement**.

In brief, the agreement provides for visa-free travel for citizens of the Union holding a valid diplomatic passport or an EU laissez-passer and for citizens of China holding a valid diplomatic passport when travelling to the territory of the other Contracting Party, for a maximum period of 90 days in any 180-day period.

The agreement was initialled by the chief negotiators of the EU and China respectively on 3 and 4 November 2015.

The report is accompanied by a short justification stressing that the **significance of visa liberalisation is considerable** as it brings tangible benefits.

The fact that the proposed Agreement also covers, for the first time, the holders of European Union's "laissez-passer" has been welcomed.

The rapporteur hoped that the visa waiver for holders of diplomatic passports represents a **step forward in the establishment of full reciprocal visa waiver for holders of ordinary passports**. It will facilitate people-to-people contact – an essential condition for the steady development of economic, cultural, scientific and other ties as well as it will intensify contacts between people. Visa liberalisation should go hand-in-hand with improvements in respect of human rights and fundamental freedoms.

The rapporteur also queried the practice of signing visa waiver agreements and applying them provisionally **before the European Parliament has approved them**. This practice is liable to reduce Parliament's room for manoeuvre. Moreover, this is all the more problematic because Parliament is not informed about them as the bilateral negotiations progress, which is in potential breach of Treaty provisions (art 218) and the current Framework Agreement on relations between the European Parliament and the European Commission.