

Third countries whose nationals are subject to or exempt from a visa requirement: Kuwait, Qatar

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The Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs adopted the report by Erik MARQUARDT (Greens/EFA, DE) on the proposal for a regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council amending Regulation (EU) 2018/1806, listing the third countries whose nationals must be in possession of visas when crossing the external borders and those whose nationals are exempt from that requirement (Kuwait, Qatar).

The committee responsible recommended that the European Parliament's position adopted at first reading under the ordinary legislative procedure should amend the proposal as follows:

Exemption from the visa requirement

Members consider that **nationals of Ecuador, Kuwait, Oman and Qatar** should be exempted from the visa requirement for stays of up to 90 days in a period of 180 days and that references to these countries should be transferred to Annex II of Regulation (EU) 2018/1806.

Negotiations on the bilateral visa waiver agreement should only start once a moratorium on the death penalty has been introduced in Kuwait.

As regards **Oman and Ecuador**, the visa waiver :

- would apply from the date of entry into force of a visa waiver agreement to be concluded with the EU;
- apply only to holders of biometric passports issued in accordance with International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO) standards.

Negotiations on the bilateral visa waiver agreement should only start three months after the entry into force of the amending regulation, following the positive assessment by the Commission of a set of criteria set out in Article 1 of Regulation (EU) 2018/1806.

Human rights dialogue

The amended text stresses that a genuine official human rights dialogue with **Kuwait, Qatar and Oman** should take place at least on an annual basis, the outcome of which should be reported to Parliament.

This dialogue should lead to tangible improvements and achievements in areas such as labour and workers' rights, including the rights of migrant workers and their access to compensation schemes and programmes, women's rights, LGBTQ+ rights, gender equality, freedom of religion, prohibition of torture, freedom of expression, freedom of the media, right of assembly and prohibition of the death penalty, and should include input from independent civil society actors.

The bilateral visa waiver agreements concluded with the EU should include explicit and concrete commitments to this effect.

With regard to **Ecuador**, the human rights dialogue established with the EU should continue and lead to further improvements and achievements, in particular with regard to prison conditions, the rights of

women and girls, the rights of indigenous peoples and human rights defenders, as well as refugee protection in the country.

According to the report, the Commission should **monitor the human rights situation in third countries whose nationals** are exempt from the visa requirement and report regularly to Parliament. Bilateral visa waiver agreements to be concluded with the EU should provide for annual evaluation by the Commission of the implementation of their provisions, in particular as regards human rights and security.

Following the model of the current process as new generation agreements under Regulation (EU) 2018 /1806, the Commission should promptly assess the situation of other third countries potentially eligible for visa exemption.