

# EU Visa Policy: Commission upgrades the Visa Information System to better secure the EU's external borders

The proposed changes will allow for more thorough background checks on visa applicants; close security information gaps through better information exchange between Member States; and ensure full interoperability with other EU-wide databases.

Commissioner for Migration, Home Affairs and Citizenship, **Dimitris Avramopoulos** said: *“Every year, millions of non-EU nationals enter the EU with a visa, be it for a short stay or for a longer period. With the upgrade of the Visa Information System, we will remove blind spots in our information systems and give visa authorities and border guards the information they need to do their job properly. Criminals and potential terrorists should not be able to come to Europe unnoticed. Europe is not a fortress – but we need to know who is crossing our borders. It is our responsibility to ensure the safety of European citizens and build a Europe that protects while not hampering mobility for those travelling to the EU in good faith.”*

The Visa Information System (VIS) is an EU database which connects border guards at the EU's external borders with Member States' consulates across the world. It provides visa issuing authorities with key information on applicants for short-stay Schengen visas while allowing border guards to detect travellers that may pose security risks. Today's proposal expands the scope of the VIS – notably by adding long stay-visas and residence permits to the system – in full respect of data protection rules, to ensure that these authorities have the information they need, when they need it. The proposal is the second step of the reform of the common EU visa policy and follows the amendments to the Visa Code, presented by the Commission in [March 2018](#).

## Enhancing security and closing information gaps

The proposed upgrade of the VIS database will enhance internal security and improve border management through the following measures:

- **Enhanced security checks across all databases:** All visa applications recorded in the VIS will now be automatically checked against all other EU information systems for security and migration, such as the newly established Entry-Exit System (EES), the Schengen Information System (SIS) and the European Criminal Records Information System (ECRIS), through a Single Search Portal. This obligatory crosscheck will detect applicants using multiple identities and identify anyone posing security or irregular migration risks;
- **Better data and information exchange:** Currently no information is held at EU level on long-stay visas and residence permits. The proposed upgrades will extend the scope of the VIS to also include such information. This will allow border guards to quickly determine whether

a long-stay visa or a residence permit used to cross the Schengen external borders is valid and in the hands of its legitimate holder – closing an important security gap;

- **More efficient return procedures:** From now on, copies of the visa applicant's travel document will also be included in the VIS database. This measure, coupled with the authorisation for the European Border and Coast Guard Agency staff to have access to the VIS, will facilitate the identification and readmission of undocumented irregular migrants, thereby increasing the efficiency of the EU's return policy;
- **Strengthened capacity to prosecute and prevent crime :** Law enforcement authorities and Europol will now have a more structured access to the VIS for the prevention, detection or investigation of terrorist offences or other serious crimes, under strict conditions and in full respect of the EU's data protection rules. Access to the VIS will be also opened to law enforcement authorities for the purpose of searching or identifying missing or abducted persons and victims of trafficking.

## Next steps

The eu-LISA will be the EU Agency responsible for the development and management of the upgraded VIS database. As the final element of the EU visa policy reform, the Commission calls on the European Parliament and the Council to complete their legislative processes as swiftly as possible to close any remaining information gaps and facilitate travel to the EU for legitimate visitors.

## Background

The common EU visa policy facilitates travel to the EU for tourism and business purposes, contributing to the EU's economy and growth and intercultural connections and dialogue. In 2016 alone, almost 14 million Schengen visas were issued for short stay visits (see the [latest statistics](#) on Schengen visas).

Since the entry into force of the [Visa Code in 2010](#), the environment in which visa policy operates has drastically changed. In recent years, the EU has been faced with new migration and security challenges. In [September 2017](#), the Commission announced it would come forward with ideas on how to modernise the EU's common visa policy. The Commission confirmed it would propose a revision of the Visa Code in its [Work Programme for 2018](#) and delivered on this commitment in [March 2018](#).

At the same time, the EU is upgrading its information systems for security and border management in order to close information gaps and enhance internal security. Following up on the [Council conclusions from June 2017](#), the Commission presented in [December 2017](#) a proposal to make EU information systems work together in a more efficient and intelligent way. Today's proposal upgrades the VIS and lays the foundation for the system to become fully interoperable with other EU databases for border and migration management

## For More Information

[Factsheet](#) – Upgrading the Visa Information System (VIS)

[Factsheet](#) – EU Information Systems

Proposal for a [new Regulation on the Visa Information System](#)

[Press Release](#) – EU Visa Policy: Commission puts forward proposals to make it stronger, more efficient and more secure

[Press Release](#) – Security Union: Commission closes information gaps to better protect EU citizens

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## **Integration of the Western Balkan countries should remain a top EU priority, insist European and regional civil society organisations**



**More than 100 civil society representatives adopted their contribution to the EU-Western Balkans Heads of State Summit in Sofia**

The participants at the high level conference, which took place on 15 May, were convinced that the enlargement of the EU, and in particular the spread of its democratic values and legal standards to the Western Balkan region, was in the interest of both the Western Balkan countries and the EU. Promoting EU values in the region guarantees security and stability, enhances social and economic development, as well as democracy and the rule of law in these countries which in turn means stability and security for the EU.

***“The future of the region is a European future”, Luca Jahier, President of the European Economic and Social Committee, underlined in his statement before the conference. “I am convinced that there is no other alternative for both the EU and the Western Balkan countries than to make steady, transformative and sustainable steps towards full membership.”***

***“I truly believe that it is in the interest not just of the countries and citizens of the Western Balkans, but also of all of us in the EU, to integrate this region into our common Union as soon as possible”, said Dilyana Slavova, President of the External Relations Section at the European Economic and Social Committee at the opening of the conference. “Organised civil society from the region and from the EU should and must have a prominent role in promoting this process, as an important controlling mechanism that guarantees the quality of its end result”.***

The Bulgarian Deputy Prime Minister for Judicial Reform and Minister of Foreign Affairs **Ekaterina Zaharieva** also underlined the need to involve civil society: “*The social partners have an important role in the socio-economic development and cohesion in the Western Balkans.*” She expressed hopes to see two of the Western Balkans countries become EU members by 2025.

The economies of the Western Balkan countries continue to grow but, despite that, the countries of the region remain among the poorest in Europe. It is estimated that full convergence with EU living standards could take as long as 40 years. The participants recommended that social, economic and territorial cohesion be assessed when evaluating the fulfilment of EU membership criteria. The discussions emphasised the paramount role of education and of a free and independent media for overcoming the legacy of the past and for enhancing democratic values. The representatives of civil society organisations paid particular attention to **the rights and empowerment of vulnerable groups in the region**. They urged the national governments to do more to tackle challenges that women are facing such as domestic violence, limited labour market opportunities, harassment and violence in the workplace, salary and pension gaps between women and men, reproductive and maternity rights and unequal access to participation in high-level politics. The participants also stressed the need **to pursue inclusive policies towards minorities in the Western Balkans**.

The participants noted that the social partners and other civil society organisations, both at EU and national level, must be meaningfully involved in the entire process of integrating the Western Balkan countries into the EU. The conference called on the Heads of States at the EU summit in Sofia to set out their clear commitment to more consistent and direct support for civil society organisations at all levels and stressed the need to organise a joint event with representatives of civil society organisations from the Western Balkans and the EU ahead of each following summit.

**Background:** *The Western Balkans Conference is a contribution from organised civil society to the EU-Western Balkans Heads of State Summit. It was jointly organised by the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) and the Technical Assistance and Information Exchange Instrument of the European Commission (TAIEX), with the support of the Bulgarian Presidency of the Council of the EU and the Economic and Social Council of the Republic of Bulgaria. Representatives from employers' associations, trade unions and other civil society organisations from the EU and the Western Balkans, as well as representatives of EU institutions, Bulgarian officials and members of Bulgarian organised civil society gathered to discuss concrete recommendations from civil society to be put forward to the national authorities and the European institutions.*

The final conclusions from the conference can be found [here](#).

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## Codification of restrictions in ERATV and ECVVR

Codification of restrictions in ERATV and ECVVR Reference: ERA/TD/2011-09/INT  
Publication Date : 16/05/2018 Published by: Interoperability Document Types: Technical Document  
Keywords: ERATV, NVR Description: This document presents a pragmatic solution intended to facilitate overcoming the language barriers in the registration of additional authorisations. This solution consists of a "pre-codification" of non-coded restrictions, so that these "pre-codes" may be used in the NVR and, if the European Commission so decides, included in the list of coded restrictions at a future revision of the NVR specification. There should be a single list of coded and pre-coded restrictions valid for both NVR and ERATV.

This document includes codes:

- indicated in [1] NVR Specification set out in Decision 2007/756/EC as amended by Decision 2011/107/EU;
- identified by the ERATV work party ([2] Decision on ERATV includes a provision for management by ERA of a list of codes for restrictions). Related documents:

□Codification of restrictions in ERATV and ECVVR ver. 1.03 ([EN](#))

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## WTO rejects vast majority of US claims in Airbus dispute

The Appellate Body definitively dismissed all US claims that any of the EU support is outright "prohibited" under WTO rules.

Commissioner **Malmström** said: "Today the WTO Appellate Body, the highest WTO court, has definitively rejected the US challenge on the bulk of EU support to Airbus, and agreed that the EU has largely complied with its original findings. Significantly, it dismissed the vast majority of the US claims that this support had damaged Boeing's aircraft sales. The EU will now take swift action to ensure it is fully in line with the WTO's final decision in this case. Also, we look forward to the upcoming ruling by the Appellate Body on US compliance with the WTO findings of the massive and persistent government support to Boeing."

The Appellate Body found that the majority of EU support to Airbus challenged by the US had expired in 2011. It ruled that under WTO rules the EU is not required to take any further action regarding state support that no longer exist, such as the alleged support for the A300, A310, A320 and A330/A340 aircraft models.

This ruling leaves the EU with only a few remaining compliance obligations in

order to bring itself fully into line with WTO rules. These are linked to repayable loans provided to the newer A380 and A350 XWB models. There are no obligations that remain regarding single-aisle aircraft.

The Appellate Body also significantly downgraded the assessment of the economic damage that the remaining EU support has allegedly caused to Boeing's aircraft sales. The US had put forward 218 claims of 'adverse effects' – such as lost sales – to Boeing as a result of alleged support to Airbus. The Appellate Body rejected 94% of US claims and only upheld 14 instances where the support had negatively affected Boeing, related only to the support for the A350 XWB and A380.

The EU will now take swift action to bring itself into line with WTO rules as regards its remaining obligations.

## **Background**

The original WTO case was initiated in 2004. The US challenged support provided by France, Germany, Spain and the UK to Airbus for the development and production of its series of large civil aircraft programmes.

The WTO ruled on the case in 2011, but the US considered that the EU, France, Germany, Spain and the UK had failed to take sufficient steps to withdraw subsidies to Airbus, or remove the economic impact of those subsidies on Boeing. The US therefore brought compliance proceedings against the EU which challenged the European efforts. Today's step marks the end of those compliance proceedings as the Appellate Body is the highest WTO court.

The EU launched a parallel case against US government support for Boeing aircraft in 2005. In that case we are also at the stage of the compliance proceedings after the EU argued before the WTO that the US had not made any efforts to remove its subsidies.

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## **Letter from President Donald Tusk to the members of the European Council ahead of their informal dinner and the EU-Western Balkans Summit in Sofia**

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Following Prime Minister Borissov's kind invitation, we will meet in Sofia tomorrow for an informal working dinner ahead of the EU-Western Balkans Summit. As planned, our discussion will focus on innovation and the digital economy – two themes of strategic reflections under the Leaders' Agenda. The enclosed Note outlines the main issues at stake to guide our discussion. You will be invited to reflect on two questions: *What should be done at the EU level to support and boost breakthrough and disruptive innovation? How can the EU become a major player in the field of big data?* This will be an open debate, without written conclusions at this stage. However, as always, it will help to steer the European Council decisions in June.

During our meeting, we will also reflect on recent global developments, in particular following President Trump's announcements on Iran and trade as well as the latest, dramatic events in Gaza.

As regards the US decision to withdraw from the Iran nuclear deal, I will ask the three leaders who are signatories to the agreement, that is Prime Minister May, Chancellor Merkel and President Macron, to present their assessment of the situation following the US withdrawal. I would like our debate to reconfirm without any doubt that as long as Iran respects the provisions of the deal, the EU will also respect it. This is the line already discussed by our foreign ministers and presented by the United Kingdom, Germany and France, who are working hard to sustain the deal. We should also get an update from High Representative Mogherini, while President Juncker will share his thoughts on how the interests of the European companies engaged in economic cooperation with Iran can be best preserved.

When it comes to the US trade measures, President Juncker will debrief us on the state of play. As we know, the US tariffs on steel and aluminium cannot be justified on the grounds of national security. This is why we agreed in March to call for the permanent exemption of the EU from these tariffs and strongly supported the steps taken by the European Commission to ensure that the interests of the EU are fully protected. This includes the possibility to respond to the US measures as appropriate and in a proportionate manner, in compliance with the World Trade Organisation rules. While recalling the European commitment to strong transatlantic relations as a cornerstone of the security and prosperity of both the United States and the European Union, we also underlined our support for dialogue on trade issues of common concern. Tomorrow night I will propose we stick to our guns. Our renewed and full support for the European Commission will strengthen its position in the negotiations with the US. This is the only way to protect European interests. It is clear that it is not the EU that is putting transatlantic trade relations at risk. But we need to be sure that we have done everything in our power, and within the limits of the international trade rules, to avoid a negative scenario.

The following day, we will meet our Western Balkan partners collectively for the first time in 15 years. After my recent trip to the region, I am convinced that the EU is the only partner that cares genuinely about the stability of the entire region and a prosperous future for its peoples – as opposed to treating it as a geopolitical game of chess, in which the people are pawns. The European perspective for the Western Balkans should remain a

firm commitment on both sides. But apart from the political declarations about the future, we must demonstrate that we care about the economic development of the Western Balkans here and now. Investing in infrastructural and human connections with and within the Western Balkans region is in the EU's best interest. And the objective of our summit is to prove it.

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