



Global Employer Services Immigration

Suspension of visa free travel for US and Canadian citizens?

History

Currently, US and Canadian citizens can travel to the Schengen zone without a visa for up to 3 months in every 6 month period. EU citizens should equally be able to travel without a visa to the USA and Canada.

This is based on the EU's common visa policy, whereby third country nationals can benefit from a visa waiver if all EU citizens can – reciprocally – travel without a visa to that country. The UK and Ireland are excluded from the EU's common visa policy (as they have exercised their right to opt out) and are not affected by what follows.

The issue

Canadian and US citizens can travel to the Schengen zone without a visa. However, Romanian and Bulgarian citizens – despite being EU citizens - cannot yet enjoy visa exempt travel to Canada. In addition to Romanian and Bulgarian citizens, the US also excludes Croatian, Cypriot and Polish citizens from the visa waiver program.

On 2 March 2017, the EU Parliament consequently adopted a non-binding resolution requesting the EU Commission to suspend visa exempt travel for citizens of countries that do not reciprocally grant visa exempt travel to all EU citizens for 12 months, in accordance with EU legislation.

What this means

Suspending the visa waiver for Canadian and US citizens would have a significant impact on businesses, as it may bring the introduction of business visas and with it additional, costly and time-consuming processes.

Is a suspension of visa exempt travel for Canadians and US citizens looming?

Canada has introduced visa exempt travel for Bulgarian and Romanian citizens who have held Canadian temporary residence for the last 10 years, or are currently holding US non-immigrant visas. Canada is currently on track to allow Bulgarian and Romanian citizens to travel without a visa as of 1 December 2017.

The new US administration has agreed to launch a result based process towards bringing the 5 EU Member States (Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Poland and Romania) under the visa waiver program, if they meet all requirements as set out in US legislation. This includes reporting to the Interpol Stolen and Lost Travel Documents database on a daily basis and signing and implementing the Preventing and Combatting Serious Crime agreement.

The EU Commission responded to the EU Parliament's resolution on 2 May 2017, stating that the suspension of the visa waiver program would be counterproductive at this time.

Companies should therefore not fear an immediate suspension of visa exempt travel. However, the EU Commission may reconsider its position in the future if insufficient progress is made.

Contacts

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