



## HOTREC position - Visa Package

HOTREC fully welcomes the Visa Package (Visa Code recast + Touring Visa) proposed by the Commission in 2014. The new visa rules fully comply with all the security aspects requested by the Schengen legislation, whereas facilitating the procedures for visa applicants to enter Europe. **Possible illegal immigration is not facilitated by the new measures. The new package only facilitates procedures.** The adoption of the new measures would imply a boost in growth and jobs for the tourism sector.

### FRAMING THE PROBLEM

The implementation of the current Visa Code ([Regulation 810/2009](#)) is too bureaucratic and unfeasible:

- The fact that visa applications often require details on holiday accommodation, but that accommodation often cannot be confirmed until passengers lists and group sizes are finalised, results in a loss of business and much wasted time;
- Visa applicants need to travel in order to be interviewed with the problems of time and money that this brings;
- Visa applicants do not know in which consulate they should ask for a visa, in case the traveller goes to more than one Schengen country (notion of main destination creates confusion);
- Visa applicants should be able to get an interview and the decision regarding the application within a short deadline;
- Lack of mother-tongue application documents and online access in origin markets;
- Supporting documents – the list should not be a burden to the traveller. The list is not clear and leaves the possibility for different consulates to be asking different documents to the travellers;
- Information on the possible use of external service providers and cooperation among Member States to grant a visa should be clearly available in the internet;
- Visa fee – 60€ is quite a high fee to be paid;
- Moreover, the current legislation prevents travellers from touring across the Schengen space for more than three months, which logically means an economic loss to the EU economy.

## ECONOMIC IMPACT

The Commission has released in August 2013 a [study](#) showing the economic benefits of facilitating visa procedures. The study focus on Russia, China, Ukraine, Saudi Arabia, India and South Africa and estimates that:

- The EU lost 6.6 million tourists from these six countries. Those potential tourists chose other destination after being put-off by formalities in obtaining a visa;
- The tourism industry loses out a potential of € 5.5 billion in direct contributions to GDP every year, adding up to approximately 113 000 jobs in the tourism industry and related sectors;
- **The EU will see an increase in trips to the Schengen area of between 30% and 60% if visa rules were more flexible;**
- **That represents €130 billion in total direct spending over five years (in accommodation, food, drinks, transport, entertainment, shopping, etc.) and some 1,3 million jobs in tourism and related sectors;**

## RESULTS

Taking into account the aforementioned problems, the European Commission proposed a new visa package on 1<sup>st</sup> April 2014, which includes:

- Proposal for a Touring Visa ([COM \(2014\)163final](#))
- Proposal for a revision of the Visa Code [COM \(2014\) 164final](#)

HOTREC fully supports the proposed Regulations, namely:

### I. Proposal for a Touring Visa ([COM \(2014\)163final](#))

- Possibility of staying in Schengen for more than three months and up to one year (the period can be extended to a maximum of two years period), as long as the applicant does not intend to stay for more than three months in any 180-day period (6 months) in the territory of the same Member State – essence of the Touring Visa.
- In fact, limiting travellers to stay in Schengen for 90 days in every six-month period poses a barrier for tourists, pensioners, artists, researchers, students, service providers, business people to stay longer in the Schengen area. It also leads to missed economic opportunities for Member States. HOTREC believes the Commission proposal addresses the lack of legislation on the referred matter.

### II. Proposal for a revision of the Visa Code ([COM \(2014\) 164final](#))

- Clarification of the notion of main destination (Art. 5/1/b) – for the traveller it is now easier to know which is the Member State responsible for analysing the visa application, if the visit includes more than one destination - the length of the stay is the adopted criteria;
- The lodging of the visa application can be done 6 months prior to the intended visit (instead of three months) - Art.8. This allows visa applicants to plan their trips more in advance;
- The deadline for the consulates to take a decision on the visa application has been reduced from 15 to 10 days (Art. 20);

- Facilitation for VIS registered regular travellers – visa applicants who are already registered in the Visa Information System (VIS) and who have obtained and lawfully used two visas in the 12 months prior to their application can be granted a multiple entry visa valid for three years (which can be prolonged to five more years). The same visa applicants will also only need to submit documents referring to the purpose of the stay (Art. 21 and Art 13/2);
- VIS registered applicants shall not be required to appear in person when lodging an application, where their fingerprints have been entered into the VIS less than 59 months before (Art. 9/2)
- The list of supporting documents is no longer a “non-exhaustive”, which brings more clarity to the visa application procedure (Art. 13 in conjunction with the following Annex: [link](#));
- Possibility of Member States to issue a temporary visas at the borders (maximum duration of 15 days), in order to promote short term tourism (Art.33);
- Enhanced consular cooperation (Art. 5) – visa applicants are entitled to lodge their application at any consulate, irrespective of their destination in the Schengen area in any third country, where there is at least one consulate processing visa applications. Moreover, Member States are encouraged to use other forms of consular cooperation (e.g.: use of external service providers - Art 41). The intention is that visa applicants do not waste money on trips to other countries in order to have their biometric data collected, in case consulates do not have a representation in their countries;
- Member States should to the extent possible allow each applicant to submit the application forms electronically (Art. 10, recital 27);
- Minors under the age of 18 years old do not need to pay a visa fee (art.14/3). This will encourage families to visit Europe;
- There is no need for the visa applicant to hold a travel medical insurance in order to ask for the visa.

For the first time ever, there is a balance between economic and security aspects in visa policy. The idea is to bring more tourists to the Schengen area, with the help of visa facilitation procedures, but without damaging the security of citizens in Europe. As a consequence there will be a boost in growth and jobs in the tourism sector. This will help Europe to continue being world’s destination number one.

For all these reasons, HOTREC calls the EU institutions for the swift approval of the two proposed Regulations.

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