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Delegations will find attached document COM(2014) 665 final.

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**REPORT FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND  
THE COUNCIL**

**On the fulfilment by Colombia of the relevant criteria in view of the negotiation of a visa  
waiver agreement between the European Union and Colombia**

{SWD(2014) 329 final}

## 1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

European Parliament and Council Regulation No 509/2014<sup>1</sup> (hereinafter the ‘amending Regulation’) amended Council Regulation No 539/2001<sup>2</sup> and in particular its annexes containing the lists of third countries whose nationals must be in possession of visas when crossing the external borders and those whose nationals are exempt from that requirement. Nineteen countries were transferred from Annex I (visa obligation) to Annex II (visa exemption), namely Colombia, Dominica, Grenada, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Micronesia, Nauru, Palau, Peru, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Timor-Leste, Tonga, Trinidad and Tobago, Tuvalu, the United Arab Emirates and Vanuatu. The amending Regulation further specified that exemption from the visa requirement for nationals of these 19 countries should only apply from the date of entry into force of an agreement on visa waiver to be concluded by each of these countries with the European Union.

Recital 5 of the amending Regulation states that before opening negotiations on bilateral visa waiver agreements with Colombia and Peru, the Commission would have to further assess the situation of these two countries with regard to the criteria set out in the amending Regulation. Indeed, the amending Regulation has formalised (by transferring them from a recital to a new article) and enlarged the traditional list of criteria that were being considered until now. The non-exhaustive list of the criteria that henceforth determine, based on a case-by-case assessment, the third countries whose nationals are subject to, or exempt from, the visa obligation, can be found in Article 1(1) of the amending Regulation: *‘illegal immigration, public policy and security, economic benefit, in particular in terms of tourism and foreign trade, and the Union’s external relations with the relevant third countries, including, in particular, considerations of human rights and fundamental freedoms, as well as the implications of regional coherence and reciprocity’*.

With this report, and a separate one adopted in parallel covering Peru, the Commission fulfils the above-mentioned requirement. Both reports are accompanied by Commission staff working documents presenting the detailed data that underpin their conclusions and containing information about the data sources and methodology used to produce the assessment.

In preparing the assessment, the Commission requested and received contributions from three EU agencies: EASO, Europol and Frontex. The EU Delegation in Colombia provided a comprehensive report on EU-Colombia relations. Spain, as the Member State most affected by migration from Colombia, provided additional information. Colombian authorities showed a high degree of willingness to cooperate with the Commission during the preparation of the assessment.

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<sup>1</sup> OJ L 149, 20.05.2014, p. 67.

<sup>2</sup> OJ L 81, 21.03.2001, p. 1.

## 2. ASSESSMENT OF THE CRITERIA

This report broadly reflects the criteria listed in Article 1(1) of the amending Regulation; it also assesses the possible risk scenarios stemming from visa liberalisation, before presenting the conclusions.

### 2.1. Migration and mobility

#### Schengen visas

Analysis of statistics on Schengen visas applied for and issued in Colombia in recent years leads to the following observations:

- More and more Colombians are willing to travel to the Schengen area for tourism, business or other types of short stays. In 2013 the number of Schengen visas issued was 121 019, which represents an increase of 42.7% compared to 2010. This increase is probably linked to the significant economic growth experienced by Colombia in parallel with recent improvements in the security situation;
- The vast majority of Colombian applicants (95.2% in 2013) are considered to be *bona fide* travellers who pose no risk and therefore obtain a short-stay visa, with the visa refusal rate having more than halved in four years, from 11.2% in 2010 to 4.8% in 2013. An increasing proportion of these applicants (40.9% in 2013) are getting multiple entry visas, which also indicates that the Schengen consulates have greater trust in Colombian applicants.

#### Legal migration

The current resident population of Colombians in the EU+<sup>3</sup> (not counting those having acquired the citizenship of a Member State) is estimated to be around 230 000, with slightly less than 75% of them in Spain. Statistical data show that after a period of spectacular growth, mostly in Spain, legal migration of Colombians to the EU is currently at a relatively low level. This is due in part to the economic crisis, meaning fewer jobs and opportunities for migrants in the EU+, thus reducing the pull factors, and to improvement of the security and economic situation in Colombia, thus reducing the push factors. The Colombian government is at present promoting the return of Colombians residing abroad through implementation of the so-called 'Return Law' that grants tax and financial incentives to returning Colombians, as well as offering integral support to those who return voluntarily.

As long as Colombia's economy continues growing at the current rates, averaging almost 5% GDP growth in the last 10 years, and the security situation remains stable or improves, Colombians will have less of an incentive to emigrate. The current economic situation in the EU, together with geography and established communities, may explain why the United States is the destination for most Colombians who have been legally emigrating in recent years.

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<sup>3</sup> Whenever 'EU totals' are presented, they exclude, unless otherwise stated, the United Kingdom and Ireland as these two countries do not participate in the EU's common visa policy. Whenever 'EU+ totals' are presented, these include data for the four Schengen associated countries (Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Switzerland) and exclude the UK and Ireland.

## **Irregular migration**

Data on entry refusals, apprehensions and returns show that Colombia is not an entirely risk-free country in terms of irregular migration to the EU. The situation has however improved markedly in recent years, with decreasing numbers of refusals and apprehensions, and an improved ratio of returns, though the numbers remain significant. The number of Colombians found to be in an irregular migration situation in the EU+ in 2013 was 3 080, for example, down from 4 195 in 2011.

A comparison of the data on return decisions issued and effected returns to a third country (the so-called 'return ratio') may indicate whether the return of Colombians having received return decisions is carried out smoothly or whether difficulties exist. The return ratio in the EU+ was very low in 2010 (9.5 %) but since then it has improved noticeably (26.9 % in 2011, 31.5 % in 2012 and 46.1 % in 2013). Last year, therefore, the EU's return ratio for Colombians was higher than the average return ratio worldwide (36.6 %), and further improvement is expected. Spain has reported excellent cooperation with Colombian diplomatic and consular authorities on issues related to the return of Colombian nationals, based on a 2001 bilateral agreement. For instance, in 2013, 229 of the 244 requests for documentation made to the Colombian consular authorities in Spain were granted. The reason why some Colombians could not be returned therefore does not appear to be a lack of cooperation on the part of the Colombian authorities. It is more likely to be due to absconding migrants or appeals against return decisions.

According to Frontex, compared to overall irregular migration pressures faced by the EU, the risks arising from a visa waiver for Colombian citizens are likely to remain fairly modest, although it is also likely that the number of entry refusals will increase, as evidenced by other visa liberalisation cases.

As regards the risk of irregular presence of persons whose asylum applications have been rejected, a significant increase in unfounded asylum applications, similar to what happened after previous visa liberalisation processes, is an unlikely scenario given the vastly different circumstances. For example, travel costs are much higher in the case of Colombia and there is no history of large-scale submission of unfounded asylum applications associated with different economically marginalised groups of Colombian society. In other words, abusing the visa-free regime for the purpose of requesting asylum is simply not economically viable, given that the travel costs for a family are significantly higher than the expected benefits associated with the asylum procedure in the EU.

It is worth noting that any increased risk of irregular migration that may follow the introduction of visa-free travel for Colombian citizens – however modest – could be partially offset by reinforced cooperation between the EU and Colombia in preventing and combating irregular migration, including through cooperation on return, and in this regard concluding an EU readmission agreement would be an option to consider.

## **Security of Colombian travel documents and travel document fraud**

Colombian authorities have made significant efforts to incorporate the required international specifications into their national passports. They have pointed out that *'in 2010, the new machine-readable Colombian passport was introduced, making it a more agile travel*

*document that is internationally recognised and technologically up-to-date.*' The current Colombian passports are compliant with the relevant ICAO specifications.

Colombia is preparing for the implementation of electronic biometric passports in the medium term. In this connection, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs will include the electronic biometric passport in the terms of reference for the procurement of new passports. The bidding process is expected to be launched in the second half of 2014.

As things stand, there do not seem to be significant risks related to Colombian nationals engaging in document fraud or to Colombian travel documents being fraudulently used. However, if Colombian travel documents were to afford visa-free entry to their holders in the future, it is likely they would become more attractive to fraudsters. Increased vigilance by border guards will be required to identify this type of fraud.

## **2.2. Crime and security**

The structure of organised crime in Colombia has changed radically over the past 10 years. The demobilisation of AUC paramilitary groups (United Self-Defence Forces of Colombia) between 2003 and 2006 led to the formation of new criminal gangs deeply rooted in drug trafficking: the emerging criminal bands (BACRIM) have, according to the Colombian government, overtaken the FARC (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia) and ELN (National Liberation Army) as a national security threat since 2011.

Colombian organised crime groups (OCGs) are present only to a limited extent in the EU. Latin American OCGs favour the Iberian Peninsula as their base of operations due to cultural, linguistic and historical ties. Here, they are particularly involved in the cocaine trade (Colombia and Peru are the world's biggest producers of cocaine) and laundering of criminal proceeds.

Visa liberalisation is certain to increase passenger flows from Colombia to the Schengen area. OCGs involved in drug trafficking will most likely try to take advantage of the growing number of passengers travelling between Colombia and the EU+ by increasingly relying on drug and money couriers. Mobile OCGs originating from Colombia could also try to benefit from the elimination of the visa requirement.

Europol considers that visa liberalisation could result in an increase in the number of Colombian victims of trafficking in human beings (THB) for labour and sexual exploitation in countries such as Spain and Portugal. In this regard, it must be noted that the Second Implementation Report of the Action Oriented Paper (AOP) on Preventing and Combating THB, adopted by the Council in December 2012, places Colombia in category 3<sup>4</sup> of priority countries and regions with which the EU should strengthen cooperation and partnership on this issue. Colombia has a national strategy to combat human trafficking. Furthermore, Colombia has adopted a number of policy instruments on prevention of THB, protection of its victims and prosecution. Further cooperation between the EU and Colombia along the lines of the AOP could strengthen both sides' efforts in addressing this phenomenon.

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<sup>4</sup> Category 1 covers specific countries; category 2, priority regions; category 3, other regions and countries of particular importance for cooperation on THB.

Colombia has ratified the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and the Palermo Protocol on THB, and has in place a comprehensive legal framework in line with international standards. Colombia should continue its efforts towards strengthening the judiciary system, including judicial cooperation in criminal matters, in particular mutual legal assistance.

Colombian and Peruvian OCGs may also exploit irregular migrants using facilitation services for the legalisation of long-term stay by recruiting them as cash or drug couriers as payment for their services.

Visa-free travel and easier access to the Schengen area could also enhance the mobility of OCGs and individual criminals by eliminating the filter that the visa obligation currently provides and by enabling them, once in the Schengen area, to pass from one country to another without going through border controls.

A positive recent development in this area is the entry into force on 25 February 2014 of the operational agreement between Europol and Colombia. The purpose of this agreement is to regulate cooperation between Europol and Colombia in order to support the Member States of the European Union and Colombia in the fight against serious forms of international crime in the areas covered by the agreement, in particular through the exchange of information and regular contacts between Europol and Colombia at all appropriate levels.

### **2.3. *Economy, trade and tourism***

Colombia today has almost 47 million inhabitants (similar to Spain). The value of its economy in 2013 was estimated by the World Bank to be USD 378.1 billion, thus placing it as the 32<sup>nd</sup> biggest economy in the world. The GNI (PPP) per capita was USD 11 340, similar to Peru's. GDP growth has averaged 4.7 % over the last ten years and it is estimated at 4.3 % for 2014. This growth has translated into a reduction in the percentage of population living under the poverty line, from 47 % in 2007 to 33 % in 2012. Other macroeconomic indicators confirm the stability of Colombia's economy: fiscal deficit of 2.3 % of GDP, inflation of 2.6 % and an unemployment rate of 9.9 %.

Bilateral trade flows of goods between the EU-28 and Colombia have nearly tripled since 2004, amounting to EUR 7.7 billion of Colombian exports to the EU-28 and EUR 5.8 billion of EU-28 exports to Colombia. Colombia is the EU's fifth largest trade partner in Latin America and the Caribbean and the main trade partner in the Andean Community. The EU-Colombia Trade Agreement has been provisionally applied since 1 August 2013, and trade flows of goods are expected to increase in the coming years. Furthermore, Colombia, together with the EU, is amongst the 23 WTO-members that are negotiating a multilateral ambitious Trade in Services Agreement ("TiSA"), which includes a strong "mode 4" component. In this context, visa-free travel for Colombian businesspeople could lead to stronger economic ties between Colombian and European companies, as more frequent participation of Colombian businesspeople in trade fairs in the EU could for instance result in more orders for products produced by European businesses.

The number of Colombian tourists in the EU+ has been increasing in recent years. According to data provided by the Colombian authorities, between 2008 and 2013 there was a 27 %

increase in Colombian tourists' departures for EU+ countries, i.e. annual growth of 5%. In 2013 the number of Colombian tourists departing for EU+ countries was 289 191.<sup>5</sup>

In any case, tourist flows from Colombia are increasing every year, so visa liberalisation would provide an extra boost to tourist flows between Colombia and the EU+. Based on these figures and past and estimated future growth rates, it could be realistic to expect around 400 000 Colombian tourists in 2016 in EU+ countries, assuming that 2016 would be the first full year when visa-free travel becomes a reality between Colombia and the Schengen area.

#### ***2.4. External relations, in particular with the EU, and human rights issues***

##### **External relations**

In the past, Colombia has relied heavily on bilateral relations with the United States, based principally on the political and military assistance (Plan Colombia) that is essential for enabling Colombia to counter the threats posed by insurgency and organised crime. The current administration, while maintaining allegiance to the traditional partners, has been successful in diversifying its foreign policy by placing more emphasis on intra-regional relations and on deeper economic integration with 'like-minded' neighbours, not least with the intention of seeking closer ties with Asia. Bilateral relations with neighbouring Ecuador and Venezuela, which have been strained in the past due to the presence of Colombian guerrillas in these countries, have been restored and intensified. These developments, as well as improved relations with a number of other countries in the region, have turned Colombia into a respected and influential regional actor.

Colombia is a member of the Pacific Alliance composed of four Latin American countries (Peru, Colombia, Chile and Mexico) whose aim is to strengthen economic/trade integration, but also going further by cooperating on migration, education, security and other issues. Colombia also participates in the negotiations on the Trans Pacific Partnership Initiative.

After Venezuela's withdrawal from the Andean Community (CAN), the four active members of CAN are Peru, Bolivia, Colombia and Ecuador. CAN is currently in a transition phase and the scope of the organisation has been mainly reduced to trade, infrastructure and mobility of citizens.

The EU-Colombia/Peru Multi-Party Trade Agreement started its provisional application with Colombia on 1 August 2013. To date, this agreement constitutes the most important contractual framework governing economic relations between the EU and Colombia. Implementation of the deal is set to bolster Colombia's position as one of the EU's largest trading partners in South America and a destination of growing importance for EU investment.

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<sup>5</sup> This number is much higher than the number of Schengen visas issued. The difference may be due to several factors: more than 40% of Schengen visas issued in Colombia are multiple entry visas; some Colombians recorded as departing tourists may hold a valid residence permit issued by a Schengen State; etc.



Burgeoning economic ties aside, the EU is also reinforcing its political dialogue with Colombia. In the absence of a comprehensive bilateral agreement, the main vehicle for this is a 2009 Memorandum of Understanding establishing an informal bilateral consultation mechanism at senior officials' level. Exploratory discussions have been taking place on the possibility of concluding a more ambitious political framework agreement. In addition, on several occasions the EU stated its support to the current Havana negotiating process.

On 5 August 2014 the EU and Colombia concluded a framework agreement that will allow Colombia to participate in EU-led international crisis management operations, organised in the framework of the Common Security and Defense Policy.

### **Human rights**

Civilians in Colombia continue to endure the consequences of a five-decade-long internal armed conflict that started around 1964. One particularly severe consequence of the conflict is the high number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) (around five million, i.e. 12% of the total population), which makes Colombia the country with the greatest number of IDPs in the world after Syria. Impunity, forced recruitment of children, sexual violence, use of anti-personnel mines, forced disappearances, and attacks on human rights defenders, local community leaders, participants in land restitution processes and trade unionists constitute the most serious human rights violations reported by the United Nations and civil society organisations.

The political and security situation in Colombia also resulted in relatively high asylum flows from Colombia to the EU from the late 1990s until about 2008. In 1997, the collapse of negotiations between the government and the main armed opposition groups, including the FARC, the ELN and the EPL, led to political violence and an economic crisis. This pattern continued over the following 10 years, with political changes and (only partially successful) initiatives to counteract paramilitary guerrilla and other groups resulting in internal instability.

However, improvements in security in recent years have led to a decrease in the number of asylum claims. The number of applications made by Colombian asylum-seekers in the EU+ in 2013 was 310, one of the lowest figures in two decades. Still, the recognition rate in 2013 was 27% and thus a relatively high one. It remains to be seen whether the current peace negotiations between the Colombian government and the FARC will lead to a peaceful end of the long-term conflict with the guerrillas.

Upon taking office, President Santos put rights-based approaches at the centre of many key measures, e.g. the landmark Law on victims and land restitution, the adoption of a national policy on human rights, and an extensive system of protection for those at risk of violence. The government also reached out to human rights defenders and civil society in general, gestures that are helping to reduce the past deep polarisation of Colombian society. However, due to the scale of the challenges and gaps in implementation capacity, only partial progress has been made so far.

Since 2008, the Colombian government has invested a great deal of resources in developing a regulatory, doctrinal framework for incorporating the Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law norms into the operations of its armed forces. In 2008 a Comprehensive Policy on Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law established objectives and guidelines to be followed by the security forces in the conduct of counterinsurgency

operations. In addition to these efforts, in 2009 the Armed Forces Operational Handbook was updated, with the adoption by the military and police of rules of engagement that comply with international standards.

In a recent report,<sup>6</sup> the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights stated that: *‘Colombia is in a position to greatly improve its compliance with its human rights obligations and to become a fully inclusive society that respects the rights of all Colombians. Significant positive signs are visible, but realizing and sustaining these gains will require innovation, persistence and the involvement of all sectors of society, as well as years of sustained efforts.’*

In November 2012 peace negotiations between the Colombian government and the FARC-EP guerrilla groups were initiated in Havana. The negotiations, preceded by a phase of secret talks, are being conducted on the basis of an agenda which includes five main points (agriculture, political participation rights, drugs, transitional justice, and disarmament and demobilisation). So far, negotiations have advanced more slowly than anticipated, and the parties have announced agreement on the first three points. In particular, in the agreement on the issue of illicit drugs, announced on 16 May 2014, the FARC undertook to disengage from coca-related activities. This commitment, if upheld, has the potential to bring about an important change in the situation of illicit drugs in Colombia.

Preliminary talks – as yet inconclusive - have already taken place with the second-largest guerrilla group, the ELN (National Liberation Army), with the objective of launching peace negotiations with this group as well.

## **2.5. Regional coherence**

Taking Latin America as the region of reference, Colombia is in the minority of countries whose citizens require a visa.<sup>7</sup> A long history of internal conflict and displacement, violence, drug production/trafficking and the resulting migratory and security risks explain why a visa has traditionally been required from Colombian citizens. Colombia has however made significant advances in tackling these problems, as shown in other sections of this report. While few countries in Colombia’s neighbourhood can be considered to be entirely risk-free, most of them have traditionally enjoyed visa-free status for the Schengen area. It might therefore seem incongruous to keep the visa requirement for Colombians while exempting the citizens of most of the other countries in the region.

## **2.6. Reciprocity**

EU citizens have traditionally been exempted from the visa obligation to enter Colombia for periods of up to 90 days. The only exception until recently was the visa requirement imposed

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<sup>6</sup> Report by the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights on the situation of human rights in Colombia – A/HRC/22/17/Add.3

<sup>7</sup> Six countries, namely Cuba, Dominican Republic, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru and Bolivia. The remaining 13 Latin American countries are visa-free: Mexico, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, Panama, Venezuela, Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay, Paraguay and Chile.

on citizens of Bulgaria. However, Colombia recently amended its visa rules and Bulgarian citizens are now also exempted from the visa requirement. Therefore, Colombia already complies with the reciprocity conditions. Notwithstanding this, any future visa waiver agreement between the EU and Colombia would need to confirm reciprocal visa-free travel.

### **3. RISK SCENARIOS**

Given all the trends, events and developments described above, it is possible to imagine at least two risk scenarios for the Schengen area following the abolition of the visa requirement for Colombian citizens.

#### **3.1. *Low risk scenario***

Under this scenario, the Colombian economy would continue to grow at a healthy pace, the peace negotiations would be successfully completed and would lead to the end of the long-standing internal conflict, and democracy and fundamental rights would as a consequence be consolidated, thus liberating the full potential of Colombia's economy and society.

Economic growth and increased security would eliminate most of the push factors for irregular migration and asylum flows to the EU+. Criminal groups' activities would decrease, as would the importance of drug production and trafficking. Trade with, and tourism towards, the EU+ would be likely to increase, bringing tangible economic benefits. Visa-free travel for Colombians would thus not produce any undesirable consequences for the EU+.

#### **3.2. *Medium risk scenario***

Under this scenario, Colombia's economy would continue growing, albeit at a slower pace; the peace negotiations would produce some results, but would not lead to a comprehensive peace agreement – meaning that even decreased levels of violence would keep hampering Colombia's potential. The country would continue to experience human rights violations, thus necessitating close monitoring of the human rights situation.

These problems could become factors that would push some Colombians to abuse the visa-free regime and enter the EU+ territory legally while intending to overstay the legal period of short stay (90 days). Criminal networks could also prosper in an unstable Colombia and export their criminal activities to the EU+ more easily.

Should these negative developments occur and lead to significant threats to the Union in terms of migration, security or other areas, the Union must be able to react quickly to any worsening situation. The visa waiver agreement to be negotiated with Colombia should therefore include in its final provisions the possibility for each Contracting Party to suspend and terminate the agreement. This will guarantee that, if a situation becomes worrying, quick remedying action will be possible. In addition, the possibility of reinforcing cooperation with Colombia on facilitated return of irregular migrants and failed asylum applicants could be considered as outlined above in order to compensate for a possible rise in irregular immigration. Such cooperation would further reduce any need for suspension or termination of the visa waiver agreement.

#### 4. CONCLUSIONS

The information contained in this report and its accompanying staff working paper, demonstrating the significant improvement of the Colombian economic, social and security situation in recent years, provides justification that Colombians should be granted visa-free entry into the Schengen area, as is already the case for citizens of most Latin American countries.

Trust in Colombian visa applicants is on the rise; irregular migration is at relatively low levels; Colombian travel documents are secure enough; security threats have receded; Colombian organised crime groups (OCGs) are currently not assessed as a significant threat to the EU (with the exception of drug trafficking); economic opportunities, including greater trade and touristic flows, are expanding in parallel with significant growth of the Colombian economy; human rights and fundamental freedoms are now much better protected and respected in Colombia than in the past; reciprocity will be ensured as Colombia already exempts all EU citizens from the visa obligation; and the relationship between the EU and Colombia has never been stronger.

These positive developments do not mean that eliminating the visa requirement for Colombian citizens is an entirely risk-free exercise. Some risks do indeed remain and could materialise, in particular if violence becomes once again the prominent characteristic of Colombia's political and social life. Although the impact of visa liberalisation on serious organised crime is considered to be limited and it is unlikely that the establishment of a visa-free regime with Colombia will lead to a notable increase in the activities of OCGs originating from this country in the EU, Colombian OCGs remain major traffickers of cocaine to Europe and visa liberalisation may facilitate their activities. While the bulk of cocaine is smuggled to the EU by sea using containers on commercial routes, the use of drug couriers is still an important *modus operandi*. An increase in passenger flows resulting from the introduction of visa-free travel will allow OCGs to intensify their use of individual couriers. There is also a risk of an increase in trafficked people and in the number of Colombians who enter the EU+ legally but intend to overstay, thus becoming irregular migrants.

These risks are nevertheless considered to be manageable. Most of them could be minimised by reinforced cooperation on return as mentioned above, and by ensuring that border controls are correctly implemented, with reinforced resources if necessary, at the airports through which most Colombians reach the Schengen area's external borders, given that with increasing numbers of arrivals from Colombia in the event of visa-free travel becoming a reality, vetting of travellers will shift from consulates to border control authorities. The recent operational agreement between Europol and Colombia will also contribute to fighting any potential increase in crime by Colombia OCGs.

In any case, the visa waiver agreement to be negotiated with Colombia will contain the necessary safeguards to suspend or terminate the agreement should this be required to avoid security or migration risks for the Union. In order to keep track of any negative developments, the Commission will set up a post-visa liberalisation monitoring mechanism focusing on potential migratory and security threats, and their causes.

In light of the overall positive assessment of Colombia contained in this report, and while special consideration should be given to the need for, and modalities of, engaging Colombia in reinforced cooperation on return, the Commission intends to present to the Council soon,

once this report has been discussed in the appropriate committees and groups of the European Parliament and the Council, a recommendation for a decision to authorise the Commission to open negotiations for the conclusion of a short-stay visa waiver agreement between the EU and Colombia.