



**COUNCIL OF  
THE EUROPEAN UNION**



Brussels, 29 November 2013  
17088/13  
(OR. en)  
PRESSE 515

## **EU-Azerbaijan agreement on facilitating the issuing of visas**

The EU and the Republic of Azerbaijan signed today a visa facilitation agreement ([15554/13](#)) at a ceremony that took place in Vilnius, in the margins of the Eastern Partnership Summit. On behalf of the EU, the agreement was signed by Linas Linkevičius, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Lithuania in his capacity as President of the Council of the European Union, and by Štefan Füle, Commissioner with responsibility for Enlargement and European Neighbourhood Policy. For Azerbaijan, Elmar Mammadyarov, Minister of Foreign Affairs, signed the agreement.

The agreement will now be sent to the European Parliament with a view to obtaining its consent before it can be concluded. It will enter into force on the first day of the second month following the date on which the two parties notify each other that the internal procedures have been completed, or at the date of the entry into force of the EU-Azerbaijan readmission agreement if that date is later. The two agreements shall enter into force together.

The UK, Ireland and Denmark are not bound by the agreement.

### **Main provisions**

The agreement makes it easier and cheaper for citizens of Azerbaijan, in particular those who travel most, to acquire short-stay visas allowing them to travel to and freely throughout the EU. A short-stay visa is a visa for an intended stay of no more than 90 days in any period of 180 days.

For some categories of frequent travellers and under certain conditions, member states are supposed to issue multiple-entry visas with a validity from one to up to five years. Holders of diplomatic are exempted from the visa obligation.

# **P R E S S**

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The agreement also provides that the visa handling fee will not be collected for certain categories of applicants, including members of official delegations, children below the age of twelve, pensioners, researchers and students.

Following the mandate given by the Council on 19 December 2011, the European Commission started the negotiations of the visa facilitation agreement with Azerbaijan. After concluding the negotiations the agreement was initialed on 29 July 2012.

## **Context**

Visa facilitation agreements go usually hand-in-hand with readmission agreements between the EU and third countries. The readmission agreement with Azerbaijan is expected to be signed soon, after the three-month deadline for the opt-in of the United Kingdom and Ireland expires and the relevant Council decision is adopted. Both, the visa facilitation and the readmission agreements will enter into force on the same day, as mentioned above.

Readmission agreements set out clear obligations and procedures for the authorities of EU member states and the third countries concerned as to when and how to take back people who are illegally residing on the territories of the parties. They cover not only the illegally staying nationals of both parties but also third country nationals and stateless persons being in an irregular situation provided they have a clear link with the requested party (e.g. visa or resident permit). Full respect of Human Rights as provided by the European Convention of Human Rights is guaranteed during the application of readmission agreements.

So far, the EU has signed visa facilitation and readmission agreements with eleven countries: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM), the Republic of Moldova, Montenegro, Russia, Serbia, Ukraine, Georgia, Cape Verde and Armenia.