

## **Trust and travel**

### **How EU member states can ease the visa burden for Turks**

24 February 2014

#### **Five steps to win the trust of citizens**

In December 2013 the EU-Turkey visa liberalisation process was launched. ESI recommends that EU member states now commit to five goals to support this process. These goals can be achieved by each member state through steps *fully in compliance with existing EU visa rules*.

#### **1. REJECTION RATES – GOAL LESS THAN 2 PERCENT**

Reject as few Turkish visa applications as possible, striving to achieve a rejection rate of 2 percent or less. Some EU member states (Greece, Italy, Hungary) already achieve this.

#### **2. LONG TERM VISA – MORE THAN 90 PERCENT**

Issue at least 90 percent of the visas as long-term multiple-entry visas valid 3 to 5 years. Member states currently vary on this issue greatly.

#### **3. REDUCE COSTS AND EFFORT**

Allow proxies to submit visa applications on behalf of Turkish applicants; waive the visa fee of 60 Euros in as many cases as possible and consider removing it altogether; waive individual document requirements wherever possible.

#### **4. SOLVE THE ERASMUS PROBLEM**

Commit to issuing long-term visas for all Turkish students and researchers in time for the beginning of their studies and projects.

#### **5. TRANSPARENCY**

Make all improvements visible and advertise them; start to provide information on all aspects of visa policy so that progress can be easily monitored.

The UK and Ireland, which do not participate in the EU's common visa policy, should also specify under which conditions they would abolish the visa requirement for Turkish citizens.



EU Home Affairs Commissioner Cecilia Malmstrom, Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu and EU Enlargement Commissioner Stefan Fule agree to launch the visa liberalisation process, 4 Dec. 2013 © European Commission

### A credible process

Up until the 1980s Turkish citizens could travel without a visa to all Western European countries except Greece. Following the 1980 military coup, these countries introduced a visa requirement for Turkish citizens. In the 1990s, with the establishment of the Schengen zone, the visa requirement became common EU policy.

In December 2013 the European Commission handed over a [roadmap towards visa-free travel](#). Now Turkey has to meet a series of requirements that the roadmap sets out. If it does, the EU has promised to abolish the Schengen short-stay visa requirement for Turkish citizens.

The roadmap is part of a broader “dialogue and cooperation framework on justice and home affairs”, which, among other things, envisages the “promotion of the regular mobility of bona fide travellers between Turkey and the EU and its Member States.” It commits the member states specifically to:

“fully exploiting all possibilities provided by the EU Visa Code and other legal instruments to further facilitating the access of Turkish citizens to the EU.”<sup>1</sup>

Turkey now has to meet the requirements that the roadmap sets out. They concern passport security, border management, asylum policy and respect for human rights, the fight against illegal migration and various forms of organised crime, as well as cooperation with the EU. However, there are widespread concerns in Turkey that EU member states might still vote against lifting the visa requirement even if Turkey meets all roadmap conditions.

<sup>1</sup> “Broader Dialogue and Cooperation Framework on Justice and Home Affairs between the EU and its Member States and Turkey”, Annex I of the Note from the General Secretariat of the Council to the Permanent Representatives’ Committee, Council document no. 16929/12, 30 November 2012.

This is why it is important that EU member states take measures now to demonstrate that they are serious about the goal of the visa liberalisation dialogue. The most effective way to do this is to keep the promise and ease the visa burden for Turkish citizens right away.

### The visa rejection rate

One important issue is the visa rejection rate. In 2012, the most recent year that data is available, Schengen countries received 668,835 applications for short-stay visas in Turkey.<sup>2</sup> In response, they issued 637,276 visas. 31,559 requested visas were not issued. This is a non-issuance rate of 4.7 percent.

There are wide variations among the 12 EU countries that received the highest numbers of applications. The non-issuance rates ranged from 13.2 percent by Belgium to below 1 percent by Greece, Italy and Hungary (see table below). A non-issuance rate of 4.7 percent is high. Ukraine and Russia also participate in visa liberalisation processes with the EU. Ukraine's rate was 2.3 percent in 2012, and Russia's 2.1 percent. There is no reason why Turkey's could not be even below 2 percent. This should be the goal.

*Rejection rates of short-stay visa applications in Turkey 2012<sup>3</sup>*

EU member state	Applications rejected (%)	Applications received
<b>Belgium</b>	13.2	11,526
<b>Sweden</b>	10.2	8,831
<b>Germany</b>	8.3	167,263
<b>Netherlands</b>	7.4	45,535
<b>Austria</b>	6.7	14,305
<b>Czech Republic</b>	4.8	21,689
<b>Poland</b>	4.6	6,904
<b>France</b>	4.0	98,333
<b>Spain</b>	2.4	39,029
<b>Greece</b>	0.9	92,992
<b>Italy</b>	0.8	115,785
<b>Hungary</b>	0.8	10,483
<b>All Schengen countries</b>	<b>4.7</b>	<b>668,835</b>

<sup>2</sup> The data on visas is taken from the visa statistics on the website of the Directorate-General for Home Affairs of the European Commission, section "Schengen, Borders & Visas", subsection "Visa policy". The visa statistics are at the bottom of the "Visa policy" page. Almost all visas issued in Turkey are also issued to Turkish citizens. We verified this with EU member state consulates. The share of nationals other than Turkish at the Belgian consulate in Ankara in 2012 was 1.4 percent; at all the Italian consulates in Turkey an estimated 2 percent; and at the Danish consulate in Ankara 1.7 percent. With 5.5 percent, Sweden receives more applications from non-Turkish citizens than other member states, an exception due to its policy towards Syrian citizens.

<sup>3</sup> Visa statistics of the Directorate-General for Home Affairs of the European Commission. "Rejected" here includes all visa not issued.

It is often young people who have problems receiving a visa. Consular officials see them as potential irregular migrants as they are usually unmarried and have fewer assets in Turkey. The costs of a visa include the fee of 60 Euros for a short-stay Schengen visa, a fee of 15 to 27 Euros for subcontractors receiving applications, which are now widely used, the cost of medical insurance during the trip,<sup>4</sup> and the cost of transport to the application centre. Rejected applicants lose all the money invested in trying to obtain a visa.

The trend concerning the non-issuance rate in Turkey has been encouraging in the past three years. It has dropped from 6.4 percent in 2010 to 5.2 percent in 2011 and 4.7 percent in 2012. This trend must accelerate so that a rate of below 2 percent is reached in 2014 by as many EU member states as possible.

*Rejection rates of short-stay visa in Turkey 2010 to 2012 (%)<sup>5</sup>*

<b>EU Member State</b>	<b>2010</b>	<b>2011</b>	<b>2012</b>
<b>Belgium</b>	34.3	14.3	13.2
<b>Sweden</b>	10.7	11.6	10.2
<b>Germany</b>	13.5	9.6	8.3
<b>Netherlands</b>	7.3	7.0	7.4
<b>Austria</b>	12.9	9.7	6.7
<b>Czech Republic</b>	5.8	7.2	4.8
<b>Poland</b>	7.6	4.1	4.6
<b>France</b>	4.2	3.4	4.0
<b>Spain</b>	0.7	2.4	2.4
<b>Greece</b>	0.7	0.5	0.9
<b>Italy</b>	1.2	1.2	0.8
<b>Hungary</b>	2.5	1.4	0.8
<b>All Schengen countries</b>	<b>6.4</b>	<b>5.2</b>	<b>4.7</b>

### **Multiple-entry visas**

A short-stay visa can be issued either for one visit or for several visits. The latter is called a multiple-entry visa (MEV). MEVs allow their holders to enter and leave the Schengen zone as many times they wish so long as they do not spend more than 90 out of 180 days in the Schengen area. Under the EU's Visa Code a multiple-entry visa can have a validity of between 6 months and 5 years.<sup>6</sup> The Visa Code encourages the use of MEVs with the aim to:

<sup>4</sup> We checked the prices of the medical insurance charged by two different providers: [Allianz](#) and [Yapikredi](#). Their prices are: 1 week: 5-6.50 Euro; 2 weeks: 7.50-10 Euro; 1 month: 13-15 Euro; 3 months: 27-30 Euro; 6 months: 40-45 Euro; and 1 year: 50-60 Euro.

<sup>5</sup> Visa statistics of the Directorate-General for Home Affairs of the European Commission. "Rejection" here includes all visa not issued.

<sup>6</sup> [Regulation \(EC\) No 810/2009 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 13 July 2009 establishing a Community Code on Visas \(Visa Code\)](#), Art. 24 (2). The Visa Code entered into force on 5 April 2010.

“... lessen the administrative burden of Member States’ consulates and to facilitate smooth travel for frequent or regular travellers. Applicants known to the consulate for their integrity and reliability should as far as possible benefit from a simplified procedure.”<sup>7</sup>

There are wide variations between the MEV rates of individual member states. Austria and Italy issued almost only MEVs (99 and 97 percent, respectively), while Spain issued very few (4.5 percent). In 2012, the overall percentage of MEVs among short-stay visas issued in Turkey was 50 percent.

*MEVs among short-stay visas issued in Turkey in 2012<sup>8</sup>*

<b>Visa-issuing country</b>	<b>Percentage of MEVs</b>
<b>Austria</b>	99
<b>Italy</b>	97
<b>Greece</b>	88
<b>Netherlands</b>	77
<b>Poland</b>	76
<b>Sweden</b>	66
<b>Hungary</b>	32
<b>Belgium</b>	31
<b>Czech Republic</b>	26
<b>France</b>	19
<b>Germany<sup>9</sup></b>	17
<b>Spain</b>	4.5
<b>All Schengen</b>	50

Other EU countries could do the same as Austria and Italy. The goal should be to increase the rate of MEVs to more than 90 percent. The trend has been going in the right direction during the past few years:

*Share of MEVs among short-stay visas issued by Schengen countries<sup>10</sup>*

	<b>2010</b>	<b>2011</b>	<b>2012</b>
<b>In Turkey</b>	34	37	50
<b>Globally</b>	34	39	42

<sup>7</sup> [Visa Code](#), recital 8 of the preamble

<sup>8</sup> Visa statistics of the Directorate-General for Home Affairs of the European Commission.

<sup>9</sup> Germany data includes only MEVs with a validity of more than 1 year.

<sup>10</sup> Visa statistics of the Directorate-General for Home Affairs of the European Commission.

However, EU member states appear to issue predominantly short-term MEVs, valid for half a year to a year.<sup>11</sup> Member states should make a greater effort to issue longer-term MEVs, preferably the maximum length of five years.

In this context, it is important that the European Commission, which collects and publishes statistical information on visas that have been requested and issued or rejected,<sup>12</sup> starts to request information on the length of the validity of the issued MEVs. So far it has not done this.

### **Application by an authorised person**

In cases where consulates have a valid reason to issue a single-entry visa, they should not require the applicant to appear in person for subsequent applications, but allow the applicant to send a proxy.

Under the Visa Code, applicants have to appear in person for only the first application for a Schengen visa because they need to submit their fingerprints. This is no longer necessary “when the applicant is known to [the consulates] for his integrity and reliability.”<sup>13</sup> The fingerprints in the system, which is shared among the Schengen countries, remain valid for 4 years and 11 months.<sup>14</sup>

In such cases, the Visa Code allows applicants to authorise somebody else to submit the application and to pick up the passport with the visa. All member states, as well as subcontractors (if the collection of visa applications is outsourced), should offer this option.

### **Waiver of the Schengen visa fee of 60 Euros**

The Visa Code lists categories of people for whom the Schengen visa fee of 60 Euros must be waived: children below the age of 6; school children, students and researchers on study/research trips; and representatives of non-profit organisations aged 25 years or less participating in conferences and events.<sup>15</sup>

There is also a list of categories for which the visa fee *may* be waived. These include:

- “(a) children from the age of six years and below the age of 12 years;
- (b) holders of diplomatic and service passports;
- (c) participants aged 25 years or less in seminars, conferences, sports, cultural or educational events, organised by non-profit organisations.”<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Two member states provided us with the data. In the case of one of them, with a high rate of MEVs, 73 percent of the MEVs issued in 2012 were valid for less than 1 year; 26 percent were valid 1-3 years; and only 1 percent were valid for 5 years. The picture was similar in the case of the other member state, which had a rather low MEV rate. Of those MEVs, 80 percent were valid up to 1 year; 16 percent were valid 1-2 years; and 3 percent were valid 2-5 years.

<sup>12</sup> This paper is largely based on the data that the Commission collects and which is available on the website of the Directorate-General for Home Affairs.

<sup>13</sup> [Visa Code](#), Article 20, paragraph 2.

<sup>14</sup> [Visa Code](#), Article 13. The shared system is VIS, the Visa Information System, where member states enter the information of all the applicants and the visas issued or denied to them.

<sup>15</sup> [Visa Code](#), Article 16, paragraph 4.

<sup>16</sup> [Visa Code](#), Article 16, paragraph 5.

All of the 12 EU member states that issue the highest number of visas in Turkey allow Turkish holders of diplomatic and service (“green”) passports, over a million people, visa-free access. Hence there is no visa fee for them. Concerning the other two categories, the picture is mixed.<sup>17</sup>

Those who still charge a visa fee to children between 6 and 12 years and to young participants of seminars and events in the EU should abolish it. In addition, *all member states* should consider waiving the fee in as many other cases as possible. The Visa Code stipulates:

“In individual cases, the amount of the visa fee to be charged may be waived or reduced when to do so serves to promote cultural or sporting interests as well as interests in the field of foreign policy, development policy and other areas of vital public interest or for humanitarian reasons.”<sup>18</sup>

This provision gives member states the possibility to waive the visa fee *for every single applicant* since better bilateral relations with Turkey can be considered “an interest in the field of foreign policy”. Some years ago some EU member states waved the visa fee for Serbia (before it obtained visa free travel). Such a complete waiver of the visa fee would be a strong signal to Turkey that these member states support the end goal of visa liberalisation.

### Streamlined document requirements

Under the Visa Code, visa applicants have, as a rule, to submit the following documentation supporting their application:

- “(a) documents indicating the purpose of the journey;
- (b) documents in relation to accommodation, or proof of sufficient means to cover his accommodation;
- (c) documents indicating that the applicant possesses sufficient means of subsistence both for the duration of the intended stay and for the return to his country of origin or residence (...) or that he is in a position to acquire such means lawfully (...);
- (d) information enabling an assessment of the applicant’s intention to leave the territory of the Member States before the expiry of the visa applied for.”<sup>19</sup>

Normally, each of these points may require applicants to provide several individual documents, however, which documents is at the discretion of individual member states.

In 2011, following negotiations with the member states in Ankara, the European Commission issued a Decision establishing a *harmonised* list of *specific* documents that Turkish citizens have to submit. Depending on the nature of the visit (tourism, family visit, business, etc.), applicants now need to submit 4 to 6 documents (consulates can still demand additional

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<sup>17</sup> Of the 12 EU member states with the highest numbers of applications, 5 waive the visa fee for children between the ages of 6 and 12, 5 charge a reduced fee of 35 Euro, and in 2 cases the information could not be obtained. Concerning “participants aged 25 years or less in seminars, conferences, sports, cultural or educational events, organised by non-profit organisations,” 5 member states do not charge any fee, while the information could not be obtained in the other 7 cases.

<sup>18</sup> [Visa Code](#), Article 16, paragraph 6.

<sup>19</sup> [Visa Code](#), Article 14.



documents in justified cases).<sup>20</sup>

This was already a step forward. Nonetheless, each member state can *further* reduce the list of required documents. The Commission's Decision states:

“This harmonisation should not prejudice the possibility in individual cases either to waive one or more of the listed supporting documents for applicants known by the consulate for their integrity and reliability in accordance with Article 14 (6) of the Visa Code ...”<sup>21</sup>

Member states should strive to waive as many documents as possible. All of these improvements should be visible and widely known in order to show Turkish officials and citizens that things are changing.

### Application collection points

Until a few years ago, Turkish citizens could submit their visa applications only at the consulates of Schengen countries. Those that receive many applications usually have consulates in Ankara and Istanbul. A few also maintain consulates in Izmir (Germany, Greece and Italy) and Edirne (Greece). Turkey, however, is a large country and travelling to one of these consulates can take time and costs money. For example, the distance from Diyarbakir in south-eastern Anatolia to Ankara, the closest location of Schengen consulates, is 1,000 km by car.

One of the aims of the Visa Code is to ensure wide consular coverage “in order to avoid a disproportionate effort on the part of visa applicants to have access to consulates.”<sup>22</sup> To this effect, the Visa Code makes several suggestions such as representation (one member state represents another one for consular purposes), co-location (one member state allows the consular staff of another member states to use its offices and facilities), the opening of common visa application centres (member states jointly operate an application centre) as well as the use of subcontractors (external service providers) which receive visa applications and bring the passport with the visa back to the applicants.

The use of subcontractors is described as “a last resort,”<sup>23</sup> to be used in cases where the described forms of cooperation are not feasible, and where a “high number of applicants does not allow the collection of applications and of data to be organised in a timely manner and in decent conditions”<sup>24</sup> or where “it is not possible to ensure a good territorial coverage of the third country concerned in any other way.”<sup>25</sup>

The European Commission made already in 2001 wider access to visa procedures in Turkey one of the issues to improve the visa application procedure for Turkish applicants. This has happened, as the map below shows.

<sup>20</sup> [Commission Implementing Decision of 13.10.2011 establishing the list of supporting documents to be presented by visa applicants in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Sri Lanka, and Turkey \(Ankara, Istanbul, Edirne and Izmir\)](#), C(2011) 7192 final, Brussels, 13 October 2011.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid*, preamble, recital 4.

<sup>22</sup> [Visa Code](#), preamble, recital 4.

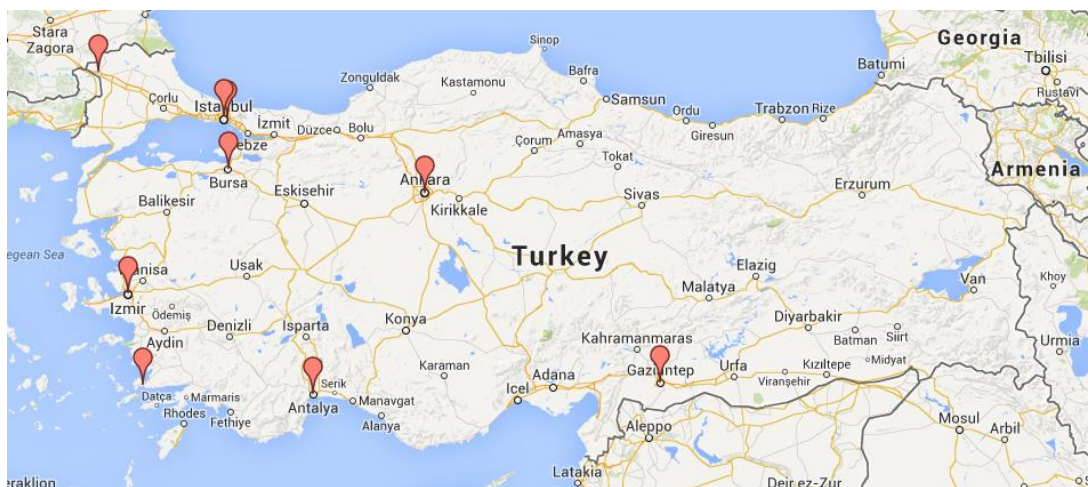
<sup>23</sup> [Visa Code](#), Art. 40, paragraph 3.

<sup>24</sup> [Visa Code](#), Art. 40, paragraph 3a.

<sup>25</sup> [Visa Code](#), Art. 40, paragraph 3b.



## Visa application centres in Turkey



This coverage has been achieved through the use of subcontractors. Member states have preferred this option to opening common application centres because it is the cheapest option for them. Applicants pay a service fee of between 15 and 27 Euros that covers the costs of the external service providers, while member states save money since they outsource a good part of the application procedure, including the contact with applicants and the necessary explanations, the collection and formal verification of applications, and the taking of fingerprints.

Member states should now do several things in order to improve access to visa application procedures. Firstly, Eastern Turkey is still not covered. Member states should either open a joint application centre there or hire an external service provider to open a collection point in the region. Since member states work with only two companies in Turkey – VFS Global and IDATA – they could conclude a collective contract with one of them and keep the service fee low.

Secondly, some members have yet to open more collection points, in particular those that receive high numbers of applications, such as France, which accepts applications only in Ankara, Istanbul and Izmir. This is important because applicants cannot choose the Schengen country where they submit their application; they have to do it at the consulate of the country that is their sole or main destination, or the country that they will enter first.<sup>26</sup>

Thirdly, member states should also allow applicants to submit applications at their consulates, which the Visa Code obliges them to do.<sup>27</sup> Yet most have drastically reduced the opening times and channel applicants to the external service providers.

<sup>26</sup> [Visa Code](#), Article 5, paragraph 1.

<sup>27</sup> [Visa Code](#), Article 16, paragraph 5.

*Visa application centres in Turkey*

	<b>Applications in 2012</b>	<b>Consulates</b>	<b>External service providers (plus opening date)</b>	<b>Service provider fee (€)</b>
<b><i>Germany</i></b>	167,263	Ankara Istanbul Izmir	Sept. 2011: Ankara, Istanbul (Harbiye), Istanbul (Bahariye), Izmir Nov. 2011: Bursa, Gaziantep, Antalya	23
<b><i>Italy</i></b>	115,785	Ankara Istanbul Izmir	Ankara, Istanbul (Harbiye), Istanbul (Bahariye), Izmir, Bursa, Gaziantep, Antalya	18-27 depending on location
<b><i>France</i></b>	98,333	Ankara Istanbul	Jan. 2011: Istanbul Nov. 2011: Izmir June 2013: Ankara	15
<b><i>Greece</i></b>	92,992	Ankara Istanbul Izmir Edirne	Bodrum, Antalya, Edirne July 2012: Izmir Dec. 2012: Bursa	20
<b><i>Netherlands</i></b>	45,535	Ankara Istanbul	Oct. 2013: Ankara, Istanbul (Harbiye) Nov. 2013: Edirne, Bursa, Izmir, Gaziantep, Antalya, Bodrum - Jan 2014: Istanbul (Altunizade)	23
<b><i>Spain</i></b>	39,029	Ankara Istanbul	Ankara, Istanbul (Harbiye) - Jan. 2013: Gaziantep, Antalya, Bodrum, Bursa, Edirne - Feb. 2014: Istanbul (Altunizade)	18 (27 outside Ankara and Istanbul)
<b><i>Czech Republic</i></b>	21,689	Ankara Istanbul	<i>Does not use external service provider</i>	-
<b><i>Austria</i></b>	14,305	Ankara Istanbul	Gaziantep, Bursa, Istanbul (Harbiye), Izmir, Antalya, Bodrum - Feb. 2014: Istanbul (Altunizade)	26
<b><i>Belgium</i></b>	11,526	Ankara Istanbul	Jan. 2013: Ankara, Istanbul July 2013: Antalya, Gaziantep, Bodrum	17
<b><i>Hungary</i></b>	10,483	Ankara Istanbul	<i>Does not use external service provider</i>	-
<b><i>Sweden</i></b>	8,831	Ankara Istanbul	Istanbul, Antalya April 2013: Ankara, Izmir	25
<b><i>Poland</i></b>	6,904	Ankara Istanbul	Ankara, Istanbul (Harbiye) Jan. 2014: Istanbul (Altunizade), Izmir, Gaziantep, Antalya	18

### Long-term visas for students

The issuance of visas longer than three months is conducted under national legislation. However, the EU has established some common rules.

In 2004, the EU issued the so-called “Students Directive” that should make it easier for university students (as well as pupils participating in exchange programmes, unpaid interns and volunteers) to obtain a visa to go to the EU.<sup>28</sup> It obliges member states to issue a long-term visa of at least one year to students “within a period that does not hamper the pursuit of the relevant studies”<sup>29</sup>, and it specifies the documents that the applicants have to submit.<sup>30</sup> Students should be allowed to work at least 10 hours a week to support themselves.<sup>31</sup>

In 2011, the European Commission evaluated the implementation of this Directive. It found that foreign students in the EU – 200,000 in 2009 – still experienced difficulties to come to the EU to study. It observed that the Directive had been implemented unevenly and that its provisions were not strong enough since only a few were legally binding.<sup>32</sup>

In March 2013, the Commission therefore issued a recast proposal that strengthens the rules and expands the rights of students. Member states will now have to issue a visa within 60 days. Students will be allowed to work for 20 hours a week and remain in the EU for one year after the end of their studies. It will also be easier for them to move within the EU. Furthermore, the proposal merges the Students Directive with a Directive on third-country researchers coming to the EU.<sup>33</sup> The European Parliament is expected to vote on the proposal in March 2014, after which it has to be adopted by the Council.

Member states should begin to implement the new provisions for Turkish students and researchers now. The exchange of students is one of the most effective ways to foster people-to-people contacts, and it is popular. The EU’s Erasmus exchange programme, which allows foreign students to study for a few months in the EU and EU students to study abroad, has become one of the most successful EU programmes. The exchange of students is of particular relevance for EU-Turkey relations as Turkey has a large young population (31 million Turks are 24 or younger).

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<sup>28</sup> [Council Directive 2004/114/EC of 13 December 2004 on the conditions of admission of third-country nationals for the purposes of studies, pupil exchange, unremunerated training or voluntary service](#). EU member states should have transposed this Directive into national legislation by 12 January 2007.

<sup>29</sup> [Students Directive](#), Article 8, paragraph 1.

<sup>30</sup> Students have to show a valid travel document, a sickness insurance, sufficient means to finance the studies and the trip, and evidence that they have been accepted by a higher education establishment. If the member state in questions requests it, they also have to provide evidence of the necessary language skills and of payment of the study fees. [Students Directive](#), Articles 6 and 7.

<sup>31</sup> [Students Directive](#), Art. 17.

<sup>32</sup> European Commission, [Report from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council on the application of Directive 2004/114/EC](#), COM(2011) 587 final, Brussels, 28 September 2011.

<sup>33</sup> European Commission, [Proposal for a Directive of the European Parliament and the Council on the conditions on entry and residence of third-country nationals for the purposes of research, studies, pupil exchange, remunerated and unremunerated training, voluntary service and au-pairing](#), COM(2013) 151 final, Brussels, 25 March 2013.

### **What about the UK?**

Since the UK and Ireland are not full members of Schengen, they do not participate in the EU's common visa policy. They have their own visa policies. They are therefore also not part of the EU-Turkey visa liberalisation process.

If the EU lifts the visa requirement for Turkish nationals in a few years, this will not affect the UK and Ireland. Their visa requirement for Turkish nationals can then remain in place. It would only be fair, however, for both countries to opt into the EU-Turkey visa liberalisation process. Alternatively they could put forward their own conditions under which they will abolish the visa requirement for Turkish nationals.

### **What member states can do today – a case of best practise**

To understand how much individual EU member states can already do today, within existing Schengen Visa Code provisions to ease travel for Turkish citizens, we can take Finland as an example.

Finland has introduced a fast-track visa application procedure for Turkish businesspeople whose companies have business relations with Finland and who regularly travel to the Nordic country.

Applicants need to submit only two documents and have medical insurance. They do not need to apply in person (if they have submitted fingerprints at a Schengen consulate within the past five years). They qualify for a multiple-entry visa valid five years; and the Finnish consulate makes a decision within five working days. This is currently made known by leaflet (see next page).

Other EU consulates treat businesspeople that they know in the same way, but they have not formalised this approach and they do not advertise it. This – and other facilitations for Turkish visa applicants – should be formalised and made visible. It would then send a clear signal to Turkish civil society and to Turkish officials that EU member states are making a genuine effort.



FINLAND  
*team*



### BLUE WAVE FAST TRACK BUSINESS VISA PROGRAM TO FINLAND

The Finnish Embassy in Ankara has launched the Blue Wave Fast Track Business Visa Program to facilitate business visits to Finland.

*What is the Blue Wave Fast Track business visa program?*

- it offers simplified procedures for obtaining Schengen visas for business people, who regularly travel to Finland in business purposes

*Who can benefit from the Blue Wave Fast Track program?*

- employees of companies with business relations with Finland
- close family members of employees (spouses, under aged children) when travelling together with the employee

*What does the Blue Wave Fast Track program offer?*

- decision within in maximum of five working days
- documentation requirements:
  - support letter from the company
  - employment insurance payment document (when applying first time for a Schengen visa to Finland)
  - travel insurance
- no need to apply in person
- multiple-entry visas (valid up to five years)

*Where the applications can be submitted?*

- at the Embassy of Finland in Ankara
- at the Honorary Consulate General of Istanbul

*How do I get more information on the Blue Wave Fast Track program?*

- by contacting Finnish Embassy´s Immigration and Consular Department at [Consulate.Ank@formin.fi](mailto:Consulate.Ank@formin.fi)
- by contacting Honorary Consulate General in Istanbul at [finconist@finconist.com](mailto:finconist@finconist.com)



## About ESI's Schengen White List Project



*ESI White List Project Board meeting in Rome in January 2013 (Italians, Swedes, Germans, UK, Turks, Austrians and Moldovans in support of a strict but fair visa liberalisation process)*

ESI has been working on the issue of visa liberalisation since 2006. For this we have created an advisory board including former interior ministers from across Europe (**Giuliano Amato**, **Otto Schily**, **Charles Clarke**) who provide us with guidance in this endeavour.

Since 2012, we have focused on Turkey, seeking to contribute to the launch of a visa liberalisation process between Turkey and the EU. Our main donor for this work has been the **Stiftung Mercator**. We have also continued to work on the visa issue in the Western Balkans and Moldova and held events on lessons learnt from previous visa liberalisation in Georgia and Ukraine.

Please visit our website “Europe's Border Revolution and the Schengen White List Project” at [www.whitelistproject.eu](http://www.whitelistproject.eu).

Relevant ESI publications:

ESI scorecard: [Turkey's visa liberalisation roadmap](#)

ESI paper: [Happy Anniversary? EU-Turkey relations at age 50 – An appeal](#) (12 September 2013)

ESI report: [Cutting the Visa Knot – How Turks can travel freely to Europe](#) (21 May 2013)

ESI interview: Today's Zaman, ["Knaus: Turkey, EU to develop more trust through plans for visa-free regime"](#) (27 January 2013)

ESI report: [Saving visa-free travel – Visa, Asylum and the EU roadmap policy](#) (1 January 2013)

ESI analysis: [Moving the goalposts? An analysis of the Kosovo visa roadmap](#) (6 July 2012)

ESI discussion paper: [Nine reasons for a visa liberalisation process with Turkey](#) (20 June 2012)

ESI backgrounder: [Facts and figures related to visa-free travel for Turkey](#) (15 June 2012)

ESI news: [ESI meeting President Gul and EU ambassadors in Ankara to discuss visa free travel for Turks](#) (22 March 2012)

ESI commentary: [“Being fair to Turkey is in the EU's interest”](#) (12 March 2012)

Rumeli Observer: [Land borders in Europe. A dramatic story in three acts](#) (12 October 2011)

Rumeli Observer: [Amexica and other reflections on border wars](#) (12 December 2010)

ESI Report: [A very special relationship. Why Turkey’s EU accession process will continue](#) (11 November 2010)

ESI/Populari report: [“Bosnian Visa Breakthrough”](#) (16 October 2009)

ESI Scorecard: [Which Balkan countries deserve visa-free travel](#) (22 May 2009)

Glossary: [Understanding Europe’s borders \(A to Z\)](#)

There have been [more than 400 articles in international media](#) referring to the ESI White List Project and our work on visa liberalisation.