



EP supports measures to facilitate local border traffic in the Kaliningrad area

Plenary sessions

Measures to make it easier for people living in the Kaliningrad region to cross the border with Poland and enter neighbouring districts were backed by Parliament on Thursday.

The Commission proposal would amend current rules on local border traffic in order to treat the entire Kaliningrad region, together with a specific border area on the Polish side, as a single border zone. This would prevent an artificial division of the Kaliningrad enclave, enable more people in the area to cross the border and travel within the neighbouring districts more easily, and enhance economic and cultural exchanges.

The EU's 2006 local border traffic regulation allows Member States to negotiate bilateral agreements with neighbouring countries to grant special permits to citizens living in border areas. With these permits, residents can cross the border frequently and stay on the other side for a few hours or days each time. They also face fewer systematic checks at crossing points (no stamping of documents, special lanes, etc). Moreover, the local border traffic permits may be issued free of charge.

Treating the whole Kaliningrad region as a single border zone means allowing an exemption to the 2006 regulation that defines border areas as extending no further than 50 km from the border line. This does not create a precedent and responds to the unique situation of the Kaliningrad enclave, say MEPs, stressing that this exception does not affect the general definition laid down in the regulation.

Background

The Kaliningrad region of the Russian Federation, which has a population of almost one million inhabitants, became the only enclave inside the European Union following EU enlargement in 2004.

Four local border traffic agreements have entered into force so far: Hungary-Ukraine in January 2008, Slovakia-Ukraine in September 2008, Poland-Ukraine in July 2009 and Romania-Moldova in October 2010. Other agreements have been signed and are expected to enter into force soon: Poland-Belarus, Latvia-Belarus, Lithuania-Belarus and Norway-Russia.

The resolution was passed with 556 votes in favour, 69 against and 12 abstentions.

Next steps

The Commission proposal should now be approved by Council. It will enter into force 20 days after its publication in the EU Official Journal.

Procedure: Co-decision, 1st reading

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