

(English version)

Question for written answer E-000964/22
to the Commission
Jordi Cañas (Renew)
(10 March 2022)

Subject: Unwarranted charge for consular information by the United Kingdom

The Agreement on the withdrawal of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland (the 'UK') from the European Union and the European Atomic Energy Community ⁽¹⁾ provides that workers in the host State and frontier workers in the State or States where they are employed are entitled to receive the same assistance in the host State as nationals of that State receive ⁽²⁾.

There is an unwarranted difference in the cost of telephone calls made to UK consulates in Spain to ask for information on visas, which costs 69 pence per minute ⁽³⁾, and the cost of calls asking for the same information made to Spanish consulates in the UK, which are free of charge ⁽⁴⁾ ⁽⁵⁾.

These facts demonstrate a serious lack of cooperation by the UK, which is violating the right granted under the Withdrawal Agreement to people seeking employment in the UK to access information freely.

In light of the above:

1. What steps will the Commission take to stop this violation of rights by the UK and put an end to the difference in the amounts charged by the UK and Spain?
2. Will the Commission check whether this unwarranted charge also occurs in the other Member States, including for consular telephone calls concerning matters other than visas?

Answer given by Vice-President Šefčovič on behalf of the European Commission
(14 June 2022)

1. The Withdrawal Agreement does not regulate charges for consular services. A call charge of 0.69 GBP per minute for consular services provided to Spanish nationals does not violate the Withdrawal Agreement.

This conclusion is not invalidated by Article 12 of the Withdrawal Agreement, which prohibits discrimination on grounds of nationality in the host State and the State of work within the material scope of the Withdrawal Agreement in respect of beneficiaries of the Withdrawal Agreement.

The principle of equal treatment applies only inside the host State or State of work between beneficiaries of the Withdrawal Agreement and own nationals. In the context of the issue raised by the Honourable Member, this means that the United Kingdom (UK) must treat Spanish nationals, who are beneficiaries of the Withdrawal Agreement, in the same way as it treats UK nationals. The principle of equal treatment does not, however, apply in comparison between different host States or States of work and therefore, does not mean that the UK must treat Spanish nationals in the same way as Spain treats UK nationals.

2. The Commission has no plans to check charges for consular services in other Member States.

⁽¹⁾ [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:12019W/TXT\(02\)](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:12019W/TXT(02))

⁽²⁾ [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:12019W/TXT\(02\)](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:12019W/TXT(02))

⁽³⁾ <https://www.gov.uk/world/organisations/british-consulate-general-madrid>; +34 917146300 No extension.

⁽⁴⁾ <http://www.exteriores.gob.es/Consulados/LONDRES/es/Consulado/Paginas/Consul.aspx>; +44 2075898989 No extension.

⁽⁵⁾ <http://www.exteriores.gob.es/Consulados/LONDRES/en/Consulado/Pages/Visas.aspx>