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Answer given by President von der Leyen
on behalf of the European Commission
(26.4.2021)

Whilst the EU and the United Kingdom (UK) are free to determine their respective visa policies, the UK has committed in the EU-UK Trade and Cooperation Agreement (TCA)¹ to treat all nationals of EU Member States equally for the purposes of visas for short-term visits. Accordingly, the UK cannot provide for visa-free travel for short-term visits to citizens of certain Member States, whilst imposing a visa requirement to others.

The UK's reduction of visa fees relates to long-term visas, which are not covered by the TCA. The Commission regrets that the UK decided to treat EU citizens differently in this specific case. Commission Vice-President Šefčovič raised the issue in his meeting with the UK Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster Michael Gove on 11 February 2021².

The principle of non-discrimination between EU citizens is also applicable in other areas of the TCA, which are directly relevant to citizens, such as in relation to social security coordination or participation in Union programmes. The Commission confirms its resolve to uphold the principles of equal treatment and non-discrimination and to take into account the interest of all Union citizens in the course of the implementation of the TCA. When monitoring the application of the TCA, the Commission will be vigilant to any actions by the UK discriminating between the Member States or their citizens and will take any appropriate measure in that regard.

¹ Trade and Cooperation Agreement between the European Union and the European Atomic Energy Community, of the one part, and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, of the other part, OJ L 444 of 31 December 2020, p.14.

² https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/STATEMENT_21_565