

**Question for written answer P-013071/2013
to the Commission**
Rule 117
Tonino Picula (S&D)

Subject: Dropping of visa requirements for the USA and Canada

The USA currently requires EU citizens from Bulgaria, Cyprus, Romania, Poland and Croatia to hold visas. Canada, meanwhile, requires Czech, Bulgarian and Romanian citizens – as well as Polish and Lithuanian citizens without biometric passports – to have visas when entering.

It is noteworthy that the annual number of US visas issued to the citizens of these five Member States has changed little over the past 10 years – and even fallen in the case of Poland – while the number of refused 'category B' visas is either stagnant or falling dramatically. In Croatia in 2012, for example, the percentage of refused 'category B' visas amounted to 4.4%, which is 1.9% less than in the previous year. By way of a comparison, in some EU Member States whose citizens no longer need visas to enter the USA – such as Latvia and Lithuania – the percentage of refused 'category B' visas has, in some years, exceeded 20% of the total number of applications.

In addition to having a low refusal rate for visa applications, Croatia has taken a number of specific steps, such as introducing biometric passports and fulfilling the criteria for membership of NATO and the EU.

The financial dimension of reciprocity is also far from negligible: the citizens of 23 EU Member States have to pay USD 14 to register in the American system for travel authorisation, while the citizens of the remaining five Member States have to pay, on average, USD 160 for a visa application.

The Report on the proposal for a regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council amending Council Regulation (EC) No 539/2001 listing the third countries whose nationals must be in possession of visas when crossing the external borders and those whose nationals are exempt from that requirement also calls for visa reciprocity between EU Member States and third countries. This report was adopted at the September 2013 plenary session of Parliament.

In this connection, what steps does the Commission plan to take in order to establish genuine visa reciprocity between EU Member States and third countries, with particular emphasis on the United States of America and Canada?