

**The European Commission presents a proposal to the European Parliament and the EU Council to lift visa requirements for Georgian citizens.**

On 9 March 2016, the European Commission presented a legislative proposal to amend Regulation (EC) No 539/2001 to the European Parliament and the EU Council to allow short-term visawaiver for Georgian citizens within the Schengen area.

We welcome the European Commission's initiation of the legislative process, which is yet another step towards visa liberalisation with the European Union and the clear recognition of the reforms carried out by the Government of Georgia.

The European Commission's proposal is based on the Progress Report published on 18 December 2015, according to which Georgia met all the benchmarks set in respect of the four blocks of the Visa Liberalisation Action Plan (VLAP): document security; border management, migration management and asylum; public order and security; fundamental human rights.

The legislative proposal to amend Regulation (EC) No 539/2001 will be submitted for consideration to the EU Council and the European Parliament. The latter has to provide its consent to the amended regulation, upon which it will be approved by the EU Council and signed by the President of the European Parliament and the Foreign Minister of the country holding the EU Council Presidency. Based on the amendment, Georgia will be listed among the third-countries whose citizens will enjoy visa-free travel to the Schengen area. The Regulation envisaging short-term visa-free visits to the EU countries will enter into force on the 20th day following its publication in the Official Journal of the European Union.

The EU Council and the European Parliament are expected to complete relevant procedures in the near future allowing Georgian citizens holding biometric passports to enter the EU/Schengen area without visa for short stays (90 days in any 180-day period).

Short-term visa-free travel applies to 30 countries, of which 22 are EU/Schengen members: *Portugal, Spain, France, Germany, Belgium, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Italy, Denmark, Sweden, Finland, Austria, Greece, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia, Hungary, the Czech Republic, Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, Malta*; 4 EU member states — *Cyprus, Croatia, Romania and Bulgaria* are Schengen candidate countries; and 4 countries: *Iceland, Norway, Lichtenstein and Switzerland* are associated with the Schengen area.

The progress Georgia has achieved in the visa liberalisation process is a clear proof that the European Union acknowledges the efforts made by the Georgian Government and that the reforms it has carried out bring concrete benefits to each citizen of Georgia.