

PRESS RELEASE

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Vanuatu: Council fully suspends visa free travel agreement

The Council today decided to fully suspend the visa waiver agreement with Vanuatu due to the risks posed by its investor citizenship schemes ('golden passport' schemes).

A partial suspension of the agreement had already been adopted on 3 March 2022. Following the partial suspension, the Commission started a dialogue with Vanuatu on 12 May to address the EU's concerns. However, since then the country has failed to engage in any meaningful way and the circumstances that led to the temporary suspension still persist.

Based on careful monitoring and assessment of Vanuatu's investor citizenship schemes, the EU has concluded that they present serious deficiencies which could pose a risk to the EU, notably due to:

- the extremely low rejection rate, which raises doubts as to the reliability of the security and due diligence screening
- the absence of physical presence or residence requirements, short processing periods and a lack of information exchange with applicants' countries of origin or residence
- the granting of citizenship to applicants listed in Interpol databases
- the nationalities of origin of successful applicants, which include several countries whose nationals require a visa to enter the EU

Next steps

The decision will now be published in the Official Journal and will apply as from 4 February 2023.

Background

A visa waiver agreement has applied between the EU and Vanuatu since 2015. This agreement allows citizens of Vanuatu to travel to the EU without a visa for stays of up to 90 days in any 180-day period.

In recent years, Vanuatu has established additional investor citizenship schemes and the number of successful applicants has increased. In 2017, the Commission started investigating those schemes, since they raised serious doubts on account of their security failures. The Commission also warned the Vanuatu authorities about the suspension clauses contained in the visa waiver agreement. Despite the commitment by Vanuatu authorities to implement reforms in order to address concerns, in April 2021 the government of Vanuatu took further steps to set up a new citizenship programme.

In this context, the Commission considered that the investor schemes in place in Vanuatu countered the objectives of the EU visa policy, and on 12 January 2022 proposed the partial suspension of the visa waiver agreement with Vanuatu.

The agreement was partially suspended for a period of nine months, from 4 May 2022 to 3 February 2023, to allow for an enhanced dialogue with Vanuatu to remedy the situation. Due to the lack of progress, on 12 October 2022 the European Commission proposed the full suspension of the agreement from 4 February 2023.

Press office - General Secretariat of the Council

Rue de la Loi 175 - B-1048 BRUSSELS - Tel.: +32 (0)2 281 6319

press@consilium.europa.eu - www.consilium.europa.eu/press