



Ministerial Statement
By

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Junior Minister of Home Affairs

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Visa-free Access for BOTC Nationals to Schengen Countries

Mr. Speaker, I stand today to advise this Honourable House of the recent approval by The European Parliament and The Council of the European Union permitting British Overseas Territories Citizen (BOTC) passport holders to travel visa-free to the Schengen countries.

The amendment comes under Regulation (EC) No. 539/2001 and includes specific categories of British nationals in the Schengen visa exemption list. Aligned with the new permissions afforded to BOTCs, the other three categories the UK added to the visa exemption list are British Overseas Citizens (BOC), British Protected Persons (BPP), and British Subjects (BS).

Mr. Speaker, it was determined by the European Parliament and Council that the imposition of the visa requirement on nationals of Dominica, Grenada, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Micronesia, Nauru, Palau, St. Lucia, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Timor-Leste, Tonga, Trinidad and Tobago,

Tuvalu, the United Arab Emirates and Vanuatu is no longer justified. Equally, it was decided that BOTCs (known as British Dependent Territories citizens prior to February 2002), such as Bermuda, the Falkland Islands, and St. Helena, should also be exempt as such nationals are entitled to right of abode in the UK or for British Citizenship.

There are approximately 250,000 BOTC nationals based in 14 Overseas Territories around the world. The decision to move toward an expanded exemption list was based on the fact that the aforementioned countries (including several others) do not present any risk of illegal immigration or a threat to public policy and security for the Union in accordance with the criteria set out in the Regulation.

Mr. Speaker, according to the UK Government, the change has removed the anomaly that saw a small number of British nationals requiring a visa to visit the area. The UK Government identified a short summary list of other benefits this change brings. These include: border control is more straightforward as all categories of British nationals will be treated the same, the exemption list will pose a negligible risk of irregular migration, people to people contacts will be encouraged (i.e. ease of travel for tourists and greater potential for trade benefits), and intra-Caribbean travel will be facilitated as BOTCs residing in the UK Caribbean Overseas Territories will be able to travel visa-free to other European Union Caribbean Overseas Territories.

Mr. Speaker, there are currently 26 Schengen countries, which include 22 EU countries and four non-EU countries. Travel to the Schengen countries allows stays for up to 90 days in a 180 day period. With the effective date of June 9, 2014, there is much buzz locally, and for Bermuda this is welcomed news as it will simplify

business, tourism or family visits for BOTCs to countries such as France and Monaco, Germany, Greece, Italy, Portugal, and Spain, to name a few.

Mr. Speaker, the Department of Immigration has had inquiries from the general public already asking for supporting documentation to assist with travel to Schengen countries. Through dialogue with Government House, I can confirm that the only proof that one requires is a BOTC passport which will allow for unhindered landing in a Schengen country.

As with any change, sometimes it takes time for key stakeholders to embrace it. To this end, persons who have a need to travel shortly after June 9, 2014, and who may be concerned with being landed in a Schengen country, the Department of Immigration suggests that the such persons print off the information pertaining to the exemption by searching online and typing in “*Official Journal of the European Union - L149/67.*” Government House has also posted a message on its Facebook page and the Honorary Consuls' network have been duly informed, and the Bermuda Airlines Representative will be similarly apprised.

Mr. Speaker, finally, whilst we are grateful for the work that Mr. Walton Brown has advised he undertook, it is important that the Opposition wait for official notices to be released by the Government so that there is no confusion to the general public. For example, in this instance, the information reportedly attributed to Mr. Brown advised that the commencement date was June 4, 2014. We have been advised by Government House who is the official source, that the commencement date is in fact June 9, 2014 and not June 4, 2014.

Thank you Mr. Speaker.