

Euro MPs urge Canada to end visa demands

May 21, 2012

BBC News

MEPs have renewed calls for Canada to lift its visa restrictions for citizens of Bulgaria, Romania and the Czech Republic, making travel to the country visa-free for all EU citizens.

Canadians can travel anywhere in the 27-nation EU without a visa, and the European Parliament wants reciprocal treatment for the three European countries.

The EU is currently negotiating free trade arrangements with Canada, with the aim of signing the Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA) at some point this year.

However, it will need the approval of the European Parliament - and MEPs from the centre-right, liberal, socialist and democrat groups warned on 21 May 2012 that they might be inclined to vote against the agreement unless Canada drops its demands.

They said the policy was "unjustified" and discriminated against people from Bulgaria, Romania and the Czech Republic, arguing that they should benefit from visa-free travel to Canada like all other EU citizens.

But British Conservative MEP David Campbell Bannerman and UK Independence Party MEP Gerard Batten defended Canada's decision. They said it was for the Canadian government to decide who to let into the country and why.

German Left-wing MEP Cornelia Ernst took the view that the EU should improve living conditions in home countries in order to prevent emigration to places like Canada.

EU Home Affairs Commissioner Cecilia Malmstrom shared MEPs' frustration.

She said she had raised the issue with the Canadian government and hoped to resolve the situation very soon.