

Asylum: EU list of safe countries of origin to replace national lists in 3 years

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The future EU common list of safe countries of origin, which should help member states to process certain asylum applications faster and more consistently, should replace today's national lists after a three-year transition period, Civil Liberties Committee MEPs agreed on Thursday. The EU Commission will assess which countries should be included, removed or temporarily suspended from the list.

“We met the challenge of delivering a text that is both pragmatic and ambitious”, said Parliament’s rapporteur, [Sylvie Guillaume \(S&D, FR\)](#) after the vote. “We have thus ensured optimal harmonisation by eliminating national lists within three years in a smooth and organised manner. In the event of a sudden deterioration of the situation in a country designated as a safe country of origin, we have also provided for a process that is as responsive and flexible as possible”, she added.

Ms Guillaume made it clear that “applying the concept of a safe country of origin in no way dispenses with the duty to carry out an appropriate individual examination of the relevant asylum applications”, including offering applicants a personal interview and, following Parliament’s amendments, an automatic suspensive effect of appeals.

“The methodology for designating or reviewing a country as safe country of origin has also been greatly improved. A consultation process is now included to enable third parties, such as EASO, UNHCR or NGOs to take part in the Commission’s task of monitoring the EU common list”, Ms Guillaume added.

How to add, suspend or remove a country from the EU list

Decisions to add or remove countries will be taken using the ordinary legislative procedure, following a proposal by the EU Commission. To assess the situation in third countries and the possibility of adding them to the EU common list, the Commission will rely on the information received from member states, EEAS, EASO, UNHCR, the Council of Europe and other relevant organizations and, following amendments by MEPs, also international and national NGOs.

The Commission will also be responsible for regularly reviewing the situation in the listed and suspended countries and will also decide, under Parliament's scrutiny, on the temporary suspension of a country in the event of a sudden deterioration of the situation there.

Coexistence of the national lists with the EU common list

During the three years before national lists disappear, EU countries will be able to suggest to the EU Commission that other third countries be added to the common list, but they will not be allowed to consider “safe country of origin” any country which has been suspended or removed from the European list.

Special protection for minors and minorities

In order to strengthen protection for unaccompanied minors and other vulnerable groups, the safe country of origin concept will not be applied “in the case of applicants belonging to a minority or group of persons that remain at risk in the light of the situation in the country of origin concerned.” Accelerated or border procedures cannot be applied to unaccompanied minors originating from a safe country of origin unless they receive “adequate support”, says the amended text.

The report was approved by 36 votes to 10, with 3 abstentions.

Next steps

The committee also backed the opening of talks with the Council to try to agree on the legislation at the first reading. The negotiating mandate was approved by 43 votes to 6. The discussion will start after the summer recess.

Note to editors

In agreement with the Council, Parliament’s rapporteur asked the European Asylum Support Office (EASO) to assess the situation in Turkey and the Western Balkans before deciding whether the seven countries proposed by the EU Commission should be included in the EU common list. While awaiting the experts’ contribution, the two institutions will try to reach a partial agreement on the architecture of the list and its functioning, excluding countries that should be listed for the time being.

Under the EU Asylum Procedures Directive, member states may apply specific fast-track processing rules where an asylum seeker is a national of a country that is considered a safe country of origin in view of its stable democratic system and compliance with international human rights treaties. Currently, 12 EU countries have such lists, but they are not coordinated, which can lead to different treatment of similar applications”.

The European Commission proposed in September to establish a common list, which included Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Kosovo, Montenegro, Serbia and Turkey.

Procedure: co-decision

Further information

- Briefing by EPRS with details on the proposal and background information (8.10.2015)
: <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/EPRS/EPRS-Briefing-569008-Safe-countries-of-origin-FINAL.pdf>
- Procedure file
:
<http://www.europarl.europa.eu/oeil/popups/ficheprocedure.do?lang=&reference=2015/0211%28COD%29>
- Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs:
<http://www.europarl.europa.eu/committees/en/libe/home.html>

Press release

Contact

Estefania NARRILLOS

BXL: (+32) 2 28 31324

STR: (+33) 3 881 73661

PORT: (+32) 498 98 39 85

EMAIL: libe-press@europarl.europa.eu

TWITTER: EP_Justice