



EMBASSY OF BELIZE
MISSION OF BELIZE TO THE EUROPEAN UNION

THE CASE OF BELIZE FOR SCHENGEN VISA WAIVER

Introduction

The Government of Belize is currently engaged in a concerted effort to obtain the support of the Member States of the European Union (EU) for Belize to be placed on the list of countries whose nationals do not require a Schengen visa. We do this (a) based on our confidence that Belize fully meets the EU's criteria for a visa waiver, (b) based on our concern that nationals of Belize, including government officials, face undue burdensome and costly challenges to lodge a Schengen visa application, and (c) to maximize economic relations with the EU, and especially the promised benefits under the CARIFORUM-EU Economic Partnership Agreement.

The Need for a Schengen Visa Waiver

Belize is a unique case in that no Schengen Member State maintains a Consular Office in Belize. Indeed, the only EU Member State maintaining a resident diplomatic presence in Belize is the United Kingdom, which is not a Schengen Member. The process of obtaining a Schengen Visa by Belizeans has always been onerous and has become significantly more so over the last year as new 2014 Schengen visa requirements include the provision of biometric data by the applicant. Therefore, Belizeans wishing to apply for a Schengen Visa must now travel to Mexico City for taking fingerprints and digital photographs as part of the application process. Because passport applications can no longer be done via courier, the 'in person' application process is more time consuming, costly and inconvenient.

Belize meets the EU's criteria for granting Schengen Visa Waiver

We are aware that in considering whether to grant a waiver of Schengen Visa requirements, the EU considers such factors as level of support among Member States, travel document security, regional coherence, reciprocity, risk of illegal migration, public security, relations with third countries, human rights and economic relations with the EU. Belize is confident that such criteria have been met:

Travel document security -- Since 2005, Belize has had in place a secure machine-readable passport system. Belize took additional steps in 2013 to enhance the integrity of the passport application process and of the travel document itself. Belize's travel document conforms to the requirements of the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO). In March 2013, new regulations were enacted to strengthen the authentication component of the passport application process. Additional security features were also embedded into the paper and printing of the travel document which require different inspection equipment to detect. Overall, Belize's ordinary passport now contains over twenty security features.

Regional coherence -- Belize is a full member of the integration systems of Central America (SICA) and of the Caribbean (CARICOM). Nationals of all Central American countries do not require a Schengen Visa to travel to Europe. An increasing number of CARICOM Member States' nationals also do not require a Schengen visa. To date Council has given its approval for eight of the fourteen CARICOM Member States to move to the positive list. Belize's exclusion from the positive list runs counter to achieving regional coherence.



EMBASSY OF BELIZE

MISSION OF BELIZE TO THE EUROPEAN UNION

Reciprocity -- Visa waivers are traditionally granted on the basis of reciprocity. Belize does not require visas for any national of the European Union, which goes even beyond Schengen Member countries. Additionally, countries, upon joining the EU, automatically do not require visas to travel to Belize. This is the case, for example of Croatia, which joined the EU on 1 July, 2013. Belize's non-requirement of visas for EU nationals has, to date, been on a unilateral basis and should be reciprocated.¹

Risk of illegal migration -- Given Belize's small population of 350,000, the distance and cost of travel to Europe, there is an extremely low risk of illegal migration by Belizeans. Indeed historically, illegal migration of Belizeans to Europe has not been a problem.

Public security -- In terms of public security, Belize has had no problems with mass, public instability or insecurity. Belize is a peaceful and stable democratic state with a growing economy.

Relations with the EU -- Belize has enjoyed long-standing and excellent relations with the EU and with its Member States both bilaterally and as part of a number of groupings including Caribbean Forum of States (CARIFORUM), Caribbean Community (CARICOM), African, Caribbean and Pacific Group (ACP), Community of Latin America and Caribbean States (CELAC). The EU is a major trading partner for Belize and receives 36% of Belize's exports. The EU is also a major development partner for Belize. Belize is also a long-standing consistent supporter of candidatures of EU Member States in multilateral organizations. Indeed the practical difficulties of obtaining a Schengen Visa places countries like Belize at a disadvantage in taking advantage of the services provisions of the Economic Partnership Agreement, as compared to other CARICOM countries that have a waiver.

Human Rights – Fundamental human rights and liberties are enshrined in the Belize Constitution. In addition, Belize is a party to all the major United Nations human rights instruments as well as those of the Inter American system. A robust and current national legal and institutional architecture is firmly in place to promote and protect the human rights of all Belizeans. Belize has submitted to two cycles of the UN Human Rights Council's Universal Periodic Review, which has analyzed the status of the implementation of our international human rights obligations.

A Solid Case

There is an excellent case for the positive consideration of Belize in the next round of waivers of Schengen Visa requirements. Belize believes that there is no justification for maintaining Belize on the list of countries whose nationals require a Schengen visa to enter the European Union.

***Mission of Belize-Brussels
February 2015***

¹ Belizeans do not require a visa to travel to the UK, though the UK is not a Schengen Member. Additionally holders of Belize diplomatic or official passports do not require visas to travel to Austria