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**CANADA TO ANNOUNCE VISA WAIVER SCHEDULE FOR BULGARIA, ROMANIA IN AUTUMN**

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Canada is expected to announce in the autumn a schedule for the lifting of visas for Bulgarian and Romanian citizens. This became clear after a meeting on visa reciprocity held in Brussels on Monday. The meeting, which was hosted by European Commissioner for Migration, Home Affairs and Citizenship, Dimitris Avramopoulos, was attended by representatives of Bulgaria, Romania and Canada. Bulgaria was represented by Deputy Interior Minister Philip Gounev and Deputy Foreign Minister Rumen Alexandrov. Dragos Tudorache, minister and head of Prime Minister's Chancellery, attended on behalf of Romania, while Canada was represented by John McCallum, Minister for Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship.

The participants in the meeting reviewed the latest progress on Canada's ongoing assessment of the compliance of Bulgaria and Romania with the criteria which the two countries have to fulfill before being granted visa exemption. They discussed the visit conducted by Canadian technical experts in Romania in June and the forthcoming similar visit scheduled to take place in Bulgaria at the end of July. McCallum thanked the two governments for their continued cooperation in supporting the assessment process, which is expected to be completed this summer. Avramopoulos was firm that full visa reciprocity for all member states of the EU is the objective of the Union. McCallum vowed to inform in early autumn on the outcomes of the assessment and to provide timelines for the lifting of visas.

The Bulgarian representatives expressed the firm stance that the lifting of visas is among the priorities of the government. According to them, the application of visa regime for Bulgarian citizens is as unfounded unequal treatment which does not correspond to the level of bilateral relations established with Canada. Apart from being allies in NATO, the two countries also share common values and have successfully cooperated in international organisations. In their words, reciprocity goes beyond the framework of concrete visa policies and concerns the relations between the EU and Canada, which aim to reach the level of strategic partnership through the negotiation of the Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA).

They viewed the conclusion of the free trade agreement and achievement of full visa reciprocity as a single process. Bulgaria expects Canada to present clear outline on the lifting of visa restrictions before the EU-Canada summit scheduled to take place in October. The Bulgarian representatives thanked the European Commission for its constructive engagement in the dialogue with Canada. The two Bulgarian representatives were confident that the Commission will take all necessary actions so that Bulgarians could benefit from visa-free travel to Canada.

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